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Introduction to the Special Issue:
Homelessness in Canada

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In February 2009, over 700 people gathered for more than three-days at ’Growing Home,’ Canada’s second national conference on housing and homelessness (www.nhc2009.ca) to explore causes and solutions to this urgent problem. Conference delegates included those who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness, their families, policy analysts, political activists, politicians, professionals, scholars, those in the affordable housing community, and concerned citizens generally. Over 140 academic papers and workshops were delivered by the country’s leading researchers and homelessness-serving practitioners.

There is an enormous scale of homelessness in advanced industrialized countries such as Canada. In a country of over 34 million people, between 150,000 and 300,000 are homeless, and various levels of government commit from $3 – $6 billion to supporting those on the streets. There are structural issues that can increase the risk of homelessness, including threats to income such as a rise in unemployment, low assistance levels for those with disabilities and seniors, lack of social housing and rent supports, insufficient affordable housing, and too many precarious jobs (involving job insecurity, low wages or high risks of ill health). Then there are events in a person’s life
that, under the worst circumstances, may lead to homelessness. These personal triggers include such crises as leaving the parental home because of conflict and abuse, marital or relationship breakdown, family violence, death of a spouse, leaving prison, leaving some form of social- or health-sector care, sharp deterioration in mental health, increase in alcohol or drug abuse, mounting debts or eviction from a rented or owned home. In today's economic uncertainty, these issues have become urgent and threatening.

It is particularly timely, therefore, to present a special issue on homelessness, bringing together some of our country's leading experts on the topic. Employment is a particularly critical area to be understood by policy makers, practitioners, and scholars. It is an important segue out of homelessness and precarious employment, unemployment, or other issues associated with labor market integration which put people at risk of being homeless. And yet we know less than we should, from both theoretical and analytical grounds. The first article, by Micheal L. Shier, Marion E. Jones, and John R. Graham qualitatively analyzes the perceptions of employed individuals' experiences of homelessness in Calgary, Alberta—a population hitherto neglected in the literature. They are followed by an examination of some issues of specific impact to select homeless sub-populations. Unemployment of young people is particularly high in Canada, as in other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations. Karabanow, Hughes, Ticknor, Kidd, and Patterson therefore delve into youth perceptions about formal and informal employment in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Following them are John Coates and Sue McKenzie-Mohr, examining the trauma histories of homeless youth in the Maritimes using an adapted Trauma Symptom Inventory. A different and also under-researched area is immigration, and to the fore come anthropologists Alina Tanasescu and Alan Smart, who use interview and survey data collected from immigrants experiencing housing stress to better understand how this population might be assisted. Geographer Geoffrey Nelson takes a new look at a different secondary literature, providing the first major analysis of the transformative evolution from custodial forms of housing to supportive housing to the present supported housing, or
"housing first" model. A vitally important stakeholder, and again one about which we do not know enough, is the media. As a corrective, communications scholars Barbara Schneider, Kerry Chamberlain, and Darrin Hodgetts examine the ways that four Canadian newspapers frame stories about homelessness in Canada—and show that all is not what one might first think. Concluding the edition is economist George Fallis, one of the country’s eminent scholars on homelessness, who presents a history of Canada’s welfare state as it pertains to housing policy.

The interdisciplinary nature of the special issue is paramount. The following pages highlight the useful contributions that scholars, particularly those with an interest in theory, bring to the table. The special edition guest editors would like to thank Dr. Robert D. Leighninger, Melinda McCormick, and their team for helpful guidance at all stages in our process; to Micheal Shier and Heath McLeod, for leadership of the management of the copy editing of our special edition; to Sarah Meagher, who provided many months of leadership to the management of the special edition review and author submission processes; and to the authors, communities, and funders who were involved in the resulting dissemination. Not an unusual facet for a special edition: in several instances, and with the encouragement from the team at the journal, the co-editors were authors, and in each of these instances the double blind peer review process (as with all of the other articles) prevailed: authors were at all times precluded from any peer review decision making process.

The special edition provides ample evidence that scholars can provide enormously helpful research into such issues of public policy as homelessness. Likewise, the work of Canadians can be of interest to readers from other countries. May the present special edition fertilize these prospects further; and above all else, may they contribute to our understanding of, and therefore solutions to, one of the great social problems of our time.
Perspectives of Employed People Experiencing Homelessness of Self and Being Homeless: Challenging Socially Constructed Perceptions and Stereotypes

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In a study that sought to identify the multiple factors resulting in homelessness from the perspective of 65 individuals in Calgary, Alberta, Canada who were both employed and homeless, we found that participants' perceptions of being homeless emerged as a major theme which impacts their entry to and exit from homelessness. Four sub-themes related to these perceptions were identified: (1) perceptions of self and situation; (2) impact of being homeless on self-reflection; (3) aspects of hope to consider; and (4) perspectives on having a permanent residence. Analytically, these findings help challenge present stereotypes about homelessness and usefully inform social service delivery organizations.

Key words: homelessness, service delivery, employment, perceptions, social work

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Negative public perspectives and stereotypes of homelessness is a significant issue that needs to be addressed to help eliminate the stigma attached to people who are homeless and to the shelters that provide services (Forte, 2002; Oakley, 2002; Phelan, Link, Moore, & Stueve, 1997; Rosenthal, 2000; Takahashi, McElroy, & Rowe, 2002). Many stereotypes are anchored to non-empirical assumptions. As a partial corrective, the present paper challenges some stereotypes surrounding homelessness by examining the experience of individuals who are homeless and employed—a cohort about which there is little scholarly and public policy analysis.

Public perception during the early and mid-20th century considered the homeless man living in “skid row” districts of America’s major urban centers as “lazy” and uninterested in permanent work (Kusmer, 2002). In his historical study of homelessness in the United States, Kusmer found that people who were homeless have often been employed while homeless, and he identifies aspects of the changing labor market—in particular the loss of low-skill jobs—as having an influence on the affordability of housing. Such a solely macro-level discussion hinders our ability to challenge societal perceptions of homelessness. While it is important that we recognize aspects of the changing labor market and how people fit in (or do not) because of their competency and skill levels, such a finite discussion is easily misinterpreted and unhelpfully applied within policy initiatives and local service delivery.

Even earlier sociological studies on homelessness helped perpetuate some stereotypes. Many studies only described the characteristics of homeless populations living in skid row areas and focused on general behaviors (such as alcoholism) to categorize the population (see Kusmer, 2002). Few researchers described the experiences and perceptions of those living in these communities; however, those studies that did explore this aspect found interesting and noteworthy results. For example, some earlier research found that the residents in skid row neighborhoods, just like people living within more mainstream housing, wanted to live independent lives (Kusmer, 2002).

Stigma negatively influences the emotional well-being of those in society who are homeless, and also the ability of these
Employed People Experiencing Homelessness

individuals to obtain help and support in their time of need. As these earlier studies demonstrated, societal perceptions of homelessness have a direct impact on the resources and types of support people experiencing homelessness receive and the nature of their interactions with service delivery (Applewhite, 1997; Dluhy, 1990; Goldberg & Simpson, 1995; Medina, Gutierrez, & Vega, 1997; Sosin & Bruni, 2000). Recent research has shown that perceptions and attitudes control how community members interact with shelter service systems, having a direct impact on the type of service (e.g., supported housing, dormitory emergency shelter services, clinical services) that people experiencing homelessness are offered (Graham, Walsh, & Sandalack, 2008; Shier, Walsh, & Graham, 2007). As a result of these negative perceptions, an individual’s needs may not be met, and individualized solutions can often be overlooked (Zufferey & Kerr, 2004).

Service delivery is important in the process of re-housing (Ferguson, Wu, Drynmess, & Metz-Spruijt, 2007; Lindsey, 1996; Rife, First, Greenlee, Miller, & Feichter, 1991). Failure to recognize perceptions and stereotypes results in at least two outcomes. The first is that service delivery can be inflexible—that it cannot adjust intervention methods to the changing needs that arise as new subgroups of people experiencing homelessness emerge (Kutza & Keigher, 1991). The second, as is the case for employed people experiencing homelessness, is the creation of subgroups that are poorly serviced and not necessarily appropriate for the services they do receive.

In recent years, a growing corpus of research has explored homelessness from the perspective of those people experiencing homelessness (Baumann, 1993; Elias & Inui, 1993; Gibson, 1991; Zufferey & Kerr, 2004). Greater effort has been made to document lived experiences to provide alternative perspectives of people living homeless, whether in shelters or on the streets (Butler, 1993; Kosor & Kendal-Wilson, 2002; McNaughton, 2008; Morris & Heffren, 1988; Scott & Sturk, 2000), and some studies have even shown that these perspectives are drastically different from those held by service providers and the wider community (de Oliveira, Baizerman, & Pellet, 1992). The underlying theoretical concept that motivates much of this exploration is that public perceptions influence an individual’s social
situation. Perceptions of homelessness can have an impact on how individuals interact with service delivery, with other informal supports, and with the wider community.

Further research needs to understand how these perceptions have an impact on individuals' entrance into and exit from homelessness. With that agenda in mind, the present article discusses results from a study that sought to better understand pathways to and from homelessness from the perspective of people who were employed and homeless in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Calgary is a major Canadian urban center of one million residents located in a region that has been the epicenter of the Canadian oil industry; it is a site that is uniquely positioned to provide insight into the experiences of those who are homeless and employed. Although Calgary experienced a continual increase in unemployment similar to the national increase over the study period, its unemployment rate was still below the national average during our period of data collection. For example, Statistics Canada indicated that the Calgary unemployment rate went from 3.7% to 3.9% between November and December 2008, while the national rate rose from 6.3% to 6.6% (Alberta Employment and Immigration, 2008). This trend continued throughout this study: in June 2009, the unemployment rate in Calgary had risen to 6.6%, while the national average had risen to 8.6% (Alberta Employment and Immigration, 2009).

Our research into employed people experiencing homelessness was motivated by two other reasons. The first concerns our interest in understanding how people who work experience the possibility of access to adequate stable housing. The second reason is rooted in a more analytical context. By focusing on the employed homeless, we can better appreciate the phenomenon of homelessness as it intersects with housing, the labor market, and service delivery. Moreover, the subjective understanding of employed homeless people helps to link macro-level analytical discussions of homelessness with micro-level experiences—a useful outcome for scholars and policy makers alike (Clapham, 2003).
Methods

This research is based on interviews conducted between November 2008 and February 2009 with 65 people, all 18 years old or older, who identified themselves as being employed and homeless and who were using homelessness services in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Since four of the recorded interviews could not be transcribed, the final sample for coding consisted of 61 people (25 females and 36 males). Local service organizations in Calgary estimate that approximately 6 out of 10 people experiencing homelessness in this city are employed in some capacity.

The growth in Calgary's homeless population is staggering. In 2006, the number of people experiencing homelessness had grown to 3,436, a 740% increase since 1994 (Laird, 2007). More recently, after the 2008 homelessness count in Calgary, it was estimated that 4,060 people were absolutely homeless (i.e., accessing emergency shelters or sleeping outside with no permanent residence of their own) [Stroick, Hubac, & Richter-Salomons, 2008]. For purposes of our work, homelessness is based on the physical conditions in which individuals negotiate shelter: not having a "roof"; living in a homeless shelter facility or similar institutional setting; staying in these institutions for extended periods of time because there is no other accommodating situation; residing in places that are not long-term solutions to homelessness; staying with friends; or "squatter"—taking up residence illegally in an abandoned building or using land illegally to build shelter (Kleniewski, 2002). The researchers selected participants using a targeted snowball sampling of current clients of one of three service-providing organizations in Calgary participating in the study. Two of the organizations were homeless shelters, and one was a community-based resource center. All three offered a mix of programs.

Researchers selected participants on the basis of their current employment status. Initially we sought participants who identified themselves as being employed full-time. However, after the first several interviews we realized that our view of what constituted employment was biased. Considering only formal full-time jobs as employment did not provide a
true picture of the relationship between the respondents' employment and their experience of homelessness. The situation of homelessness has a direct impact on the type (permanent or temporary) and nature (part-time, casual, or full-time) of employment available to people experiencing homelessness. Consequently, we extended our criteria to include more informal types of employment. Of the 61 participants, 14 were employed in a full-time capacity, 6 in a part-time capacity, and 25 in casual or temporary employment situations. Many of the casual or temporary workers were working full-time, but in different job locations and positions from one day to the next. One participant was identified as self-employed, and 15 reported being unemployed at present but had recent histories of full-time or part-time employment. In this last category of participants, some reported being laid off from their positions of paid employment or being on unpaid medical or maternity leave, and others reported working only sporadically, through temporary employment agencies.

Data were collected using standard ethnographic techniques (Fetterman, 1998, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1991). Interviews were conducted in person using a semi-structured, open-ended interview guide. The interviews lasted approximately one hour. Questions prompted respondents to describe their housing, employment, and job training history, to identify factors that they considered as having an impact on their present situation of being homeless, and to give their perspective on how being homeless affects other aspects of their lives. Reporting here eliminates identifying characteristics such as place, date, and sex.

Data were analyzed using qualitative methods. The transcriptions and the interviewer notes taken throughout the interview process were examined. Analytic induction and constant comparison strategies (see Goetz & Lecompte, 1984; Glasser & Strauss, 1967) were used to detect patterns within the transcribed interviews. Specifically, emergent themes (see for example: Charmaz, 2000; Williams, 2008) and patterns (see for example: Creswell, 2009; Fetterman, 2008) were identified within the transcribed interviews with a focus on the factors that respondents identified as having an impact on their present housing situation. The first step in the coding process
was to read through all the interviews with the objective of identifying common themes. The themes were coded and the data were searched for instances of the same or similar phenomena. Finally, the data were translated into more general working hypotheses that were refined until all instances of contradictions, similarities, and differences were explained, thus increasing the dependability and consistency of the findings. The research team collaboratively worked on this stage of research to maintain the credibility criteria of the study (i.e., discussing the rationale for determining particular codes that emerged).

The present paper reports on one major category emerging from the data: perceptions have an impact on homelessness. The findings about respondents' perceptions of their situations and the impact of societal views on their homelessness are described below and supported by selected quotations. These findings help to challenge socially held perceptions of the situation of homelessness and people who are homeless.

Findings

Respondents in this study provided their own perspectives of being homeless. We find many of these excerpts help to challenge some of the stigma that is attached, at both societal and individual levels, to people experiencing homelessness. In particular, the fact that each respondent was employed in some capacity or had very recent employment histories helps to challenge public perceptions about employment and homelessness—well beyond simplistic entitlement failure and inadequate supply. More specifically, the data highlight how employed people experiencing homelessness are impacted by their present situation and how they perceive themselves. Four primary themes emerged from these data: (1) perspective of self and being homeless (i.e., being homeless impacts how I perceive myself); (2) impact of being homeless on self-reflection (i.e., being homeless impacts my personal outlook and/or personal development); (3) aspects of hope when homeless (i.e., I have hope of getting out of this situation); and (4) perspective of the meaning of a permanent residence (i.e., I want to have a permanent residence because it offers safety, distance
from negative influences and interactions, stability, privacy, and/or independence).

**Perspective of Self and Situation**

Studies that seek to get at perspectives about homelessness and people experiencing homelessness have tended to focus on the attitudes of people who do not fit such a category, examining instead the local community, public perception, professional attitudes, and service delivery experiences (Belcher, Deforge, & Zanis, 2005; Brooks, Milburn, Rotherman, & Witkin, 2004; Powers-Costello & Swick, 2008; Somerman, 1993; Tompsett, Toro, Guzicki, Manrique, & Zatakia, 2006). Alternatively, this study focused on gaining insight into respondents' own perspectives of themselves, their experience of being homeless, and the overall social situation. Some respondents described being embarrassed about being homeless, while others provided insight into being homeless and staying at shelters for help-seeking reasons. Also, some respondents provided insight into how they view themselves while in this situation of homelessness.

With regard to embarrassment, respondents described their reluctance to tell other people about their present situation:

> Oh, yeah, my current situation is embarrassing—I mean for me to contact anybody and say, “Yeah, I’m back in a shelter”—for the simple fact that throughout the years, I’ve been an addict—and [with] the lying and mistrust that comes along with being an addict. Then all of a sudden I try to straighten up, and I go on the right and narrow, and then all of a sudden back in the shelter again. So right now, it’s embarrassing for me to phone and say, “Hey, I tried the right way and it’s not working.” (64)

> Like this respondent, others also considered a judgment from other people as a fuel for their embarrassment:

> I wouldn’t mind saying I’m at the Seed because it is decent here. But I do have a little problem admitting it because I’m embarrassed. [People will ask] “Why are you in a shelter? How old are you? What’s wrong with you?” [It is just the] mistakes I have made (26).
The condition of the shelter was also embarrassing for some respondents:

There is no privacy or freedom here. It is scary, very scary. I don’t know what is worse, camping on the outside of the building or being inside the building. I mean, I’ve never camped outside. I’m too terrified, paranoid. But even being on the inside of the building, it is like being in an adult day care. It is kind of humiliating, sometimes degrading. But at the same time, it is home. It was really depressing for me to have to come back here. (28)

It is clear from these excerpts that the respondents are embarrassed about being homeless and embarrassed about being in the shelter. For many respondents, being in the shelter was necessary to gain help with their present situation. Respondents were accessing shelters because the alternatives—sleeping outside or using less formal supports such as family and friends—were less appealing or helpful:

I decided to come here and ask for help [after respondent went to a temporary employment agency that could not provide any work] because I really do not want to live on the streets. I mean it is not a place for somebody my age to begin with, and second of all, I am trying to realize that I am better than that. (10)

For many respondents, accessing shelters was a part of the process of seeking help to become permanently housed and deal with other personal issues that had developed within their lives: “This shelter has really helped me out. I am getting fed while I am working. My first paycheck is in another two weeks. Then I’ll be on my own” (17).

Some respondents were accessing the shelters as a result of personal crisis. For example, one respondent, dealing with the grief and depression that resulted from the death of a brother, ended up living in a shelter in Calgary while working through issues related to mental well-being that were affecting other aspects of his/her life.

It is just a matter of patience. And it is not all negative.
There is a lot of positivity here. For example, my brother passing on. I have been searching because I was wandering about—all of a sudden I am wondering what happens—where you go. So I have really been searching that out [here]. (1)

Another respondent was unable to function at work—the stress was overwhelming, significantly affecting his/her emotional and mental well-being. This individual explained the need to be within the shelter while working through these issues:

I think I’m happier now, believe it or not. Perhaps not happier, but more of a free spirit. I do not have the same worries as I did once before [in a previous job] with (respondent describes requirements of employment), and I don’t have that inner tension and that inner turmoil. I worked in a job that I hated working at for the last 14 years. I hated working there. Dealing day in and day out … it turned me into a very explosive person. (29)

A final theme respondents identified was that the situation had a direct impact on their overall outlook on themselves. For example, stereotypes respondents had of people who are homeless affected their overall outlook when they themselves became homeless:

The first time I felt really depressed. I felt, “Oh, I am a drunk.” That’s always what I thought a drunk was—an alcoholic, a person on the street who didn’t have a home. I thought, “Oh, no! I am a drunk.” (25)

Some respondents maintained positive outlooks of themselves within the stereotypes:

Me, I am not a bum, and I am not an idiot. I made some mistakes in life, but if anyone judged me I’d have a lot to say about it. I would not just shut up and hide in a corner. There are hundreds of people like me that do not deserve to be stereotyped. They deserve a second chance. They deserve someone who thinks they are better. (58)
Many respondents also discussed the impact of judgments from other people. For example, some highlighted how judgments impact the way they perceive behaviors, both their own and those of other people who are homeless:

For a lot of us, it is just that we are here. You can beat me over the head all you want; I have to figure this out myself, and thank you for offering. [Nonetheless] you know I’m going to try to be as nice as I can. It is not the end of the world: I do not have to be a bad person because I am homeless. I do not have to be mean and scream and yell and tantrum like a three-year-old either. (39)

Furthermore, other respondents described how they interact with other people and their awareness of these public perceptions:

[Sometimes] you get hassled. I mean like, “Oh, these guys walking down the street—they’re from the hostel.” Everybody hits the panic button. We are not all criminals; there are a lot of good, hard-working honest people like myself that are just trying to start over and build a life for themselves the best way they can in these days and times. (65)

The respondents’ perspectives can help provide clarification of the situation of being homeless that may speak to common stereotypes. An example is the embarrassment respondents expressed about the use of shelter services. The source of such embarrassment is speculative, and further research could usefully explore this aspect, but it can be seen to stem from societal perceptions of homelessness: perceptions held by the wider social community and by individuals who interact with people experiencing homelessness. Without generalizing these findings to all individuals experiencing homelessness, we must still recognize the importance of the subjective experiences of people who are homeless; these include embarrassment and how this feeling affects their behavior and their interactions with other people and within the community at large.
Furthermore, respondents provided insight into the help-seeking relationship. Many recognized that they need some social support, and their rationale for using shelter services was not just that they were homeless, but also that being in those shelters was providing social support around issues that were compounding—issues, problems, or situations of the types that lead to homelessness. The alternative perspective that their statements provide is that people are accessing services that are needed: services that are not available within the mainstream social welfare system until a person reaches the point of losing his or her permanent residence.

Impact of Situation on Self-reflection

Previous research has found that people experiencing homelessness have a devalued sense of self, which impacts their own personal identity (Boydell, Goering, & Morell-Bellai, 2000). Respondents here provided further insight into how being homeless affects their self-reflection. Some respondents described the impact of being homeless on personal outlooks, and others described the impact on personal development.

With regard to the impact on personal outlooks, central is the impact on the respondents' self-worth. For some respondents, certain factors associated with homelessness had a negative impact on self-worth. One factor identified was the ability to maintain adequate hygiene:

Your hygiene and stuff brings up your self-esteem; you do not feel so down on yourself. Every time you feel down, you go out and have a drink because you do not really care anymore—you are dirty, stinky, all greasy. There are times where you just hide in the bushes and drink your beer because you do not want to be around nobody because you are full of shame. When you are clean and stuff, it gives you more self-esteem to go out there and walk around and use the computers and print out resumes and walk around and drop off your resumes at job sites. They actually look at you different: like not as a homeless gangster or a bum. They actually reach out and they shake your hand. (35)

Also, some respondents highlighted ways in which the environment of the shelters and their interactions with other
shelter guests had an impact on overall self-worth:

It is really hard in the mornings, as people are really grumpy down there. There is nothing really to be happy about; you are waking up in a filthy environment with a whole bunch of strangers you don’t even know. All you are trying to do is better yourself, but it is like, what is the point anymore? Why care? (10)

A further consideration is the perception of just being in these shelters and being without a home. One respondent described his feelings:

I wouldn’t find myself caught dead in that place before—when I was employed, when my life was on track and everything was ok. To end up there—it’s like you almost want to kill yourself. Because you just don’t know, because you stand on the street one day, and you have absolutely no direction: you don’t know where to go at all. (58)

Other respondents described the emotional hardship of becoming homeless and the subsequent impact on self-worth. For example:

I felt like a failure again because after ending up homeless when I was single, I said I am never going to do that again; I am going to be on my toes, it is not going to happen, and then it did happen. I beat myself up about it, and at first, the last few nights I was at the apartment before we came here, knowing that it was going to have to be the inevitable, some nights were spent crying, waking up through the night. Not eating just because I didn’t want to have to face the fact. (56)

Respondents also said that being homeless changed their overall perceptions of themselves:

I think I am more tolerant of others now. I think I have come into a part of me that I didn’t actually know before. I would say I have more compassion for people now—more of an understanding. I’m not quite so quick
to judge. I was very judgmental before. But then I lived in my own little sphere. (29)

I mean, you change as a human being when you lose your home and you have to stay at these shelters. All your beliefs are different now. Before, if you had any judgments towards people on the streets—you sometimes saw a person that was dirty and was picking up bottles—I would be like, “Oh, they’re picking up bottles,” and my friends would be like, “Oh my God!”—you know. I would be so ashamed and stuff, but now you look at them and it’s like, wow. You know, I’ve been there, I’ve been around these people, and they are actual human beings. They are good people. (58)

Also, some respondents found that being homeless changed their sense of values:

I have actually taken good from being homeless. Before, I had a crappy car, and I hated driving it. I would take a crappy car now and be like, “This is the greatest ride. It gets me somewhere—I don’t have to take a bus. It is perfect.” So it has been a learning experience which has probably been good for me. I needed it. (11)

Being homeless also affected the personal development of some respondents: their overall self-esteem and their inner strength. With regard to self-esteem, one respondent said:

To a point it [being homeless] does [affect my self-esteem]. Of course it does, but to keep that self-esteem—just because you are homeless does not mean you have to look homeless. ... That is part of self-esteem, right? How people are going to perceive you. (24)

Homelessness has a lot to do with self-esteem, but so do the public perceptions of people who are homeless. Many respondents similarly described the impact of public perceptions on self-esteem:

A lot of people out there look down on people that are homeless. “Oh, look at them! Look at how dirty their
coat is," or how dirty this and that. That is wrong to even say stuff like that to a homeless person because they have no idea what it is like to be homeless. If you put them in your shoes, how do you think they would feel? They probably would not like it if someone looked down on them. So people up there should not look down on homeless people because it is not a nice thing to make that homeless person feel that big [respondent makes gesture demonstrating being made to feel small or insignificant]. (37)

I have noticed that my appearance has been a lot different [now, being homeless]; I am not myself, really, like I used to be. Just when I am outside and people see where I am, you can tell they look down on you. I have never had anybody do that to me before, and I have never felt that before, so it is hard. (55)

Some respondents spoke of how their inner strength was affected by being homeless. The struggles involved with being homeless provide a challenge that has helped their personal development:

You learn to be stronger, stand up for yourself, like I never used to. I used to cower and hide ... Like you learn to get strong. (20)

My saying is whatever doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. That is the way I feel, so I definitely feel stronger now because every day I am fighting a battle ... I am getting there, so it makes me stronger. It’s hard, but I am doing it. (21)

The respondents’ statements demonstrate that being homeless can affect their personal outlook and personal development in both positive and negative ways. An understanding of the implications of the homeless situation for people can usefully be applied to methods of intervention. These personal implications provide further evidence that public perceptions of homelessness have a direct impact on the ability of people to exit that situation. For example, various aspects associated with being homeless affected respondents’ self-worth and their
self-esteem, and in some cases, their personal development. For some respondents, the situation of homelessness acts as a further barrier to undertaking those tasks necessary to become re-housed.

It is also important to note that respondents described positive developments and positive outlooks as a result of being homeless. Social service practitioners taking empowerment-based approaches to service delivery might usefully explore some of these positive meanings when working with people.

Aspects of Hope within the Situation

Historically, perceptions of people experiencing homelessness have included the belief that homeless people lack hope—that is, they lack a vision of the future, dreams, or aspirations (Kusmer, 2002). Recent studies have shown that this is not true (de Oliveira et al., 1992; Kosor & Kendal-Wilson, 2002). Some respondents participating in our research add to this literature by providing insight into the factors that affect a person’s hope of getting out of the situation of homelessness.

Respondents identified two aspects for consideration. The first relates directly to the person’s outlook on being homeless:

I have a lot of hope that a lot of people do not have because I used to have a life; I remember what it was like. I have a lot more hope than other people. People ask me, “How can you be so happy when you’re out here?” Where I come from, it is pretty damn cold at night. A lot of people do not see the morning. I am very happy to see the sunrise. I am so happy sometimes even when I stay out all night. I’m very happy to see the sunrise, and I thank God for it. I got a better chance to do it right, which means I will probably mess it up before midnight, but a chance to try and get it right anyway. (3)

Another hopeful aspect for consideration is the perspective on addiction. The way this respondent perceived the situation and understood the consequences of addiction was sufficient to maintain hope. Other respondents’ outlooks similarly affected hope:
I would rather have my own place. It would be a lot easier. But, you know, because of the situation, I have to do what I need to do and get my place and hopefully be out of here soon. I just hope for the best, and that is what I am doing. (21)

The second consideration identified by respondents is the role of personal goals in maintaining hope to become permanently housed. For some respondents, maintaining the personal goal of getting out of the situation was important:

All I know is I need to find a pathway to get into a shelter, like get a place to live, and that’s it. I know I can do it, so that’s not an obstacle for me—like I know I can find a place, I know I’m going to get there. Sure it will take time, but I’ll get there. That is something that I want, so I just have to keep struggling at it and I’m sure I’ll get there. (8)

Another point to consider, as identified by respondents, is related to personal goals for issues that are exacerbating the respondents’ housing situations. Some respondents referred to working through emotional issues with family members, or to personal crises like addictions. One respondent, for example, described how being in control of the addictions gave hope of getting out of the situation of homelessness:

Just the fact that I’m getting physically stronger and I kind of like the feeling, and you know ... I wake up in the morning with a clear head and you know. See, with crack cocaine, you can be out there: you can go on a run. God, I think the longest one I was on was eight days. No sleep, you know, and so you can imagine: you go to sleep, and even when you wake up after that, you still feel rotten. I don’t have that anymore. (13)

Respondents’ insight around hope provides direction for service delivery organizations to think about effective ways to interact with people experiencing homelessness, and provides to the wider community some perspective on what people experiencing homelessness want. With regard to service intervention, the respondents suggest the need to maintain
particular outlooks and set personal goals. Incorporating these aspects into service delivery might usefully influence perceptions of self-reflection that respondents identified, essentially challenging negative images of self-worth and improving overall self-esteem. Furthermore, such an approach—one that promotes hope—might also usefully facilitate commitment to the process of becoming re-housed.

**Perspective on the Meaning of a Permanent Residence**

A perception within society is that people experiencing homelessness do not have the desire to live in mainstream housing. Research has shown that this is not true (Busch, 2002). Some respondents in this study provided insight into what the meaning of having a permanent residence was for them. Five common sub-themes emerged from participants’ comments on the meaning of housing: safety, distance from negative influences and interactions, stability, privacy, and independence.

Respondents stated that with a permanent residence comes safety. They included several aspects of personal safety, such as personal health, physical well-being, and safety from others:

> Having a permanent residence will help me big time. It would help me get a doctor and dentist. I could try then and get a bus pass instead of hopping trains or buses to go to work. I would have a safe environment so you do not have to worry about getting robbed or getting beat up. Basically that would be very good for me. (6)

Other respondents also described negative interactions that are more likely to occur when a person is homeless. They said that having a more permanent residence helps to disassociate them from those negative influences and interactions and maintain other positive aspects of their life, such as employment. One respondent stated:

> I figure once I get a place, then I’ll be away from the crowd. This is important because once you start drinking and you are drinking with everybody you are basically stuck in there, because your decision making is gone. You want to just stay and party all night. But when you’re at your house, it is a lot easier to just have
a couple of beers, watch the hockey game, eat supper, and then go to bed. So I'm hoping that once I get out of here, I'll be able to maintain more of a steady employment with that guy. (11)

This respondent and others described having an element of normality. Some respondents said that permanent residence allows them to participate in other socially-based activities—activities in which they cannot participate in their present situation of crisis.

Permanent residency also offers the comfort of stability that is missing when a person is homeless. Many respondents communicated the desire for stability with permanent residency. One described the impact of instability on personal outlook and behavior:

Instability has a lot to do with the kind of life style that we've all led, right? I mean, if you don't have a place to go at night, who cares? If you don't have any appointments to keep or a schedule—if your life is unstable, you tend to be unstable and make bad choices. I do, anyways. (24)

The fourth sub-theme was a desire for the privacy that comes with having a more permanent residence. Not having privacy within the shelters has a direct impact on people, and privacy is something that they would get, through having their own residence, that respondents would appreciate:

Well, it brings you down being in a situation like this because of the fact that you really have no privacy. You cannot just up and go lay down if you want. If you have a girlfriend, you cannot lay on the couch and cuddle or whatever. You can't—there's a lot of restrictions that aren't fun. But at the same time, I'm lucky to have a place like I have right now. (23)

An advantage related to privacy that individuals have with their own residence is that of independence, which is the fifth sub-theme. The previous respondent partially described this relationship with regard to restrictions in the shelter. Other
respondents described the desire for independence, which they perceive as coming with permanent housing. For example:

It would be better to have your own place; you can sit back on the couch and watch TV if you want. If you wanted to go out and wanted to come back, you could. You wouldn't have to have 300 people sitting around you. It would be nice to have a friend over if you want, instead of always having other people around. (25)

These aspects that respondents desire in stable permanent housing suggest a similarity between people who are without a permanent residence and those that have one. Recognizing these aspects is important to the process of changing public perception and also to working effectively with people experiencing homelessness: this recognition allows practitioners to compare what they have to what these respondents do not have while staying in the shelters. The perspectives that these respondents provide can improve others' understanding of what it means to be homeless and what people experiencing homelessness no longer experience.

Conclusion

Many studies that seek the perspectives of people experiencing homelessness focus on the particular needs of homeless sub-populations (Anderson, Stuttaford, & Vostanis, 2006; Anucha, 2005; Carroll & Trull, 2002; Freund & Hawkins, 2004; Goldberg, 1999). While that research is useful, it tends to elaborate on only the systemic issues of the situation, or the particular resources that an individual or sub-group requires. Of course, it is important to understand these systemic aspects and the required resources, as they help direct service delivery in potentially meaningful ways. Missing, however, is an account of people's perceptions of themselves while homeless, their perspectives of what it means being homeless, and the personal impact of the situation. The alternative focus identified here—placing emphasis on individual perceptions and experiences of homeless people—makes it possible to challenge some of the socially contrived perceptions or stereotypes of homelessness, as well as those assumptions that in turn
influence policy development, service delivery, or both. Our study is obviously not representative of all people experiencing homelessness, nor is it representative of all employed people experiencing homelessness.

However, with these responses, we gain new perspectives on how a particularly large subgroup of homeless people—employed people experiencing homelessness—perceive their present situation and the role of services. People access social services for multiple reasons, and respondents highlighted the critical importance of many of these services. We should point out, too, that homelessness prevention—access to services prior to being homeless—is especially germane.

Our research also helps us to better understand the possibility of hope among the employed homeless. Our respondents confirmed that service practitioners and the wider community promote the conditions in which a person experiencing homelessness can develop a sense of hopeful change; this could be a useful segue into a positive pathway of housing. Furthermore, respondents' perspectives on what having a house means for them provided insight into the similarity between their perceptions and those of people who have a permanent residence. Respondents pointed out positive social interactions, independence, stability, privacy, and safety as desired aspects of securing and maintaining permanent housing. These insights, in turn, are useful for service delivery organizations and policy makers helping people to work through other personal and systemic issues and barriers that impede their transition back into a situation of permanent residency.

Our research identifies several factors that policy actors and service delivery organizations could consider for effective responses to homelessness. More effort is needed to help people who experience crisis in their lives, those who have inadequate skills to deal with crisis, and those who are coping with issues that may later result in crisis. Equally important is the fact that social service and social science scholarship has long understood how systemic or social environmental factors elevate individual risk of homelessness (Hocking & Lawrence, 2000), but this is not the only level that needs to be addressed. Our respondents identified some very personal features of their present situations—unique circumstances based on
the individual experiences and relationships of each person throughout life. Unless we recognize the many aspects of perception at micro and macro levels of practice, we cannot solve the immediate problems people are presenting—problems that are very much a part of these respondents’ present situations, as are social environment factors such as inadequate affordable housing, labor market shortages, insufficient resources, and minimal service delivery opportunities. The reflections of these participants on their present situations help us to challenge many stereotypes about people who are homeless, but they also point to the role that present practices in education and intervention play in maintaining these stereotypes. We can use these insights to inform better methods of intervention and policy development.

