

On the Move:
A longitudinal study of pathways
in and out of homelessness

By

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

And as Paul said these things to himself, a wave of sadness washed over . . . He was understanding now that no man could live without roots – roots in a patch of desert, a red clay field, a mountain slope, a rocky coast, a city street. In black loam, in mud or sand or rock or asphalt or carpet, every man had his roots down deep – in home (Kurt Vonnegut, Jr Player Piano: 227: Bard Books, Tenth Printing 1971).

When you are approaching poverty . . . you also discover the great redeeming feature of poverty: the fact that it annihilates the future (Orwell 1953:20)

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While a PhD is specifically written with an academic audience in mind, I hope this thesis has broader value. In particular, I hope it is of interest to Australian policy makers who can do much to alleviate the plight of the homeless. I also hope it is of relevance to those agencies, who directly or indirectly, work with the homeless and advocate on their behalf. Further, I hope it challenges and disrupts some of those limiting and stigmatising constructions of the homeless that underpin public perception and many policy responses. It

is, I hope, an account grounded in a reality recognisable to the homeless themselves and the people who work with them.

Most importantly, I would like to thank those people who took the time to participate in the study. I hope that the findings will ultimately contribute to an improvement of their lives.

Finally, while this work represents the input of many people, I take full responsibility for contents of this thesis. Any mistakes are mine, and mine alone.

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Abstract

In Australia the homeless population has become more diverse over the last 20 years with more young people, women and families experiencing homelessness. It is also evident that there is considerable variation in the length of time people remain homeless. How these changes relate to movements into and out of the homeless population is not well understood. This research asks: 'Is there a connection between how people become homeless, how long they remain homeless and how they 'get out' of homelessness?'

A review of the literature identified two gaps directly relevant to the issue of movement in and out of homelessness. First, it is not well understood why people experience homelessness for different lengths of time when they face similar structural conditions. Second, the prevalence of substance use and mental illness reported in the homeless population has led some to conclude these factors cause homelessness. However, researchers have generally been unclear about whether such problems precede or are a consequence of homelessness.

In addition, research has generally presumed a relationship between the amount of time a person is homeless and patterns of behavioural and cognitive adaptation to a homeless way of life. Yet recent research suggests that people's biographies play a significant role in the duration of homelessness. How these different findings relate to each other remains unclear.

This thesis investigates these issues through a longitudinal study of homeless households. Data was gathered in two rounds of semi-structured interviews. In the first round 103 interviews were conducted. Approximately one year later 79 of these households were re-interviewed. The process of, and connections between becoming, being and exiting the homeless pathway are analysed using the 'pathways' concept. While on these pathways homeless people actively produce and reproduce social structures including both embracing and rejecting the stigma and subculture associated with homelessness. This complex world of homelessness is then analysed by extending the pathways concept by distinguishing five ideal type pathways based on the main reason for becoming homeless. They are a mental health pathway, a domestic violence pathway, a substance use pathway, a housing crisis pathway and a youth pathway.

The research indicates that people on each pathway respond to the experience of homelessness differently and this has implications for the amount of time they spend in the homeless population. People on the substance use and youth pathways commonly describe themselves as 'homeless', focus on the 'here and now', use the welfare service system, are very mobile, and over time, many start to sleep rough. Their embrace of the homeless

subculture commonly 'locks' them into the homeless population for long periods of time. In contrast people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways generally do not identify themselves as homeless and resist involvement with other homeless people. These homeless careers tend to be shorter. Then there are those who enter homelessness on the mental health pathway. They were frequently exploited in the early stages of their homeless careers and most sought to avoid exploitation by isolating themselves which then increased their marginalisation. These were the longest homeless careers.

The use of the pathways concept also helps to understand how the circumstances of homeless people can change while they are homeless. The research found that some homeless people changed pathways. In particular the study found that two thirds of the people who reported substance use problems developed these problems after they became homeless. Most of these people entered the homeless population on the youth pathway. The research also found that three quarters of the people with mental health issues developed these issues after they became homeless, and that for some this was also connected to drug use.

Overcoming homelessness is never easy and individuals manage the process in different ways. Again the pathways concept proved useful to understanding how homeless people accomplished this. The findings show that people travelling the different pathways require different levels and types of assistance to resolve their homelessness. The research concludes that the process of re-integration can take a long time but, given the right social and economic support, every homeless career can end.

1 Setting the question

Whether homelessness is chronic, part of an acute life crisis, or intermittent, it must be seen as a process (Neil & Fopp 1993:9).