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Employed People Experiencing Homelessness


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The Economics of Being Young and Poor: How Homeless Youth Survive in Neo-liberal Times

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Based upon in-depth interviews with 34 youth in Halifax and seven service providers in St. John's, Montreal, Hamilton, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Calgary, the findings of this study suggest that labor occurs within a particular street context and street culture. Formal and informal work can be inter-related, and despite...
the hardships they experience, young people who are homeless or who are at-risk of homelessness can respond to their circumstances with ingenuity, resilience and hope. Often street-involved and homeless young people are straddling formal and informal work economies while mediating layers of external and internal motivations and tensions. The reality is that the participants in this study cannot very easily engage in formal work. There is a dearth of meaningful formal work available, and when living homeless there are many challenges to overcome to maintain this work. In addition, there are few employers willing to risk hiring an individual who is without stable housing, previous employment experiences and, most likely, limited formal education. Therefore, street youth are left with informal work that provides them with survival money, basic needs, and a sense of citizenship, but which also invites belittlement, harassment, and mockery.

Key words: youth resilience, hope, livelihood strategies, homelessness

Throughout the globe, neo-liberalism as a political and economic philosophy has gained widespread acceptance (Muncie, 2005). As a result, there is a renewed faith in the market economy, less involvement from governments in terms of economic and social stewardship, diminished social and economic safety net structures, and an increase in part-time, casual and temporary employment. Politically, there has been a drastic movement throughout developed and developing nations towards individualism, self help, and tough-on-crime punishment portfolios. As such, an increasing number of people are struggling to sustain their livelihoods, preserve a sense of social citizenship and remain politically, economically and socially viable.

There is a dearth of understanding concerning the relationship between homelessness and the formal (regulated) and informal (unregulated) economy. While much scholarship has focused upon illegal and criminal street activities, there has been little attention paid to formal and informal economies. To begin to address this knowledge gap, this study explored the linkage between homeless young people and their labor within these economic sectors.

Homeless youth across Canada often report family violence, poverty, instability and trauma during childhood and adolescence (Coates, 2000; Hughes, et al., in press; Karabanow, 2004a, 2006, 2008; Novac, Serge, Eberle, & Brown, 2002). There
are widespread stories of problematic and dehumanizing experiences within group home and foster care systems, and a large majority of youth arrive on the street out of desperation or with the sense that even life on the street is safer or more acceptable than the life that they are fleeing (Alleva, 1988; Auerswald & Eyre, 2002; Karabanow, 2004a). Once on the street, many youth resort to risky and often illegal activities for making money, finding shelter and food, and defending themselves against the threats of violence and further alienation (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002; Karabanow, 2004a). These activities cause further marginalization for these youth, and create additional barriers to “success,” including addictions, physical and mental illness, and criminal justice involvement (Durham, 2003; Karabanow, 2006, 2008; Karabanow, Clement, Carson, & Crane, 2005; Karabanow et al., 2007; Novac et al., 2002).

This study took place in Halifax, Nova Scotia—a medium size urban city (population roughly 373,000) and the largest city in the Atlantic Provinces. Nova Scotia, an eastern maritime province of Canada, is not insulated from these global trends, neither are street youth. Street youth are not only increasing in numbers throughout Canada (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006), but their predicaments are worsening due to economic recession trends, greater restrictions on social assistance and employment insurance, and weakening social safety net supports (Karabanow, 2004b; Krauss, Eberle, & Serge, 2001). Generally, this leaves young people in precarious economic circumstances.

Formal and Informal Economies

Formal and informal economies exist in every country. Formal economies are comprised of legal and lawful work which is documented and taxed in an economy. For the young people interviewed, the formal sector included unskilled, short-term, and temporary labor within the service sector (e.g., restaurants, call centers, fast food, cleaning/janitorial, and child care) or the industrial sector (e.g., construction, roofing, bricklaying, yard work, and snow removal/landscaping). Informal work tends to be differentiated by the nature of how the work takes place and the nature of goods and services
being exchanged (Losby, Else, Kingslow, Edgcomb, Malm, & Kao, 2002; Schneider, 2002). For example, providing childcare services and receiving cash rather than check payments, and not filing taxes would be considered informal work. However, such forms of work are unlawful, as formal regulations are not being followed (i.e., reporting income for taxation purposes), yet, they are still legal. Similarly, panhandling is legal in Canada, but is unlawful if the earnings are unreported. Squeegeeing and median panhandling, on the other hand, are illegal work activities in most communities since bylaw legislation has been enacted in most major Canadian cities banning ‘working in a roadway’ (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002). The illegal side of informal economies, beyond squeegeeing and median panhandling, includes criminal activities (such as selling drugs, sex work, sale of stolen goods, and theft) which are otherwise jobs for a majority of people in the informal economy (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Losby et al., 2002; Schneider, 2002). Informal work activities are often the only way to survive for street youth, and they are usually involved in both unlawful and illegal labor (Baron, 2004; Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002; Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Schneider, 2002).

While informal economies were once treated as a phenomenon seen in developing countries, they are now emerging in the industrialized nations (Schneider, 2002; Vogel, 2006). Since the 1980s, the trend of neo-liberalism has resulted in various challenges for low-skilled workers in North America (Crow & Albo, 2005). The shifts from manufacturing industries to services, as well as changes in the organization of work, including demand for more qualified workers, play a key role in the emergence of informal economies. Manufacturing and low wage industries are often the only option to earn a living for workers with low education levels. While exports have significantly grown, benefitting some in the nation, there have also been significant employment cut backs in low-wage industries, greatly affecting low-income families. In addition to free trade and globalization, economic restructuring is another factor leading to increased unemployment and the rise of precarious employment in Canada (Baron, 2001; Economic Policy Institute [EPI], 2006). As jobs were cut back, household incomes fell drastically. Accompanying these neo-liberal trends is the
diminution of the Canadian government’s role in providing social services intended to offset economic downturns (EPI, 2006). Further, the federal government’s role in providing social services intended to offset economic downturns has diminished (EPI, 2006) along with affordable housing for low-income people, which has resulted in marginalized populations having little choice but to live on the street and engage in the informal economy (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002).

Informal economies emerge in response to desperate times; individuals, communities, or populations who need money create ways of acquiring what they need. Informal economies are often referred to as underground, shadow, invisible and/or black market economies and have been developing as economic survival strategies for many workers who cannot find employment in the formal economy (Losby et al., 2002; Vogel, 2006). The majority of people engaged in the informal economy are there not by choice, but by circumstance (Vogel, 2006).

Informal economies are comprised of a very diverse labor force. Participants of the informal economy are usually the ones who cannot find or engage in employment in the formal economy. These include illegal immigrants, workers who cannot work legally for a variety of reasons (e.g. criminal record), workers who are unemployed due to structural/systemic unemployment, and people, including youth, who cannot engage in formal work due to a lack of permanent housing or low levels of education. This is especially the case for street youth who have much difficulty engaging in formal employment as a result of their homeless status, lack of proper housing, age and education, and often a lack of legal documentation (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Karabanow, 2004b). Clearly, the neo-liberal shift, the decrease in meaningful, livable work opportunities, and the changing demographic landscape in Canada is placing young people in difficult economic circumstances—before they have even entered the labor force in an adult capacity.

The Informal Economy and the Lives of Street Youth in Canada

Street youth are defined as young people (typically between
16-25 years of age) who do not have a permanent place to call home, and who instead spend a significant amount of time and energy on the street (such as in alleyways, parks, storefronts, and dumpsters), in squats (usually located in abandoned buildings), at youth shelters and centers, and/or with friends (typically referred to as “couch surfers”) [Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002; Halifax Regional Municipality, 2005; Karabanow, 2004a].

Street youth engagement with informal economies is often only discussed in relation to economies of criminal activities (Baron, 2004; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). This is misleading. Although street-involved young people are more likely to be engaged in illegal work, less is known about the choice of work—legal or illegal—available to them (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Karabanow, 2004a, 2006). While some of these youth depend on social assistance and support from family/friends for food, shelter and money, finding the means or money to meet their basic necessities of survival is an everyday struggle for a large number of them (Karabanow, 2008). Most North American criminology research on street youths’ informal money-making is almost always situated in the context of crime instead of work (a way to earn money), whereas earning a living in the formal sector—where income is reported and tax paid—is considered as work or employment (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002). This means that most of the research is focused on understanding how street youth become ‘criminally involved’ rather than understanding what street-involved young people need to become self-sufficient without criminal involvement. Further, the contextualization of street activities (e.g. squeegeeing cars, panhandling) as crimes does nothing to address the motivation (i.e., survival) driving the pursuit of these entrepreneurial activities. Hagan and McCarthy (1997) suggest that a majority of street youth do not prefer to engage in certain (illegal) money-making strategies, like prostitution and drug selling. Indeed, in cases where street youth can choose their work, it has been noted that the work selected not only signifies a way they choose to earn money, but also reflects the contexts of where they are (such as background factors and social networks) and represents their perspective towards society in general. Such action demonstrates that these so-called “deviant” and “delinquent” young people are actually

In the present study we have examined the narratives of homeless youth regarding their involvement in informal and formal economies. Much of the research to date has generally involved recording the frequencies of the various means through which homeless youth generate income. We have not, however, been able to find any in-depth examinations of the experience of youths engaged in these forms of labor that are not framed within the context of criminal involvement. This exploratory, qualitative examination of youth experiences provided an opportunity to examine the intersections between work-related identity, the meanings youths ascribe to various forms of work, and their socioeconomic contexts. Furthermore, we sought to triangulate youth perspectives by examining the narratives of experienced service providers regarding their efforts to facilitate employment for their clients.

Methodology

This study was developed and implemented in collaboration with a community based drop-in centre called ARK Outreach in Halifax, NS. The research issue reflects a need identified by ARK; the organization collaborated on how best to explore the issues, and participated in proposal development, recruitment and data analysis. The community–research partnership is the cornerstone of this project and was integral to community buy-in, in particular for the youth participants. To further ensure our project was grounded in the lived experiences of young people, three youth who frequent ARK were invited to be involved in the project as an advisory committee. These street youth facilitated participant recruitment, contributed to the analysis of data, write-up of findings, and both academic and community presentations of our work.

This paper is based upon the findings emerging from in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 34 youth in Halifax and seven service providers in St. John’s, Montreal, Hamilton, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Calgary.
One-on-one interviews were used to collect narratives from youth aged 16-24 years who identified as street or homeless youth, and to elicit understanding of the issues from service providers. The average age of youth participants was 21 years old; 39% of the sample were females; 16% identified as either gay, lesbian or bisexual; 44% defined their ethnicity as Caucasian and 18% as Aboriginal; 82% were Canadian; 50% were currently sleeping rough (i.e., outdoors); and the vast majority engaged in panhandling and squeegeeing as primary income sources.

Interview guides were drafted by the research team to shape the narratives collected around key aspects of employment and labor—including daily routine, preferences, school and mentors, benefits and challenges, and ‘dream jobs.’ Using grounded theory to guide the process, the research design was community-based and naturalistic, endeavoring to build understandings based on emerging data trends which form the foundation of our arguments. Grounded theory analysis involves the process of identifying common and dissimilar themes while building conceptual narratives from the data through open, axial and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process facilitates the fracturing of the data into conceptually-specific themes and categories—rebuilding the data in new ways by linking primary categories and auxiliary themes into a path analysis, and constructing a theoretical narrative shaped by data integration and category construction.

Purposive sampling was employed for both youth and service providers. Using community networks and the relationships of our community partner to the young people they serve, youth were recruited relatively easily. Youth were invited to participate based on the study criteria: young people 16 to 24 years of age (most common age range when considering youth on the street) who identified as homeless or street youth. During the summer months (July–August) youth who were ‘traveling’ or moving around and likely pursuing informal work were recruited for the first round of data collection; in the fall, youth who were more ‘settled,’ and likely pursuing or engaged in more formalized work, were recruited. This strategy was suggested by ARK as a way of diversifying our sample. Youth participants were interviewed at ARK or a
nearby café and the conversations were audio-recorded.

To complement the voices of street youth, service providers were recruited from across Canada through professional networks (of the research team) and according to a list of organizations youth participants mentioned in their interviews as being particularly helpful. The research team invited key service providers from across Canada to share their observations, opinions, and ideas about supporting homeless youth in exploring work and employment options, and to share practitioner wisdom and insight into the relationship between homeless youth and formal and informal work. All aspects of this study were reviewed and approved by an institutional research ethics board.

Results

Participants in this study demonstrated a clear rationale for engaging in both formal and informal employment—it is a way to survive the poverty of street life. The majority of young people interviewed had both formal and informal work experiences; however, informal labors such as squeegeeing and panhandling are by far the most common forms of work. Such work fits the circumstances of being young, poorly housed, poorly educated, poorly fed, poorly clothed and generally socially, politically and economically excluded from mainstream culture. With much reflection and thoughtfulness, the majority of participants chose informal work over formal work (panhandling, squeegeeing, flying a sign, and/or busking). Informal labor is both accessible and congruent with the life circumstances that attend homelessness. It allows for immediate payment, a sense of control over one's work, and it can lead to a 'real job' and an increased sense of self-worth. In the following discussions, we highlight three grand narratives from the data: street life is work; informal and formal work are highly intertwined; and, work provides a sense of identity for those on the street.

Street Life as Work

The daily work of street youth often involves the least desirable work available, with no job security, and is conducted in
public, leaving these youth at the mercy of public opinion and scrutiny. Images of panhandling and squeegeeing, among the other menial tasks street-involved youth perform to survive, are often considered deviant or criminal. These assertions fail to acknowledge the physical and social conditions that these young people endure in an effort to sustain their survival each day and which keep them at arms-length from mainstream culture:

When you are on display, everybody’s poking and clawing at you ... a lot of people always give squeegeers a hard time because “we don’t want to be part of society,” which is not true. We are really part of society; we’re out there every day. Like you know what I mean? We are a major part of society.

Homeless youth spend a large portion of their day seeking out ways to make money in order to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, and companionship. Money is central in planning or scheduling their day, however making large amounts of money is not the objective—they tend to make approximately $20 - 40 per work stretch (3-5 hours). Rather, they work to make ‘their goal,’ enough to meet their needs for the day (e.g., buy some food, buy necessary gear, pay for travel, go to a show, etc.). Their work is intentional and purposeful:

I have a goal in my head of what I’m trying to make, you know. Whether it be for a drink, whether it be for a meal, whether it be for you know, a ticket out of town, something like that.

The daily routine of homelessness and informal work is not significantly different from the routine required to maintain formal work. The difference is in who controls its structure. Informal work scheduling tends to be determined primarily by the individual whereas in formal work it is determined by the employer. For the youth interviewed, this was a significant difference between working informally and formally.

There are many derogatory references to street-level informal work activities; very rarely are they considered work. However, for street youth, informal work provides
opportunities for expressions of autonomy (e.g., creativity, entrepreneurship) that buffer the controlling forces associated with other activities of daily life (e.g., appointments with agency workers, making it to scheduled drop-in meals or programs, and finding shelter). For example, if they were having a 'low' day or were in a bad mood, youth would opt for activities that required less public engagement (e.g., flying a sign in a median) or would choose more passive means of working (e.g., put out a cup and read a book rather than converse with passersby). As in most business enterprises, the type of informal work chosen and its location must be consistent with the community in which they find themselves:

Depends what, depends where I am. I don’t really feel comfortable squeegeeing in small towns, I feel like I’m going to get the cops called on me real quick. Um, flying a sign usually works pretty well but again, some towns you get the cops called on you real quick. So a lot of small towns, it’s easier to just sit down with a little cup and smile.

Other factors taken into consideration include which days of the week are best for work: “Like, if it’s a Sunday, maybe it won’t be so busy downtown, so I would probably be better off [squeegeeing].” Time of day is also a consideration.

Before people are going to work, if you’re out really early … or like lunch time when they’re out, like in lunch or whatever, like in busy towns. … And then there’s like the dinner rush and like when people are going home.

Inclement weather can significantly affect income. While Canadian winters are particularly harsh, almost everyone agreed that rain was the most challenging weather in which to work. Not only is it cold, wet, and uncomfortable to be outside and exposed as a ‘worker,’ generally the public mood is less than pleasant when it is raining, which means it is more difficult to make enough money for the day.

Informal work positions homeless young people very much in the public realm and at the mercy of their charity which can
be either lucrative or can expose them to the wrath of an often misunderstanding civil society:

I’ve had people just go off on rants, like “fuck you, you stupid worthless piece of shit, blah, blah, blah, get a fucking job, why don’t you just go fucking die,” and like, try to spit on me. I’ve been kicked and stuff ... I’ve had people throw stuff at me out of cars and shit. Like just, people get pissed off, man.

In particular, young women shared stories of harassment (mostly of a sexual nature) and the need to strategize for protection:

If I was a male I probably would [fly a sign for work] but I’m a girl and if you’re holding a cardboard sign “will work” usually people get the wrong idea. I’d feel weird holding a sign like that, especially with perverts and stuff.

Combating the negativity associated with street level work is all ‘part of the job’ and challenges youth to find ways of maintaining a positive stance and hope: “You’re just like, you’ve just got to be like on top of the world kind of. You just like, no matter what [people are saying to you]. Like something will come through and you’ll just be happy.” Equally frustrating to youth was the degree to which the public is uninformed about the realities of homelessness, in particular for youth, and about how hard they do work when engaged in informal activities. A number of the youth participants explained that being ignored, misunderstood, and accused of being delinquents or criminals was hardest to reconcile. They wished that the public would try to understand how and why they are on the street, engage in a conversation, and be part of the solution, rather than simply criminalizing and ignoring their ‘public’ existence.

In response, many young people on the street create their own community structures (called tribes or crews), which are group-centered and focused on need: “… we’re very communal people, very contributing to each other, very aware of each other’s needs.” Working and living in groups is purposeful—it is about feeling safer (especially for young women)
and also about feeling connected:

You know, you don’t feel so confident when you’re there by yourself and everybody’s yelling at you. You’re walking the line on every [traffic light] ... nine out of ten people are giving you like you know, the fuck eye or like, you know, it’s kind of embarrassing almost. But when you’re with somebody else, you’re more confident and it’s kind of okay, you know. Especially if somebody will attack you, like it’s happened, you know. You have somebody there to protect you almost or help you out.

As they try to make sense of their lives and their homelessness, youth create their own community (or ‘family’) on the street in response to the shared difficulty and hardship they face. In some ways, youth participants characterized their culture as ‘collective’; people use their gifts or talents to make money throughout the day, and when they are done they return to an agreed upon location and determine what they can do with the money they have acquired. Sometimes individuals work for themselves, but ‘crews’ often pool their resources to ensure that everyone (dogs included) is fed, watered, and taken care of (e.g., has necessary medical supplies, able to get new footwear, etc.).

Within these collectives, there appears to be a strong street etiquette concerning work arrangements. Contrary to the common perception of the streets having ‘no rules,’ there was indeed a clear structure/honor code to engaging in informal work, consisting of, first and foremost, respect:

Like a lot of people think when kids are living on the street that “oh, they just don’t want to listen to rules.” There is a lot of rules within living on the street. ... If you don’t respect another person, they won’t respect you and it all goes down the line. You know, so there’s a lot of ... the unspoken rules, I guess. ... And just respect, respect, respect. That’s the number one rule, to have respect.

Part of having respect is honoring the fact that other people also need to make money. This means negotiating space or ‘spots’ to work:
Well, if someone is panning, you don’t pan right beside, like you move down a few blocks or if someone is flying a sign, you know, ask them “how long are you going to be here or do you mind if I [work here too],” Yeah, you just respect people’s space and respect their need to make money. Just wait your turn.

In addition to honoring the ‘spot,’ it is important not to ‘burn out’ a particular location. ‘Burning out’ a work location refers to overstaying one’s welcome. Work spots that become too popular or over used can be problematic—the public will often notice if someone is in the same place day after day, and usually respond by limiting their ‘drops’ when they may have freely given previously. Most youth participants also described the unspoken rules such as: “Like you don’t ever ask anybody with a child for spare change. You don’t ask the elderly, you don’t you know, you just have to have, it’s common sense. You just have to have respect, you know ...”

While street life and street communities are most often portrayed as violent, unsafe, unstructured, unhealthy and exploitative, there needs to be recognition of the strong collective and ritualistic bonds that can form between those living on the street and which provide companionship, structure, support, and survival (see Karabanow, 2006, 2008).

The Intersection of Formal and Informal Work

The vast majority of young people on the street are engaged in informal work. Yet, street youth are also involved in formal work in different ways—looking for a job, leaving a job, having a job to go back to, or currently working in the formal sector. In some cases, youth held trades certificates or had previous training and were working in unskilled labor or service industry jobs, demonstrating that these youth were not necessarily disinterested in having formal employment. Participants often related having a formal job to feeling better about themselves and the money they earned when it came from an ‘honest day’s toil.’ However, young marginalized people face a variety of challenges in securing gainful employment. Indeed, the two realities—homelessness and formal work—are highly incompatible:
I’ve worked sometimes being homeless but like, it’s just extremely hard. You work [a full shift] and then you’ve got to go and look for shelter and then while you’re sleeping you’ve got cops and other people waking you up and kicking you out. So you’re walking around the city for another twelve hours and then you’ve got to go back to work. You’re not going to do it … it’s harder to keep a job when you’re on the street … it’s almost impossible, like unless you can get a house, but you can’t get a house without a job, you can’t get a job without a house. So that’s when you’re kind of stuck in the bind of things.

Despite the challenges of being homeless, most of the youth participants in the study managed to acquire formal jobs at some point in their homeless careers, had resumes prepared or had used a resume in the past. In many cases youth used online services (e.g., government job banks, Kijiji.com, or other internet-based employment services), word-of-mouth, ‘cold calls,’ or having a friend already employed at a place would lead to formal employment.

Needing affordable, adequate, and safe housing was identified as a key reason why youth did not pursue or retain formal work. In some cases, youth participants tried to maintain a formal job without stable shelter and had learned how difficult it was to manage: “Yeah, it’s better to have a home if you’re going to work, that’s for sure … and then as soon as you take away the home, the working becomes way too much to handle.” Housing also provides a space for preparing to work. Being able to eat, rest, and wash-up are important aspects of maintaining employment and employability.

Also, youth relationships with employers can be temperamental. It was not uncommon for participants to share stories of employers or coworkers who ‘asked too many questions.’ Youth tended to negotiate these interactions by responding with as little information as possible to halt the questioning. Yet, managing these conversations, deciding whether or not to disclose one’s current circumstances, and balancing life needs with work needs can be too much for some young people. There is an element of risk in disclosing (or being put in a
position to disclose) homelessness at work—stigma and discrimination are rampant.

Importantly, for many of the youth participants who identified as travelers, working formally meant ‘settling down.’ Herein lies much of the tension between formal and informal work structures, between systemic difficulties and inequities that keep them from gainful employment, and personal resistance to conventional mainstream lifestyles.

Work—whether formal or informal—is critical to economic survival and as a means of ‘bridge funding’ to support entry into formal work. Further, informal work provides a safety net of sorts; if the formal job does not work out, informal work can be used to top up earnings or for sustaining themselves while waiting for a first paycheck. The challenge of this circumstance is obvious and frustrating:

A lot of times when I first start at a [job], I usually end up having to panhandle until I get my first paycheck anyway. So after work, yeah, it kind of sucks because after doing a full day’s work, I have to go and ask people for change and have them tell me to go get a job. You know, it’s like it’s a little more aggravating when you are working, hearing that.

As such, formal and informal work continually intersect. It is often the only work that is available to youth and is less a choice than a necessity for survival when formal work is simply unattainable. Their motivations for working informally are the same as why they work formally—to make money to survive, even if they consider work like panhandling as ‘de-meaning’ and ‘having no dignity.’ “Well, see, panhandling’s not for everybody. It’s not a job that’s for everybody. You have to, um, you have to not have dignity.” The vast majority of participants acknowledge that informal work is often unpleasant, but at the same time the youth argue that informal work is still work. For some of them, informal work becomes the only work available to them, depending on their age, where they are from, how they are involved with the justice system, and whether they have identification and other necessary papers to be eligible for formal employment.
The participants are very aware of how they are positioned 'in society.' Some view themselves living outside of society, but others argue that they must be part of society because their work is consistently situated within the public realm. This tension around citizenship is a key theme of what work means to youth:

You feel bad because you’re on the streets, so you go out and make money. While you’re making the money you feel bad about taking other people’s money but you have to come back and do it again the next day. So you’ve just got to do it.

In contrast, other youth comment on how their informal work brings them into contact with the public in a positive way. The street-level exchanges and conversations they have with passersby present learning opportunities and time for developing new perspectives on life and the world. These moments can facilitate a sense of belonging, even as outsiders. Although much of the psychological processing of social experiences and the consequences of doing informal work is personal and internal, many of the youth feel that working informally is no different than working formally in terms of the effort, dedication, and motivation required. Part of working informally is presenting themselves as hard-working citizens, as one youth noted: “[I work] about as much as a regular work day. I’m out there every day, trying to keep it consistent so that people don’t think I’m a slacker or something.” Work activity provides a sense of belonging and contributing to society, and allows for choices and possibilities that otherwise would be unavailable:

Stuff like squeegeeing just helps me like feel more like, I don’t know, like a member of society I guess, even though it’s not really like formal. I’m not paying taxes but I still feel like I’m like doing something, you know. You know, like working you know, then I get money and then I like got the choice to like ride the bus instead of walking or like, you know, go buy some food and eat something, or you know, just like, I don’t
know, just having money, man, it just opens up certain possibilities.

Earned money also strengthens self-esteem and feelings of autonomy (personal choice): “I don’t feel like [I should feel bad] when I’ve worked for it, that’s my money. Hell no, you can’t tell me what to do with it, I worked for this.”

Most youth worked to create a future for themselves. When asked about ‘living a good life’ and what it would look like, most youth reflected traditional ideas of stability, sustainability, security, and belonging: “A place to wake up that’s mine, with food in my fridge and no worries. … Basically, needs are taken care of—when I wake up I don’t have to do the menial tasks that give me what I need.” Some had very middle class dreams “Money, you know, bank account, nice house, cars, you know. Wife on my arm, you know, 2-3 kids, little dog or something, you know, the normal lifestyle.” Others spoke more about sustainable and meaningful living that reflected a philosophy of alternative, non-mainstream, back-to-the-land orientations—a more communitarian way of life:

My dream circumstance would be to work, get enough money to get a plot of land and like materials to like build a farm or something. Start off small with just a couple of livestock, then work my way up, plant shit, just sustain it that way and then just like, have a family there. That would be what I’d want it to look like.

Engaging in work—even informal work—can provide these otherwise excluded youth with a sense of accomplishment and, depending on the activity, meaningful work. Engaging with the public and sharing particular life stories can be a way for street youth to reflect on their experiences, and in some cases, feel pride in how they have managed to survive and get by with much less than most. Living homeless and working informally for most youth participants demonstrates a willingness to be productive and organized, and prove to mainstream culture that they are far from a common perception of being lazy: “Like I said, I’m not a lazy person. When I go work, I work my ass off.” In many ways, informal work
is also about feeling “human” and purposeful—providing a means to protect their health and well-being: “I’ll still do it the next day because I need to, to survive. Survival of the fittest—you can’t be lazy. If you are, then you’ll probably not last out here [on the street].”

For many of the youth participants, being able to work informally was a strategy to combat negative self-perceptions and to feel more in control of their circumstances and emotionally and psychologically stronger when engaged in some form of work:

If I’m not doing something, like I just feel like crap because like, I’m feeling like I can’t support myself or like, you kind of get depressed after a while because like you’re not doing anything. Like you just feel useless.

In particular, those young people who identified as ‘squeegeers’ reflected on their work as providing a service—a service which the public could choose to use—and was more honorable than “just panhandling.” Other youth reflected on their informal work and described it as “providing entertainment” (e.g., a song by a busker, a poem from a writer, a piece of artwork from an artist, a joke from a comedian, etc.) for money. Regardless of the type of work, youth participants referred to engaging the public as their job: “Panhandling isn’t just sitting there and doing nothing, you need to keep up conversations with people. I like to say ... my job is entertaining drunk people.”

While many of the youth participants argued that they were able to be independent and “free” because they worked informally, most would also agree that informal work very much reflects a last option for making money in the face of hunger, extreme poverty, and marginalization: “I ended up in this big city. I couldn’t get a job there ... So I had to find other ways to make money. I wanted to work, I just couldn’t. So panhandling was my last option.”

The current reality is that informal work is often more readily accessible for young homeless people, and it provides a means of making money when there are few options. Further, it provides youth with some control of their day and the freedom
to work as little or as much as they like. Informal work also provides a way of earning money that can assist street youth in surviving without engaging in illegal or criminal activities:

Most of the kids I know, they’re not like bad, they’re not like, they don’t rob people, you know. Like they just, you know it’s like, they’re not the people that like, you know, they don’t really steal, you know, they don’t sell drugs, they don’t, you know, they’re not prostitutes. They’re doing it because that’s how they make money. ... I remember this kid, he had this line, “Keep it real; it’s better to beg than steal.”

For the vast majority, being in the public denotes a sense of anomie (social exclusion), alienation amid aggressive judgments, and persistent harassments, including being followed or being asked about how the money earned will be spent, and other intrusions into private lives with nowhere to go to escape the daily onslaught of street life, as this young person notes:

When you do that [public work], there’s no privacy in your life at all, you know. Like people will, like I used to be followed to see where I was going after I would leave a corner, to see what I was spending my money on and stuff. And like, it’s that sort of like violation. ... It’s like it’s none of your business and there’s just no privacy on the street and you know, like yeah, I always used to think like man, it’s bad that I’m standing out here crying but it’s like, if I had an apartment or a room, I would go there and cry. ... So it’s like, there’s nothing, just yeah ... I cried because I just had no shelter and privacy or nothing.

Dealing with the general public and their hostilities is one risk of informal work, however, as more cities have enacted legislation against street-level activities like squeegeeing, panhandling, and flying signs in medians, negative interactions with law enforcement agencies (e.g., municipal police, RCMP, contracted security companies, etc.) have increased. The youth participants are very aware of how their informal work is criminalized, and they acknowledge the risk of getting
caught. Yet, as this youth explains, they persist and create strategies for avoiding ticketing, despite the very public nature of the work:

For me, when you're working in the public, you're also in the eye of like the cops, right, that's ... their whole thing. So you just, like most kids now, they say "six up." Like they always have eyes out for like cops and they always watch each other. I think that is the biggest thing when you're out, because if [the public] can see you, the cops can see you.

Some youth explained how they had ceased a particular work activity (usually squeegeeing) due to ticketing (bylaw legislation). Nevertheless, most youth participants indicated that if they needed money, the possibility of being ticketed would not deter them from "doing what they needed to do to get what they needed [if desperate]." As more visible work like squeegeeing is criminalized, young people find other, less visible and riskier, ways to make what they need. In this way, ticketing may in fact be pushing some youth into rougher aspects of the street economy, such as the drug trade, organized crime, sex work, and theft. In most cases, such alternatives are undesirable:

They're trying to take out squeegeeing you know, like the way people make their money. If we don't have this, where would we be? You know, stealing stuff, doing like robbing cars, like robbing houses? No. We don't want to do that. At least we're doing this instead of that.

Further, youth describe the futility of criminalizing informal work as a means to address homelessness and poverty:

They give you a two hundred dollar ticket while you're trying to make, you know, a couple of bucks for food. You're not going to be paying back that ticket any time soon, you know. It's like yeah, in order for me to pay off that ticket, I'm going to have to squeegee even more and I'm just going to rack them up; it just doesn't make any sense.
Participants captured the tension of being labeled and stereotyped based on informal work activities when using informal work as a strategy to survive: "It's currently a good source of money. It may be illegal but it still pays the bills." Despite the realities of street work, the conditions under which they informally work (e.g., public response, weather, location), and balancing the challenges of surviving on the street (e.g., finding food, shelter, keeping safe, etc.) the youth participants still find meaning in their work.

Our findings suggest that informal economies play a very important role in their everyday survival strategies on the streets, from earning money to acquiring other necessities like food, clothing and shelter. Informal economies, whether legal or illegal, provide work for street youth. Being primarily excluded from the formal economy, street youth may rely on flexible money-making strategies for their survival, including odd jobs, panhandling, and squeegee cleaning, among other activities. Their engagement in informal economies and the process of finding and engaging in different types of work can be interconnected and contingent upon two major factors: their circumstances on the streets and what they need to survive. In some cases, youth who are panhandling, squeegeeing, or busking, for example, might be using these activities as a way to generate income, but they have also created a money-making enterprise that allows them to stay away from more criminal money-making pursuits.

Conclusion

While the experiences and insights of young people living on the street and those who support and care for them describe the complexities and nuances of the intersections between homelessness and labor, the grand narrative seems less complicated and intricate. Popular public myths suggest that street youth are unintelligent, lazy and delinquent. In fact, these young people appear thoughtful and reflective with a strong work ethic that is steeped within civil society, not outside of it. Rather than deviant and criminal in nature, youth participants increasingly seek out employment that is deemed legal and lawful within their contexts. This seems to be the core finding
from our work and is largely absent from the street youth literature—these young people cannot very easily engage in formal work. There is not much available, nor is there much economic incentive to engage. As such, they are left with informal labor that provides them with survival money, pride, self-worth and accomplishment, despite the belittlement, harassment and mockery that comes with such activities. It is a rational survivalist decision on their part. For some it fits a lifestyle of travel and independence, for others it provides the daily support to exist within street culture. What is troubling is that this labor continues to maintain street youths’ status of marginality and social exclusion at the same time as it allows them a means to survive.

References


Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire: Trauma in the Lives of Homeless Youth Prior to and During Homelessness

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Anecdotal evidence from those who work with homeless youth indicates that trauma permeates these young people's lives. This paper presents the findings from a study of 100 homeless youth regarding the presence of trauma in their lives, both before and during homelessness. Participants living in the Maritime Provinces volunteered to take part in a semi-structured interview lasting one to two hours. The interview questionnaire was conducted by a trained interviewer, and was composed of standardized and adapted survey instruments, as well as questions regarding demographics, experiences prior to becoming homeless, assistance received while dealing with stressors, and current needs. The results indicate that trauma is both a cause and a consequence of youth being homeless, as a large majority of participants experienced a number of types of highly stressful events both preceding and during homelessness, and that trauma in the lives of both male and female homeless youth should be understood as a pervasive reality with serious implications. Implications for service delivery are discussed.

Key words: trauma, homelessness, youth, abuse, Trauma Symptom Inventory

Homelessness has gained increasing attention in Canada as structural factors such as poverty, shifts in employment

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patterns, lack of affordable housing, gentrification, and violence (Daly, 1989; Farge, 1989; McLaughlin, 1987) have resulted in growing numbers of homeless persons being increasingly both vulnerable and visible (Hewitt, 1994; Hwang, 2001). Homelessness has grown to such import that national and regional initiatives and conferences have been organized in Canada to address this issue (for example, federal initiatives such as the National Homelessness Initiative and Homelessness Partnering Strategy; Growing Home: Housing and Homelessness in Canada Conference, 2009; Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, 2005). Homeless youth have been recognized as one of the fastest growing, and particularly vulnerable, sub-groups within the homeless population (Gaetz, Tarasuk, Dachner, & Kirkpatrick, 2006).

Since many homeless youth go on to become homeless adults (McLean, 2005; Simons & Whitbeck, 1991), and because the incidence of psychological distress increases the longer a youth is ‘on the street’ (Kamieniecki, 2001), efforts to serve homeless youth can have significant long-term benefits for both the youth and society at large. Programs have emerged to serve homeless youth and, while providing protection from the elements remains the primary service, many shelters have established outreach and referral programming in efforts to assist youth to obtain needed services (such as medical, employment, and counselling assistance). Many services target homelessness itself as the core problem, and as a result provide interventions that focus primarily on accessing housing, readmission to school, and securing employment training or actual employment. However, as severe and serious as homelessness is, for many youth being homeless is symptomatic of longer-term and deep-seated social and personal realities. For example, Tyler and Cauce (2002) report that 75% of homeless adolescents’ reports of abuse have been met with a lack of concern, and homelessness for many youth begins in a search for a better life, as they leave home to escape abuse and neglect (Janus, Archambault, Brown, & Welsh, 1995; Kurtz, Kurtz, & Jarvis, 1991; Schneir et al., 2007; Tyler & Cauce, 2002).

Homeless youth are “not simply in need of temporary shelter and short-term counselling, but ... ongoing help (is) needed to help them resolve, or at least cope with, the burden of
long-standing family, school, and personal problems" (Kurtz et al., 1991, p. 547).

The remainder of this paper describes the research project that was undertaken to explore the presence and impact of stressful events in the lives of homeless youth both before and during homelessness; presents the results of this study; and considers implications for both service delivery and future research.

Literature Review

While the presence of trauma has been found to be correlated with adult homelessness (North & Smith, 1992), and with young offenders (see for example, Greenwald, 2002; Sawdon, Reid-MacNevin, & Kappel, 2003), few studies on the prevalence or impact of trauma in the lives of homeless youth have been carried out. Anecdotal evidence from shelter staff in New Brunswick indicates that many youth have experienced trauma as a contributor to the onset of homelessness and/or as a consequence of being homeless. However, efforts to study the role of trauma in the lives of homeless youth are made more difficult by the reluctance of many homeless youth to trust service providers and professionals (Kidd, 2003; Schneir et al., 2007), and by the life circumstances experienced by the majority of homeless youth. Life conditions include chronic poverty, family instability, parental substance abuse, mental illness and social isolation (Koegel, Melamid, & Burnam, 1995; Masten, Miliotis, Graham-Bermann, Ramirez, & Neeman, 1993; Ziesemer, Marcoux, & Marwell, 1994). The instability of their life conditions renders potential participants difficult to track.

Despite these methodological challenges, considerable research (Ayerst, 1999; Simons & Whitbeck, 1991) provides strong evidence to explain that large numbers of homeless youth, both male and female, fled their parental homes to escape physical and/or sexual abuse. For example, Farber, McCord, Knast, and Baum-Faulkner (1984) and Powers, Eckenrode and Jaklitsch (1990) reveal rates of physical abuse within families of homeless youth of 78% and 60%, respectively. These American studies are supported by Canadian data (Janus et al., 1995; Janus, McCormack, Burgess, & Hartman, 1987) that indicate
78% and 43%, respectively, of runaways experienced abuse in their homes. Similar experiences are also found among young offenders (see Greenwald, 2002; Sawdon et al., 2003), as the abuse often does not come to public attention (i.e., not referred to child welfare authorities) until a youth’s disruptive behavior (criminal offence, school expulsion, homelessness, etc.) draws attention. As Karabanow (2004a) notes, drawing upon his research findings of the experiences of homeless youth in Halifax, “If ‘home’ is defined as a safe haven, with people who love and care for you, most of these youth were homeless long before they left for the streets” (p. 22).

The well-being of homeless youth is further compromised as many face violence after they become homeless. Janus and colleagues (1995) report that while the “allure of the streets” is safer than being at home, homeless youth are “not able to protect themselves from physical risk” (p. 443). Thus, while exposure to highly stressful experiences frequently occurs prior to a youth becoming homeless, traumatic experiences also occur as a consequence of being homeless (Gwadz, Nish, Leonard, & Strauss, 2007; Kamieniecki, 2001; Karabanow, 2004a; McCormick, 2004; Stewart et al., 2004). Goodman, Saxe, and Harvey (1991) extend this point, arguing that homelessness itself can be understood as a form of psychological trauma. For youth on the street, the common experience of violence and rejection has repercussions that can lead to or exacerbate negative effects of trauma.

Schneir and colleagues (2007), working for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, cite studies (Robertson & Toro, 1999; Ryan, Kilmer, Cauce, & Hoyt, 2000) that support the findings of other researchers (Karger & Stoesz, 1998; Page & Nooe, 1999; Van Wormer, 2003) who indicate that homeless youth have developed a variety of mental health problems that constrain their ability to cope effectively with life’s challenges. Several studies indicate that for many homeless youth, mental health concerns appeared before homelessness (Kamieniecki, 2001; Morrell-Bellai, Goering, & Boydell, 2000), and are manifested in studies of youth who are homeless (Page & Nooe, 1999; Powers et al., 1990; Safyer, Thompson, Maccio, Zittel-Palamara, & Forehand, 2004). Mental health concerns experienced by youth before becoming homeless can be exacerbated
Trauma in the Lives of Homeless Youth

by the trauma of street life. Further, Kamieniecki (2001) found a high rate of psychiatric disorders among homeless youth and this rate tended to increase the longer one was homeless. This is consistent with a number of other studies of homeless adults, which found a high prevalence of abuse and mental health problems that began in childhood (Coates & Neate, 2000; Herman, Susser, Struening, & Link, 1997; Koegel et al., 1995; Morrell-Bellai et al., 2000).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is one such mental health construct commonly referenced in the literature as a consequence of highly stressful experiences. Exposure to traumatic events can result in high levels of distress that may lead to the development of PTSD (see Volpicelli, Balaraman, Hahn, Wallace, & Bux, 1999), which has been defined as an often chronic and debilitating psychological disorder characterized by intrusive memories of trauma, increased avoidance and interpersonal difficulties, and increased psychological arousal (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Critics, however, have cautioned that this psychiatric classification emphasizes pathology and can therefore stigmatize individuals (Burstow, 2003; Morrissette, 1999; Ussher, 1999). This medicalized construction of trauma distracts attention from the potential social and political roots of the problem and experiences of oppression. As such, PTSD has been described as "a grab bag of contextless symptoms, divorced from the complexities of people's lives and the social structures that give rise to them" (Burstow, 2003, p. 1296).

As a result of youth experiencing multiple and prolonged stressors both before and once homeless, the PTSD construct alone may not provide an adequate understanding of the experiences of homeless youth. Some writers have concluded that these conditions have cumulative effects, creating a "pervasive social vulnerability and instability" (Ziesemer et al., 1994, as cited in Page & Nooe, 1999, p. 256). Anglin (2003) highlights this reality most clearly when he states that homeless youth experience "deep and pervasive pain" that is often denied by adults and caregivers. Anglin argues that caregivers and researchers must broaden their focus beyond just "managing behavior" to address the challenge of what he refers to as "pain-based behavior"—behavior that is an externalization of deep-seated pain—
a pain that can be associated with the experience of trauma. Trauma, for example, can violate a youth’s basic trust, disrupt attachment, and diminish feelings of self-worth. These factors frequently hinder the development of interpersonal boundaries and reduce socially accepted behaviors. This sensitivity to threat can lead to impaired social competence and intolerable emotions such as intense fear or sadness that may contribute to substance abuse, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and other risky behaviors. Trauma can also foster an instant gratification orientation and diminish regard for delayed consequences or future plans (Clarke et al., 1997). Given the complex and tumultuous social realities of this population, it may be more effective to assess these behaviors based on an understanding of homeless youth trauma as cumulative and dimensional rather than categorical (see Davis, 1999).

Not only is our understanding of the phenomenon of trauma in the lives of homeless youth influenced by this more contextualized assessment, but so too is our understanding of the needs and potential solutions for youth. It is important to keep in mind that many factors contribute to trauma, and service providers should be cautious not to reduce the cause of youth homelessness primarily to a personal predisposition or vulnerability. With research indicating that the majority of homeless youth fled or were pushed out of abusive homes, youth homelessness might more correctly be understood as a coping strategy. The subsequent ‘life on the street,’ however, may result in exposure to additional risk factors (such as poverty, physical and sexual abuse, crime and violence), some of which are likely to be traumatagenic. With greater understanding of the reality of trauma in the lives of homeless youth, shelters and youth services may be able to play a more effective role in enabling youth to recover from trauma, thereby preventing more serious and long-term personal and social difficulties.

Methodology

Participants in this study were youth from the Maritime provinces who had been homeless for at least one day in the previous twelve months, and who volunteered to participate. The parameters of this definition of homelessness are admittedly broad with regard to potential complexity and duration
of youths' experiences of homelessness, because an inclusive range of homeless experiences was sought. The research team had settled upon this definition, anticipating the potential need to compare and contrast findings between those with relatively brief homeless experiences and those whose experiences were more complex and extended. Such a comparison, however, was unnecessary. While there was heterogeneity of youths' degree of street entrenchment and their living situations, almost no participants described a brief and relatively 'straightforward' homeless experience. With regard to participants' experiences needing to have occurred 'in the previous twelve months,' the research team set this parameter in order to focus on recent experiences of homelessness, increasing the likelihood that youths' memories of this time would be quite clear and continuing effects of relevant highly stressful experiences could be assessed.

Youth who participated expressed an interest to participate upon viewing a flyer posted at youth drop-ins or were referred by agencies, such as outreach and residential services that targeted homeless youth. At the time of the interviews, the majority of participants lived in major urban centers in the region, and their participation was complimented by that of a small number of youth who were living in rural areas of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

Each participant took part in a semi-structured interview with a trained interviewer (BSW or MSW graduates). The interview required one to two hours to complete. As several of the instruments were designed to be self-administered, all youth were given the option of completing them on their own or having the interviewer administer the questionnaires orally. Almost all youth preferred to have the questions read to them. Respondents were reimbursed $20 for participating. Ethics approval was received from the Research Ethics Board of St. Thomas University. For comparative purposes, the Trauma Symptom Inventory (TSI) was administered to a sample of first year university psychology students.

The semi-structured interview schedule was developed from a review of the literature on trauma, and homeless and 'at risk' youth. This review revealed the use of various methodologies such as self-report, interview and caregiver reports (see, for example, Meichenbaum, 1994, 2000; Newman, 2002;
Page & Nooe, 1999; Swenson et al., 1996), and risk factors such as poverty, parental addiction, incidence of runaway attempts, physical and sexual abuse, family disengagement, length of time homeless, and experience in foster care (see, for example, Anderson & Imle, 2001; Greenwald, 2002; Janus et al., 1995; Kamieniecki, 2001; Morrell-Bellai et al., 2000; Simons & Whitbeck, 1991; Sullivan & Knutson, 2000; Van Wormer, 2003). The completed interview schedule was reviewed by a small number of experts (frontline workers, youth who had been homeless, and researchers of youth homelessness) to assess the instrument’s face validity.

The questionnaire was composed of survey instruments including an adapted version of the Trauma History Questionnaire (THQ) (Green, 1996), and the Trauma Symptom Inventory (TSI) (Briere, 1995), along with questions regarding demographic information and questions regarding youths’ experiences prior to becoming homeless (such as foster care, being forced from their home, and couch surfing).

The Trauma History Questionnaire (THQ), developed by Green (1996) for a general or clinical population, provides a history of exposure to potentially traumatic events that may meet the stressor criterion for posttraumatic stress disorder. While some standardized self-report measures of trauma exposure (such as the Traumatic Stress Schedule, Norris, 1990) offer more restricted definitions of potentially traumatic events, the THQ uses a broader definition, including a range of both traumatic and stressful life events, and aims to provide comprehensive trauma histories. Green (1996) collected reliability data from 25 female participants, all of whom were tested twice over a two- to three- month interval. Test-retest correlations ranged from .54 to .92. As evidence of the questionnaire’s validity, scale means were found to be higher in an outpatient sample than a university sample (see Norris & Hamblen, 2004, for further details).

The original THQ instrument had 24 items addressing the lifetime occurrence of a variety of traumatic events in three categories: crime, general disaster/trauma, and sexual and physical assault experiences. For each event endorsed, respondents of the THQ are asked to document frequency of occurrence of the event and their age at the time of occurrence. As Green
herself notes, the THQ is a “relatively complete” inventory of events (1996). Our research team made the decision to remove two items (e.g., “serving in combat,” as this has less relevance in Canada) and to add a small number of events that have also been recognized as potentially traumatic and which are not uncommon amongst youth (e.g., having been bullied by peers) (our adapted THQ had a total of 29 event items). One further adaptation was made for our purposes—the adapted THQ asked participants to indicate whether the event had occurred before and/or since becoming homeless. This addition to the THQ was important to allow the research team to ascertain the range of highly stressful experiences both before and since becoming homeless. A sampling of the experiences addressed in the adapted THQ is listed in Table 3. Participants could also report other events that they considered to be highly stressful.

The Trauma Symptom Inventory (TSI), developed by John Briere (1995), is a widely used assessment tool for use with those who have experienced various forms of trauma. It is a global measure of trauma sequelae. As such, symptom items are not linked to a specific event (Briere, 1996). The TSI assesses trauma related symptoms through 100 questions that provide 10 clinical scales (Anxious Arousal, Depression, Anger/Irritability, Intrusive Experiences, Defensive Avoidance, Dissociation, Sexual Concerns, Dysfunctional Sexual Behavior, Impaired Self-Reference and Tension Reduction Behavior). Each scale is scored by adding the responses to 8-9 questions; the response to each question is in a Likert format (0-3: never-often).

The TSI has consistently demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (alpha .74-.91) and has been standardized across several populations (see Runtz & Roche, 1999). Raw scores can be converted to standard (T-Scores) with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. Briere (1995) argues that individuals with a standardized score above 65 are showing negative effects of trauma.

The analysis was quantitative and included descriptive statistics to report demographic information and the frequency of responses on the THQ. T-tests (independent samples) were used to compare the total number of stressful experiences (THQ) before and since first becoming homeless, and to compare the scores on the TSI scales of homeless youth and
university youth. An ANOVA was used to compare the low, moderate and high scale scores on the TSI when scores were standardized (see Briere, 1995).

Findings

Demographics

One hundred and three youth responded to the survey, of which 102 interviews were usable for the purposes of this study. Table 1 presents relevant demographic information. The participants revealed various ages when they first became homeless (7% first experiencing homelessness at the age of 12-13, although the mean age was 16 years).

While 90% of the respondents were from the Maritime provinces, the majority of the respondents were not from the city where they were interviewed. For example, 45 youth lived in Moncton, 25 in Halifax and 11 in Fredericton, but only 17, 8 and 6 respectively, were originally from those cities. Consistent with anecdotal information from service agencies, the data indicates that youth move to larger urban centers where some services are available.

Experiences with Living Arrangements

For the majority of homeless youth in this study, their journey into homelessness was marked by a series of varied and unstable living arrangements (see Figure 1). Youth frequently experienced a "back-and-forth movement" among various family members and friends on their way toward more long-term experiences of homelessness. While the data does not enable us to report any particular sequence, the data does indicate that for the large majority of the youth, homelessness was not the product of a single event, nor did it lead immediately to the streets. Rather, homelessness for most of the youth resulted in a number of different living arrangements that reflected the use, and perhaps even the "burning out," of their available social networks. On average, a youth experienced 6 of the 9 living arrangements listed, reflecting a pattern of unstable and diminishing options.
### Table 1. Demographic Information (N=102)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>16-24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Maritimes</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed High School</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had difficulty with law</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been in foster care</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been in sex trade</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently employed in some capacity</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See self as currently homeless</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First experience of homelessness</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before or during their 16(^{th}) year of age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 1. Have you experienced any of the following? (N=102)

- **Kicked out of parent’s home**: 81%
- **Ran away/left home**: 83%
- **Stayed with extended family**: 58%
- **Stayed at friend’s home**: 84%
- **Couch surfed at various homes**: 71%
- **Told to leave other’s home**: 50%
- **Slept on the street**: 81%
- **Stayed at a shelter**: 82%
- **Told to leave shelter**: 39%
Two excerpts from interviews typify the erratic nature of living arrangements that were articulated by most participants:

I never knew my dad, I just know his name. I was removed from my mom's care when I was 2, and went into foster care until I was 12. I went from group home to group home. I learned a lot of street smarts—how to survive. My last place was living on my own, I had a 2-bedroom apartment. I partied too much, and got evicted. I had the apartment for 5 months. I'm not in touch with any family. I'm trying to get a job. ('Jim,' age 23)

I grew up in (rural community). When I was 17, my mom brought me to a shelter. She couldn't afford to keep me. I stayed at the shelter, and then back home for a while. Then back to Halifax again, spent a week on the street, went to (shelter) for one night, got into a place to stay. I was kicked out for smoking in my room. I came back to the shelter, then went back to my mom's place until recently. I came back to the shelter because I want to be back in the city. ('Mike,' age 19)

**Stressful Events**

Responding to the Trauma History Questionnaire (adapted), youth reported having experienced numerous and varied highly stressful events during their lives. Table 2 indicates the proportion of respondents who reported having encountered each of the highly stressful experiences.

Of particular note is the very high incidence of being bullied (78%), facing isolation (63%), being assaulted (61%), and fearing being killed or injured (61%). The experience of, and witnessing of, physical abuse within the family is also very high (58% and 55% respectively). In addition to these 'high incidence' events, it is important to emphasize that a large proportion of the youth faced very severe situations—almost half had been assaulted with a weapon, 40% faced serious injury, one-third had been sexually abused, over 30% had been mugged, and almost one quarter had been raped.
Table 2. Proportion of Youth Who Reported Stressful Experiences
(N=102)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>49 (74%)</td>
<td>31 (86%)</td>
<td>80 (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You or someone close to you experienced a life-threatening event</td>
<td>49 (74%)</td>
<td>31 (86%)</td>
<td>80 (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressful isolation</td>
<td>40 (61%)</td>
<td>24 (67%)</td>
<td>64 (63%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been assaulted without a weapon</td>
<td>42 (64%)</td>
<td>20 (56%)</td>
<td>62 (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feared being injured or killed</td>
<td>41 (62%)</td>
<td>21 (58%)</td>
<td>62 (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been physically abused by a family member</td>
<td>39 (59%)</td>
<td>20 (56%)</td>
<td>59 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessed physical abuse by a family member</td>
<td>33 (50%)</td>
<td>23 (64%)</td>
<td>56 (55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessed death or injury</td>
<td>35 (53%)</td>
<td>19 (53%)</td>
<td>54 (53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious accident</td>
<td>35 (53%)</td>
<td>13 (36%)</td>
<td>48 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been assaulted with a weapon</td>
<td>36 (55%)</td>
<td>11 (31%)</td>
<td>47 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressful school experience</td>
<td>32 (49%)</td>
<td>14 (39%)</td>
<td>46 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member or close friend killed or injured</td>
<td>30 (46%)</td>
<td>13 (36%)</td>
<td>43 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious injury</td>
<td>31 (47%)</td>
<td>10 (28%)</td>
<td>41 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbed</td>
<td>31 (47%)</td>
<td>5 (14%)</td>
<td>36 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually abused by someone outside the family</td>
<td>14 (21%)</td>
<td>20 (56%)</td>
<td>34 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugged</td>
<td>28 (42%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>32 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble with the law</td>
<td>27 (41%)</td>
<td>9 (25%)</td>
<td>36 (35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced to touch another sexually</td>
<td>11 (17%)</td>
<td>21 (58%)</td>
<td>32 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced abortion or miscarriage</td>
<td>13 (20%)</td>
<td>17 (47%)</td>
<td>30 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home broken into</td>
<td>19 (29%)</td>
<td>11 (31%)</td>
<td>30 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced to have sex</td>
<td>4 ( 6%)</td>
<td>20 (56%)</td>
<td>24 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt high stress as a perpetrator</td>
<td>17 (26%)</td>
<td>6 (17%)</td>
<td>23 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human disaster</td>
<td>19 (29%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>23 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious illness</td>
<td>14 (21%)</td>
<td>7 (19%)</td>
<td>21 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced into other unwanted sexual acts</td>
<td>6 ( 9%)</td>
<td>15 (42%)</td>
<td>21 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural disaster</td>
<td>13 (20%)</td>
<td>5 (14%)</td>
<td>18 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handled dead bodies</td>
<td>15 (23%)</td>
<td>2 ( 6%)</td>
<td>17 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually abused by a family member</td>
<td>8 (12%)</td>
<td>9 ( 9%)</td>
<td>17 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another stressful event</td>
<td>19 (29%)</td>
<td>16 (44%)</td>
<td>35 (34%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thirty-four youth responded to the ‘other stressful experience’ question—the majority of responses to this question reflected more pervasive stressful realities—such as their
children being taken into care, missing family, life on the street, life with parents, addiction, and one's "whole life (as) hell." The small number of specific stressful events reported appear to be those that continue to be emotionally bothersome—for example, gang rape, assault, injury, death of a loved one.

**Stressful Events—Before and After First-Time Homeless**

For both males and females, the numbers of stressful experiences were high (13.5 on average), and similar in their prevalence: 13.8 (males) and 13.3 (females) overall. As well, the number of stressful experiences before becoming homeless was similar to the number of stressful events that were experienced after becoming homeless: 7.0 and 6.4 respectively (see Table 3). Table 3 also reveals no significant differences between males and females regarding the overall incidence of stressful experiences before and since becoming homeless.

Table 3. Mean Number of Stressful Events Before and After First Time Homeless (N=102)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male n=36</th>
<th>Female n=66</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>T-value *ns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before homeless</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>.161*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>4.227</td>
<td>3.794</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since homeless</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-.650*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>3.849</td>
<td>4.251</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-.302*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>6.571</td>
<td>6.133</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the fact that many youth left home to escape stressful events, the street held its own significant stressors—almost equal in number. However, as Table 4 reveals, the nature of the trauma-inducing events shifted considerably once youth became homeless.

Table 4 reveals several of the stressful events reported by youth. The extremely high incidence of bullying that was encountered by both female and male participants was most common before becoming homeless. Many forms of sexual and physical violence, reflected in most of the first seven items, decreased overall after becoming homeless. The exception to this trend, however, involved the high prevalence of females'
experiences of varied forms of sexual violence by non-family members (rape; sexual abuse by a non-family member; forced sexual touching), which continued after they became homeless. As well, experiences of physical assault continued to be very prevalent in both men’s and women’s experiences after becoming homeless. The incidence of other forms of violence and threats of violence (muggings, break-ins, fears of being killed) was considerably higher after becoming homeless, particularly for male participants. Overall, the data indicates

Table 4. Stressful Experiences Before and After First Becoming Homeless

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trauma Event</th>
<th>Before Homelessness</th>
<th>Since First Being Homeless</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Close friend killed or injured</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex abuse by family</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex abuse, non-family</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced sexual touching</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically abused by family</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious accident</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugged</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break-in</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assaulted with and without a weapon</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion/Miscarriage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feared being killed</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that homelessness brought a shift as family violence was replaced by street violence. One other highly stressful event noted by participants, the increase in abortion after becoming homeless, seems to be reflective of a shift in living arrangements. It is also worth noting that a number of males identified experiencing their girlfriend having an abortion as a personally traumatic event.

Current Negative Effects of Trauma

The Trauma Symptom Inventory (TSI) was administered in the interviews, as it is a widely accepted and administered indicator of the negative effects of trauma. The raw scores for each of the 10 scales range between 0-27, with higher scores suggesting progressively more severe current negative effects.

Table 5. Comparison of Negative Effects Scale Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TSI Scales</th>
<th>University Youth-1999*</th>
<th>Physically Maltreated as a child *N=152</th>
<th>Homeless Youth N=101</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxious arousal</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger/Irritability</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusive exp.</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive avoidance</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissociation</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual concerns</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob. sexual bhvr.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impaired self-reference</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension reduction bhvr.</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Reported in Runtz and Roche, 1999.

Table 5 compares the raw scores of a sample of female University students and a sample of female University students who reported having been physically maltreated as
Trauma in the Lives of Homeless Youth

children (both reported by Runtz & Roche, 1999), and the homeless youth participants of this study. The sample of homeless youth scored substantially higher than the other two groups on all TSI scales, even higher than the sample who reported having experienced physical maltreatment as children.

Table 6. Mean of Scale Scores of Current Negative Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TSI Scales</th>
<th>Homeless Youth</th>
<th>University Youth</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>T-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N=101</td>
<td>2008 n=104</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious arousal</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>-6.8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>-8.2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger/Irritability</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>-8.371*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusive exp.</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>-10.493*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive avoidance</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>-10.764*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissociation</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>-7.438*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual concerns</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>-5.311*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob. sexual bhvr.</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>-5.223*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impaired self-reference</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>-6.522*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension reduction bhvr,</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>-7.731*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **equal variances, *p<.001

Table 6 compares the TSI scores of the homeless youth in this study to a mixed-gender group of first-year undergraduate university students (conducted by the authors in 2008). The differences in scale scores were even larger than those reported in Table 5, and all differences were statistically significant (p < .001). The severity of the negative effects may be due to high levels of physical and sexual abuse experienced by youth in
the current sample, as a study by Kurtz and colleagues (1991) revealed that youth who had been maltreated experienced more personal and social problems than youth who had not been maltreated.

Raw scores on TSI Scales, as explained previously, range from 0 to 27, and the standardized scores on each scale have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation (SD) of 10. Following the methodology outlined by Briere (1995), the standardization has produced three zones with the low and high score groups each 1.5 SD above or below the mean (1.5 SD ± X). A 'low' group is made up of participants with a mean of 0-34, a 'moderate' group includes those with means between 35 and 64, and a 'high' group includes those with means of 65 and above. According to Briere (1995), respondents who score 65 or above are "clinically significant" and "indicate greater degrees of symptomatology" (p. 11). Briere points out that a T-score of 70 indicates that an individual's score is higher than 98% of the standardization sample. Table 7 presents the raw scores of the homeless youth after they have been separated into the standardized scores for the TSI scales. It offers the results of an ANOVA and indicates significant differences (p < .001) across the groups. Each column reports the mean (x) and the number of youth (n) in each group. Most relevant to our study, for the majority of the scales, approximately half or more of our homeless youth participants scored in the high or "clinically significant" group. Sexual concerns and problematic sexual behavior did not score as high for a majority of these youth.

It is important to note that in Table 7 there was no statistically significant difference in scale scores for youth within the current study based on: having experienced foster care; duration of time in foster care; or the number of foster homes. However there are small negative correlations with half of the TSI scales and 'age when a youth was first homeless,' indicating that there tend to be higher TSI scale scores, the younger a participant was when first becoming homeless (AA -.27, D -.23, AI -.20, ISR -.25, TRB -.22) (p < .01, N=101). Similarly, a small negative correlation (-.17, p < .05) was found between age when first homeless and number of highly stressful events experienced.
Discussion

Stressful or traumatic experiences were pervasive in the lives of youth participants both before and after becoming homeless. While this finding corroborates results of previous studies (Gwadz et al., 2007; Stewart et al., 2004; Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Ackley, 1997; Wolfe, Toro, & McCaskill, 1999), the current research extends our understanding of the breadth and impact of these stressful experiences in their lives. The stressful experiences faced by these youth are numerous, wide-ranging and severe. Youth were confronted with, on average, 11-12 different forms of potentially traumatic events, approximately half of them before, and the other half after, becoming homeless. Youth left or were forced out of homes where most had experienced extensive trauma, only to find themselves experiencing severe and multiple forms of trauma ‘on the street.’ Sadly, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (Schneir et al., 2007)

Table 7. Frequency and Means of Standardized TSI Scores for three groups (n=101)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TSI Scales</th>
<th>Overall Mean</th>
<th>Low 0-34</th>
<th>Moderate 35-64</th>
<th>High 65-100</th>
<th>ANOVA F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxious arousal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4 / 13</td>
<td>11 / 41</td>
<td>19 / 47</td>
<td>195.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3 / 14</td>
<td>10 / 42</td>
<td>19 / 45</td>
<td>212.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger/Irritability</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5 / 16</td>
<td>13 / 31</td>
<td>22 / 54</td>
<td>343.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusive exp.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2 / 9</td>
<td>9 / 39</td>
<td>19 / 53</td>
<td>170.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensive avoidance</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4 / 8</td>
<td>12 / 41</td>
<td>19 / 52</td>
<td>201.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissociation</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2 / 12</td>
<td>9 / 34</td>
<td>18 / 55</td>
<td>132.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual concerns</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 / 40</td>
<td>8 / 38</td>
<td>22 / 17</td>
<td>251.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prob. sexual bhvr.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.5 / 34</td>
<td>6 / 23</td>
<td>14 / 43</td>
<td>133.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impaired self-reference</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2 / 9</td>
<td>10 / 39</td>
<td>19 / 53</td>
<td>157.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension reduction bhvr.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 / 18</td>
<td>5 / 28</td>
<td>13 / 54</td>
<td>152.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Sig. for all = p<.001
notes that the struggles of the street are, for many youth, better than the negative treatment they had experienced at home, or in the child welfare and justice systems.

Supporting previous findings (Gwadz et al., 2007; Powers et al., 1990), the current study concluded that both male and female homeless youth experienced highly stressful events at very high rates. As well, the findings from the current study were similar to previous research indicating that homeless youth experienced high rates of physical violence (Janus et al., 1995). However, in the current study, male homeless youth were found to have experienced more physical types of violence (abuse, assault, muggings, etc.), while females more often experienced violence that was sexual in nature (rape, sexual abuse, unwanted touching, etc.). It is important to point out that while sexual victimization was more prevalent among female youth both before and after becoming homeless, several male youth experienced sexual assault in their homes. The flight from their homes served to shift the types of stressful events that youth experienced; some types decreased after becoming homeless, only to be replaced by other forms of traumatic events. The types of experiences that decreased upon leaving home tended to be forms of sexual and physical abuse, and the extremely high incidence of being bullied. Significantly diminished experiences of being bullied after becoming homeless may be related to the high drop-out rates from high school (78%) that accompanied this (as reflected in Table 1). Youth may be fleeing violence that is occurring in both their homes and schools.

The incidence of physical violence (excluding forms of family violence) remained consistent for male youth and increased for females after becoming homeless. The incidence of sexual violence was consistent both before and after becoming homeless for female youth but all forms of sexual violence decreased for males upon becoming homeless. The increase in other forms of violence (muggings, break-ins, and fears of being killed) was considerably higher for male than for female participants.

A large proportion of homeless youth in this study scored very high on the TSI scales. This is consistent with other studies (Hicks-Coolick, Burnside-Eaton, & Peters, 2003; Kamieniecki, 84
2001) that reported higher rates of mental illness among homeless youth. Over 50% of the youth scored in the ‘severe’ group on six of ten scales, and over 43% on all scales but one (sexual concerns). The cumulative impact of the various highly stressful events appears to have contributed to the large number of youth with very high clinically significant TSI scores. Over 50% of homeless youth were currently experiencing severe negative effects of trauma. The impact of the pervasiveness and continuity of stressful experiences is consistent with the findings of Davis (1999), whose research emphasized the importance of considering ‘continuously experienced trauma.’ Efforts by the youth to escape trauma experienced in their homes and home communities have mixed results. While some types of stress (bullying and various forms of family violence) decreased dramatically, it appears that the source of violence and stress had shifted from home to the street. After becoming homeless, youth continued to face highly stressful events, and the continued negative repercussions were revealed in their high scores on the TSI scales.

Implications

While the focus of this investigation did not involve a direct assessment of current services or approaches available to homeless youth or those at high risk of becoming homeless, findings regarding both the trauma histories and effects of these experiences in the lives of youth who have experienced homelessness offer us a place from which to reflect on practice and policy implications.

In considering potential implications of this research, the need for effective trauma-informed service stands out. With regard to considerations for trauma-informed service, we highlight implications in three areas: therapeutic; programming and organizational practice; and policy/social change. Before exploring implications across these three areas, it is important to return to our conceptualization of trauma.

The study of trauma has been strongly influenced by the domains of psychiatry and psychology, and within these realms the concept has most often been individualized, medicalized, universalized and de-contextualized. As long as the construction of trauma is understood merely as an individual
phenomenon, attention is not paid to potential social and political roots of a problem, forms of oppression, and experiences of families and communities (Brown, 1995; Burstow, 2003; Davis, 1999). Solutions remain limited to the medical and psychological realms, working toward individual recovery rather than addressing individual growth and emancipatory goals toward social change. We require instead a "radical understanding of trauma and trauma work" (Burstow, 2003, p. 1293), one that offers "a more inclusive, critical theory and practice, appreciating the full variety of traumatic reactions, and responses, as well as of contexts within which they are derived" (Davis, 1999, p. 771). It is this latter conceptualization of trauma upon which we base our discussion of needed trauma-informed service.

**Therapeutic implications.** Many homeless youth experience multiple forms of trauma in the context of negative living conditions (e.g., poverty, social marginalization, dangerous environments, and deprivation), both preceding and during homelessness. The results of having experienced multiple forms of trauma in one’s childhood and youth (coined ‘complex trauma’) have been found to be diverse and serious (Briere, Kaltman, & Green, 2008; Briere & Lanktree, 2008; Briere & Spinazzola, 2005). Research findings link trauma experiences to challenges observed frequently in homeless youth populations. These include addictions, heightened suicide risk, mental health difficulties, lack of trust in relationships, and difficulty creating stable conditions (such as the ability to concentrate in school, or to show up reliably for employment). Linking such challenges to trauma histories allows new attributions to be considered and solutions sought. For example, drug use by homeless youth may be understood as a form of self-medicating in order to manage the distressing effects of trauma (such as anxious arousal) (Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Stuart, Capostinsky, Joyce, Lucier, & Healy, 2006).

The marginalized location of those who have faced multiple traumas in their youth is correlated with difficulties in accessing appropriate services to respond to the effects of trauma. Accessible counselling services staffed by professionals with knowledge and training in responding to youths’ experiences of complex trauma (including advocacy and interventions at the system level) is necessary (see Briere and
Lanktree’s [2008] guide for the treatment of multiply-traumatized youth). Assisting youth to transition away from coping strategies that heighten health risks and to develop abilities in coping strategies that reduce risk is one important aspect of this work (Briere & Lanktree, 2008; Kidd & Carroll, 2007). Addressing the ways that youth have made meaning of their trauma experiences may also be an important element of this work. One’s meaning making after trauma can have powerful effects on identity, sense of self-worth, life course, and relationships. Given common experiences of social stigma and marginalization, homeless youth may need to find ways to “replace internalized messages of guilt and shame with a more empowering understanding of the various factors underlying stigma and systemic discrimination” (Kidd, 2007, p. 298). Therapeutic rewritings of the life narrative may be one adaptive meaning-making process, assisting youth in establishing new understandings of self, relationships and beliefs that create hope and possibility (Kidd & Davidson, 2007). Approaches such as this may assist in transforming dominant blaming discourses in their explanation of youth homelessness. This process of rewriting the life narrative may be a liberating experience that could be incorporated into experiential forms of therapy such as performing theater or completing creative writing exercises. As Karabanow and Clement (2004) note in their review of service delivery approaches that have been provided to homeless youth, forms of experiential therapy can be motivating and recognize youths’ potential.

**Programming and organizational implications.** Responding to the negative effects of trauma in the lives of homeless youth is infrequently a focus of programming. Those creating services for this population must become more versatile, so that interventions can be “tailored to an individual youth’s circumstances” and needs (Kidd, Miner, Walker, & Davidson, 2007). While not all homeless youth are coping with distressing effects of trauma, many are. Effects of complex trauma are often severe and can undermine other efforts that youth may be undertaking to bring stability and security to their lives. Programming has not adequately targeted this need of many homeless youth, and without greater investment in such programs, other programming efforts are less apt to succeed.
Common barriers to moving off the street (such as drug use, mental health issues, and challenges in readjusting to a routinized lifestyle) (Karabanow, 2004a), can be linked to trauma effects. These understandings can be helpful in shaping organizational policies. For example, most shelters do not promote a harm reduction model. If a youth is using drugs to manage severe negative effects of trauma, it often takes time and the assistance of a counsellor to replace this coping strategy with more effective alternatives. In the meantime, the youth requires safe and secure shelter, and a harm reduction policy would be more inclusive and responsive to her/his needs.