1.1 Introduction

The recognition of a fundamental change in the nature of homelessness in Australia can be traced back to the mid 1970s when two influential reports – *The Working Party on Homeless Men and Women* (1973) and *Homeless People and the Law* (Sackville 1976) - noted that the homeless population was becoming more diverse and that homelessness was no longer a problem confined to the 'derelicts' and 'bag ladies' of skid row. The new arrivals were generally younger than their skid row counterparts, were no longer exclusively male and there were more families in the homeless population.

These changes in the characteristics of the homeless population, along with a sharp increase in the number of homeless people, are commonly used to distinguish the skid row homeless of the 50s and 60s, and what researchers define as the 'new homeless' (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989; House of Representatives 1995; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1998; Fopp 1998; Adkins, Barnett, Kristine, Heffernan & Minnery 2003).

Pinning down the reasons that resulted in the transformation of the homeless population is difficult, but some of the key social and economic changes that are regularly cited include the impact of economic 'stagflation' resulting from the oil shock of 1973, the recessions of 1981-83 and 1990-92, the roll back of the welfare state, along with situational factors such as increasing substance abuse, de-institutionalisation and changing attitudes towards domestic violence and family conflict (Horton 1996; Victorian Homelessness Strategy 2002).

While the emergence of new forms of homelessness have generated periodic community concern, high levels of homelessness have persisted throughout the 90s and into

the 21st century (Chamberlain 1999; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003) and there is little doubt Australia continues to have a serious problem with homelessness (Department of Family and Community Services 2000).

Alongside the emergence of different forms of homelessness, there has been growth in the study of homelessness. Most studies have focused on the issue of cause, or, to a lesser extent, on the effects of being homeless. A result of this is that few studies examine how people 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness. This thesis addresses this problem and my core argument is that to understand how people 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness, it is important to think about how people enter the homeless population, how they cope with being homeless and how the experience of these two stages influences the strategies people use to 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness.

1.2 The problem

In Australia advocates and researchers have ensured that traditional concerns with the issue of 'who' is homeless, and the issue of 'how many' people are homeless, continue to capture public and policy interest. However, since the late 1980s a growing body of local and international research has argued that it is equally important to develop an understanding of how movements into and out of the homeless population relate to each other – that is in understanding the dynamics of homelessness (Blasi 1990; Stretch & Kreuger 1992; Neil & Fopp 1993; Piliavin, Sosin, Westerfelt & Matsueda 1993; Piliavin, Wright, Mare & Westerfelt 1994; Dworsky & Piliavin 2000; Robinson 2003).

Interest in the dynamics of homelessness emerged as a result of a significant shift in thinking. Prior to the 1980s, the homeless population was relatively homogeneous and stable (DeHoog 1972; Jordon 1994;1995) and homelessness was typically conceived as a 'state into which people fell and remained' (Neil & Fopp 1993:9). As the homeless population started to change, researchers identified a number of empirical patterns that challenged this view, of which four are relevant here.

First, the reasons for becoming homeless were now seen as more varied than in the past with a large number of structural, situational and individual factors presented in the literature (see Watson 1984; Watson & Austerberry 1986; Watson 1988; Pleace 1998; Somerville 1998; Williams & McMahon 2000; Watson 2001; Williams 2001; Australian Federation of Homeless Organisations 2003; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2003; Robinson 2003). The point to bear in mind is that the wider range of 'causes' underlying the growth in homelessness also means that people bring with them a more diverse range of background experiences than did their skid row counterparts. How these different background experiences relate to movements in and out of homelessness is not entirely clear.

Second, the experience of homelessness was seen as being more differentiated than in the past. The issue of different experiences of homelessness is reflected in both Australian and overseas literature that indicates the homeless population is constantly changing, with some people experiencing homelessness for only a short time, some moving in and out of homelessness over many years, and some remaining homeless for extended periods of time (Rossi 1989; Momeni 1990; Shlay & Rossi 1992; Neil & Fopp 1993; Baldwin 1998; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1998; Bartholomew 1999; Phelan & Link 1999; Chung, Kennedy, O'Brien & Wendt 2001; Rossiter, Mallett, Myers & Rosenthal 2003). Research has typically focused on quantifying the numbers in each group and while this is useful, different temporal experiences raise the question of why people experience homelessness for different lengths of time given that they face similar social and economic conditions.