Communities also need to offer longer-term safe and supportive programs (such as second stage housing) that create space for youth to establish stability in their lives as they address the effects of trauma. Such programming will, in turn, support youth to improve various elements in their lives (such as schooling, employment, and relationship issues). Karabanow (2004b) notes Toronto’s Covenant House and Phoenix Youth Services in Halifax as progressive programs, both of which offer partially-independent supportive housing.

Preventive care options as part of child welfare services must be made a priority. Earlier interventions to assist families, and support and care programming for those youth who are exiting group homes or the foster care system are needed to minimize risks that these youth will become homeless. In November 2008, New Brunswick’s Child and Youth Advocate Report Card offered the grade of C+ to the province’s response to child welfare, highlighting the dearth of youth transition homes and services for 16- to 18-year-olds, and calling for much greater effort in this area.

Overall, agencies that are offering services to homeless youth or youth at-risk of becoming homeless must work to become effective “trauma-informed agencies” (Prescott, Soares, Konnath, & Bassuk, 2008). In their guide for creating trauma-informed services for those experiencing homelessness, Prescott and her colleagues (2008) recommend the adoption of organizational guidelines, such as: creating physical environments that are safe; developing policies and procedures based on the assumption that some service users will be managing the effects of trauma and working to minimize related
barriers to service; reviewing current policies and practices
to ensure that they do not re-traumatize service users; estab-
lishing services that offer caring, long-term relationships and
ongoing crisis prevention activities; and providing training on
trauma-informed care.

Policy and social change implications. Of course, therapeutic
and programming recommendations noted in the previous
two sections are only possible with adequate funding, and
public and structural supports. Currently, numerous structural
factors limit youths' choices, and thus trauma-informed inter-
ventions must include assessment of political and social roots
of the problem, advocacy work, and empowerment and social
change strategies. Funding cutbacks have depleted services for
homeless youth, and with meager resources available, most
programming is limited to responding to youths' basic needs.
There are urgent calls for "a more comprehensive service re-
sponse based on a better understanding of the complex prob-
lems associated with life on the street," with an emphasis on
"continuity in the delivery of consistent, caring and long-term
support" (Kelly & Caputo, 2007, pp. 734-735). Such continuity
of service is only possible with adequate and stable funding.

Serious gaps in the social service delivery system play a
role in youths' trauma experiences. Rather than investing in
proactive, collective interventions aimed at primary preven-
tion of family difficulties to assist in diminishing early trauma
experiences for youth, programs are mainly reactive, defi-
cits-based and professional-driven. Gaps in services to youth
aged 16-18 also contribute to instability and homelessness in
youths' lives, which heightens their risk of further trauma.
Alternatives must be explored, as our system is failing many
youth. Responding to the significant gaps in the current social
service delivery system, Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2006)
highlight the value of developing programs that are strengths-
based, and are committed to primary prevention, empower-
ment, and community conditions. Karabanow (2004b) also
articulates and recommends a number of characteristics of
anti-oppressive organizations to best serve homeless youth,
which include elements of: a structural definition of the situ-
atation; consciousness-raising; locality development; social de-
development; and social action. These elements highlight the
need for a re-storying of the causes of youth homelessness and the active involvement of youth in working for structural changes.

Implications for future research. In considering useful directions for future research, we suggest several areas worth pursuing. Exploring means for earlier identification of youth with needs related to trauma in their lives would be of value. As well, we have the potential to further develop and strengthen our current initiatives by evaluating the effectiveness of existing longer-term, supportive services that focus on mental health and social stability with homeless youth or those at risk of becoming homeless.

Our research design drew heavily upon standardized measures, and while helpful for our purposes, we would benefit by listening intently to youths’ stories and their ideas regarding how we can best address the effects of trauma in their lives. The exploration of youths’ changing meanings and ideas surrounding survival and resilience before and while homeless would assist scholars and practitioners in considering strategies to help overcome dominant discourses that blame homeless youth for their circumstances. A client-driven approach that invites youths’ active involvement in planning services and interventions is imperative, and will assist professionals in overcoming or minimizing barriers for youth in accessing these services.

Conclusion

While much of the research conducted on youth homelessness in Canada has occurred in large urban centers in central and western Canada, the undertaking of research in the Atlantic provinces in more recent years is beginning to shed light on the experiences of homeless youth in this region (see, for example, Asher, 2007; Coates & Neate, 2000; Karabanow, 2004a). The current study contributes to this emerging regional knowledge base, as we attempt to better understand the experiences and potential needs of homeless youth. With a concern based not only on the individual but also on the social, the current study is politically grounded in its desire to deconstruct relations of power and in its attempt to inform the continuing efforts for
improved services for youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This study supports the growing body of research that indicates that trauma is pervasive in the lives of youth, both prior to and during homelessness. Most importantly, this study reveals that the consequences of such trauma are both serious and ongoing. These findings direct us to look beyond the short-term services that focus on shelter, training and employment which, while helpful for some youth, are inadequate for most. To be effective, shelters and services must be structured to enable youth to address trauma-induced issues.

References


Kidd, S., & Davidson, L. (2007). “You have to adapt because you have no other choice”: The stories of strength and resilience of 208 homeless youth in New York City and Toronto. Journal of Community Psychology, 35, 219-238.


A common explanation of immigrants’ under-representation among the homeless population in Canada is that kinship and community networks act as a buffer to absolute homelessness. There are indications that immigrant homelessness is, however, increasing, suggesting that the buffering capacity of social networks reaches a limit. Further, evidence of precarious housing situations indicates that we should approach this form of housing provision with some caution. This paper draws on a larger study of housing difficulties among immigrants in Calgary to address the ways in which social capital serves a buffering role, and under what conditions it loses its ability to prevent absolute homelessness.

Key words: immigration, social capital, housing, homelessness

Immigration has a far-reaching impact on Canada’s population and economic growth, particularly in large urban centers (Chui, Tran, & Maheux, 2007; Pruegger, Cook, & Richter-Salomons, 2008). Despite the crucial role of immigration in the future of Canadian cities, our management of immigrant integration has deteriorated in recent years. Immigrants’ declining economic outcomes are well recognized, but comparable problems in the area of housing are much less studied and understood, despite their importance. In this article, we suggest that unwarranted optimism about social capital as a
mechanism to facilitate the housing of immigrants is an important part of this neglect. By drawing on the results of a multi-method study of newcomers' housing stress in Calgary, this paper will explore the role of social capital in mitigating and exacerbating housing challenges for immigrants to Canada. The analysis draws on findings from a two-stage multi-methods study, including a quantitative survey (292 participants) and in-depth interviews with twenty newcomers.

The under-representation of immigrants among the homeless population has been thought to result from the ways in which social networks and ethnocultural communities "buffer" vulnerability, providing affordable housing solutions through social capital. Such benign neglect, we argue, is inadequate. Firstly, with the declining economic situation of the growing immigrant population in Canada, buffering mechanisms show signs of reaching their limits. Secondly, our survey and interview results indicate that social capital is less important to housing access than is often assumed. Thirdly, we found that there are serious negative consequences when relying on social capital for housing access. Social capital tends to be romanticized in the academic and policy literature, with its "dark side" often neglected. When low-income immigrants have no alternative but to rely on their social networks for access to housing, this can lead to unfortunate situations of exploitation and abuse.

Assumptions about social capital must be critically examined in light of neoliberal discourses which have incorporated it in policy initiatives that shift responsibility for social issues onto individuals and communities. Our findings point to a need for seriously considering the discourse of social capital and notions of individuals and communities "helping themselves" in light of neoliberal ideologies—those that buttress the downloading of government responsibility for social issues onto citizens. While helpful as a broad conceptual tool for understanding the role of social relations as resources, this article makes a contribution to the study of social capital by proposing and demonstrating how it can be examined within the context of the concrete political economy (Smart, 2008). In this manner, the social capital lens can become significantly more useful in understanding contemporary society, by
shedding light on connections, networks, and solidarity as well as revealing disjunctures in light of global processes.

Social Capital as Theory and Policy Intervention

Social capital is a concept that emphasizes the resources that are embedded in social relationships, particularly reciprocity, obligation, and trust (Woolcock, 1998). Social capital is often understood from the dimension of networks between individuals and groups, as well as their engagement in participative communities (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Paxton, 2002). Most research on social capital focuses on its benefits to communities or individuals (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1998; Putnam, 1993). The concept emphasizes the ways in which relationships can be used to generate benefits of a material, social, or psychological nature. It varies from economic capital since obligations are not contractually enforceable and thus relies on culturally and contextually specific values and etiquette (Smart, 1993).

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 248). Social capital is context-dependent and takes many different interrelated forms, including obligations, trust, norms, and sanctions. For Bourdieu, social capital is used to increase the ability of an actor to advance her/his interests and becomes a resource in struggles carried out in different social arenas. He notes that social capital is fundamentally rooted in economic capital, though it can never be completely reduced to an economic form; social capital remains effective because it conceals its relationship to economic capital (see Bourdieu, 1986, 1998).

Robert Putnam’s (1993) central thesis is that well-functioning economic systems and high levels of political integration are the result of the successful accumulation of social capital. In his view, Western societies are experiencing a decline of social capital, which explains poor voter turnout, increasing distrust of government, and poor participation in civil society, especially community voluntary associations. The family and the neighborhood have also lost their traditional strength as
key mechanisms for reinforcing solidarity and democracy. By strengthening the role of community-based voluntary organizations that negotiate, represent, and promote members’ shared interests, social capital can be increased.

Social capital has been credited with the ability to cure most social ills (Portes, 1998). It helps people resolve collective problems with more ease, facilitates development, heightens awareness of our globally interconnected fates, fosters the flow of useful information, and improves people’s health, resilience, and productivity (Policy Research Initiative, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Public health, crime, homelessness, alienation, immigrant integration, poverty, and underdevelopment are just some of the societal challenges that “can allegedly be resolved or alleviated through the appropriate mobilization of social capital” (Smart, 2008, p. 1). Despite the fanfare, some have pointed out that not all social capital is “good,” and can lead to less than desirable outcomes. Too much social capital, for example, can result in closed ethnic communities where tight bonds become barriers to integration into the mainstream (Portes, 1998).

Given its relevance to conceptualizing social issues and their resolution, social capital theory is of particular interest to policy makers. For example, the World Bank has embraced social capital as a means to move beyond the “Washington Consensus” of global deregulation and promotion of the free market (Fine, 1999, 2006; Harris, 2001; Li, 2006). Dominant public discourses on social capital are based on the idea that strong participation in social networks, community organizations, and a sense of trust and solidarity facilitate cooperation between citizens. In turn, this reduces poverty and crime, whilst increasing political participation to allow for a better government (Helly, 2003).

Ideas about social capital, cohesion, and inclusion have also influenced Canadian public policy approaches, particularly since the 1990s. The Government of Canada Policy Research Initiative of the Privy Council Office conducted a major research program between 2003 and 2005 on social capital to understand how it can potentially impact public policy outcomes. The initiative also aimed to “develop a conceptual framework and measurement tools that will have practical applications
for various federal policy departments" and "transfer lessons learned and policy recommendations to key players in the policy and research communities (Policy Research Initiative, 2005, p. 2). One of the initiative’s conclusions was that:

Governments inevitably affect patterns of social capital development. Taking into consideration the role of social capital (and the interaction between social relationships and policies) in a more systematic way ... can potentially make a significant difference in the achievement of policy objectives. (p. 2)

Social Capital, Immigration and Housing

Theories of social capital have been particularly influential in policy responses to immigration and integration in receiving societies. Social capital is looked upon by researchers and policy makers to explain, among other issues, immigrant attachment to the labor market, economic mobility (Hernandez-Leon & Zuniga, 2002), educational attainment (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009), migration flows (Nannestad, Svendsen, & Svendsen, 2008), social cohesion and acculturation (Cheong, Edwards, Goulbourne, & Solomos, 2007; Hooghe, 2007), civic engagement and participation (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2009).

Although the struggle for adequate housing is a well-known experience of migrants throughout various historical periods, it is notable that immigrant housing outcomes in Canada have been deteriorating for the past twenty years. Studies have demonstrated that since the 1980s, immigrants’ rate of homeownership has decreased dramatically; prior to this, immigrants’ high levels of homeownership prompted the researchers to examine why they had more successful housing careers than Canadian-born persons (Haan, 2005). Presumptions of high levels of social capital among immigrant communities have been used to explain these changes in housing outcomes, particularly homeownership attainment, housing affordability, and access issues (Haan, 2005; Hulchanski, 1994; Murdie, 2002, 2003; Murdie & Teixeira, 1997; Ornstein, 2002; Owusu, 1998). For example, Kilbride and Webber (2006) explain decreasing housing outcomes from immigrants to Canada to be the result of a loss of social capital resulting from migration.
Other research suggests that social capital can play a positive role in housing outcomes as ethnocultural networks, informal assistance, and group pooling of resources somewhat buffer the extent of relative and absolute homelessness among immigrants (Chan, Hiebert, D’Addario, & Sherrell, 2005; Mendez, Hiebert, & Wyly, 2006; Pruegger & Tanasescu, 2007).

Understandings of social capital have impacted government responses and interventions in immigrant housing issues. Canadian Immigration and Citizenship, the ministry responsible for immigration and settlement, does not currently prioritize immigrants’ housing outcomes as part of its mandate. The prevailing assumption is that immigrants find their way to housing via social capital, kin, and informal networks. In other words, immigrants “take care of their own” (Hiebert, D’Addario, & Sherrell, 2009, p. 4). The fact that immigrants are under-represented in the homeless population reaffirms the assumption that social capital is buffering housing difficulties. This assumption is being challenged by growing evidence of increasing housing challenges experienced by immigrants. Based on new data from the 2006 Canadian census, several trends can be observed. Immigrants are more likely than Canadian-born persons to spend 30% or more of their income on shelter, irrespective of their tenure. Further, the proportion of those overspending on housing is increasing: 28.5% of immigrants lived in households that spent 30% or more of their income on shelter in 2006, up from 25.4% in 2001. This compares with 18.6% of the Canadian-born population, which changed very little from 2001 (Rea, Mackey, & LeVasseur, 2008).

These Canadian trends are reconfirmed by The City of Calgary analysis of Census 2006 data for immigrant-led households, which showed that 42% of immigrant-led renter households and 24% of immigrant-led owner households were in need of affordable housing. By comparison, the Calgary general population showed a need of 37% and 12% for renters and owners respectively (City of Calgary, 2008a). Earlier findings from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, which captures data from arrivals between October 2000 and September 2001, showed that 32.2% of Calgary immigrants surveyed reported having difficulties finding suitable housing (Chui, 2003). Canada’s 2001 census data also showed that recent
immigrants to Calgary were more likely to live with relatives, in larger and extended families, and with more children and seniors than their Canadian-born counterparts (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005). The proportion of very recent immigrants in extended family situations (one in eight) is twice as large as that of Canadian-born persons. In addition, crowding is a factor, with 15% of recent immigrant households in Calgary compared to 2% of non-immigrant households and 3% for earlier immigrants having one or more persons per room (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005). This data confirmed assumptions about the tendency and preference of immigrants to mobilize social capital in the form of kin, friend, and community networks to access housing.

The Role of Kin, Friends, and Ethnocultural Communities in Immigrant Housing: Results from the Quantitative Survey

What do increasing housing challenges facing immigrants tell us about the role of social capital in mitigating its effects? Can we explain the rise in housing pressures as a result of the changing role that social capital plays in buffering housing challenges? To shed light on these questions, we drew on recent results from a study that examined the experiences of immigrants' housing challenges in Calgary (Tanasescu et al., 2009).

Housing affordability is a critical issue throughout Canada, where more than 1.4 million households, roughly one in ten, are considered to be overspending on shelter (Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, 2008). Homelessness has grown to an estimated 150,000-300,000 persons nationally (Laird, 2007). These trends are mirrored in Calgary's case as well. The City of Calgary estimated that 37% of all Calgary renter households and 12% of all owner households were in need of affordable housing (City of Calgary, 2008b). In July 2008, Calgary's homeless count indicated an 18% increase from the number in 2006, bringing the total to 4,060 (City of Calgary 2008c).

These trends are a result of a number of factors. Calgary is Canada's fastest growing large city, with a population reaching one million in 2008 (City of Calgary, 2008a). Calgary's
economic and demographic growth has been intimately tied to the Alberta oil and gas industry's booms and busts over the past century. The unprecedented jump in oil prices during the mid-2000s fuelled economic growth, resulting in severe labor shortages until the onset of the global economic recession (City of Calgary, 2008d). The economic growth only translated into marginal increases in real wages, and the gap between the top and bottom income quintiles widened. The economic prospects that attracted migrants to Calgary placed upward pressure on rents and home prices. From 2005 to 2006, the average price of resale homes increased by almost 40% (Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, 2007). As a result of virtually no new rental construction, stock loss due to condo conversion, and increasing demand, rents continued to increase (Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, 2008). Calgary is currently experiencing increasing vacancy rates due to loss in employment growth that slowed migration. Despite the slowdown, rental rates have maintained high prices (Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation, 2009).

Survey Methods
We analyzed data collected in July–August of 2008 from a survey of, and interviews with, immigrants experiencing housing stress. The quantitative data came from 292 survey responses, of which 289 were available for analysis—three of the surveys were excluded because the participant did not provide formal consent to participate. This data was analyzed using SPSS software. This data is complemented by in-depth interviews with twenty immigrants who self-identified as experiencing housing difficulties. The breakdown of participant characteristics is available in the full study report (Tanasescu et al., 2009); therefore, only findings relevant to the argument in this article are outlined herein. (Note: percentages have been rounded for ease in readability and are based on n=289 unless otherwise stated.)

The survey participants primarily came from the following countries of origin: Cameroon, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, Egypt, India, Iran, Mexico, Nepal, Philippines, Romania, Vietnam, and the former Yugoslavia. The sampling method for this study was based on a quota of 300 surveys
collected by research assistants (RAs) belonging to ethnocultural communities. To recruit participants, the RAs were instructed to administer a target of 30 surveys each using a snow-balling technique. The RAs were also instructed to use their personal connections to identify and invite participation from their networks, thus survey respondent selection was based on convenience and self-identification of participants as experiencing housing stress. Housing stress was purposefully broadly defined as having inadequate income to cover housing costs and/or housing that was perceived to be inadequate or unsafe in order to capture a range of self-perceived ideas around housing stress. Each interviewee represented their household; thus, they reported on the situation of their household members as well as their own. This method was chosen largely because the study aimed to gather quantitative data suitable for descriptive purposes complementary to in-depth interviews rather than for hypothesis testing. The survey instrument used included 60 questions regarding demographic information, housing status, household composition, housing condition, neighborhood preference, housing help, assistance access, citizenship, immigration and migration history, social history, employment, and income. Participants were provided with an opportunity to provide comments as well. The survey response rate was 79%. Ethics clearance was obtained from the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) before data collection commenced.

Discussion of Survey Findings

The majority of participants (66%) were between 25 and 44 years old, 23% were between 45 and 64, and 9% were between 18 and 24. There was a fairly even gender breakdown with 51% male and 49% female respondents. Most of the respondents were Permanent Residents (65%) or Canadian Citizens (27%) at the time they participated in the survey. Most were employed (57%), 12% were unemployed but looking for work, and 9% were in school. Most (81%) arrived in Canada since 2000; participants had been in Canada for an average of six years at the time of data collection.

Most respondents (70%) were renters, while 24% were
homeowners. The average percentage of immediate family net income spent on housing was 50%; this places them at high risk for experiencing homelessness according to The City of Calgary (2008e). Approximately 34% reported their housing was in need of minor repairs and 9% reported housing was in need of major repairs. Respondents reported experiencing difficulties with housing for multiple reasons. Among these were: having a low income (33%); not having a job (21%); language barriers (24%); age of children (20%); lack of references (18%) and identification documents (17%); the size of their family (16%); their ethnicity/race (13%); and a lack of credit history or bad credit (13%).

The study gathered data to test particular assumptions about the nature of housing challenges in immigrant populations and the strategies employed to mitigate these, particularly those related to social capital. The common assumptions in the research and policy literature are that immigrants are likely to rely on housing help (finding, obtaining, maintaining housing) from: (a) immediate and extended kin; and (b) cultural and religious community networks. Therefore, immigrants will likely prefer living near other ethnocultural community members and facilities. The findings from the survey and the subsequent in-depth interviews with immigrants experiencing housing difficulties revealed surprising findings that shed further light on these assumptions.

In particular, the hypothesis that kin played a critical role in housing assistance was challenged by survey results. For example, when asked about co-habitation with self-identified immediate family, most respondents reported living with their spouse (60%) and children (58%). About 4% lived with parents, 3% lived with siblings and 2% lived with in-laws; these were classified by respondents as immediate family members. Only 3% of respondents reported co-habitation with other family members, including in-laws, cousins, step-children, uncles, and aunts. When asked about house-sharing arrangements, the frequency of sharing with people not considered as immediate family was about 44%. These findings challenge the assumption that extended kin relations play a central role in easing housing challenges for immigrants. The instrument did not have an item measuring if respondents had kin networks
The Limits of Social Capital

in the city; this would have influenced the outcome.

The survey findings also show that housing help mostly came from friends rather than family, ethnocultural communities, or settlement agencies. When asked about where they received help finding housing, participants’ most common response was “from friends” (60%), followed by several indicators that point to relying on one’s own capacities (34% internet, 20% newspaper, 15% fliers/postings). A smaller percentage reported receiving help from family (14%), settlement (13%) and homeless serving agencies (8%).

Another central assumption about immigrants is that they rely on their ethnocultural communities, religious or cultural associations (both formal and informal) to assist with housing. This is often how the tendency of immigrant groups moving to a particular city or neighborhood is explained. They need to have ready access to the informal networks that can assist in settlement with jobs, housing, information, religious activities, and social inclusion. However, only a small portion of survey respondents reported receiving any help with house finding from their faith (4%) or their ethnocultural community (5%). The survey further suggests that living close to faith and ethnocultural communities is less important to immigrants than expected. Only 10% and 7% reported being close to their ethnocultural and faith communities, respectively, as something they liked about where they live. Rather, respondents preferred having access to transit, shopping, and schools in nice and safe neighborhoods. Their neighborhood dislikes primarily concerned lack of housing affordability and being far from work. In fact, only 4% and 6% reported being far from their faith and ethnocultural community, respectively, as something they did not like about where they lived.

These findings suggest that dominant understandings of social capital as a buffer to immigrants’ housing difficulties should be re-examined. House sharing with non-immediate family members and high reliance on friends for house sharing counters the assumption that immigrants activate kin networks to ease settlement related stress. The minimal role of the faith and ethnocultural community in housing assistance reported further challenges assumptions about their importance in informal housing assistance.
The Contested Role of Informal Assistance, Social Networks, and Ethnocultural Communities: Results from the In-Depth Interviews

Survey findings nevertheless confirm that relationships play an important role in housing assistance, but support tends to come from one's immediate family members and friends. What do these findings tell us about social capital's role in immigrant housing? To shed light on informal housing assistance from family and friends, the remainder of this section will examine the perspectives of twenty newcomers who agreed to participate in in-depth interviews.

In-Depth Interview Methods

The participants were recruited using the same research assistants deployed for the quantitative survey administration. All RAs were asked to invite potential interviewees for the research team members to talk to at a later time. In addition, two agencies serving newcomers also assisted with recruitment of three of the interviewees. The selection criteria were the same as that for the survey—newcomers who self-identified as experiencing housing stress and were willing to undertake the interview. There was no quota or specific selection criteria regarding family type, age, or country of origin. As the RAs and agencies suggested potential interviewees, the researchers took care to ensure there was a variety of countries of origin represented and to ensure adequate gender representation. The immigrant interviewees selected were comprised of thirteen females and eight males, most of whom were between 30-40 years old. Nine were married with children, one was married without children, five were single parents, and two were single without children. In all but one case, each interviewee represented their household. Respondents' countries of origin were: China, Columbia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Vietnam.

Participants were interviewed by three Master of Arts level researchers on the project team using a semi-structured interview schedule that focused on their housing situation, immigration experience, support networks, barriers to stable housing, and solutions. All but four of the interviews included
the presence of the referring RA or agency worker to assist with interpretation. Interviews were audio-taped and notes were taken from the recording by the interviewer, who subsequently analyzed these thematically following a pre-set thematic guide developed by the research team. To ensure consistency between the three interviewers, meetings were held monthly to review themes from the interviews being conducted and update the interview guide. At the end of the data collection, one researcher undertook the thematic analysis, and the other two subsequently verified the findings.

Discussion of Interview Findings

Interviewees spoke about a common housing trajectory in which informal relations played a critical role. When looking to relocate either from abroad or elsewhere in Canada, immigrants contact a friend, family member, or acquaintance before immigrating. This contact often provides them with valuable information about job opportunities and potential housing options. The "guide" would at times connect the immigrant to a potential housing provider. At other times, though not as often, the guide would offer to host the immigrant for the initial resettlement period. A friend or family member sometimes acts as a "host" to the immigrant and his or her family until they are settled with employment and can obtain housing on their own. The immigrant is a "guest" and lives in a house-sharing situation for varying periods of time, depending on their capacity to find their own home and how well co-habitation ensues. Generally, the guest family has access to a limited portion of the host's home. In one case, a family of four only had one room in which to live. Because the host may also be struggling with high housing costs, there is an expectation that the guest will contribute to household expenses. Therefore, the host-guest relationship has an aspect of exchange, which can take the form of payment for rent, or reciprocity, such as babysitting or cleaning for the host. As one interviewee noted, the two families "are helping each other" (Interviewee 15).

The host-guest relationship between friends and acquaintances usually led to the guest family improving its housing by moving out of an inadequate, shared space and into their own housing. The parting of ways between the host and guest
was described as often amicable and tensions were smoothed by the understanding that the house sharing arrangement was temporary and undertaken ‘by choice’ and mutual benefit for both parties. Despite the important role of informal housing help, the host-guest relationship is by no means without strains. In fact, participants described having problems with their host in six interviews. For example, one immigrant noted he was “more stressed about finding housing than finding a job” because he felt he was burdening the host family. Many pointed to the lack of privacy that shared space resulted in for both host and guests. In some cases, the relationship broke down because of the strain of a lack of privacy, and the guest family was so uncomfortable that they had to leave. In other cases, there is a realization that the host-guest relationship or any settlement help from co-ethnic friends and acquaintances is not “free.” As one interviewee noted, his friends connected him with their acquaintances only for him to realize that these connections were “expensive.” He remarked that “when you really need help from friends, there are no friends; I stay away from my people” (Interviewee 4).

It is important to note that when the host-guest relationship involves members of the same family, it can have different dynamics than when it is between friends and acquaintances. Five interviewees reported difficulties with family members with respect to housing. When these immigrants planned to come to Canada, they did so with the intention of joining a close family member (e.g., sister, uncle, and husband) and arranged to live with them. However, when these relationships broke down, considerable difficulties ensued for both hosts and guest, which we will describe further in this section. It is important to note that these five cases involved females who were either married and reuniting with their spouses or single and joining their families.

The in-depth interviews demonstrate another side to the romanticized view of ethnocultural communities, particularly from women who are more vulnerable to victimization and marginalization. Being single, female, and new to Canada made these women particularly vulnerable. The situation was further complicated for those who had children with them. One interviewee spoke about being victimized by community
members and forced into illegal activities (Interviewee 10). In another situation, a woman who came to Canada to live with her sister reported that she was asked to leave after refusing to be her sister’s “slave” (Interviewee 12). In another case, a woman joined her husband and his family in Canada and was forced into unpaid labor. She was physically abused and confined until she ran away. She sought help from an uncle in Canada, who, in turn, subjected her to similar treatment (Interviewee 13). Those who spoke about their experiences of ‘getting out’ noted they were exceptions.

It is therefore important to recognize that family and community assistance and close bonds can be extremely helpful in settlement but can also be abusive and exploitative. One female participant noted that she does not go near neighborhoods with higher concentration of co-ethnics for fear of being recognized and reported to her husband and uncle’s families (Interviewee 13). After having experienced these situations, some participants note that they purposely sought outside help from members outside of their ethnocultural communities.

Contextualizing Increasing Immigrant Housing Difficulties

Clearly, social capital is not the panacea to immigrants’ housing challenges. The absence of a concerted government response to increasing immigrants’ housing difficulties, even when manifested as homelessness, is based on the assumption that ethnocultural communities “take care of their own” and that “they know best.” The intensifying housing challenges immigrants are experiencing, as confirmed by the study’s findings, must be understood in light of larger macro-social processes including: (a) the growing reliance of Canadian cities on immigration for economic growth; (b) increasing disparities in labor market outcomes for immigrants correlated to language, country of origin and visible minority status; and (c) the complex interplay of immigrant settlement in major urban centers where competitive housing markets and systemic barriers to housing exist. These trends are also apparent, based on immigrants’ experiences, with housing in Calgary.

Calgary’s foreign-born population has grown rapidly to
become the fifth-highest in the country. In 2005, almost one-quarter (23.6%) of the city’s population was foreign-born (Chui et al., 2007). From 2001 to 2006, the foreign-born population grew by 28% compared with 9.1% for the Canadian-born population. Despite the importance of immigrants for Calgary’s economic growth, they are experiencing intensifying difficulties finding and maintaining appropriate employment and housing. The gap between the immigrant employment rate and that of non-immigrants widened and immigrant unemployment rates remain higher than those of non-immigrants; the lack of recognition of foreign credentials remains a key barrier to employment for recent immigrants (City of Calgary, 2008c). Census data demonstrates that over the past quarter century, the earnings gap between recent immigrant workers and Canadian-born workers widened significantly (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2008). At the same time, the proportion of immigrants with a university degree in jobs with low educational requirements (such as clerks, cashiers, and taxi drivers) increased during the 1991 to 2006 period. Galarneau and Morissette (2008) conclude that the observed difference between the labor market outcomes of native-born Canadians and immigrants can be attributed to immigrants’ language, country of origin, and visible minority status.

The employment and income disparities immigrants face in Canada, and Calgary specifically, are congruent with larger global economic trends. The economic restructuring that resulted from a shift towards globalized capitalism in the past two decades has coincided with a significant change in Canada’s immigration policy—a shift towards developing countries being sources of immigrants—and retrenchment of the welfare state from social assistance and social housing. It is important to note that immigrants to cities embedded in the global economy do not have the same opportunities upon arrival; the segmentation of visible minority foreign-born workers into low wage employment is a global phenomenon in developed nations’ cities (Friedmann, 1986; Friedmann & Wolff, 1982; King, 1991; Sassen, 2002), and apparent in Calgary’s case as well. Calgary’s central role in the oil and gas industry has enabled its rise to prominence on the world stage and simultaneously necessitated increased attraction of flexible workers to fuel
economic growth. Both highly skilled technical and low-skilled workers are needed to meet the labor need of the globalized city, and Calgary has been no exception. Canada’s immigration policy places significant value on higher education for immigrants; however, actual labor needs in receiving urban centers include demands in the low wage, low skill sector. Trends in employment for immigrants by industry show a significant growth in immigrant employment in the lower wage sales and service occupations (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Growing income and employment disparities impact immigrants’ capacity to obtain and maintain housing. The fact that immigrants are attracted to major urban centers, where real estate and rental prices are the highest, further limits their capacity to obtain affordable housing. Not surprisingly, housing affordability challenges, low wages, and systemic barriers to housing combine to impact immigrants’ housing situations. The housing challenges faced by immigrants in Calgary echo increasing reports of relative and absolute homelessness reported in Vancouver (Chan et al., 2005), Toronto (Murdie, 2003, 2005; Paradis, Novac, Sarty, & Hulchanski, 2008), and Edmonton (Enns, Felix, & Gurnett, 2007).

There is evidence that immigrant housing outcomes have been deteriorating for the past twenty years. Studies have demonstrated that since the 1980s, immigrants’ rate of homeownership has decreased dramatically (Haan, 2005). Researchers have attributed the erosion of this “homeownership advantage” (Ray & Moore, 1991) to discrimination and systemic barriers to housing and employment (Anucha, 2006; Ornstein, 2002; Owusu, 1998). Research further confirms that immigrants, especially visible minority immigrants, are streamed into poorer neighborhoods with marginal housing stock that significantly affects the life chances of their residents (Fiedler, Schuurman, & Hynd, 2006; Smith & Ley, 2008). There is a growing relationship between the clustering of certain visible minority groups in urban neighborhoods and the spatial concentration of poverty in Canadian cities (Walks & Bourne, 2006). Immigration status interacts and interweaves with other interlocking oppressions of ethnicity, race, gender, religion, age and language to impact housing (Dion, 2001; Ornstein, 2002; Paradis et al., 2008; Pruegger & Tanasescu, 2007; Skaburksis,
Discrimination by real estate agents, mortgage lenders, insurers, and landlords make it difficult for immigrants and racial minorities to obtain housing (Chan et al., 2005; Danso & Grant, 2000; Haan, 2007; Murdie, 2005; Skaburskis, 1996; Wayland, 2007).

These trends are confirmed by results of the Calgary study. Not surprisingly, the most common barriers to housing that were reported centered on inadequate income. The issue of foreign credentials was persistently mentioned as a reason for housing difficulties, because it essentially excluded the immigrant from the higher-skilled work and wages that would enable him/her to afford appropriate housing. The additional barriers to housing reported (language, the age of children, lack of appropriate documentation, race and ethnicity, and poor or no credit history) compounded with inadequate income to limit access to mainstream housing. As a result of these barriers, immigrants had to rely on several different strategies to obtain housing. House sharing and poorer quality accommodation were two common ways immigrants managed to gain access to housing they could afford. However, inappropriate or inadequate housing, such as basement suites or room rentals, is more likely to be insecure, unsafe, and have considerable health consequences. The lack of knowledge about landlord-tenant rights and the fear of losing housing increased the vulnerability of immigrants. These precarious housing situations resulted in immigrants worrying significantly about their living situation.

Although many were clearly in need of support, most survey respondents did not report accessing mainstream systems. Housing help came primarily from friends rather than social agencies, government, or ethnocultural and religious community associations. As discussed, these informal networks and accompanying housing arrangements have both benefits and notable strains. The lack of access of agencies and mainstream support systems was at times reinforced by interviewees' feelings of shame and guilt about "failing" to succeed in Canada. However, there were significant barriers to accessing these systems as well. Immigrants commonly reported not knowing assistance was available or how to access it. Those who tried to gain social housing, daycare, and/or social
assistance supports met significant challenges navigating complex application processes, and some simply gave up. Immigrants also expressed a lack of clarity around why they were denied a particular benefit. In cases where benefits were obtained, these were often inadequate to meet the basic necessities of living in Calgary.

Conclusion

The experiences of study participants illustrate the impacts of neoliberal policy trends in state approaches to social welfare that reinforce the importance of individual enterprise as a means of mitigating the failure of the market and government to provide affordable housing and support social integration. These processes are contextualized in the broader economic re-structuring that resulted from the shift toward globalized capitalism in the past two decades (Hackworth & Moriah, 2006; Harvey, 1989, 2005, 2007; Lyon-Calvo, 2004), which has resulted in "an attenuation of capitalist and class interests" and "growing coincidence of capitalist interests across borders" (Harrison, 2005, p. 3). The impacts of neoliberal ideologies in practice have led to the "intensification of inequities across classes, genders, and ethnicities, both within and between developed and underdeveloped worlds" (Harrison, 2005, p. 5). These inequities are manifested by the housing difficulties facing immigrants captured in this study.

Given the widespread and complex global processes that have created the current housing and income disparities for immigrants, the expectation that ethnocultural communities and informal assistance between friends and family members will buffer these impacts seems overly optimistic. Even if immigrants could be absorbed by family, friends, and community members, there are clear tensions and pressures that arise from these situations. The declining economic prospects of immigrants further reduce this sustaining capacity and the desirability of reliance on this mechanism as a buffer to homelessness. Though informal housing assistance can help with the payment of increasing shelter costs and assist in the settlement process, we must keep in mind the costs of such savings.

Although Calgary and Canada rely on immigration to fill
labor needs and remain competitive in the global economy, government action to address the basic needs of immigrants arriving in over-heated housing markets has been limited and has therefore contributed to current challenges. The barriers immigrants face to accessing mainstream supports are symptomatic of the neoliberal state’s retreat from social assistance in the past twenty years. For immigrants, furthermore, access challenges are compounded by racism and discrimination. In a sense, the discourse of social capital and individuals as well as communities “helping themselves” resounds neoliberal discourse that legitimizes the downloading of government responsibility for social issues onto citizens. While helpful as a broad conceptual tool for understanding the role of social relations as resources, social capital should be examined within the context of the concrete political economy (Smart, 2008). The social capital lens can become significantly more useful in understanding in contemporary society if it is used to complement the concern with ties, relationships, and solidarity with attention to disjuncture and tension.

These findings have implications for policy and programming. The housing cost challenges immigrants face are shared with other groups and confirm the need to increase the supply of affordable housing options that are appropriate for newcomers in terms of size, location, and proximity to amenities. The reported barriers to accessing mainstream supports point to the need for a thorough review of current policies and practices, as well as the removal of barriers for those most in need of receiving mainstream supports. Immigrants face the added challenges of being new to Canada and may lack the language skills necessary to navigate these systems. A central gap that this research points to is the fact that current settlement funding does not focus on housing as a critical component to successful transitions in the host country, and therefore adequate resources are not being targeted to this end.

There is also a clear need to enhance collaboration and communication between the homeless and settlement sectors to increase joint program design, planning, and service delivery for immigrants, given the apparent need in these communities. This raises issues around tailoring services to meet the needs of immigrants and ensuring their appropriateness and
accessibility. There is a need to increase immigrant awareness about housing supports, services, and rights. We have to be mindful that working with and through ethnocultural communities are not the sole strategies through which these reforms can be pursued.

References


Housing for People with Serious Mental Illness: Approaches, Evidence, and Transformative Change

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The evolution of housing approaches for people with serious mental illness is described and analyzed. A distinction is made between three different approaches to housing: (a) custodial, (b) supportive, and (c) supported. Research evidence is reviewed that suggests the promise of supported housing, but more research is needed that compares supported housing with different supportive housing approaches. It is argued that the current move to a supported housing approach represents a fundamental shift or transformative change in mental health policy and practice. Strategies to facilitate this shift are discussed.

Key words: housing approaches, mental illness, homelessness, housing first

Prior to the 1950s and 1960s, people with serious mental illness were confined to mental hospitals (Foucault, 1965). Goffman (1961) characterized these hospitals as "total institutions" that encompassed all aspects of life for the patients who resided within them. Mental hospitals typically had "long stay" wards for so called "chronic mental patients," and some even had their own graveyards where deceased patients were
buried. With the advent of deinstitutionalization in the 1950s and 1960s, many people who had been patients in mental hospitals were released into the community. In Canada, for example, there was a 70% drop in the inpatient population of provincial mental hospitals between 1965 (69,000 patients) and 1981 (20,000) (Nelson, 2006). Similar reductions in the inpatient populations of psychiatric hospitals occurred in the U.S. (Bachrach, 1976) and U.K. (Scull, 1977). With public welfare and new psychotropic medications, people with serious mental illness could be maintained at a subsistence level within the community (Scull, 1977).

Deinstitutionalization was not accompanied by the development of community supports (Bachrach, 1976). Even though many of the problems faced by people admitted to psychiatric hospitals are social, economic, or interpersonal in nature, the support that they received upon discharge in the early days of deinstitutionalization, and still today in many cases, usually consisted solely of medication (Harris, Hilton, & Rice, 1993). This lack of support has led to numerous challenges. For example, in their study of psychiatric aftercare in Toronto, Goering, Wasylenki, Farkas, Lancee, and Freeman (1984) found that six months after discharge from psychiatric facilities in Toronto, one-third of the sample was readmitted to the hospital, only 38% were employed, 68% reported moderate to severe difficulties in social functioning, and 20% were living in inadequate housing. In Denmark, Munk-Jørgenson (1999) found increased suicide rates, incarceration in correctional facilities, and hospital admissions in the aftermath of deinstitutionalization.

The type of housing and support that former patients receive after discharge is the focus of this paper. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the evolution of housing approaches from the early days of deinstitutionalization in the 1950s in North America, the U.K., western Europe, and Australia and New Zealand to the present; the second part examines published research evidence regarding different housing approaches; and the last section includes both a theoretical analysis and practical strategies for changes in housing approaches.
The Evolution of Housing Approaches: From Institutions to Housing to Homes

Trainor, Morrell-Bellai, Ballantyne, and Boydell (1993) traced the evolution of housing approaches for people with serious mental illness. They argued that housing has shifted from a custodial approach to a supportive housing approach to supported housing. An overview of some of the important qualities of these three approaches is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Housing Approaches for People with Serious Mental Illness

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<td>Custodial Housing</td>
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<td>Typical settings</td>
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<td>Role of staff</td>
<td>Care provider</td>
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<td>Locus of control</td>
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<td>Nature of intervention</td>
<td>In-house staff provides care services</td>
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Adapted from Parkinson, Nelson, and Horgan (1999).
Custodial Housing: The Medical Model in the Community

Housing emerged as a significant problem in the era of deinstitutionalization, with many former patients living in "psychiatric ghettos," consisting of for-profit board-and-care homes, semi-institutional facilities, foster families or poor quality rental housing (Dear & Wolch, 1987; Murphy, Englesmann, & Tcheng-Laroche, 1976; Rochefort, 1993). Psychiatric survivor Pat Capponi (1992) has provided a compelling narrative of the despair and alienation that she and others experienced living in a board-and-care home for former psychiatric patients in Toronto. In these settings, there are many areas of concern: (a) many ex-patients share rooms, thus not affording residents with privacy; (b) the physical quality of the housing is often poor; (c) there tends to be a care and dependency orientation of staff towards residents; and (d) residents have little control (Parkinson, Nelson, & Horgan, 1999). Typically in board-and-care homes, residents receive custodial care, consisting of medications and meals, much like what they received in mental hospitals, but little in the way of active rehabilitation or support that would enable them to become more independent and better integrated within the community.

Supportive Housing: The Residential Continuum Approach

In response to the limitations of custodial housing noted above, mental health professionals began to develop housing that provided active rehabilitation programs with a focus on the promotion of life and social skills, independence, and work. Quarterway houses, halfway houses, group homes, lodges, and supervised apartments are exemplars of this approach (Nelson, Aubry, & Hutchison, 2009). These settings integrated treatment and housing in a single, group or congregate setting, and were often organized in terms of a residential continuum. In theory, the residential continuum consisted of a range of settings varying in terms of the intensity of rehabilitation services provided and the amount of autonomy afforded (Ridgway & Zipple, 1990). As residents' functioning improved, they were expected to move to a less restrictive setting (e.g., from a halfway house to a quarterway house). Problems with this approach soon became apparent. Few communities were able to develop a full continuum of housing; resident progress
led to disruptive moves away from settings where they had developed supportive relationships; and the end of the continuum, independent housing, consisted of housing for which there was no financial or rehabilitation support.

**Supported Housing: The Housing First Approach**

In the U.S., Paul Carling (1995) introduced the idea of supported housing. The essence of this approach is that mental health consumers "choose, get, and keep" the housing that they prefer. Support staff assists consumers in finding permanent "homes," not specialized housing programs. Rent supplements, provided by the Section 8 program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, are an important ingredient of this approach, as they provide consumers with the financial means to access housing that is available in the community for anyone (typically private apartments). Section 8 certificate holders pay no more than 30% of their income on rent; the balance is covered by government. There are no requirements that consumers be in treatment, sober, asymptomatic, etc. to obtain supported housing; they receive "Housing First." Finally, another important feature of supported housing is that housing and support are de-linked or are independent of one another.

The "Pathways to Supported Housing" program in New York City is an excellent example of supported housing in practice (Tsemberis & Eisenberg, 2000). Pathways is:

... founded on the belief that housing is a basic human right for all individuals, regardless of disability, the program provides clients with housing first—before other services are offered. All clients are offered immediate access to permanent independent apartments of their own. (Tsemberis & Eisenberg, 2000, p. 488)

Pathways combines supported housing with Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and a variety of other support services to help consumers function independently and integrate within the community. The original Pathways program has worked successfully with a very challenging population of people with serious mental illness, a history of homelessness
and substance abuse problems (Tsemberis, Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004). Moreover, the “Housing First” approach has been adopted in several U.S. cities (National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices [NREPP], 2007).

Research Evidence

While it appears that the different housing approaches are guided by different values and assumptions regarding people with mental illness, there is a need to understand how these different approaches work and how effective they are in improving consumer outcomes, such as housing stability and quality of life. There has been a great deal of interest in research evidence regarding the effectiveness of different housing approaches in recent years. Over the last 35 years, there have been 20 different published reviews of this literature, with 13 of these reviews appearing from 1999 to 2009 (see Table 2).

Custodial Housing

Overall, the research does not support custodial housing as an effective approach for people with serious mental illness (Parkinson et al., 1999). For example, in an early study comparing foster family care with a control group of patients who remained in a psychiatric hospital, Murphy et al. (1976) found no differences between the two groups on several outcome measures over an 18-month follow-up period. In a 10-year follow-up of sheltered care residents in California, Segal and Kotler (1993) found that sheltered care was associated with a reduction in independent social functioning and an increase in assisted social functioning. In other words, residents became more dependent over time in custodial housing. In a comparative evaluation of different types of housing in southwestern Ontario, residents of board-and-care homes did not show the same gains in personal growth, community involvement, and independence as those residing in supportive group homes or supportive apartments (Nelson, Hall, & Walsh-Bowers, 1997). Moreover, in the qualitative component of this research, residents of board-and-care homes made the following comments about their housing:
We can tell them what we believe is wrong, but they always make their own decisions and we never know what it's about... We have house meetings every five months, but the staff does what they want anyway.

The living room is overcrowded. Everybody here should have their own rooms. Right now there's three in one room. (Participants in Nelson et al., 1997)

Supportive Housing

There is more evidence regarding the effectiveness of supportive housing. An early, well-controlled, 40-month longitudinal study of supportive housing is Fairweather, Sanders, Cressler, and Maynard's (1969) randomized trial of the Lodge program, in which formerly hospitalized patients lived together in a congregate facility in the community. They found that relative to patients receiving "treatment as usual," the members of the Lodge group showed significant improvements over time in terms of reduced hospitalization and increased competitive work. While much of the research on supportive housing suffers from methodological problems, the overall conclusion of recent reviews of this literature (Leff et al., 2009; Nelson, Aubry, & Lafrance, 2007; Parkinson et al., 1999) is that supportive housing is associated with many positive outcomes for people with serious mental illness.

Supported Housing

The Housing First approach has recently generated a great deal of research on: (a) consumer preferences for housing; (b) the importance of choice and control in supported housing; (c) the implementation of supported housing; and (d) the outcomes of supported housing.

Consumer preferences for housing. In supported housing, it is important to ask people with mental health issues where they would like to live, rather than assuming that professionals know best where consumers should live. In a review of the literature on consumer preferences for housing, Tanzman (1993) found that most consumers: want independent housing (their own homes or apartments); want to live with a friend
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Focus of review</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Rog, D. J., &amp; Raush, H. L.</td>
<td>Reviewed studies of halfway houses for people with mental illness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Carpenter, M. D.</td>
<td>Reviewed research on the effectiveness of transitional housing program for people with mental illness.</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>Colten, S. I.</td>
<td>Reviewed the literature on different models of community residential treatment.</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>Nelson, G., &amp; Smith Fowler, H.</td>
<td>Reviewed the informal systems, policy/planning, and geo-social contexts of housing for people with mental illness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Ogilvie, R.</td>
<td>Reviewed correlational and outcome studies of supportive housing for people with mental illness.</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>Parkinson, S., Nelson, G., &amp; Horgan, S.</td>
<td>Reviewed implementation and outcome studies of supportive and supported housing for people with mental illness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Rosenheck, R.</td>
<td>Reviewed correlational and outcome studies of supportive housing for people with mental illness.</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Newman, S. J.</td>
<td>Reviewed outcome studies of outreach, case management, and housing programs for homeless people with mental illness.</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>Evans, G. W., Wells, N. M., &amp; Moch, A.</td>
<td>Reviewed correlational studies and outcome studies of custodial, supportive, and supported housing for people with mental illness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Rog, D. J.</td>
<td>Reviewed outcome studies of supportive and supported housing for people with mental illness.</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Macpherson, R., Shepherd, G., &amp; Edwards, T. Frankish, C. J., Hwang, S. W., &amp; Quantz, D. Hwang, S. W., Tolomiczenko, G., Kouyoumdjian, F., &amp; Garner, R.</td>
<td>Reviewed outcome studies of supportive and supported housing for people with mental illness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reviewed the literature on homelessness and health, including mental health.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reviewed outcome research on a variety of interventions (including housing) for homeless people (including people with mental illness).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Nelson, G., Aubry, T., &amp; Lafrance, A.</td>
<td>Reviewed outcome research on a variety of interventions (including housing) for homeless people (including people with mental illness).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Kyle, T., &amp; Dunn, J. R.</td>
<td>Reviewed controlled outcome studies of housing for homeless people with mental illness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Leff, H. S., et al.</td>
<td>Used meta-analysis to examine the effects of different housing models on outcomes for people with mental illness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
or romantic partner, not other people with mental health issues; identify low-income as the major barrier to obtaining good quality housing; and want staff support available on a 24-hour basis, but not live-in staff. In a survey of 300 people with serious mental illness in southwestern Ontario, Nelson, Hall, and Forchuk (2003) found that 79% of the sample wanted to live in an apartment or their own home, but only 38% of the sample lived in the type of housing that they preferred. Similarly, in a study in Montreal, 77% of consumers preferred to live in their own apartment, a supervised apartment, or social housing (Piat et al., 2008). This research clearly demonstrates that mental health consumers prefer to have their own, independent housing.

The importance of choice and control in supported housing. There has also been some research on the basic premise that having choice and control over housing and support is associated with positive outcomes for mental health consumers. This research has shown that resident choice and control are related to independent functioning (Nelson, Hall, & Walsh-Bowers, 1998), housing satisfaction, residential stability, and psychological stability (Srebnik, Livingston, Gordon, & King, 1995), and mastery and reduced psychiatric symptoms (Greenwood, Schaefer-McDonald, Winkel, & Tsemberis, 2005). In a study of homeless people with mental illness in three Ontario cities, Nelson, Sylvestre, Aubry, George, and Trainor (2007) found in both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses that consumers' perceptions of choice and control over their housing and support were positively related to their quality of life, the quality of their housing, and their functioning in the community (as rated by support workers). Similarly, in the previously mentioned consumer preference survey of 300 mental health consumers, Nelson et al. (2003) found that those who lived in the type of housing they preferred enjoyed a significantly better quality of life than those living in housing that they did not prefer. Together these studies support a fundamental premise of supported housing that consumer choice and control over housing is good for one's mental health, and they challenge the notion that professionals know what is best for consumers.

The implementation of supported housing. While supportive
housing and supported housing once stood in sharp contrast to one another, over time there has been more of a blurring of these two approaches. Some of the principles of supported housing (e.g., permanency of housing, individualized support) have infiltrated congregate supportive housing programs. For this reason, it is important to clearly specify and operationalize the key ingredients of supported housing and to evaluate the extent to which they are implemented.

Some research has started to do this. In a multisite evaluation, Rog and Randolph (2002) used a stakeholder approach to generate both the core dimensions of supported housing (e.g., housing choice, separation of housing and services, service choice) and indicators of these dimensions. Each indicator was then operationalized on a five-point scale with a rating of five being closest to the ideal of supported housing and a rating of one being furthest away from the ideal. Instruments were then developed to collect data from program managers, staff, and residents on each indicator for each dimension. These data were used to compare 43 supported housing programs with 129 comparison housing programs. While there were differences between these two types of housing, there was considerable overlap in the distributions of ratings between these two program types and considerable variability within the two program types. Thus, rather than a clear distinction between what is supported housing and what is not, the results indicated that there is more of a continuum of supported housing.

In a more recent study, Wong, Filoromo, and Tennille (2007) identified the following core domains of supported housing: consumer choice, typical and normalized housing, resource accessibility, consumer control, and individualized and flexible support. They also developed a set of indicators for each domain and gathered data from archival sources, a provider survey, and a consumer survey for 27 supported independent living programs. Like Rog and Randolph (2002), they found considerable variability in the degree to which the programs approximated the ideal qualities of supported housing.

Clearly more work is needed on the implementation of supported housing programs and the degree of fidelity to the model of supported housing. This is important because without such data, outcome studies of supported housing
The outcomes of supported housing. Research has also examined the outcomes of supported housing. In a recent review of the literature, Nelson, Aubry, and Lafrance (2007) located four studies that compared supported housing with standard care or treatment as usual. In a study in San Diego in which formerly homeless people with mental illness were randomly allocated rent supplements under Section 8, those who received the Section 8 certificates showed a significant improvement in housing stability over a period of two years compared with those who did not (Effect Size [ES] = .57). In New York City, Tsemberis and colleagues have reported the results of two evaluations of the Pathways supported housing program for homeless individuals with mental illness. The first of these was a quasi-experimental comparison of Pathways with the residential continuum of housing over a period of five years (Tsemberis & Eisenberg, 2000), while the second was a randomized trial of these two approaches over a period of two years (Tsemberis et al., 2004). Those assigned to Pathways received rent vouchers and ACT support services. Both studies reported dramatic increases in housing stability for those in Pathways compared with those living in residential continuum housing (ES = .92 in Tsemberis & Eisenberg, 2000; ES = .77 in Tsemberis et al., 2004). Finally, in a four-city (Cleveland, New Orleans, San Diego, San Francisco) randomized trial of supported housing for homeless people with mental illness, Rosenheck, Kasprow, Frisman, and Liu-Mares (2003) found significant improvements in housing stability over a period of three years for those who were assigned to supported housing (ES = .51). These studies have also shown that supported housing improves housing choice, quality, and satisfaction, reduces use of hospitalization, and leads to decreases in drug and alcohol use (Cheng, Lin, Dasprrow, & Rosenheck, 2007).

In the most recent published review of this literature, Leff et al. (2009) similarly concluded that compared with other types of housing, permanent supported housing has the greatest impact on housing stability, reduction of hospitalization, and housing satisfaction.

While all of the published controlled outcome studies of
Housing First have been carried out in the U.S., new multi-site studies of Housing First are either underway or in the planning stages in Canada (Mental Health Commission of Canada [MHCC], n.d., “At home”), France (Eric Latimer, personal communication, 2010), and western Europe (Jose Ornelas, personal communication, 2010).

Supported Housing vs. Supportive Housing

Few studies have directly compared supported housing with the linear residential continuum of supportive housing. The two studies of Pathways cited above (Tsemberis & Eisenberg, 2000; Tsemberis et al., 2004) have found superior outcomes for supported housing over the residential continuum on housing stability and housing choice outcomes. However, in a study of homeless individuals with mental illness in Boston, Goldfinger et al. (1999) reported somewhat contrary results. Participants were randomly assigned to independent apartments or staffed group living residences. While both groups showed high levels of housing stability after 18 months, members of minority groups living in independent apartments had significantly more days homeless than those in group living situations. In another study in New York City using a quasi-experimental design, Siegel et al. (2006) found no significant differences in housing tenure at an 18-month follow-up for people with mental illness and a history of homelessness living in supported housing or community residences. Those living in supported housing reported significantly more satisfaction with autonomy and their economic situation, but also more isolation, than those living in community residences.

McHugo et al. (2004) randomly assigned homeless people with mental illness to either “integrated” or “parallel” housing. The integrated approach bore some resemblance to supportive housing because support and housing were closely linked, while the parallel housing bore some resemblance to supported housing because support and housing were de-linked. However, many of the people in parallel housing lived in congregate facilities. After 18 months, those in integrated housing reported more stable housing, higher life satisfaction, and a greater reduction of psychiatric symptoms than those in parallel housing. It should be noted that neither of the latter
two studies employed rent vouchers, so that a basic element of supported housing was missing in this research. From the few studies that have been conducted, it is unclear whether independent supported housing or congregate supportive housing has differential effects on consumer outcomes.

**Ameliorative vs. Transformative Change**

In this section, I analyze the evolution of housing approaches for people with serious mental illness using theory regarding change in human systems, as it is important to understand what the changes in housing approaches represent. Are changes more or less a repackaging of old approaches ('old wine in new bottles'), or do they represent something that is fundamentally new and different? Recent reports in the U.S. (National Empowerment Center and the Recovery Consortium, 2006; President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003) and Canada (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2009) have used the language of transformative change, so it is important to understand what transformation means in the context of mental health policy and practice.

Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fish (1974) made a theoretical distinction between first-order and second-order change, which has important implications for housing for people with serious mental illness. First-order change involves change within a system, with no questioning of the fundamental values or structures that guide the system. Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010) have referred to first-order change as ameliorative because the goal of this type of change is improvement of the existing system. In contrast, second-order change is concerned with a change in the values and structures of the system. This type of change has been called transformative because it entails a fundamental alteration in the way the system operates. Corrigan and Boyle (2003) made a similar distinction in their analysis of mental health system change, contrasting evolutionary and revolutionary approaches to change. Importantly, Watzlawick et al. (1974) asserted that the way that a problem is initially framed or constructed defines the type of change process, ameliorative or transformative, that will be used to address the problem.
Ameliorative Change

When the problems of psychiatric institutions were recognized, the primary change that was believed to be needed was to move services from the institutions to the community. However, it is apparent from Table 1 that custodial housing replicates the key features of psychiatric institutions. There is still a focus on care services (medication and meals) rather than rehabilitation, and patients continue to have little control over their living environment. Most important is the relationship between mental health consumers and the staff of custodial housing. Staff retains most if not all of the power in custodial housing, keeping patients in a dependency position.

While supportive housing shifts to more of a rehabilitation orientation, residents gain only partial control over these living environments, which remain segregated settings in the community. Former patients have little control over where and with whom they live, and they are required to participate in the rehabilitation activities provided by staff in these “non-normalizing” settings. Supportive housing is clearly an improvement over institutional or custodial housing in the community, but the fundamental status of the patient as a service-recipient is unchallenged. In custodial or supportive housing, mental health consumers and family members are not asked what they think is needed, and they are not included as important stakeholders in the change process.

Transformative Change

Values and power are important in transformational efforts that strive for fundamental change in the structures of social systems (Nelson, Lord, & Ochocka, 2001; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). In a new paradigm in mental health, the person with a mental health struggle is viewed as a tenant in his or her housing, a person with rights and the potential to contribute to society, not as a patient or client to be supervised or managed. As well, there is a focus on strengths and the potential for recovery, not on the person’s deficits or illness. Moreover, in a transformed mental health system, consumers become active participants in planning, services, and research, with real power, voice, choice, and control. A major barrier to implementing this value is that professionals are sanctioned
by society as experts who have the power to diagnose and treat mental illness. Another important assumption for a new paradigm in mental health is that of social inclusion. People with mental health struggles should not only be in the community, they should be valued members of the community. Finally, there is the need for social justice and a more equitable allocation of resources. Policies and supports need to be put in place to overcome the poverty in which many mental health consumers live.

Supported housing is an example of transformative change in housing approaches for people with serious mental illness. At the individual level, there is a transformation from patients or clients of housing to tenants with rights; at the relational level, helping relationships are transformed from on-site staff supervision to individualized, consumer-directed supports; at the organizational level, housing and support are de-linked, thus taking mental health professionals out of the landlord role; at the community level, there is a transformation from stigma and exclusion in specialized, segregated housing to integration into normal housing and communities; and at the societal level, the rent supplements afford people greater access to and control over finances and housing (Carling, 1995).

Strategies for Transformative Change

While there is currently substantial interest in the Housing First model of supported housing, many people with serious mental illness still live in custodial housing, in substandard private rental housing with no financial supplements for rent, in shelters, or on the streets. In 2002, a total of 4864 beds, or 44% of the total number of government-funded beds for people with mental illness in Ontario, were in custodial housing (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2002). While 56% of the beds are in supportive or supported housing, clearly there is a need for housing policy for people with serious mental illness to catch up with current thinking and research that supports the effectiveness of supportive and supported housing in improving outcomes for mental health consumers. Nelson et al. (2009) have suggested change strategies that can be used to shift the paradigm in housing and mental health.

Building a vision and values. There is a need to challenge
assumptions and build a vision and values that are consistent with the Housing First approach. There still exist today many myths and misconceptions about mental illness, including views that people with mental illness are dangerous, unpredictable, incapable of making their own decisions, and in need of care. These victim-blaming, stigmatizing assumptions, beliefs, and values are the deep structures of systems (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang, 2007). For transformative change to occur, these assumptions must be directly confronted and replaced with an alternative vision of recovery and a set of values (citizenship, holistic health, power, social inclusion, and social justice) that guides the journey towards that vision (Sylvestre, Nelson, Sabloff, & Peddle, 2007).

The Kirby report on mental health in Canada (Kirby & Keon, 2006), Out of the Shadows at Last, provides a solid foundation from which to build more positive views of people with mental illness, their potential for recovery, and their need for and right to income, housing, and support. The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), which grew out of the work of Senator Kirby, has funded an anti-stigma campaign called Opening Minds that will be targeted at youth and health care professionals in its first year (Mental Health Commission of Canada, n.d., “Opening minds”). In a qualitative study of three mental health organizations in the Waterloo Region of Ontario, Nelson et al. (2001) found that building a new vision and values were an important starting point for the transformative changes that each of the three organizations underwent. An alternative vision and values act as signposts to guide a process of change, so that people know where they are headed.

Education and advocacy. Education and advocacy are needed to overcome myths, misconceptions, ignorance, and inertia about the pressing social problem of housing for people with serious mental illness. There is also a need for a social movement to pressure governments to fund housing for this population. For example, housing policy in Canada for low-income citizens has eroded over the years. From 1984 to 1993 the Mulroney government cut $1.8 billion from the federal housing budget, then eliminated federal funding for housing altogether (Hulchanski & Shapcott, 2004). Under the federal Liberal government, fewer than 1,000 units of social housing
were created between 1993 and 2000, and responsibility for housing was downloaded to the provinces. In 1998, the Harris government in Ontario downloaded responsibility for housing to municipalities. Housing policy in the U.S. has followed a similar pattern, with responsibility for housing devolving to states and locales, which do not have adequate funding streams for the creation of housing for low-income citizens (Orlebeke, 2000).

To combat this erosion of public policy for housing, grassroots organizations in Canada and the U.S. have organized to educate and advocate for housing (Nelson & Saegert, 2009). Some of these efforts focus broadly on housing for low-income citizens, while others target housing for people with serious mental illness. While Nelson and Saegert (2009) have reported that some of these efforts have resulted in positive changes in the public housing sector, particularly for individuals with serious mental illness, O'Hara (2007) has noted that progress has been uneven across states in the U.S. and that federal funding for housing needs to be substantially increased to combat the housing problems faced by people with serious mental illness.

One of the recent initiatives of MHCC that came out of the work of Senator Kirby is a noteworthy exemplar of transformative change in housing and mental health. MHCC has funded the At Home/Chez Soi five-city (Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, Moncton) research demonstration project on Housing First for homeless people with serious mental illness (MHCC, n.d., At Home). More than 1,300 Canadians with serious mental illness who have been homeless will be housed under this initiative in housing of their choice. As was mentioned earlier, similar initiatives are in the planning stages in Europe. Moreover, recent reports in the U.K. (Dunn, 2008) and Australia (Edwards, Fisher, Tannous, & Robinson, 2009) have called for government support for the Housing First approach for people with serious mental illness.

Consultation. Finally, there is a need for consultation with governments, planners and policy-makers, and practitioners to change current custodial housing to supported or supportive housing. With the help of a consultant, Waterloo Regional Homes for Mental Health, Inc., in the Waterloo Region of
Ontario, shifted to a more supported housing approach, transforming existing housing and creating 100 new units of supported housing (Lord, Ochocka, Czarny, & MacGillivary, 1998). My colleagues and I consulted with the Niagara District Health Council about housing and mental health. At the time of our consultation, Niagara Region had 74 consumers living in custodial housing, 28 in supportive housing, and none in supported housing. After receiving our consultation report, Niagara Region was able to use new funding from the Phase II Mental Health Homelessness Initiative to create 86 units of supported housing (Parkinson, Nelson, & Horgan, 1998). A consultation with the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care recommended a shift towards a supported housing approach (Sylvestre et al., 2007).

Conclusion

Since the early days of deinstitutionalization, housing approaches for people with serious mental illness have evolved from custodial housing to supportive housing to supported housing. Not only is supported housing philosophically and conceptually appealing, but, as has been shown in this article, there is growing research evidence attesting to the beneficial outcomes of supported housing. Further research is needed that compares the outcomes associated with supportive and supported housing, since there is little research that evaluates the differential outcomes of these two approaches. The shift to supported housing is clearly transformative in the sense that it represents a new way of thinking about people with serious mental illness as people who are competent and capable of making choices about their lives, not as patients who are sick and need someone to take care of them, and a new way of thinking about housing as a basic entitlement of life, rather than as a therapeutic environment. While there is a long way to go in terms of making this vision a reality, there are several strategies that can be used to make this shift.
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Representations of Homelessness in Four Canadian Newspapers: Regulation, Control, and Social Order

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This article reports on a content analysis of homelessness representations in four Canadian newspapers: two city broadsheets, one city tabloid, and one national newspaper. Clear differences between the papers emerged showing that in general coverage of homelessness in Calgary was much more positive than coverage in Vancouver. It conveyed a stronger sense of crisis or urgency and a stronger sense of optimism that the problem should and can be solved. Experts dominate public discourse about homelessness, with people who experience homelessness themselves marginalized as speakers. Despite these differences, the four papers present a unified narrative of homelessness in which readers are exhorted to be sympathetic to the plight of homeless people while at the same time, ‘they’ are presented as needing to be controlled and regulated in order to maintain social order. This narrative has implications for citizenship and social inclusion of people who experience homelessness.
Key words: homelessness, media coverage, content analysis, regulation and control, framing

Media accounts of homelessness have become commonplace. These accounts are a primary source of information about homelessness for many citizens, especially if they live in the suburbs where they are less likely to see people begging on the streets or lined up in front of a shelter waiting to be admitted for the night. Media accounts typically report on shelter use, offer information about rates of homelessness, and detail crimes carried out by or upon people who are homeless. They introduce readers to individuals who have experienced homelessness and provide selected details about their circumstances and explanations for their plight.

However, news coverage does much more than simply present an "objective" description of the "facts." Journalists do not just recount events, they also interpret and explain them and try to influence people to see things and to act in particular ways (Fairclough, 1995). Tuchman (1978), for example, asserts that media can be understood as a framing or constructive force that contributes to the production of social reality in general and to the understanding of the nature of specific social problems. So while news media may indeed reflect what goes on in a community, they also shape social phenomena in important ways. In fact, the very recognition of homelessness as a social problem rather than simply a personal circumstance may be attributable to the way in which it is represented in the news media. Numerous scholars have traced the emergence of particular issues, such as AIDS or smoking, as social problems in media representations (Albert, 1989; Malone, Boyd, & Bero, 2000). These studies have established the important role that the media play in framing and constructing social problems, particularly policy problems, in the public arena.

Readers do not, of course, believe everything they read in the media. Rather, news media provide a central source of information, which people often draw upon in shaping personal understandings of social issues such as homelessness. Silverstone (2007) offers the concept of the mediapolis, in which news media are seen as central to civic life, in many respects constituting an extension of the ancient Greek polis or
the shared space for civic communication. The mediapolis is a technologically mediated forum where contemporary social issues, including homelessness, can be deliberated. Like the ancient polis, this forum is typically exclusive and somewhat elitist. It is constructed through processes of symbolic power whereby some people and groups have more access to appearing and speaking in the media than others. This can be seen in the reliance by journalists on professionals and experts to frame social issues (Silverstone, 2007). The concept also offers the potential for extending civic participation through the inclusion of marginalized voices in news media reports. Systematic analyses of news media coverage are crucial for realizing this and for extending the range of participants and perspectives involved in framing issues such as homelessness.

The framing perspective as laid out by scholars such as Entman (1993) and Iyengar (1991) offers a way to understand how the media shape social problems. As Entman (1993) says, “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52). Frames therefore define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. They do this by highlighting some kinds of information over others, drawing attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring others, making some ways of thinking about a topic more salient to audiences than other possible ways. Media representations thus have the potential to contribute to public understandings of homelessness, influence how homeless people are regarded and treated (Ruddick, 1996), and play a role in debates about public policy about homelessness (Greenberg, May, & Elliot, 2006).

Homelessness was “rediscovered” by mainstream North American journalism in the early 1980s (Campbell & Reeves, 1999). The amount of media coverage of homelessness in the United States increased rapidly during the 1980s, reaching a peak in 1987 and then leveling off in the late 1990s and early years of the 21st century (Buck, Toro, & Ramos, 2004). Studies of media representations of homelessness have generally been critical of the ways that journalists have represented
homelessness. While news coverage is often sympathetic to individuals who are homeless, it tends to portray homelessness as an individual rather than structural problem, thus blaming individuals for their circumstances (Buck et al., 2004; Hodgetts, Cullen, & Radley, 2005). News items typically emphasize the "stubborn" nature of homelessness and ignore the complexities of the problem (Klodawsky, Farrell, & D'Aubry, 2002). Shields (2001) suggests that changes in the amount of coverage may not reflect changes in the actual circumstances of homelessness, although it is very difficult to determine actual circumstances and numbers of people experiencing homelessness. In fact, intensified news coverage of a social problem may have the paradoxical effect of stabilizing and perpetuating the problem rather than leading to social change (Shields, 2001).

Homelessness representations also have implications for citizenship and social inclusion. The "common sense" understandings produced by news coverage work to exclude homeless people from participation in society by fixing the boundaries between "us and them" (Forte, 2002; Shields, 2001; Whang & Min, 1999) and perpetuating a view of homeless people as residing "outside of 'normal' social enterprise and relationships" (Hodgetts, Hodgetts, & Radley, 2006, p. 525). What has emerged is a restricted mediapolis, missing both diversity of voices and perspectives and discussion of the complexities of homelessness.

In this article we report on a study of homelessness representations in Canadian newspapers. Although they were writing in 2000, in the early days of the internet explosion, we believe Hackett and Gruneau (2000) are still right when they say that newspapers are an important medium to study because they offer "accessibility, in-depth analysis, potential diversity of viewpoints, and sustained reflection on important political and economic issues" (p. 12). In fact, in spite of dire predictions about the fate of newspapers in the internet age, particularly in the United States, readership has remained stable and even increased in Canada from 2007 to 2008 (NADbank, 2008), the time period during which this study took place. Print media therefore contribute significantly to the process by which both social problems and appropriate responses to them are framed. Our goals were to assess how homelessness is
Representations of Homelessness

represented in Canadian newspapers, to provide a corpus of material for future discursive analysis, and to provide a baseline for further work with audiences, journalists, and people who have experienced homelessness themselves. The research question was “How is homelessness represented in four Canadian newspapers?” The data we collected offered an overview of trends and patterns in coverage, revealed some unexpected differences between papers, and sensitized us to a number of issues for further exploration. We make no claims about public opinion or about policy responses to homelessness in Canada, as we did not study either of these. However, we concluded that the problem of homelessness is framed somewhat differently in the two cities we studied, leading to different ideas about who can and should respond to it. In addition, coverage in all the papers we studied works to assert a need for control and regulation of “them,” homeless people, in order to maintain social order. This overarching narrative of control and regulation is problematic in its implications for citizenship and social inclusion of homeless people, leading us to suggest a need for media advocacy to change the way in which homelessness is framed in the press.

Method

Items from four Canadian newspapers were collected for the period from August 1, 2007 to July 31, 2008: two broadsheet newspapers, the Calgary Herald and the Vancouver Sun; a tabloid, the Vancouver Province; and a national newspaper, the Globe and Mail. Weekday circulation of the four papers in 2007 was as follows: Calgary Herald: 125,000; Vancouver Sun: 165,000; Vancouver Province: 141,000; Globe and Mail: 323,000 (Canadian Newspaper Association, 2009). These papers were selected to compare coverage in the largest circulation daily papers in two large Western Canadian cities, to compare coverage in the broadsheet and tabloid press in Vancouver, and to see how local–provincial concerns in these two cities are represented in the national press.

Calgary and Vancouver were selected because each has unique circumstances that make them suitable for comparison. Calgary is the site of the first ten-year plan to end homelessness
in Canada, an initiative spearheaded by CEOs of major corporations in the city. Alberta, the province within which Calgary is located, is the first, and at this writing the only, province in Canada to adopt a plan for ending homelessness. Vancouver was planning for the 2010 Winter Olympics during the time that data was collected, and much concern was expressed about how visitors would perceive an area known as the Downtown East Side, one of the most poverty-stricken neighborhoods in Canada. This neighborhood has become synonymous with homelessness, addictions, and mental illness, and presents a “problem” that is widely cited not just in the Vancouver press but all across Canada. Thus the circumstances in each city offered an opportunity to examine similarities and differences in coverage in the two cities.

The time period for data collection was selected as both cities released homeless “counts” during that year, and Calgary announced its ten-year plan. The most recent homeless count for Calgary (Stroick, Hubac, & Richter-Salomons, 2008) showed that, with a population of just over 1 million, 4,060 people were identified as being homeless, an increase of 18% over the previous count in 2006. In Vancouver, with a population of well over 2 million, 2,592 people were identified as being homeless in 2008, an increase of 22% over the previous count in 2005 (Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2008). The documents associated with these counts in Calgary and Vancouver indicate a number of differences in who was selected for counting and how the count was conducted, leading to very different results in relation to the size of the population in each city. Homeless counts have been critiqued as a way to ascertain existing levels of homelessness (Cloke, Milbourne, & Widdowfield, 2001; Shields, 2001), but their results are widely publicized in the media and they provide a local context within which further media coverage of homelessness unfolds. We cite these numbers not to establish a definitive assessment of the number of homeless people in these cities but to describe a context in which there seems to be an ever-increasing number of homeless people, despite the prosperity and wealth of both Calgary and Vancouver during the period of the study. There was therefore much coverage of homelessness in both cities during this year, offering a wealth
of material for examination of how homelessness is framed as a social problem.

Each newspaper was searched in the database ProQuest using the following search terms: homeless*, vagran*, squatt*, street pe*, panhandl*, affordable housing, subsidized housing, social housing, and NIMBY (not in my back yard). As the focus of the study was on how the media presents urban homelessness, we omitted several kinds of items that these terms identified, for example, items about homeless pets, homelessness because of natural disasters, and artistic works about homelessness. We also excluded items in which politicians referred in passing to homelessness as a way to advance their own political agendas and letters to the editor which, although they offer a glimpse into how readers respond to news items about homelessness, do not reflect how people who work in the media write about the topic. We also excluded items that focused primarily on affordable housing if they did not mention homelessness. This resulted in a corpus of 765 items in the four papers.

A coding frame consisting of a set of exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories was constructed based on coding information available in previous studies of media coverage of homelessness, consultations among the three authors, and a series of trial coding sessions carried out by the principal author and three research assistants using newspaper items collected for the study. Definitions for all terms that appeared in the coding scheme were also developed. After coding of the newspaper items began, inter-coder reliability tests were conducted every two days using two of the items being coded that day. Inter-coder reliability averaged 81%. Items were coded for various technical aspects of their appearance in the paper: month of publication, word count, type of item (news, editorial etc.), location in the paper, presence of images, and word count of quotations in items. Content of items was also coded: age, gender, race, family membership and portrayal of the main homeless person; causes, solutions, and responses to homelessness; crimes mentioned and whether the homeless person was the victim or perpetrator; and associations of homelessness with about 25 additional factors including such things as mental illness, addictions, weather, health problems, and so on. The coding frame is available upon request from the first
author. Data was analyzed using SPSS, a statistical package for the analysis of quantitative data.

Results

Of the 765 items coded in total, 255 appeared in the *Calgary Herald*, 227 in the *Vancouver Sun*, 131 in the *Vancouver Province*, and 152 in the *Globe and Mail* (see Figure 1). Of these, 532 were identified as “primary” items about homelessness (i.e. homelessness was the main topic of the item, for example an item about the costs of social services for homeless people, or one about how many people are using homeless shelters during a cold spell). The remaining 233 were identified as “secondary” items about homelessness (i.e. homelessness was mentioned or described in the item, but was not the main topic, for example an item on downtown violence that describes a number of recent crimes, among them one committed by or against a homeless person) (see Figure 2A). The *Calgary Herald* had the largest number of items overall and the largest number of primary items. However, the *Vancouver Sun* had both the largest number and the largest proportion of secondary items; that is, the topic of homelessness appeared in the *Vancouver Sun* in a larger proportion of articles that were not primarily about homelessness. This was largely due to frequent references to the area known as the Downtown East Side. We also identified whether an item was a news story or an editorial (this category included both editorials and columns) (see Figure 2B). The *Calgary Herald* had a significantly higher number and proportion of editorial items dealing with homelessness than the other newspapers. This measure offers an indication of how much weight a newspaper attributes to an issue; when journalists choose what to write about in editorials and columns, they are choosing more often in Calgary to write about homelessness.

![Figure 1. Number of Articles Found](image-url)
A number of measures indicate the prominence of items in these newspapers. They include where the item is located in the newspaper and whether an image accompanies the item. In comparison to the other papers, significantly more images of homelessness appeared in the *Calgary Herald* than in the other papers (see Figure 2C). Additionally in this paper, more items were located on the first page of the section they appeared in, more appeared on the front page of the paper, and more of the front page items were accompanied by images (see Figures 2D and 2E). Even people who do not read the paper in Calgary are exposed to more headlines and visual representations of homelessness as they walk by newspaper boxes or see papers lying around in coffee shops and workplaces. We are not able to comment on images in the *Globe and Mail* as the database we used did not report on the presence of images in this newspaper.

Figure 2. Technical Aspects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Globe &amp; Mail</th>
<th>Calgary Herald</th>
<th>Vancouver Sun</th>
<th>Vancouver Province</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: primary/secondary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primary</td>
<td>532/89.5%</td>
<td>233/30.5%</td>
<td>604/39.0%</td>
<td>161/21.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secondary</td>
<td></td>
<td>231/4.3%</td>
<td>343/5.5%</td>
<td>137/18.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: news/editorial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>news</td>
<td>609/91.3%</td>
<td>261/36.4%</td>
<td>114/16.0%</td>
<td>62/8.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>editorial</td>
<td></td>
<td>53/7.2%</td>
<td>45/6.5%</td>
<td>16/2.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: no image/with image</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no image</td>
<td>698/91.2%</td>
<td>187/26.4%</td>
<td>101/14.7%</td>
<td>67/9.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with image</td>
<td></td>
<td>57/8.8%</td>
<td>77/11.3%</td>
<td>5/0.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: not front page article/front page article</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not front</td>
<td>57/8.8%</td>
<td>143/20.8%</td>
<td>206/30.7%</td>
<td>126/18.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>front</td>
<td></td>
<td>32/4.5%</td>
<td>21/3.1%</td>
<td>5/0.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: front page articles - no image/with image</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no image</td>
<td>698/91.2%</td>
<td>187/26.4%</td>
<td>101/14.7%</td>
<td>67/9.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with image</td>
<td></td>
<td>57/8.8%</td>
<td>77/11.3%</td>
<td>5/0.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who is Homeless

Our results confirm the stereotype identified in the literature of the typical homeless person as a single adult male (Widdowfield, 2001). We coded the main homeless person described in an item for gender, age, and family membership only if these characteristics were identified in the item. At least one homeless person was identified in 315 items, but not all pieces of information were available for each of these people. In our corpus, 79.8% of the people described in items in which the gender and age of the main homeless person could be identified were adult males (see Figure 3A). Women, young people, and seniors were also identified as being homeless. Particularly in the Calgary Herald and Vancouver Sun, there were a significant number of references to homeless families (33 in the Calgary Herald and 19 in the Vancouver Sun). Although the most prevalent representation is still that of the adult male, these references to other groups may signal an understanding that homelessness also affects young people, old people, and families (see Figure 3B). It is also perhaps a result of the work of an organization like the Calgary Homeless Foundation to increase awareness of "the many faces" of homelessness. Homelessness is seen to be affecting people who don't fit the usual stereotype—deserving groups of people like women and children who cannot be as easily dismissed as having brought their problems on themselves.

Figure 3. Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Globe &amp; Mail</th>
<th>Calgary Herald</th>
<th>Vancouver Sun</th>
<th>Vancouver Province</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A: gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>51(16.2%)</td>
<td>17(16.5%)</td>
<td>19(24.0%)</td>
<td>3(5.0%)</td>
<td>80(16.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>216(83.8%)</td>
<td>86(83.5%)</td>
<td>60(76.0%)</td>
<td>57(95.0%)</td>
<td>349(83.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B: age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>youth</td>
<td>12(16.2%)</td>
<td>13(15.5%)</td>
<td>3(15.8%)</td>
<td>3(14.8%)</td>
<td>35(14.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>senior</td>
<td>12(16.2%)</td>
<td>5(8.1%)</td>
<td>3(5.7%)</td>
<td>3(7.0%)</td>
<td>23(5.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adult</td>
<td>60(98.2%)</td>
<td>46(75.7%)</td>
<td>37(69.8%)</td>
<td>37(86.0%)</td>
<td>199(94.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Proportions may not sum to 100% due to rounding.)
How are Causes, Solutions, and Responses to Homelessness Depicted

Two main ways of attributing causes for homelessness have been identified in the literature: individual deficits such as mental illness, addictions, and poor life choices; and societal/structural factors such as low availability of fair-wage employment and decent low-cost housing. Buck et al. (2004) note that their sample showed a greater emphasis on the individual deficits and deviance of people experiencing homelessness and a lesser emphasis on societal or structural causes of homelessness. Causes were identified in only 24.4% of our corpus. Even in stories in which we coded causes, we often had to infer causes when, for example, mental illness was associated with homelessness. Any conclusions about causes must therefore be regarded as tentative. Overall, individual causes were cited more than societal causes (see Figure 4A). The Vancouver Sun data shows a much larger number of items in which causes were identified. This may be because we could infer causes in more cases in this newspaper as it contained a much larger number of references to addictions and mental illness (55% of items referred to addictions, 39% referred to mental illness, compared to averages of 29% and 20% in the other newspapers). The Vancouver Sun also showed a greater number and proportion of references to societal causes of homelessness.

Figure 4. Causes, Solutions, and Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Globe &amp; Mail</th>
<th>Calgary Herald</th>
<th>Vancouver Sun</th>
<th>Vancouver Province</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Causes identified in 24.4% of articles: individual/societal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34[82.9%]</td>
<td>63[60.0%]</td>
<td>71[50.0%]</td>
<td>65[48.8%]</td>
<td></td>
<td>122[65.2%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 [33.3%]</td>
<td>4[40.0%]</td>
<td>1[14.3%]</td>
<td>7[50.0%]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal</td>
<td>3[3.3%]</td>
<td>7[7.1%]</td>
<td>7[50.0%]</td>
<td></td>
<td>17[9.1%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Solutions identified in 52.0% of articles: temporary/permanent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td>90[45.5%]</td>
<td>75[45.5%]</td>
<td>52[45.4%]</td>
<td>22[44.9%]</td>
<td>210[52.8%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41[82.9%]</td>
<td>5[5.1%]</td>
<td>13[63.6%]</td>
<td>11[50.0%]</td>
<td></td>
<td>188[47.2%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>3[1.0%]</td>
<td>20[7.1%]</td>
<td>10[4.8%]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Responders identified in 74.2% of articles: gov/non-gov</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gov</td>
<td>77[56.8%]</td>
<td>101[53.9%]</td>
<td>46[54.8%]</td>
<td></td>
<td>286[50.4%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62[59.6%]</td>
<td>3[0.3%]</td>
<td>3[0.3%]</td>
<td>3[0.3%]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-gov</td>
<td>42[40.4%]</td>
<td>132[63.2%]</td>
<td>70[40.9%]</td>
<td>38[45.2%]</td>
<td>282[49.6%]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Solutions to homelessness were mentioned in 52% of our corpus (See Figure 4B). However, our decision to exclude items that focused on affordable housing without mentioning homelessness means that we may have excluded items that discussed potential permanent solutions to the problem of homelessness. There is a general sense in the homeless-helping community that the solution to homelessness is housing people long term, not sheltering them short term (Calgary Committee to End Homelessness, 2008; McLean, 2008). In the news items, we see somewhat more reference to temporary solutions, particularly in the Calgary Herald. As a result of our exclusions we cannot make any definitive statements about whether the “providing permanent housing” perspective, contested by some (McLean, 2008), is increasingly making its way into popular understanding.

We also coded our data for references to who was or should be responding to homelessness. Responders were mentioned in 74.2% of the stories (see Figure 4C). These were coded according to whether the potential or actual responder was a government responder (either a specific government department or a government representative) or a non-government responder (a non-profit agency, a corporate entity or representative, or a private individual). The Calgary Herald was the only paper in which non-government responders were identified more often than government responders. The much larger attribution of societal causes for homelessness in the Vancouver Sun may be related to the larger number of mentions of government responses—if the problem is structural, then the government, rather than members of society, will be able to address it.

*How are Homelessness and Homeless People Characterized*

Characterizations of homeless people and depictions of homelessness generally were assessed with three codes. These included the tone of the item toward homelessness generally; the depiction of homeless people generally presented in the item; and in items in which a main homeless person could be identified, the portrayal of that person. These codes were operationalized by having the coders make a global assessment of the dominant tone of items or depiction of people using a five point scale (1 = positive, 3 = neutral, 5 = negative). This enabled
us to achieve a high degree of inter-rater reliability on these codes. While the tone of the items in all four newspapers was primarily neutral, as might be expected given journalistic standards of reporting, in Calgary the tone was somewhat more positive than in the other papers (see Figure 5A). Across all the papers, characterizations of homeless people were overwhelmingly deserving or neutral (see Figure 5B). However, the *Calgary Herald* presented both the highest number and the highest proportion of deserving representations. Portrayal of individual homeless people who were mentioned in items was overwhelmingly neutral or positive (see Figure 5C). Again in the *Calgary Herald*, however, there were both a larger number and a larger proportion of positive portrayals than in the other newspapers.

Figure 5. Depiction, Tone, Portrayal and Negative Associations

We also coded for what we called “associations” with homelessness (e.g., inappropriate use of public space, bottle-picking, addictions, mental illness, health problems caused or exacerbated by being on the street, safety issues for the public or for homeless people, and so on) and for specific crimes
described in items (e.g., theft, drug-related crime, vandalism, panhandling when it was represented as a crime, murder, and so on). In some cases, these factors were not central to the item itself, instead appearing in stories about other topics, for example a story about the length of jail sentences that referred in one short paragraph to repeat offenders who are homeless people with mental illnesses. We have combined these factors into a variable we called negative associations (see Figure 5D). A significantly lower proportion of articles in the *Calgary Herald* referred to one or more of these factors. This supports the results of the previous three variables indicating that coverage in the *Calgary Herald* was significantly more positive than in the other three newspapers.

*Who Speaks about Homelessness*

We assessed who was speaking about homelessness by counting the number of words that appeared inside quotation marks in the items and were attributed to specific sources. While sources are often paraphrased as well as quoted directly, we were unable to achieve inter-rater agreement on paraphrases, so have not included these in the study. We used Martin's (1997) classification of journalists' sources into three "tiers" to code the quotes. These tiers consist of primary or expert sources, people who are quoted because of their status as a public figure or because of their professional or academic expertise; secondary sources or citizens, ordinary people who are typically asked for their reactions to events and issues; and marginalized groups, in this case, homeless or formerly homeless people. Overall, 70.7% of the words that appeared in quotation marks in the stories were attributed to experts. In our data, this category includes social service agency workers, government representatives, scholarly experts, and celebrities. The rest of the quotes were split between homeless or formerly homeless people (18.7%) and citizens (10.6%) (see Figure 6). When homeless people are quoted, it is primarily to "tell their story" and emphasize the importance of "having a home." These personal stories provide a backdrop to and justification for the pronouncements of the various kinds of experts identified above. Domiciled experts dominate public discourse about homelessness, with people who experience homelessness themselves marginalized as speakers.
Representations of Homelessness

Table 6. Who Speaks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Globe Mail</th>
<th>Calgary Herald</th>
<th>Vancouver Sun</th>
<th>Vancouver Province</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>professionals</td>
<td>72.8%</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homeless</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>citizens</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparisons Among the Newspapers

We identified a number of interesting similarities and differences between the newspapers of the two main cities, between the national paper and the two main city papers, and between the tabloid and broadsheet newspapers in Vancouver.

Calgary/Vancouver broadsheet comparisons. A comparison of the two main city newspapers shows a number of similarities in coverage but also some significant differences. Both newspapers paid a significant amount of attention to the topic of homelessness. In fact, readers of the Calgary Herald and Vancouver Sun were bombarded with stories that referred to homelessness, with one appearing on average two out of three days during the year of the study. Both papers had a substantial number and proportion of secondary articles that mentioned homelessness, indicating that homelessness is regarded as an important enough problem to show up repeatedly in articles that are not primarily about homelessness. Both newspapers also had references to women and people in families, groups that do not fit the traditional stereotype of the adult male homeless person.

However, coverage also shows some significant differences. In general, the Calgary Herald coverage conveyed a stronger sense of crisis or urgency than Vancouver Sun coverage and also a stronger sense of optimism that the problem should and can be solved. This sense of urgency was conveyed by the finding that the Calgary Herald had more items overall than the Vancouver Sun, a larger number and proportion of primary items and editorials, more images, more front page stories with images, and more mention of temporary solutions rather than permanent solutions. Calgary readers also saw a considerably larger number of items that communicated a sense of crisis than those in Vancouver—59 in the Calgary Herald compared to 39 in the Vancouver Sun.
Calgary readers also saw more items that communicated a sense of optimism that something can be done about homelessness. The *Calgary Herald* had many more items that were positive in tone, more items that presented homeless people as deserving, more positive portrayals of homeless individuals, and fewer negative associations with homelessness. The *Calgary Herald* also had more references to homeless people who are working, more references to homeless people as victims of crimes (23 compared to 9 in the *Vancouver Sun*), and fewer mentions of mental illness and addictions. The coverage conveyed a general sense that these are people who need and deserve our help. In addition, a much smaller number of items described or asked for government responses to homelessness in the *Calgary Herald* compared to the *Vancouver Sun*. Homelessness is something the community can address without waiting for the government. This may be related to the optimistic entrepreneurial can-do spirit that is said to characterize Calgary, which also expresses itself in a distinct conservative, less-government-intervention political bent in Calgary.

*National/local coverage comparisons.* Coverage in the national newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*, differed from coverage in the two main city newspapers in a number of ways. The *Globe and Mail* offered significantly less coverage of homelessness than either of the city broadsheets, and the coverage it did offer was more negative. It included a higher proportion of primary items, a lower proportion of editorials as compared with news items, and a lower proportion of items on the front page. Altogether, homelessness was given much less prominence in the *Globe and Mail* than in the two city broadsheets. It also had a lower proportion of positive portrayals and a larger proportion of negative portrayals of homeless individuals, a lower proportion of deserving depictions and a higher proportion of undeserving depictions of homeless people in general, and a much larger proportion of articles with neutral tone resulting in a lower proportion with positive tone. Negative associations appeared in a larger proportion of items than in the *Calgary Herald* and about the same proportion as in the *Vancouver Sun*, but the average number of negative associations per item was higher than in either of the city papers (3.6 in the *Calgary Herald*, 4 in the *Vancouver Sun*, and 4.5 in the *Globe and Mail*).
This was calculated by dividing the total number of negative representations in each paper by the number of items in which negative associations appeared. Fewer homeless individuals were identified as being in families, more mention was made of enforcement of laws targeting homeless people, and many fewer homeless people were identified as working.

In the *Calgary Herald* and the *Vancouver Sun*, items described homelessness primarily in the local or provincial context (84.8% and 68.9% respectively). In the *Globe and Mail*, items were also primarily provincial, being about homelessness in a specific city or province in Canada, and only rarely had a national focus on homelessness. However, in spite of the somewhat greater attention to homelessness in the *Calgary Herald* than in the *Vancouver Sun*, only 6 (4%) of the *Globe and Mail* stories in which the location was identified were about Alberta. In contrast, 82 (54%) were about British Columbia and 49 (32%) were about Ontario. If readers of the *Globe and Mail* across Canada are gaining a sense that there is a homelessness crisis, it has a British Columbia face, not an Alberta one. In general, there is more reference in the *Globe and Mail* to problematic individual behaviors and personal failings than in the two city papers. In conjunction with fact that there are very few national stories about homelessness in the *Globe and Mail*, we conclude that the national paper presents homelessness as an individual and local problem, something that accords with the fact that there is no national strategy for homelessness in Canada.

**Vancouver broadsheet/tabloid comparisons.** A comparison of the two Vancouver papers shows that the tabloid *Province* offered significantly less coverage of homelessness than did the broadsheet *Sun* and the coverage it did offer was more negative than that in the *Sun*. The *Province* carried just over half as many items on homelessness as the *Sun* and offered a significantly lower proportion of editorial comment on the issue, indicating that it accords less importance to the issue than the *Sun*. Only five stories and four images appeared on the front page compared with 21 stories and 14 images in the *Sun*. It also had a much larger proportion of shorter stories than the *Sun*. Almost all the individuals described or mentioned in the *Province* were adult males (95%) and a significantly higher
proportion of these individuals were portrayed negatively. The *Province* also had a significantly lower proportion of items with positive tone and deserving depictions. Although there was no significant difference in the proportion of items that made reference to negative associations in the two papers, a lower proportion of homeless people were described in the *Province* as working, as having health problems, or as victims rather than perpetrators of crimes, factors that might be expected to increase sympathy for homeless people. Overall, coverage in the *Vancouver Province* was sparser and more negative. It is likely that these depictions of homelessness are shaped by assumptions about the readership of each of these papers. The *Province* is a tabloid newspaper, and tabloids tend to offer shorter stories that examine issues in less depth and to offer more sensationalist—in this case, more negative—coverage than broadsheets. In both papers, more items referred to government responses to the problem, something that might be expected in the more social democratic political environment of British Columbia.

**Discussion**

We found clear differences between the newspapers we studied in how homelessness is framed. In Calgary, coverage was more positive than in Vancouver, conveyed a stronger sense of both urgency and optimism that the problem of homelessness should and can be solved, and focused on the community rather than the government as the source of solutions. In Vancouver, coverage was more negative, conveyed less urgency, and focused on the government as the source of solutions. The national paper presented homelessness as a local rather than national problem. It seems that when homelessness is presented more positively, as in Calgary, the community is more willing to take responsibility and participate in finding solutions. When it is presented more negatively, as in Vancouver, there is an expectation that the government will take care of the problem.

Despite these differences, overall the four papers present a unified narrative of homelessness in which readers are exhorted to be sympathetic to the plight of homeless people, while at the same time, "they," homeless people, are presented
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as needing to be controlled and regulated in order to maintain social order. This framing of homelessness as a problem needing control and regulation is an overarching narrative that dominates in the construction of homelessness as a social problem. Bird and Dardenne (1988) describe news narratives as myth, meaning not that they are false, but that they become “what everyone knows” about a topic. Narratives provide a frame for ongoing coverage, as each individual newspaper item is presented not as an entirely new piece of information but as an element in this ongoing narrative (Silverstone, 1988). Readers are less likely to remember individual news stories than the overarching narrative onto which individual stories are hung. Kitzinger (2000) suggests similarly that templates organize news coverage, with previous coverage providing a frame for further coverage, encouraging readers to understand new coverage in light of the old. Templates present one dominant version of a problem, thereby becoming “instrumental in shaping narratives around particular social problems” (Kitzinger, 2000, p. 61) and guiding public discussion and advocacy for policy change.

The ongoing narrative that we identified in the newspapers we studied supports the work of scholars such as Hopper (1988) and Feldman (2004) who point to two dominant versions of homeless people that appear in media coverage. One version represents them as victims of circumstances beyond their own control who need and deserve help. The second version, which often overlays the first by appearing at the same time, represents them as having freely made bad choices that have led to their present unfortunate circumstances. Therefore they do not deserve help and are a social evil needing to be controlled and even punished. They are “matter out of place” (Feldman, 2004, p. 6).

These two frames occurred together throughout our data. On the one hand, representations of individual homeless people were overwhelmingly neutral or positive (overall only 19.9% were negative), and depictions of homelessness and homeless people were overwhelmingly neutral or deserving (only 12% negative). On the other hand, 78.6% of items mentioned negative associations, with an average of 4 associations in each of these items. Most of these negative associations are
individual characteristics or behaviors, such as addictions, squatting, or panhandling, which are easily understood as individual choices. At the same time as people were described as needing and deserving help, they were described as somehow associated with or as having chosen activities that domiciled people do not like and want to have disappear from the streets and other public places. Although the representation of homeless people as needy and deserving seems positive and sympathetic, both representations work to keep people who are homeless on the margins of society, controlling them, disenfranchising them, and denying them full participation as citizens. The first representation casts them as requiring charity, a relationship that positions them as socially inferior to those who provide the charity. The goal of this charity is, of course, to turn them from homeless people into domiciled people and in this way charity functions a means of social control (Stern, 1986). The second representation more self-evidently functions to justify control and regulation of homeless people and their exclusion from full participation in society because in this version they have chosen to engage in socially disruptive or outright illegal behaviors.

In keeping with this narrative of regulation and control, our data shows that the voice of people who are or have been homeless is largely excluded from media coverage. Over 70% of the words quoted in our corpus come from domiciled experts. Less than 19% come from homeless people themselves. While the predominance of the voice of experts is in part a result of the social organization of news gathering and reporting (Fishman, 1980), it is nevertheless problematic in a number of ways. Experts work as filters to separate homeless people from their own experience by effacing their public voice. They are the intermediaries who speak for and about homelessness, translating for readers the “facts” about the “experiences” of homeless people. This sets up an opposition between those who are entitled to speak about homelessness, “experts,” and those who are spoken about, “them,” whose stories are there primarily to give the experts something on which to comment. Despite the fact that coverage often tells the “story” of particular individuals who are homeless, they are generally displaced from their own stories by journalists who tap into the ongoing
narrative to present aspects of the story that they think the public will expect to read (Hodgetts et al., 2005).

The predominance of quotations from experts also produces a sense that homeless people are a problem to be solved not by “us” ordinary newspaper readers but by the professional “carers” who speak about them. Frequent references to solutions in the media coverage works to justify the activities of experts, who are designated to stand in for “us” to take care of the problem. Solutions were mentioned in over half of the items. But these are not solutions that ordinary domiciled people can implement—establishing temporary shelters or constructing affordable permanent housing. These are solutions that service providers, politicians, and others must implement. Ordinary domiciled people, while they may decry the existence of homelessness in rich societies such as ours, are off the hook for actually doing anything about it.

Control and regulation are implicit in the assigning of responsibility to care-giving professionals for “solving” the homelessness “problem.” Fox (1995) describes the paradoxical nature of care. Care is almost always seen as a good thing, and the word carries almost no negative meanings. Control, however, seems to be an inevitable consequence of the provision of care, even if not intended by carers. On the one hand, the act of caring comes from concern and a desire to provide for the needs of others. On the other hand, the disciplinary knowledge of the carer—that is, their expertise in the field of homelessness and/or mental health and knowledge of theories of care and professional practice—supplies “the basis for the authority and power of those who practice care” (p. 111). Fox captures the control aspects of care in his description of what he calls the vigil of care in which the cared-for are continually subjected to “the vigilant scrutiny of carers” (p. 112). For Fox, the vigil is more about power, surveillance, and control grounded in the professional knowledge of care givers than it is about the positive values typically associated with care. Control and regulation are thus embedded within even sympathetic media items that present homeless people as worthy of the efforts of the charitable organizations that are designated to address their problems.
Conclusion

The framing of homelessness in the coverage we studied has clear implications for citizenship and inclusion of people who are homeless. If, as Silverstone (2007) has pointed out, the media have become the primary site of public debate in society, participation in society depends, at least in part, on being able to find a voice in the media. Homeless people find it difficult to get their voices into the media and to affect the ongoing public narrative about themselves. Various scholars (Greenberg et al., 2006; Iyengar, 1991; Klodawsky et al., 2002) assert that framing in media coverage informs the policy solutions that are considered; if so, then homeless people are excluded from full participation both in defining and in finding solutions to their “problems.” The narrative of control and regulation positions people as legitimate objects of scrutiny, regulation, and control. While we cannot make any claims about the effects of the coverage we studied, it is likely that it contributes to an ongoing estrangement of homeless people from domiciled people and therefore decreases the likelihood of the development of effective national policies in Canada to address homelessness.

Although the narrative of regulation and control that we identified dominates media coverage of homelessness, it is not fixed and immutable. The media are often described as “having” widespread symbolic power through their ability to broadcast to large numbers of people over wide geographical areas. Couldry (2001) offers instead an understanding of media power as a social process that requires constant reproduction though the activities of social actors at every level of social life, including ordinary members of audiences. Media power comes to seem natural through routinized patterns of reporting and reading, but it can also be resisted and contested, offering the possibility that the ongoing narrative of homelessness could be different than it now is. Journalists could write differently, audiences might think differently, and policymakers might then respond differently. This offers the possibility of a civic oriented journalism (Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Scammell, Karapu, & Nikora, 2008) in which journalists come to recognize and understand the implications of the present ongoing narrative for both audience and policy responses and perhaps work directly with people who are homeless to find ways to
represent them that interrupt the dominant frames.

Not surprisingly, almost nothing of the ways in which homeless people organize themselves socially and make lives for themselves on the streets and in shelters appeared in our corpus. This is a version of homelessness in which people have a legitimate right to choose how they will live, to use public spaces, and to interact with domiciled people that does not fit easily into the ongoing narrative that we have just described. Hodgetts et al. (2008), however, show the possibilities for change in media representations. They describe a situation in which the authors worked with journalists to change the tone and content of reporting on use of the local library by homeless people by showing that homeless people use the library for the same activities as domiciled people.

This form of media advocacy is, however, a difficult enterprise that requires planning and reflection. Platt (1999) notes that a “warts and all” portrayal of homeless people is difficult to present. As he says,

Someone who is homeless may be unlikable and in need at the same time, may be spending too much of their money on drink and drugs and still be worthy of help in getting enough to eat, may have lost their last home in part due to their own action but still a need a roof over their head now. (p. 113)

There is a risk of perpetuating stereotypes when increasing journalistic engagement with homeless people. One means of overcoming this is to develop relationships between researchers and journalists to create a meta-commentary that allows for “warts and all” portrayals without undermining the need for empathy and support.

In summary, there are clear differences between the Canadian newspapers we examined, likely tied to local contexts and expectations of readership. However, the problematic overarching narrative of regulation and control present in all the newspapers points to a need for media activism with journalists to promote a more complex look at the lives of homeless people. This may require journalists and their employers to look beyond the simple stereotypes that underpin the narrative of regulation and control and to work actively to present stories that promote the social inclusion and citizenship of all members of society, regardless of their housing status.
References


Progressive Housing Policy in the 21st Century: A Contrarian View

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After years of cutbacks to housing programs in Canada, there has emerged a consensus that a progressive housing policy requires significant construction of new social housing units to address both the problems of housing affordability and homelessness. This paper argues that large scale social housing should not be the focus of progressive housing policy in the 21st century. We should use the progressive goals of the original welfare state, but we should modify the programs designed to meet these goals. The paper examines the income and personal insecurities faced by low-income households today, contrasting them with the insecurities faced in the early postwar period, and concludes that social housing is poorly suited to the problems of today. To deal with housing affordability problems, the focus should be upon employment programs, education and training, and income support, not upon new social housing. Furthermore, expansion of social housing would do little to help the homeless. The focus of progressive housing policy should be on programs to directly help the homeless. This requires a coordinated combining of housing first with social support programs: a supportive housing strategy.

Key words: Canadian housing policy, homelessness, social housing, supportive housing strategies

Compared to many western countries, Canada has never had a large social housing sector. Social housing is defined in this paper as rental housing that is owned and managed by
government or non-profits, and provided to residents at less than cost. (Social housing also includes non-equity co-operatives at less than cost). In the mid-1990s, "about 5 percent of Canada’s households live[d] in non-market social housing. This compares with 40 percent in the Netherlands, 22 percent in the United Kingdom, 15 percent in France and Germany, and about 2 percent in the United States" (Hulchanski, 2004, p. 179). Nonetheless, for about a fifteen-year period from 1964 to 1978, Canadian governments moved toward a comprehensive housing policy, including significant programs for the construction of new social housing units, creating about 20,000 to 25,000 per year. 

However, over the next twenty years, housing programs were severely cut back, in a continuing effort to reduce the deficit, culminating in 1993 with the federal government’s declaration that it would no longer provide funding for new social housing units. By the late 1990s, the Canadian economy was growing strongly, government deficits were replaced by surpluses, and the possibility of a ‘new agenda’ for the 21st century was actively debated. In housing policy, there emerged a consensus among progressives: Canada needed a comprehensive housing policy centered on major programs for the construction of new social housing. Three major housing problems were identified: housing affordability, homelessness, and aboriginal housing. Aboriginal housing was considered sui generis, both because of the history and causes and because of the legal and legislative structures, and it required its own programs. For these reasons, the aboriginal housing problem will not be included in this paper. To address the problems of affordability and homelessness, many initiatives were called for, but the core proposal was for renewed construction of social housing. The call was for a return to the housing policy of the 1964-1978 period.

This paper offers a contrarian view, arguing we should not return to the policy of the 1964-78 period, and that a progressive housing policy does not require major new social housing. The paper is not an academic paper: it is not a report on a piece of research. Rather, the paper is an essay—an essay in the historical sense—a short piece of writing from the author’s personal point of view. Such essays can be literary criticism,
political manifestos, learned arguments, or observations of daily life. This essay offers one person's analysis, but it is hoped, it is sustained by 'learned arguments.'

The analysis begins with the origins of Canadian housing policy at the end of the Second War when the welfare state was being established. It is argued that housing policy is best understood as a component of this postwar welfare state. A progressive housing policy for the 21st century should be similarly designed as a component of the welfare state, but this time, a welfare state suited to the 21st century. We need a housing policy based both on analysis of the conditions of the 21st century and on lessons learned from housing policy over the last fifty years. The paper argues that the current progressive consensus arises too much from the desire to restore the comprehensive housing policy of the 1964-1978 period, and not enough from analysis of the situation and challenges of today. However, moving away from the comprehensive housing policy of the past need not imply retreat from progressive principles.

The Origins of Housing Policy in the Keynesian Welfare State

Before World War Two, Canadian governments had taken very few initiatives explicitly designed to improve the housing conditions of Canadians. Housing policy in Canada began with the passage of the second National Housing Act (NHA) in 1944 and with the creation of Central (now Canada) Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) in 1945. These beginnings occurred in the wider context of planning for postwar Canada. The fundamentals of this planning can be seen in three key reports—the Marsh, Heagerty, and Curtis reports—discussed below. Although each of these reports was only advisory and many of their recommendations were not adopted immediately, and some never, collectively the reports set out a vision of the Canadian welfare state. There would be a new relationship between Canadian citizens and their government. The state would take on new responsibilities to ensure the welfare of its people—hence the term 'welfare state.'

The Canadian reports were heavily influenced by thinking in other countries, particularly the economic analysis
of John Maynard Keynes in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936) and William Beveridge's report: *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942). The intellectual pillars of the welfare state are discussed in greater detail in Fallis (2007), upon which the following paragraphs have been based.

Keynes developed his economic ideas as he reflected upon the overwhelming economic problem of his era: persistent mass unemployment. Unemployment remained over 10% during the 1920s and soared during the Great Depression. He rejected classical economic analysis which held that the market economy was self-regulating and would always tend toward full employment. Keynes' economic analysis demonstrated that the market economy could become stuck at an underemployment equilibrium because of deficiency in aggregate demand. Fortunately, judicious government policy could increase aggregate demand and move the economy back to full employment. Monetary policy (discretionary changes in the supply of money) and fiscal policy (discretionary changes in tax rates or public expenditure) could move the economy back to full employment. His analysis also showed that government monetary and fiscal policy could stabilize fluctuations in unemployment. Keynes' analysis allowed the first great pillar of the welfare state: governments took responsibility for stabilization of the economy and accepted the goal of full employment. So important is this pillar that the postwar welfare state is often referred to as the Keynesian welfare state.

William Beveridge provided the blueprint for the programs of Britain's postwar welfare state in his report: *Social Insurance and Allied Services*. The Beveridge Report (1942) established a framework of comprehensive government programs for progress against what he termed "the five giants on the road to reconstruction—Want, Ignorance, Squalor, Idleness, and Disease." In the U.K. between the First and Second Wars, social assistance programs, both from the government and voluntary sectors, had grown haphazardly, with overlap, inconsistency, and inequities between programs and regions. The Beveridge Report built upon a growing public commitment to comprehensive social reform and upon public recognition that voluntarism and piecemeal government programs were not enough. "The report set out the long series of proposals that Beveridge had devised over the previous twelve months—for a national
health service, family allowances, full employment and a comprehensive system of social insurance designed to cover the whole community" (Harris, 1977, p. 419). The Report sold over one hundred thousand copies and became the vision for life after the war.

The writings of Keynes and Beveridge were influential throughout Europe and the Anglo-American world, and nowhere more so than in Canada, in the Marsh, Haegerty, and Curtis reports. Guest (1999) in The Emergence of Social Security in Canada situates these reports in an historical analysis of Canadian social security from colonial times to the late 20th century.

The Report on Social Security for Canada (the Marsh Report) was presented to the House of Commons Special Committee on Social Security in 1943. Michael Bliss has called it "the most important single document in the history of the development of the [Canadian] welfare state" (1975, p. ix). Marsh's blueprint called for a comprehensive, integrated social security system. Income security would be provided in three tiers: (i) social insurance programs for such targeted groups as the unemployed, the sick, the disabled, and those retired from work; (ii) universal family allowances to parents of all children, regardless of income; and (iii) means-tested social assistance for those exceptional cases not covered by social insurance (Government of Canada, 1994). This plan for income security, indeed all of the welfare state planning, assumed high levels of employment, achieved through Keynesian macroeconomic policies. The assumption became explicit in 1945 when the federal government committed itself "to maintain a high and stable level of employment and income" (Government of Canada, 1945).

Also in 1943, Heagerty's Health Insurance Report (Government of Canada, 1944) was released, recommending a nationwide health insurance program for the entire population, covering hospital, medical, dental, pharmaceutical, and nursing costs. It would, of course, be over twenty years until national insurance for hospital and medical costs was established; and there is still no universal national insurance for dental, pharmaceutical, or nursing costs.

The Curtis Report on Housing and Community Planning recommended major change in the government's role in housing (Government of Canada, 1943). Decrying the slums in Canadian
cities, the Report criticized the lack of city planning and called for the establishment of a federal agency to promote and coordinate town and community planning and to act as a national clearing house and dissemination center. It called for provincial planning boards to regulate all land use, foresaw significant public ownership of land for new communities, parks, parkways and other amenities, and recommended low interest federal loans to municipalities for land assembly. It recommended enhanced NHA loans to assist households in buying a home, a more attractive and expansive assistance program for housing rehabilitation, and a major program of construction of subsidized low-rental housing. Curtis also supported the development of co-operative housing. The report also advocated special programs for construction and rehabilitation of rural and farm housing. Together these reports set out a vision for the postwar Canadian welfare state.

The key points of this early history are several. First, housing policy is best understood and analyzed as one component of the welfare state. Within this welfare state, people can be assisted to obtain better housing in many ways: through employment, through income assistance, or through social housing. And second, the fundamental concern of the founders of the welfare state was that people should be able to have a job and earn income. Beveridge wrote about 'interruptions in income' and how social insurance was needed to support families during an interruption. But, we must be careful to remember that the crucial commitment under the new social contract of the welfare state was not Keynesian policy per se, but that governments have responsibility to pursue employment for all. This commitment arose from the belief that the foundation for the welfare of citizens—for their personal dignity, personal security, and indeed even personal freedom—was to have a job. Citizens would not allow governments to leave employment levels entirely to the operation of the private market.

Although not obvious at the time, we have come to appreciate that the bundles of ideas and government programs that made up the postwar welfare state were a response to a particular time and context. They were a response to the cyclical unemployment of industrial economies of the early and mid-twentieth century. They embodied a view of career and living,
namely that workers would work in one industry, perhaps even with one firm, throughout their working lives, and live in the same city and perhaps even neighborhood. And they embodied a patriarchal view of family: men were the head of the household and would work to support the family; in the main, women would work inside the home and even if in the labor force, the primary wage earner would be the man. And finally, both Canada and the U.K. were relatively homogeneous societies, culturally and ethnically, nothing like the pluralist, multicultural societies of today.

Despite the Curtis Report, from the outset there were competing visions for the postwar role of Canadian governments in housing. On one side, most social reformers urged the development of what came to be called a ‘comprehensive’ housing policy, along the lines of policies in the social democratic countries like Sweden and the Netherlands. They argued that although housing was a necessity like food or clothing, it should be approached differently than food or clothing. Rather than letting the market handle the production and distribution, as in the case of food and clothing, housing should be more like other necessities such as water or electricity. The government should handle all aspects of planning, production, and distribution of housing—at least for the working and middle classes. This vision was given voice in the Curtis Report.

On the other side, there were those who argued that the basic postwar task was to restore and improve the functioning of the mortgage market and the building and construction industries. The housing needs of most Canadians would be met by well-functioning markets; just as the needs for food and clothing would be met by the market. Some households on low income would need assistance to acquire decent housing, but these would be a small residual. Bacher (1993) gives a full account of the debates and struggles between these two visions in the formation of the Canadian welfare state.

A Short History of Canadian Housing Policy

Our understanding of housing policy in the 21st century can be given context and shape by situating the current discussions in the history of Canadian federal housing policy over the
The postwar era can be divided into four periods: 1945-1964, 1964-1978, 1978-1998, and 1998 to 2008. Of course, the selection of the periods, and how to characterize each, is not inherent in the historical record, but rather is a choice of the analyst. Nonetheless, I believe this periodization is illuminating; and what is presented below is roughly consistent with other characterizations [see, for example, Fallis (1985) and Hulchanski (2004)]. The focus in this short history is on social housing programs. The financial crisis of 2008, followed by the sharp recession and the quickly ballooning government deficits of 2009 and beyond, surely defines the beginning of another period of housing policy. But this period is beyond the scope of this paper.

The first period of Canadian housing policy extends from 1945, when CMHC was created, to 1964 when major amendments were made to the National Housing Act that facilitated large scale public housing construction. This first period was a time when the government’s focus was on the transition out of a wartime economy and a return to normalcy; it was the time of the baby boom and suburbanization of Canadian cities. The federal government was dominant in housing matters and the priorities of policy were: to get the private mortgage market working; to build new dwellings to overcome the backlog from years of low building during the Depression and the War; and to meet the needs of the returning war veterans and the families of the baby boom. The immediate postwar housing problem was that people lived in inadequate housing (in need of repair or without basic facilities) and/or in crowded conditions (Fallis, 1985). The main federal housing programs were the mortgage insurance program and the direct lending program. Both aimed at the ownership market. There was only a very small public housing program (then called federal-provincial housing). Between the competing visions for Canadian housing policy, this was certainly not the comprehensive housing policy desired by social reformers.

During the 1945-1964 period, there were dramatic improvements in the housing conditions of Canadians brought about by the robust mortgage market and strong building industry, and most importantly by sustained economic growth. By the early 1960s, the perception of the housing problem began to
shift from inadequacy and overcrowding to affordability. And there was the growing recognition, that even with strong economic growth, many households would continue to have affordability problems. The second period of housing policy, from 1964 to 1978, was a marked shift: Canada moved toward a comprehensive housing policy. In particular, there were large scale programs for social housing.

The first initiative came in 1964 with NHA amendments that it made it more attractive for provinces to enter shared-cost arrangements with CMHC for the construction and ongoing support of public housing. The provinces had long held that housing was in provincial jurisdiction and were eager to enter the social housing field. By 1970, over 10% of housing starts were public housing. The mortgage financing for the projects was jointly provided by CMHC and provincial housing agencies. All the tenants were low-income households and were charged a rent geared to their income. This rent did not cover the costs of operation (including the mortgage payments), so that the units required an ongoing deep subsidy, which was also shared between CMHC and the provinces. Even with many units being built, there was always a waiting list for public housing.

However, very quickly public housing was strongly criticized. Many of the projects were large and had required the demolition of older inner city neighborhoods—so called urban renewal; but these neighborhoods, some argued, were more functional than the replacement. Because public housing gathered many assisted households in one place, public housing was said to stigmatize tenants, and to increase crime and vandalism. Furthermore, its operation was inflexible and very bureaucratic: offering tenants little choice of location, requiring intrusive monitoring of tenant incomes and of who was occupying the units, and often locating households far from their jobs, friends and the social services that they used. Sewell (1994) offers a good survey and assessment of these criticisms.

The criticisms led to major reform. Non-profit and co-op housing programs—delivered neither by the public sector nor the private sector, but rather by the third sector—soon replaced public housing as the main way to deliver social housing. This was also a shared-cost undertaking, with CMHC and
the provinces sharing the mortgage finance and the ongoing subsidy. The projects were generally much smaller than public housing and were often initiated with community support. In perhaps the most important innovation, the tenants were not all low-income households, but were a mix of low and modest incomes. The low-income households paid rent geared to income (requiring a deep subsidy, just like public housing) and the modest-income households paid rents slightly below costs (requiring a shallow subsidy). Small scale, community engagement, and income mix were defining characteristics of these third sector programs.

Throughout this period there were also a number of programs for private rental housing construction, which created housing units that would rent for slightly (5-10%) below market rates. Because the units were new, the rents were still sufficiently high such that the units were occupied by modest rather than low-income households. There were also programs for the renovation of housing, for neighborhood improvement, land assembly, new communities, and municipal infrastructure. Beginning in the early 1970s, there were also programs designed to help middle-income households acquire their first home. Throughout the period, mortgage insurance and direct lending continued.

The 1964-1978 period was the era of expanding housing programs, particularly in social housing. Canada was moving toward a comprehensive housing policy, with over 20,000 new social housing units constructed each year. However, this was short lived. By the mid 1970s, economic growth had slowed, and both unemployment and inflation were rising. Government deficits were growing and the government’s focus shifted to expenditure restraint. The next period, from 1978 to 1998, would be an era of contraction.

The move away from a comprehensive housing policy was not primarily motivated by concerns about housing problems or how housing programs were working. Other larger concerns caused the shift, in particular, the concerns about sluggish economic growth, rising unemployment, rising inflation, and rising government deficits. These larger concerns provoked a vigorous debate because our existing policy structure—the Keynesian welfare state—was not working. Keynesian
policies did not seem to be able to secure full employment. Many argued (and many contested the analysis) that the welfare state had expanded too far, becoming a drag on the economy and causing rising deficits. Also, many of the social problems that the welfare state programs were designed to ameliorate had not diminished and some programs did not seem to work at all, indeed sometimes made things worse: public housing became an iconic example of a failed program. The economic concerns became even more acute in the mid to late 1980s as globalization brought a restructuring of the world’s economy. Canada’s long-term economic well-being seemed in jeopardy. The debate addressed quite fundamental questions about the role of government in general and the programs of the welfare state in particular. Eventually a consensus emerged that the deficit must be reduced and that it should be addressed mainly through expenditure reduction rather than tax increases.

The cuts to housing programs began with cancelling the programs directed at middle-income renters and first-time home buyers. Expenditure restraint often meant a targeting of available money at the neediest households, and so programs for middle-income people were the first to be cancelled. By the mid-1980s, most of the programs for modest-income households were gone, as were the programs for land assembly, new communities, and municipal infrastructure. Direct lending was ended but mortgage insurance continued. For the first years of the 1978-1998 period, the non-profit and co-op social housing programs continued quite strongly, although with a major change: CMHC would no longer provide the mortgage loan to finance the construction of new units, and instead groups had to secure the mortgage in the private market. CMHC would however provide assistance to keep the mortgage interest rate down. Unfortunately, this new program came just at the time that interest rates were moving strongly upward. The revised program became very expensive and also resulted in the middle-income households, who were part of the social mix in these projects, receiving a very large subsidy. The large expense and poor targeting became the object of much criticism. Gradually the federal government reduced its annual commitments to new social housing units, until in 1993 it announced it would no longer contribute to new units.
The rollback in housing, measured by the cancellation of programs, was dramatic. However, it should be remembered that although the restraint stopped the construction of new social housing units, there was no cut in the number of existing social housing units. There was no cut in total annual expenditure on housing assistance. Actual federal expenditure on housing assistance remained at about $2 billion annually, as the government continued to fund the existing units. Many of these units are now over thirty years old and in need of major upgrade. An important—but too often neglected—issue for social housing policy is what to do with these units? If they are to be upgraded, how can the renovation be financed?

The cutbacks to housing programs were completed by 1993. But the end of the restraint period is taken to be 1998 because there were still major, indeed the most significant, cuts to total government expenditure between 1993 and 1998. This was when the federal government cut transfer payments to the provinces, with the follow-on cuts across many expenditure fields in the provinces, especially social assistance. There was scant possibility of a new housing initiative before 1998.

However, by 1998 things began to change. Economic growth had returned, inflation remained low, unemployment gradually declined, and government deficits had become surpluses. The fourth period of Canadian housing policy, running from 1998 to 2008, might be labelled: A New Housing Agenda? With the surpluses, there were opportunities for new government initiatives across all its areas of responsibility. There were two fundamental questions: first, what policy areas should be the priorities for new government expenditure? And second, if housing were a priority, what should be the new housing policy?

There were many who argued that the surpluses should be used to reduce taxes and to pay down the deficit; and over the next ten years both were pursued to a degree. But there was also major new expenditure. The first federal priority was health; the transfers to the provinces were restored and increased. Additionally there were new federal commitments to higher education, most particularly in support of research, and later very significant enrichments to the equalization program, a crucial framework of the Canadian welfare state. There were
also social policy initiatives, most especially enhancements to the Canada Child Tax Benefit and its extension through the national Child Benefit Supplement.

In the housing field, there had been strenuous opposition to the housing cuts and renewed activism to spur government action. The focus of this activism was around the problem of homelessness. Homelessness had emerged as a growing and severe problem in Canada during the 1980s that had been exacerbated by the recession of the early 1990s. The most dramatic advocacy was by the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee who declared in 1998 that homelessness was a national disaster—like an ice storm or flood—and required immediate, emergency, humanitarian relief, just as we would provide after an ice storm or a flood. This activism, combined with the severity and visibility of the problem, put homelessness at the top of the new housing agenda.

More broadly, the progressive community urged a return to the comprehensive housing policy of the 1964-1978 period. This advocacy was most effectively represented in the proposal for the ‘One Percent Solution.’ In the late 1990s, Canadian governments devoted about 1% of total expenditure to housing assistance—the call was to double this to 2%. The specifics of which programs to adopt were less clear but the cornerstone would be new social housing construction of at least 20,000 units per year.

However, neither the federal nor provincial governments showed much enthusiasm for developing a comprehensive housing policy. They did, however, take major initiatives to address homelessness through the Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI), begun in 1999. Although never funded on a long-term basis, this initiative has been regularly renewed and is still in place through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), the successor program to SCPI, and stands as the most significant housing initiative of the period. Addressing homelessness is fundamental in the new agenda.

The other initiative was the Affordable Housing Framework Agreement of 2001 and its successors. While touching all the bases of a comprehensive housing policy, it is not well funded, has floundered amidst federal-provincial squabbling, and has resulted only in a smattering of assisted housing—
scattered across all income groups, for both owners and renters, and all regions. It seems to have arisen more out of a desire to show concern for 'the housing affordability problem' than out of a substantive analysis of the nature of this problem and of the best options for addressing it. The scattered approach is well illustrated by Ontario's Affordably Housing Strategy (Government of Ontario, 2006). It provides housing allowances, a little bit of supportive housing, but mainly provides assistance to new rental housing at somewhat less than cost and assistance to home buyers. There is little discussion of targeting the available money toward the neediest, and indeed many of the beneficiaries likely will not have had housing affordability problems before participating.

It is fair to say that a new agenda has not yet been established. The preference of progressives is clear: a comprehensive housing policy which doubles the current levels of housing assistance and embarks on a major social housing program. This paper offers a contrarian view rooted in the progressive principles of the welfare state and drawing upon the lessons from the housing policies and economic and social policies of the past fifty years. This paper argues against a major new social housing program; the progressive priorities should lie elsewhere.

A Welfare State for the 21st Century

The postwar welfare state was created out of an analysis of the needs of households and the risks they faced to secure their well-being in the postwar economy. Social housing programs were one component of the welfare state. A new housing policy should be situated in a vision of a welfare state for the 21st century. Again, we need to analyze the risks facing households to secure their long-term well-being, but this time examining the risks present in the 21st century.

The greatest risk to long-term security remains the inability to find a job. A core commitment of the welfare state, then as now, is that the government will work to ensure employment for all. The causes of unemployment are many; but broadly three types can be identified: frictional, demand deficiency, and structural. Frictional unemployment occurs as people
move in and out of the labor force and between jobs in the normal course of personal life and as firms hire and lay off workers as part of the ebb and flow of normal economic life. It takes time to match people and jobs and there will always be people looking for jobs, just as there will always be some job vacancies. Estimates vary about its extent, but frictional unemployment would likely run between 3% and 4%. However, unemployment can run above this if there is a deficiency in aggregate demand. Keynes recognized all three types of unemployment; his great contribution was to analysis of the second. He recognized that when there was a deficiency of aggregate demand, government fiscal policy to reduce taxes or to increase government expenditure and run a deficit, or government monetary policy to reduce interest rates, would stimulate aggregate demand and reduce unemployment. He also noted that the economy fluctuates with periods of deficient demand and higher unemployment, and also periods of excess demand and lower unemployment. The third type of unemployment is structural: when there is a structural change in the economy certain industries and regions will go into decline and unemployment will rise, even as other industries and regions expand. It takes time for people to find employment in new industries or outside the region.

Keynesian fiscal and monetary policies were conceived to address the problem of deficiency in aggregate demand, but not to deal with frictional or structural unemployment. For most of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, unemployment arose because of demand deficiency over the business cycle and Keynesian policies were very successful. However, during the late 1970s, Keynesian policies were no longer successful and both unemployment and inflation rose. By the 1980s, it was becoming clear that fiscal stimulus and its persistent government deficits would not reduce unemployment in the long run. Furthermore, it was becoming clearer that much of Canada’s unemployment was structural. The structure of the world economy was changing—the change often captured under the broad heading of globalization. The key to ensuring the people had employment was to understand the structural changes of globalization and to develop programs in response.

Globalization creates turbulent change, with industries,
countries, and regions within countries rising and falling. There are many opportunities and many people do very well, but many people also lose their jobs. There are a whole range of policies that governments need to develop to help ensure that Canadians have employment in the long run. In the context of social policy and this paper, the needed policies are of three types: policies for education and training, and—very importantly—for lifelong education and for retraining; policies to encourage the mobility, adaptability, and flexibility of the labor force; and an income security system to help those who are having difficulty with the structural changes of globalization.

These are the key components of the 21st century welfare state: education and training, encouraging adaptability, and income security. It is education and training and adaptability which will secure long-term employment, not Keynesian fiscal and monetary policy. I believe that the progressive community too often recommends Keynesian policies and has not grasped the fundamental question for a 21st century welfare state: how can we secure long-term employment for Canadians in a globalizing world?

There will, of course, be times when there is rising unemployment because of deficient aggregate demand. The severe recession of 2009 was an example. Keynesian stimulus is appropriate, but Keynesian countercyclical policies are not the long-run solution to full employment in a 21st century welfare state. The 21st century welfare state, therefore, retains the government commitment to pursue full employment, but goes about it in a different way. Similarly the 21st century welfare state retains the commitments that all will have adequate food, clothing, and shelter; the commitment to provide high quality education and health care; to provide unemployment and disability insurance; and to ensuring sufficient income in old age. But perhaps these commitments should be approached in different ways.

Large scale social housing is ill suited to the 21st century because this form of assistance reduces the mobility of households. The subsidy to households is attached to a specific dwelling unit. Households receive assistance because they live in a social housing unit which rents for less than the cost of producing and operating the unit. The assistance is attached to
a place, not to the person. If the household needs to move, for employment or other reasons, it is very difficult. It is very difficult to move from one assisted unit to another assisted unit because there is always a waiting list, and there are complicated rules for assigning households to dwelling units. In the normal course, households, regardless of income, move a great deal. Data from the 2001 Census show that about one in seven (14%) households moved in the year prior to the census, and over 42% had changed addresses in the previous five years (CMHC, 2009b). People already move around a lot, and the 21st century economy will require even greater mobility. This mobility need not meaning moving across the country; it might mean simply moving across the city to be nearer your workplace. In order to support adaptability, the 21st century welfare state should emphasize person-based assistance rather than place-based assistance.

Social housing will be a low priority in the welfare state also because in the 21st century almost all Canadians are well housed, in a physical sense. This is in marked contrast to the early postwar period. The current data on core need demonstrate this. Core need analysis is a two-step process. First, it defines three components of acceptable housing: adequacy, suitability, and affordability. Second, it examines whether the household could have gotten acceptable housing on its own, given its income.

A household is in core housing need if its housing does not meet one or more of the adequacy, suitability or affordability standards and it would have to spend 30% or more of its before tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local market housing that meets all three standards. (CMHC, 2009a)

In 2006, only 1.9% of households had a core need adequacy problem and only 1.9% had a core need suitability problem. Almost all Canadians are able to secure adequate and suitable housing; that is, they are well housed in a physical sense. The need today is not for more dwelling units. (The glaring exception is aboriginal people, where a shockingly high percentage does not have adequate or suitable housing, especially on reserves.)
This low priority is re-enforced by lessons from social housing programs of the past. The most successful forms of social housing—the non-profit and co-op housing of the 1964-1978 period—have had a mix of households by income, mixing low and modest-income households. However, inevitably this income mix results in subsidies to modest income households—households which did not have housing problems in the first place. And several times in the past, the subsidies to modest-income households became very large. Social housing with income mix is a poorly targeted program.

Social housing is also ill suited to today’s family types and dynamics. The original vision of social housing implicitly assumes a stable, traditional family structure. In any social housing program, households of different types are matched to different types of dwellings. For example, a husband and wife with one child would be assigned a two-bedroom unit; if they had two teenage children of opposite sex, they would have a three-bedroom unit. Because it is hard to move between units, the implicit assumption is that this family structure would be stable. However, family structures are much more fluid today: divorce rates are higher, single parents more common, and cohabitation arrangements more changeable. Older children leave for a while and then return to the family. Social housing is ill suited to this family fluidity. And social housing is also ill suited to the desires of many immigrant families who do not have the tradition of separated nuclear families; many immigrant families prefer to have several generations within one unit. Overall, this is another example of where housing flexibility is desirable, this time for family reasons. Unit-based social housing assistance does not provide this flexibility.

Many feminist critics have noted that the postwar welfare state assumed a patriarchal family model. The husband would be the primary income earner in the family, and the focus would be on securing employment and benefits for the husband and hence indirectly for the family. Income insecurity from unemployment was seen as the greatest risk. Today, a great risk to long-term security, particularly for women, is divorce. There are always complex and difficult housing rearrangements to be made after a marriage break-up. Social housing is poorly suited to assist these rearrangements.
This is not to say that the 21st century welfare state is not concerned with the housing conditions of households—the original commitment continues. Today’s welfare state believes all people should have acceptable housing, just as they should have food and clothing. In addition, there should be access to education, transportation, health care and so on. The commitment is there in the 21st century; the question then becomes, how do we ensure that everyone has life’s necessities? There are always fundamental choices: is it better to ensure that people have enough income and let them purchase the necessities; or is it better to provide the necessity at subsidized prices, covering the subsidy through tax dollars; or is it better to provide the necessity freely and pay for it entirely through tax dollars? For each necessity, the analysis may be different and the choice different. For example, we provide primary and secondary education for free, and pay for it through our taxes. To ensure people have enough food and clothing, we seldom subsidize these or provide them for free; rather we focus on income assistance and allow households to purchase food and clothing according to their tastes and needs. I believe that housing should be approached more like food and clothing. People’s tastes and needs differ greatly. It is an important form of self-definition and independence to choose one’s food and clothing—and I would argue—to choose your housing: to choose where to live, in what sort of dwelling, and to decorate and improve your home reflecting your tastes and personality. Social housing—the provision of specific units at subsidized prices—is ill suited to this choice. The progressive policies to ensure that people have acceptable housing in the 21st century welfare state should be policies focused on income: policies for full employment, education and training, and income security.

Housing Affordability Reconsidered

The starting point for developing a new agenda for housing is a careful assessment of the nature of housing problems today. In Canada today, the basic framework for defining and identifying housing problems is the concept of core housing need (defined above). But, before examining the core need data, we
must recognize that this framework is seriously incomplete, because core need analysis does not identify or measure homelessness. The surveys used to measure core need interview only households who have a dwelling unit. The new agenda for housing must address the problem of homelessness; this will be taken up in the next section.

Analysis of the 2006 Census is now available (CMHC 2009a) and allows a picture of core housing need in Canada over a 15-year interval from 1991 to 2006. In 2006, 12.7% of households were in core housing need. Core housing need stood at 13.7% in 1991, rose to 15.6% in 1996, and has declined since, so that in 2006, it is at its lowest level over the 15-year period. Paradoxically, core housing need has declined even though there has been virtually no new social housing built since 1991. The cutbacks to housing programs did not precipitate a housing crisis, as is sometimes claimed. The paradox is explained by the fact that after the recession of the early 1990s (which caused core need to increase), there was a long period of economic growth, low inflation, and low mortgage interest rates, which caused core need to decline. There is an important, if intuitively obvious, lesson in this history: the most important way to ensure that Canadians are well housed is to ensure that they have jobs and adequate incomes. Good macroeconomic policy is good housing policy.

Within the core need group, the housing problem is overwhelmingly about affordability—spending more than 30% of before-tax income on housing. As noted above, less than 2% of all households couldn't secure adequate or suitable housing. The problem is that for some households, they can secure adequate and suitable housing only by spending more than 30% of their income. Core need affordability is the major housing problem in Canada, affecting 11.4% of households. About 1,314,300 Canadian households have core need affordability problems. This problem is five times greater among renters than owners.

The picture of those who have housing affordability problems is very like those who have poverty problems. Indeed, they are almost one and the same group. It is puzzling why in the broad field of social policy there is so little overlap between poverty analysis and housing affordability analysis. But the
overlap is quite striking, not just because the same group of people have these problems. Consider the definitions of the two problems: the definition of core need housing affordability and the definition of poverty using Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut Offs (LICOs). The LICOs are not technically a measure of poverty, as Statistics Canada is careful to point out, but they are widely used to define and measure relative poverty. Statistics Canada states that a

LICO is an income threshold below which a family will likely devote a larger share of its income on the necessities of food, shelter and clothing than the average family. The approach is essentially to estimate an income threshold at which families are expected to spend 20 percentage points more than the average family on food, shelter and clothing. (Statistics Canada, 2009, p. 6)

To reflect differences in the cost of necessities among different communities and family sizes, LICO's are defined for five categories of community size and seven of family size. LICO's are calculated on both before-tax and after-tax income basis. Currently, LICO's are calculated recognizing that the average family spends 35% of its before-tax income on food, shelter, and clothing; thus the income thresholds are set estimating where a household would spend 55% on these necessities (20% points higher than the average).

There are differences in detail between the definitions of LICO's and core need affordability but the similarity is striking. LICO's establish poverty by determining whether a household spends "too much" (over 55% of income) on three necessities: food, shelter, and clothing. Core need establishes a housing affordability problem by determining whether a household spends "too much" (over 30% of income) on one necessity: shelter. Both make adjustments for family type and community size. Thus, in spirit, the definition of core housing affordability is really a definition of poverty: core need affordability just uses a lower threshold, because it only looks at one necessity rather than three.

I believe that much confusion has been introduced by thinking of housing affordability as a problem distinct from
poverty. The real problem is low income and the focus of progressive policy should be to understand why incomes are low and to work to increase them, whether through employment or job training, improved social assistance, improved assistance to families with children, or improved pensions. And there is much work to be done here. Despite some recent increases, social assistance incomes in real terms are below their levels in the mid-1980s (National Council of Welfare, 2008). The current system of federal and provincial child benefits is unevenly applied across the country and has become incomprehensible to most people. The overlap of programs and the tax system means low-income people often face very high marginal tax rates and are caught in a poverty trap—losing more in benefits than they would gain by working. The progressive focus should be on increasing benefit levels, coordinating across programs, and eliminating the poverty trap.

A Supportive Housing Strategy

The most serious housing problem in 21st century Canada is homelessness and the risk of becoming homeless. It is simply unacceptable in a country as wealthy as Canada, and with such a well-developed welfare state, that so many of its citizens should be homeless. The centerpiece of a progressive 21st century housing policy should be a commitment to eradicate homelessness.

How can this be done? Fortunately, we have learned a great deal about homelessness over the past twenty years. The first lesson is that a housing first approach is most effective—people need their own dwelling unit as a base. This has proven much better than the previously used continuum-of-care approach where people moved step-by-step to independent housing, from the street, to emergency shelter, to transitional housing, to a home. But, the next lesson is that housing assistance is not enough. Most homeless persons have other problems—mental health problems, substance abuse problems, many are victims of family breakdown or suffer from physical abuse, and many have chronic disease and are in poor health. They lack basic job skills. These problems contribute to their homelessness—just as these problems are made worse by homelessness.
A home must be accompanied by other forms of assistance, and all these should be sustained and coordinated. Broadly, this can be called a supportive housing strategy: housing first combined with coordinated social support programs. The centerpiece of progressive 21st century housing policy should be supportive housing.

The supportive housing strategy has been adopted by the Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI) and its successor, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), during the 1998-2008 period. We have many examples of successful initiatives using this approach in Canada and the United States. Interestingly, many of these successful initiatives placed most people in private sector rental housing rather than new social housing. A supportive housing strategy does not require a large scale new social housing program. Very few homeless persons participate in new social housing projects; indeed, many more modest-income households participate. Furthermore, a supportive housing initiative is often better designed when separately focussed upon a certain group, for example street youth, or persons with HIV/AIDS, or the frail elderly, each group requiring a very different array of social support programming. New social housing projects have historically had a different ethos and rationale and are not a good primary vehicle for delivering the package of coordinated assistance needed to address homelessness.

Most of these initiatives, for example Streets to Homes in Toronto, have focussed upon helping the truly homeless: those sleeping outside, sleeping rough, or sleeping in emergency shelters. However, any sound housing policy must also consider those at risk of becoming homeless. Many studies of the homeless looked at the length of time people are homeless and highlighted the instability of their lives.

Many drift from street, to doubling up with a friend, to emergency hostel, to rooming house, and back to the street. They can be grouped into three categories, depending on how much time and how frequently they are without shelter: the chronic who are without shelter for more than thirty consecutive days (most chronic homeless have been in that state for months or years);
the episodic, who tend to alternate for varying periods of time between being and not being domiciled; and the situational, for whom homelessness is the temporary result of a life crisis. (Fallis & Murray, 1990, p. 4)

Research examining the experience of the episodic and situational homeless can form the basis for understanding the risks of being homeless; although this research has not gotten very far yet in understanding the risks. Nonetheless, it seems very likely that the at-risk-of-being-homeless and the homeless share many characteristics: very low income and other complicating problems—mental health problems, substance abuse problems, family breakdown or physical abuse, lack of job skills, and chronic disease and ill health. These problems contribute to their risk of being homeless. This suggests that reducing the risk will also require a supportive housing strategy, in this case providing the coordinated assistance to people where they live, before they become homeless. A supportive housing strategy is well suited to addressing both homelessness and the risk of homelessness.

We do not have good measures of the number of at-risk households. A very rough proxy might be those households in core need with severe affordability problems, that is, who are spending 50% or more of their income on shelter. Of course, only a small percentage of such households will become homeless and some homeless will not come from this group, but it is a helpful first measure. In 2001, 5.3% of households were in core need and were spending 50% or more of their income on housing (CMHC, 2005).

A progressive housing policy should focus on those actually homeless and the 5% of households with severe affordability problems who are at risk of being homeless. The 21st century welfare state does not need a comprehensive housing policy; what it needs is a comprehensive policy to help this group.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that a new approach to housing policy should be situated in a vision for the welfare state of the
21st century. The most important means to secure one’s welfare is through employment, so the central problem for the welfare state today is to secure long-term employment for all, just as it was in the immediate postwar period. Today the long-term unemployment problem arises because of the structural changes of globalization, rather than from the fluctuations in aggregate demand over the business cycle. The key social program to complement the goal of full employment in the 21st century is education and training. Also, the welfare state should encourage labor market adaptability and should provide income security to those unable to obtain sufficient income from employment. Within this basic framework, what should be the role of housing policy in addressing the two major housing problems of today: housing affordability and homelessness?

Social housing—the provision of specific housing units at less than cost—is ill suited to the risks and challenges of the 21st century. It is very difficult for individuals to change dwelling units under a social housing program; thus social housing is too inflexible for the mobility needed by the labor market and family dynamics of today. Further, the housing affordability problem is better understood as a problem of low income. Progressive policy should focus on addressing the problem of low income through programs to provide employment, education, training, and income support.

The housing component of a 21st century welfare state should have two parts: (a) it should address the renovation and redevelopment of the existing social housing stock; and (b) it should focus upon strategies and programs to help the homeless and those at risk of being homeless, particularly people whose housing problems are intertwined with other problems—people with poor job skills, people with addictions, mental health problems, former inmates, or people suffering from family breakdown or family violence. The strategy needed requires a coordinated combination of social support programs with housing first—the two together creating a supportive housing strategy. Supportive housing programs, each tailored to a segment of this diverse population, should be the housing component of the 21st century welfare state.
References


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**Book Reviews**


Amartia Sen’s latest book, *The Idea of Justice*, continues the philosophical discourse on this important concept, begun by European enlightenment thinkers, including Hobbes, Locke, Kant, Smith, Condorcet, Wollstonecraft, Bentham, Marx, and Mill, and continued by 20th century U.S. philosophers, including Rawls, Nozick, and Arrow, as well as many Asian, Latin-American, and African philosophers.

Before sketching major themes of this work, I should note that it is a difficult text, requiring familiarity with philosophical concepts and with major philosophical writings beginning with early Greek authors. However, if one works one’s way through Sen’s discourse, one ends up intellectually enriched.

Sen begins with appreciation, as well as critique, of John Rawls’ major work, *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls, like many
enlightenment philosophers, worked within the “social contract” paradigm, developing a comprehensive model of principles and institutions for a just society. Sen considers the social contract paradigm as unrealistic, in view of the realized context of life of most human populations. He suggests to replace this paradigm, as others have done before him, with an alternative one, focused on systematic pursuit of significant reductions of blatant injustices such as famines, massive poverty, illiteracy, lack of health care, gender inequality and other forms of discrimination, etc. Sen thus emphasizes concrete, realistic processes of movement toward justice, instead of advocating unattainable ideal end-states. Related to Sen’s focus on progressive reductions of blatantly unjust conditions of realized life is his emphasis on comparing different ways and outcomes of reducing acknowledged conditions of injustice, in order to identify more effective approaches.

Sen criticizes Rawls’ model also because of the parochial nature of social contracts developed by one particular society without regard to consequences for people elsewhere. Models of justice, according to Sen, must have a universal, global focus.

Equal liberty and fair distribution of “primary goods,” i.e., income, wealth, and other life-sustaining resources, are, according to Rawls, key principles of just societies. While Sen agrees with Rawls concerning equal liberty as a priority aspect of justice, he considers distribution of primary goods not a goal, but a necessary means toward the real goal of justice, which is freedom of opportunities conducive to the unfolding of everyone’s capabilities. ‘Capabilities’ is a major concept developed by Sen in an earlier book, *Development as Freedom* (1999).

According to Sen, comprehensive democracy is an essential dimension without which justice seems unattainable. Democracy, in his view, involves exercise of public reason. It means participatory governance by discussion, rather than the mere practice of elections. Related to Sen’s view of democracy as “exercise of public reason” is his emphasis on the importance of unbiased reason in dealing with every aspect of justice and human affairs. Accordingly, long sections of the text serve to clarify the meanings and processes of ‘closed and open’ impartiality and objectivity.
Human rights, as formulated in 1948 by the United Nations in the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” should serve, according to Sen, as important elements of the pursuit of global justice, regardless of whether or not these rights have been formally enacted into the laws of different nations.

In summary, Sen’s work provides a realistic road map for movements toward social justice from local to global levels. It clearly assigns priority to progressive reductions of symptoms of injustice, but it also contributes insights into root causes of injustice, and thus, by implication, into strategies to confront and overcome these causes.

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In 2008, the U.S. economy seemed to be in an endless financial freefall that spread rapidly from Wall Street to Main Street and soon turned global, spawning the Great Recession, the worst economic downturn since the 1930s. Millions of ordinary people have lost homes, jobs, retirement incomes and their children’s futures, while many Wall Streeters walked off with fat bonuses! As economist Joseph E. Stiglitz notes, we have pulled back (with government help) from the precipice of late 2008, but the end of a freefall is not a return to normalcy.

Stiglitz, a Columbia University professor, is a Nobel Laureate in economics. He once headed President Clinton’s Council of Economic Advisers and later was chief economist at the World Bank, whose policies he sharply critiqued in Globalization and Its Discontents.

Freefall is jargon-free; concepts unfamiliar to non-economists are carefully explained. It packs a lot in about 300 pages of text and 60 pages of notes—many well worth reading. The absence of an index, however, poses some problems. The book first covers the complex origins of the crisis and the author’s perspectives on what was and what should have been done. “The only surprise about the economic crisis of 2008 was that it came as a surprise to so many” says Stiglitz, one of the few
economists who had been expecting the U.S. economy to crash. He firmly believes that markets lie at the heart of a successful economy but that they do not work well without government intervention—a major theme of his life’s work and of this book.

Although feckless lending of the financial sector had fed the housing bubble, which eventually burst, Stiglitz believes they had a common cause. “Bubbles and their aftermath are as old as capitalism” he points out. But for decades after the Great Depression and the New Deal of the 1930s, which put in place a significant regulatory structure that promoted economic growth and stability, the U.S. had been spared. However, once deregulation had taken hold, it was inevitable that some of these horrors would return, and the book discusses the ugly details. Also, under threat of collapse of the entire system, the same banks that had opposed regulation were bailed out with hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars. Stiglitz argues that a bank too-big-to-fail because it would have a severe impact on the whole financial system should, among other things, be broken up. Similarly, the great mortgage scam is explained in detail and policy recommendations are offered.

Highlighting massive unemployment, a major consequence of the Great Recession with huge human and societal costs, Stiglitz believes that Obama’s fiscal stimulus was necessary and made a difference but was not large enough to do an adequate job and should have been better designed. Too much went into tax cuts and too little to states, localities and people falling through the U.S.’ eroded safety net. However, his suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the stimulus do not include the possibility of a cost-effective New-Deal-style government job creation program, which can directly impact unemployment and meet societal needs.

Rare among economists, Stiglitz has a broad vision and sees the interconnections between the economy and the rest of society. He explores these issues in several significant later chapters and sees financial/economic problems as deep seated and systemic, requiring many reforms. Economics, my profession, is not exempt. It has, he says, become “free market capitalism’s biggest cheerleader.” Stiglitz notes that until the Great Depression, the reigning economic paradigm was the
neoclassical model, which postulates that markets are efficient and self-regulating, that there is therefore no unemployment and that there is a minimal or no role for government in the economy. The Depression severely weakened the stronghold of that model. Keynesianism, with its emphasis on government’s positive role in the economy, played an important part in maintaining the relative prosperity of post-World War II decades. But since the 1980s, these neoclassical views—albeit with many variants and in modern dress—again predominate and underlie much economic policy.

Stiglitz provides a compelling case that we can’t—and shouldn’t—go back to where we were before the crisis. Instead, he advocates a new capitalist order, one that resembles the Swedish welfare state. He asks fundamental questions—among them: What kind of society do we want? And is our economy helping us to achieve it? Has the market misshaped our values? Shouldn’t we be concerned about our moral deficit? The book ends with a call to create a new economic system that is sustainable, has greater income equality, gives people security, rights, and leisure, and that will, among other things, “create meaningful jobs, decent work for all those who want it.” The question is how to get there—and there are few clues from Stiglitz on that score. Perhaps in his next book!

Helen Lachs Ginsburg, Emeritus, Brooklyn College &
National Jobs for All Coalition


There is no doubt that in August 2005 Hurricane Katrina changed the history of New Orleans and its residents forever. The events that unfolded before the eyes of the world called into sharp relief how the U.S. responds to a massive crisis of dislocation, one that in this case particularly impacted poor and African American communities. Is there any doubt that had Katrina swept over one of the country’s vacation playgrounds for the wealthy there would have been no delays in rebuilding
and that President George Bush would not have done a callous 'fly over' to assess the damage?

Readers interested in the question of why place matters in peoples' lives and those interested in questions of environmental justice will find this book rewarding. In this edited volume Clark Atlanta University Prof. Robert Bullard and Dillard University Prof. Beverly Wright have assembled a richly researched and well written series of essays exploring why it is that some communities get left behind economically, spatially, and physically both before and after disasters strike. Reading the book as the summer 2010 BP oil spill disaster unfolds, much of what the authors consider in Race, Place and Environmental Justice unfortunately still applies.

Written by experts in environmental justice, land-use policy, and political science, the book makes it clear that while Katrina was, to be sure, a natural disaster, it was made exponentially worse by the government's inept urban policies before Katrina and its brutally horrible response once the levees broke. The book is divided into four parts: Challenges of Racialized Place, Health and Environment Post-Katrina, Equitable Rebuilding and Recovery, and Policy Choices for Social Changes. The editors frame the essays with an introductory chapter and an afterward in which they present their observations on what transpired over the three years to late August 2008 with respect to rebuilding the city. There they state:

Some policy analysts and elected officials have presented the plight of the city's displaced as a 'silver lining' in dispersing New Orleans' poor in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Memphis and Jackson. They spin it as an unintended positive effect of the storm—breaking up concentrated poverty—something that government officials had been trying to achieve for decades. However, the best way to break up concentrated poverty is not displacement but concentrated employment at a living wage.

Even the clean up heaped insult upon injury. Bullard and Wright in their introductory essay point out that Black-owned firms were "frozen out of the clean-up and rebuilding of the Gulf Coast." They note: "Only 1.5 percent of the $1.6 billion
awarded by FEMA went to minority businesses, less than a third of the 5 percent normally required by law.”

The parts of the book discussing the environmental damage left in the wake of the levees’ breaking offers cold comfort to communities being damaged by the BP spill. After Katrina, rather than work to clean up New Orleans neighborhoods, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) spent years making the case to leave the contamination as is!

State and federal governments remain ill prepared to deal with massive environmental disasters. The BP debacle and Katrina disproportionately affect the lives of poor and working class people. Just as there were no contingencies in place in August 2005 to handle the assault on peoples’ lives, little is being done to make right the uprooted lives of people awash this time in filthy oil. The sorry state of the government’s response post-Katrina offers little cause for optimism today as the very same region of the U.S. struggles with what is another preventable environmental disaster, which has the gravest of consequences on low-income communities and people of color.

Robert Forrant, University of Massachusetts Lowell


The history of public welfare in the second half of the twentieth century, Chappell argues, reveals a complex and unsettling story of policy making based on ideologically driven agendas that used the poor as proxies in struggles to capture the American imagination and the structures of the American state. President Clinton promised “to end welfare as we know it,” and in 1996 when he signed the Personal Responsibility Work and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRW OA), he ended Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), overturning sixty years of federal responsibility for poor children and their caregivers. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), AFDC’s successor, provided block grants to states for public assistance, effectively devolving responsibility for
the poor to states and counties. Using archival collections and the vast secondary literature on welfare, Chappell focuses on the years from 1964 to 1984 and unravels the complex social, economic and political factors leading to AFDC's demise. As a controversial public assistance program, AFDC symbolized the nation's old skepticism about welfare and fears about the pernicious effects of assistance on the poor such as dependency and illegitimacy, reminiscent of older anxieties about the need to dispense charity and assistance only to the worthy poor. In Chappell's narrative, the worthy poor are those who conform to a family model consisting of a male breadwinner and a dependent female homemaker with children. AFDC was symbolically important, she argues, since it violated the family ideal by supporting nontraditional families headed by unmarried women.

1960s liberal thought about poverty often coupled race and gender in antipoverty proposals. The influential liberal Daniel P. Moynihan, studying poverty, concluded African American female-headed families could not adequately socialize young men since they needed male role models, resulting in demoralization and antisocial behavior. Despite well-founded dissent from this disparaging perspective on female-headed families, it shaped Great Society antipoverty efforts aimed at perpetuating the male breadwinner family model among welfare recipients. Even in the 1960s, Chappell argues, that model was becoming unrealistic, as fewer male heads of families earned enough to support a traditional family. In the 1970s and 1980s, increasing family diversity owing to divorce and single parenthood and changing gender expectations shaped by the sexual revolution and the women's movement further weakened the traditional family ideal. By the end of the 1980s fewer than 20 percent of families consisted of male breadwinners with dependent family members. Nevertheless, Chappell argues, the preservation of that ideal was central to welfare reform through the 1990s. Many in the loose, liberal antipoverty coalition supported President Nixon's Family Assistance Plan, which promised a guaranteed income to shore up the social safety net by aiding poor two parent families. They deliberately ignored AFDC and its stigmatized recipients, she argues, in order to build alliances with white working class
families to shore up their political base. Conservatives appropriated liberal concerns about AFDC and its supposed pernicious social effects as they attacked welfare during the late 1970s and 1980s. Liberal feminists and welfare recipients did respond to the “feminization of poverty” and argued, unsuccessfully, for a comprehensive strategy of jobs and services to help poor women escape poverty. A fragmented welfare coalition could not withstand the wholesale attack on AFDC and welfare mounted by President Reagan. By the 1990s, “welfare as we know it” had few supporters. The elimination of AFDC and the arrival of TANF saw welfare rolls plummet as accessibility to welfare was restricted.

The Great Recession has created poverty and families headed by single mothers have been especially damaged. What is the future of antipoverty efforts? Chappell finds hope in “living wage” campaigns and efforts to create accessible daycare and creative workplace arrangements for working poor women who lost the AFDC safety net in the 1990s. She argues that a renewed social commitment to address poverty based on an ethic of communal social responsibility could overcome reluctance to accept today’s diverse family relationships and perhaps portend a willingness to acknowledge the needs of the new poor. This book is an important and provocative analysis of our long-standing ambivalence towards the poor.

John M. Herrick, Michigan State University

Birgit Pfau-Effinger, Lluis Flaquer and Per H. Jensen, Eds.,
Formal and Informal Work: The Hidden Work Regime in Europe.
New York: Routledge, 2009. $105.00 hardcover.

The current economic crisis has again focused attention on the challenge of maintaining a sufficient number of regular, well-paid jobs that generate the incomes families need to meet their everyday needs. As unemployment has soared, governments have scrambled to introduce measures to stem and hopefully reverse the recent precipitous fall in employment opportunities. However, the recession obscures the fact that regular, formal paid employment in the Western countries has been in decline for many years and that increasing numbers of
people now engage in self-employment, temporary work and "informal work."

This book examines how formal and informal work now characterize economic activities in six European countries where concerns about declining job opportunities and related labor market issues have dominated social policy debates for many years. The contributors investigate the nature and extent of formal and informal work and compare differences among these countries. They are particularly interested in how informal work finds expression in care-giving, primarily by women. It has long been known that women make a major contribution to caring not only for children but also for elders and that they usually do so without recognition or compensation. The contributors pay close attention to the way care-giving is associated with informal work in different countries and the extent to which it is recognized by governments and incorporated into official labor policies.

The book begins with an overview by the editors that offers a working definition of the concepts of formal and informal work. They define formal work as regular paid employment regulated by a legal framework involving contracts, tax obligations and membership in statutory occupational retirement and related social programs. Informal work refers to all labor activities that take place outside this legal framework. Generally it takes two forms: first, undeclared work associated with "moonlighting" and the underground economy and second, unpaid work, including care-giving and other labor activities that take place within the context of the family and household. Voluntary work for nonprofit organizations, given within what the editors call the "community economy," is also defined as informal work. However, these different ideal types are fluid and often overlap, particularly as they have become subject to government policy. For example, child care has become increasingly formalized, subsidized and controlled by statutory regulation. The editors note that these definitions need to be linked to wider theoretical interpretations of countries' state welfare and work-family arrangements.

Armed with these definitions and conceptual tools, the contributors review developments in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Britain, Spain and Poland. Each country case study is based
on extensive statistical information about employment trends, augmented with qualitative household interviews. Mindful of the cultural and institutional frameworks governing employment and work in each country, the editors conclude the book by formulating an interesting cross-national comparison showing differences in the extent and types of work in the six countries. For example, they find that informal work is widespread in Spain and Poland and where it is culturally embedded and socially acceptable. There, informal work relates both to undeclared work and to care-giving in the extended family based on cultural expectations concerning women’s roles. However, they point out that increasing labor force participation by women is reducing the extent of family-based care-giving. Also, with the extension of government involvement, particularly in Spain, care-giving is becoming increasingly formalized. On the other hand, the incidence of informal work is lowest in Denmark and Finland even though voluntary work is quite common. In both countries, care-giving is widely supported and formalized by the state. Britain and Germany occupy the middle ground between the two with moderate levels of informal work. These findings have significance for social policy in the European nations, where a more nuanced approach towards understanding the nature of informal work and its relation to poverty, especially among immigrants, is needed.

This is an interesting and highly informative book, providing important insights into the nature of informal work in Europe today. Undeclared, informal work has previously been viewed as a phenomenon associated with the developing countries but, as the book reveals, it is also widespread in the Western countries. However, because the extent of undeclared work is not fully appreciated, it remains a neglected aspect of employment policy. The book also makes a major contribution to understanding informal care-giving by women, and it shows that policies are badly needed to supplement and reward these activities. The book is thoroughly researched, well grounded in theory and is an indispensable resource for anyone interested in issues of employment and work today.

James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley
Policy analysts frequently focus on macro level policies and programs. This edited volume, while paying attention to the only relevant federal policy, the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), is more concerned with employer-initiated programs and practices at the workplace level. Starting from the premise that flexible work schedules can ease the stresses affecting most working adults with responsibilities for children, aging parents, or both, the several studies in this volume document a big divide between policies affecting professional and middle managers and those for hourly workers.

Emanating from a 2007 Pennsylvania State National Symposium on Family Issues, over 20 contributors (most chapters are co-authored) examine different aspects of workplace policies and the challenges of conducting research in this area. The book is organized into 4 parts: (1) Workplace Policies: Opportunities to Improve Health and Well-Being, focused on extant policies, their sufficiency, availability and utilization; (2) Intervening in the Corporate Workplace, primarily an examination of results-only work environment (ROWE), a flextime approach to increase Best Buy middle managers' control over their work time and place, studied in a mixed methods research design by Moen, Kelly and Chelmack; (3) Making a Difference for Hourly Employees, where Lambert and Milkman separately discuss the burdensome impact that "flexible work time" has on hourly workers; and (4) Future Directions for Research and Policies, that summarizes some of the major findings of the preceding chapters and poses areas for future study.

The inadequacies of employee benefits in the U.S., especially compared to other industrialized countries, are well-known. The FMLA covers only employees in settings with 50 or more employees and requires merely 12 weeks of unpaid leave for a serious health condition or care for a newborn, a newly adopted or fostered child, or a sick near relative. Firestein reports that the U.S., Liberia, Switzerland and Papua New Guinea are the only countries of 173 surveyed with no guaranteed paid leave for childbirth. Citing a 2006 Bureau of Labor Statistics study,
Kossek and Distelberg find that only 57% of surveyed employees have paid sick leave. Compared to Europeans, U.S. citizens work longer hours and have much less paid vacation time. Organizational culture plays an important role in disseminating information about workplace policies, either encouraging or discouraging their use. A 2007 U.S. Department of Labor study found that 30% of employers do not comply with the FMLA, and most supervisors do not facilitate employees' getting information about their rights.

The evaluation of the Best Buy ROWE program concluded that there was a "statistically significant impact on changes in employees' sense of control over their work time, their decisions about where and when they work, their sense of work-family conflict, some aspects of their health and wellness, and their work pressures and commitment." These positive results indicate that corporations can implement work organization strategies that reduce stress for managerial employees.

Hourly workers confront a completely different situation. Many are women (often single mothers) working swing shifts. Here flexibility serves employers' interests to keep labor costs low. Workers may not know until late in the week what their next week's work schedule will be. Consequently, they have great difficulty arranging for child care, transportation, medical appointments, and even mealtimes. Some employers purposefully schedule few hours for their workers, making them essentially unemployed but ineligible for unemployment benefits. At other times, when demand is high, workers are required to work overtime. These practices result in high absenteeism, turnover, stress, depressed wages and low benefits payouts.

The contributors conclude that work-life policies are, on the whole, deficient and lag behind the realities of the country's changed economy and workforce. Wisely or not, rather than looking to the federal government for remedies, they instead point to innovations at the state level (California, New Jersey and New York, principally) and those that are employer-initiated. Finally, Firestein reminds the reader that collective bargaining remains a powerful tool for workers lucky enough to be in unions.

*Work-Force Policies* offers an enormity of information. One drawback is its repetitiveness (too often, one contributor cities
another). And there is this caveat: the chapters were written before the current Great Recession; the work-life challenges depicted in the book are undoubtedly much worse now for those still in the labor force.

Marguerite G. Rosenthal, Emerita, Salem State University


One of the most fundamental questions regarding U.S. housing policy since the 1930s is: who should provide affordable rental housing? The first response—the federal public housing program—was criticized for poor design, quality, management, and financial sustainability, among other things. The second response—publicly-funded private sector development—was blamed for cost overruns, fraud, and lack of affordability despite generous public investment. The most recent response—a decentralized network centered on the nonprofit sector—might just have the right combination to make everyone happy, according to Erickson, delivering high-quality affordable housing that is both mission-driven to serve disadvantaged populations and a cost-effective investment.

Erickson argues that while many have bemoaned the exodus of the federal government from affordable housing since the 1960s, “in many ways, the welfare state is more present and harder to see” because it has simply decentralized. Relying on primary texts, including political speeches and governmental reports and secondary analysis of housing project evaluations, he presents a familiar narrative of the growth and resiliency of a new decentralized affordable housing delivery system. Erickson claims this represents a retooled, rather than a reduced, welfare state, involving a long list of partners—such as community development corporations, intermediaries, and foundations—and new flexible government funding programs—like the federal HOME block grant and Low Income Housing Tax Credit programs, state housing finance agencies, and local inclusionary zoning and housing trust funds. He suggests that this network has succeeded where prior top-down government
programs failed: offering high-amenity affordable housing in a flexible manner consistent with locally-identified needs. In order to increase effectiveness, Erickson suggests strengthening vertical and horizontal partnerships within the system, eliminating overlapping efforts through increased specialization of each player, and monitoring the health and efficiency of the network and its individual nodes through a centralized oversight mechanism.

There are several issues with Erickson’s treatment of the topic that limit the efficacy of this book. First, while quick to highlight the benefits of this new network, including glowing case studies of success, he fails to engage adequately with the expansive literature on the limitations of such a housing delivery system. This includes the fragility of this unevenly-distributed, undercapitalized, overburdened system of nonprofit housing developers, and the scars left across the country by project and organizational failures. Second, the book lacks a solid theoretical compass, leaving readers unsure as to how to interpret this “revolution”: as a network or institution, as a roll-back or roll-out of the welfare state, as equitable or uneven? This makes it difficult to distill causes and effects, and to predict alternative futures for this decentralized network should significant changes occur in any key contributors to its “success.”

Indeed, Erickson’s analysis provides few clues as to how the decentralized network might fare in the face of the recent financial and fiscal crisis. Concentrated in the most disinvested neighborhoods and reliant on well-capitalized funders, the network will be seriously challenged by the re-ravaging of the neighborhoods they have faithfully served, and the devastation of additional once-prosperous communities. Furthermore, affordable housing developers will be operating within tighter capital restraints, as evidenced by the drying up of the tax credit equity markets. Ironically, these are exactly the conditions that encouraged direct federal intervention in the housing market in the first place.

Corianne P. Scally, University at Albany,
State University of New York

Homelessness is often discussed from multiple perspectives—as a social condition, as a housing problem, as a private issue, and as a public concern. This book reflects on homelessness from both macro- and micro-perspectives. The author investigates homelessness by using ethnographic research, demonstrating both the social construction of homelessness and the perceptions of homelessness through the prism of culture, norms, and perceptions of this personal and public issue in Post-Socialist Russia.

This book is written in a fascinating manner, honestly portraying that most social problems were "officially nonexistent" in Soviet Russia, where the concept of homelessness was not openly used. Furthermore, the author articulates that homelessness in Russia is not a pure housing problem. Despite the shortage of living spaces, it is the result of a combination of Soviet control policies and socioeconomic transitions toward a market-driven economy in the 1990s. Specifically, the author details how several factors, such as the labor market, industrialization, shortage of housing, migration, and individual factors, contributed to the rise of homelessness in Post-Socialist Russia.

In addition, the research shows that homelessness is both a cause and a result of fractured ties—social, spatial, personal, and economic. The author argues that in spite of the absence of close ties, the homeless often have to establish relations of cooperation, reciprocity, and mutual help with other homeless in order to survive. The book also highlights what it takes "to be human" as an essential part of being needed. It provides examples that being clean (regardless of homeless status), developing friendships and maintaining social capital are essentials of staying human. The author stresses that individual self-worth and a sense of self-respect are also crucial to "feeling human." Interestingly, the book shows how in Post-Soviet Russia, people who lack social capital are more likely to experience social disadvantages such as loneliness, lack of attachment, chronic housing problems and health concerns, which
result in their inability to successfully adjust in times of economic transformations.

The strength of this book is that it highlights multiple factors that result in homelessness for many people—a shift from a Soviet-style to an open-market economy which caused a drastic increase in poverty, especially among people with mental illness and substance abuse problems or in dysfunctional families. Elocutently, the researcher incorporates personal experiences and reflections, as well as qualitative inquiry, to highlight the subjective perception of the problem through linguistic and cultural idiosyncratic expressions.

On the other hand, there is a need to understand the multiple factors that can potentially cause homelessness based on age, family construction, substance abuse problems, criminal record, policy changes, economic disadvantages, or personal choice. Moreover, the problems of bank and housing fraud are especially important to evaluate in transitional economies. Finally, the argument that violence among generations is one of the causes of homelessness is worth further attention.

In sum, the book stresses the concept of space through the social stratification paradigm and the reality of having limited living space provided by the welfare state and charities to the homeless. The role of social capital and family support are presented as almost the only guaranteed pathways for individuals to remain human and come back to established society. The understanding of the larger context and the conditions that lead to loss of housing in Russia as well as how personal problems affect human dignity are worth further investigation.

Sviatlana Smashnaya, Boston University


In The People Shall Rule: ACORN, Community Organizing, and the Struggle for Economic Justice, editor Robert Fisher continues his efforts to advance theory, strategies, and tactics of achieving social justice while providing community
organizers with frameworks to support their work. In previous work Fisher achieved these goals by exploring historical models of organizing and examining specific issues, such as the influence of social and economic conditions, on community organizing efforts. In *The People Shall Rule*, Fisher uses the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) as a vehicle to expand our understanding of the field of community organizing while reminding his readers of our collective obligation to pursue economic justice.

At the time the book was written ACORN was, according to its website, "the nation's largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families, working together for social justice and stronger communities." Today ACORN is beleaguered, making framing a book review awkward as it is hard to know if the book serves as an historical artifact or a review of an existing organization. The edited volume contains 12 chapters that explore ACORN from theoretical and applied perspectives. Individually, the chapters provide organizers with tools and frameworks to support their work.

Against a backdrop of controversy, ACORN has become emblematic of some contemporary tensions. For example, in the first chapter, Peter Dreier juxtaposes the possibilities of community organizing represented by President Obama's inspirational presidential campaign with contrary challenges, such as attacks from the right and fragmentation of the left. While the strategic goals of many community organizing efforts often have a single focus, Dreier points out that ACORN has been successful in bridging strategic areas. ACORN's work has included building a membership organization, advancing electoral politics, and combining organizing with community development and social services. While ACORN's use of multiple strategies has been effective, it will be interesting to observe in subsequent analyses if ACORN's wide focus has contributed to its present problems.

Most chapters are case studies about ACORN covering historical, comparative, empirical, and narrative enquiries. Topics range from school reform, housing, predatory practices of tax preparation organizations, voter mobilization and gentrification. Each chapter has lessons for organizers in the areas of strategy, leadership, partnership, issue-framing,
identifying targets and tactics, motivating people/groups for social change, and how “old fashioned organizing [was able to] trump resources and sophistication ... of a well funded public relations effort.”

Fisher claims that many community organizing efforts are hampered by four dominant trends within the field: (1) a turn from organizing for economic justice to culture; (2) a turn from oppositional strategies to community building; (3) a turn from building power to local organizing; and (4) a turn from social movement building to community organizing—and that these trends dampen social justice efforts. ACORN has bucked these trends, and Fisher uses its successful 38 years to remind organizers that there are alternatives to accepting dominant trends.

Fiduciary issues raised against ACORN—a source of possibly trumped up scandal—are not addressed until page 251. Chapter author Gary Delgado links the questions of ACORN’s future existence to the possibilities associated with “developing the internal and external strategies to grow beyond” its existing success. ACORN has seen more difficulties since Delgado wrote these words, and yet ACORN still has many lessons to teach. These include: how many of ACORN’s problems are a result of attacks from the right, and therefore an outgrowth of its success, and how many result from poor management decisions that left the organization vulnerable to such attacks?

No matter what the future of ACORN entails, the future of community practice theory is always strengthened by Fisher’s probing eye, and this book is no exception.

Elizabeth Beck, Georgia State University


Documenting the history of Africans in America from slavery through the century has typically proved to be a difficult task. Many slaves and, later, free Blacks were not literate, making it difficult to document the events in their lives. Researchers interested in writing about the lives of Africans in
early America (1619 through the 1800s) lack enough first person accounts to tell an accurate story or end up misinterpreting their sources. Foster dedicates a chapter to the importance of distinguishing fact from fiction in writing about Africans in America. Throughout, she emphasizes the importance of using first-person accounts in context and understanding myths and memory. "Distanced as we are by time and circumstance, we need to listen and read with our eyes and ears tuned to what we can know about the speaker and the speaker’s circumstance.” She explains that myths can be fictional or factual and that personal voices and context help to make the distinction.

Historical research can be caught in the dichotomy between fact and myth. Foster refers to the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and historians Ira Berlin and Leslie Rowland in describing plantation slave relationships. “Both accounts are factual. Both are narratives that have gone on to acquire the power of myth. They are stories that contain at least one truth … stories we believe.” Foster herself has used primary sources, including African American newspapers and love letters, as well as the work of historians and novelists to weave her stories of marriage in this socio-historical account. 'Til Death or Distance Do Us Part: Love and Marriage in African America adds an important dimension to previous slave stories by concentrating specifically on the rituals leading up to marriage, marriage itself, and the challenges of being married in the face of the legal and socio-cultural mandates of slavery and antebellum America.

Traditional wedding vows include the phrase, “‘til death do us part.” The reality of slavery in America was that death or distance due to being sold to separate plantations could separate a married slave couple. Foster uses the example of fugitive slave Henry Bibb to illustrate the point. Bibb’s marital situation “shows that distance created involuntary separation and intolerable circumstances could not dissolve a marriage but that giving up the struggle could…. When he heard his wife had been sold to a man to be his concubine, Bibb states, ‘my wife was living in a state of adultery with her master … This was a death blow to all my hope and pleasant plans … I could no longer regard her as my wife.’”

While reminding us of this harsh reality for African slaves and the restrictions that the antebellum period sometimes
placed on Blacks, Foster nonetheless dispels myths that slaves were unable to marry. Interweaving historical accounts with personal stories that remind us of how African Americans create culture, Foster challenges the reader to imagine that Africans could be passionate, engage in love rituals, write love letters and poems, and create happy, healthy households. We are taken on a journey that describes courtship, the rules and laws of society that dictated and restricted marriage among people of African descent, and through the marriage rituals themselves.

By comparing the story of a modern-day African couple who will be separated because their individual asylum statuses dictate they live on separate continents to that of the slave couples, Foster concludes the book by bringing us full circle to the dilemma of death or distance—a bittersweet reality of marriage among modern-day Africans living in the western world eerily similar to African slaves in early America.

There are some confusing transitions as Foster interweaves first-person narratives with the work of other authors and modern-day stories, but overall the book is well-written with enough first-person stories to support the truths about African marriage in America. This is a useful book for any scholar of African American history and, in particular, for those looking to understand families of African descent. No stranger to writing about African slaves and Blacks in the antebellum period, Foster has done an excellent job discussing a significant ritualized institution that very often gets lost in the history of Africans in America—marriage.

*Shannon Butler-Mokoro, Salem State College*


The United States prison population increased sevenfold in the last four decades, with over 1.5 million people currently in state or federal facilities and an additional 700,000 individuals serving time in local jails. Stakeholders are divided on mass incarceration—most either brand themselves as staunch
advocates for punitive sanctions or supporters of more lenient policymaking. The prison explosion has sparked a growing literature on the family effects of incarceration, and scholars are not exempt from this ideological chasm. While an early publication by Pauline Morris recognized the disparate impact of incarceration on families, the majority of studies have cast such implications in a negative light.

In Doing Time Together, the culmination of her dissertation work and first full-length publication, Megan Comfort repudiates this polarized thinking. Through a nuanced examination of how incarceration shapes romantic relationships, Comfort explores the institution of prison as an active agent rather than as an external, passive entity.

Utilizing in-depth interviews and participant observation with women visiting their partners at San Quentin in California, Comfort’s book explores a range of topics: the process of accessing the facility; the risks and rewards of remaining partnered with an incarcerated man; the roles of correctional officers and institutional policies in intimate relationships; means of communication; and community reentry. Comfort grounds her findings in theory and previous scholarship on families and incarceration. Drawing on Donald Clemmer’s notion of prisonization, “the taking on ... of the folkways, mores, customs, and general culture of the penitentiary,” she argues that women involved in relationships with men behind bars become engaged in “secondary prisonization,” during which they become “quasi inmates.” Through regulatory oversight that is qualitatively similar and at times only slightly less severe than that experienced by inmates, female partners are surveilled, confined and dehumanized while at the prison and at home.

One of Comfort’s tasks is to dispel the myth of prison as a wholly positive or negative force. She claims that current research draws a causal relationship between incarceration and poverty, unemployment, and single motherhood with little analysis of the extent to which these circumstances existed prior to prison or whether incarceration relieves rather than exacerbates such hardships. In reality, the picture is more complicated; her interviews reveal accounts of family life surrounding prison that are neither straightforward nor homogenous.
The author utilizes Merton and Barber’s notion of sociological ambivalence to move away from a “monotonal evaluation of ‘good versus bad’” in assessing the effects of penal systems.

Part of the ambivalence expressed by Comfort’s respondents results from their experience of a dissolution of boundaries between home and penitentiary. This is an important finding for scholars and social service providers alike, in contrast to the conventional distinction between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside.’ Rather than depicting a system that is removed from the community, respondents describe an institution that is constantly and emphatically present in their lives. Comfort argues that the current discourse is an inaccurate reflection of the experiences of inmates’ partners; as such, it suggests only ineffective services and policies.

Although Comfort’s study addresses how incarceration shapes intimate relationships, her sample is somewhat limited. While keenly aware of the challenges of maintaining ties, respondents recount mutual efforts to strengthen their connection during incarceration. Because Comfort interviews only individuals who visit the prison and choose to remain in their relationships, the book does not elucidate the experiences of partners whose relationships do not endure a prison spell.

Comfort does not propose system reform based on this initial work, calling mainly for further investigation of the ‘secondary prisonization’ of partners and the enmeshment of the prison and the home. Her research takes important steps to refine the narrative about the nuanced family implications of prison and to identify the prison system as an active agent in producing change. Lest the reader be confused by assertions that partners can become “reliant on, and even grateful for, carceral control,” Comfort’s goal is not to advocate for harsher penal policies; rather, she calls for comprehensive analysis of the powerful grip of the penal system in order to generate effective service delivery, policymaking and scholarship. *Doing Time Together* is a critical read for anyone concerned with the unrelenting growth of the prison population.

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