Third, it is generally argued that the longer people are homeless, the more likely they are to become acculturated into the homeless subculture and identify with homelessness as a 'way of life' (Wallace 1965; Piliavin et al. 1993; Snow & Anderson 1993; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1998). From this perspective the longer people are homeless increases the *possibility* they will adapt, behaviourally and cognitively, to the contingencies of homelessness. This implies that many 'pathologies' commonly linked to the homeless actually emerge after prolonged exposure to homelessness (Weitzman, Knickman & Shinn

1990; Snow & Anderson 1993). The extent to which people become acculturated is also relevant to the issue of the difficulty people have in terms of 'getting out' and 'staying out' of the homeless population (Snow & Anderson 1993; Argeriou, McCarty & Mulvey 1995; Thomson Goodall and Associates 1999a; Thomson Goodall and Associates Pty Ltd 1999b).

However, many people, long term homeless or otherwise, do not engage with the homeless subculture and recent research demonstrates that the link between behavioural and cognitive adaptations and the amount of time a person is homeless is not straight forward. Mallett, Edwards, Keys, Myers and Rosenthal's (2003) research demonstrates that rates of behavioural adaptation - in this case drug use - are more strongly linked to the biographies people bring with them, rather than the amount of time people are homeless. While reality is, of course, more nuanced than this, their findings, along with other similar results (see Hutson & Liddiard 1994; Pears & Noller 1995) raise the question of how people's biographies influence movement into, through and out of homelessness.

Finally, research has established that the characteristics of people who have a short experience of homelessness are different from those who have longer experiences. Among the long term homeless population there is a disproportionate representation of substance use problems, mental illness, poor physical health, and criminal behaviour (Bassuk, Rubin & Lauriat 1984; Burt & Cohen 1989; Piliavin, Westerfelt & Elliott 1989; Snow, Baker & Anderson 1989; Bassuk, Buckner, Weinreb, Browne, Bassuk, Dawson & Perloff 1997; Baron 1999; Horn 1999; Teeson, Hodder & Buhrich 2000; Neale 2001; Dalton & Rowe 2002). The high prevalence of these issues has led some people to conclude that these factors 'cause' homelessness (Teeson et al. 2000). In Australia and overseas people with experiences in the state care and child protection system are also over represented among the long term homeless population both in Australia and overseas (Bassuk et al. 1997; Roman & Wolfe 1997; Zlotnick, Kronstadt & Klee 1998).

A number of authors have argued, however, that studies of the homeless population do not establish whether problems such as substance use or mental illness, precede or are consequences of homelessness (Neil & Fopp 1993; Snow & Anderson 1993; Pinkney &

Ewing 1997; Clapham 2003). In their longitudinal study of the conditions 'affecting the duration of individual homeless careers', American researchers Irving Piliavin, Michael Sosin, Herb Westerfelt and Ross Matsueda (1993:578) stress this point about causality:

Despite this repeated documentation of high rates of behavioural health problems among adults, research has not systematically investigated whether these conditions are causally related to the onset of homelessness and to the duration of homeless careers. Consequently, assertions as to the conditions contributing to homelessness are virtually without systematic empirical support.

In other words, even if disproportionately high rates of these problems are found in the homeless population, 'such higher rates may not exist among people who become homeless, but only among people who remain homeless' (Culhane 2005:19). I refer to this as the issue of clarifying 'temporal order'. Without clarifying temporal order, it is difficult to separate the processes that lead to homelessness from those that occur after people become homeless.

Explaining the dynamics of homelessness presents many challenges. Nevertheless, clarifying temporal order and distinguishing different temporal patterns is important because it provides a more robust basis for policy and program design (Piliavin et al. 1993).

1.3 The question

Each of these four patterns – growth in the causes of homelessness; greater differentiation in the experience of homelessness; different patterns of engagement with the homeless subculture; and variation in the duration of homelessness - have been the focus of scholarly activity. Despite this, our understanding of how these four patterns interact is poor. This reflects the fact that in Australia there has been no systematic investigation of the way that the different processes of becoming homeless, being homeless and exiting homelessness connect to one another. Consequently, it remains unclear the degree to which people's past experiences are implicated in movements into, through and out of homelessness. Without this information it is difficult to establish which groups are more susceptible to long term homelessness, or establish how other groups manage their exposure to homelessness in such a way that it enables them to 'get out' relatively quickly.

The uncertainty surrounding these relationships led to the research question posed for this thesis. The principle question asks: ***Is there a connection between how people become homeless and what subsequently happens to them?*** This includes how they respond to being homeless, how long they remain homeless and how they 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness. In looking at the relationship between these three stages diachronically, that is as a process, this thesis contributes to the important task of redressing the lack of an 'empirically supported theory about the conditions that lead into and out of homelessness' (Shlay & Rossi 1992:45).

Despite recognising the importance of thinking about homelessness as a process, the dominant methodological approach has been point-in-time surveys. These surveys generally collect quantitative data to examine statistical relationships between survey variables. Point-in-time studies are suited to counting and characterising the homeless population and they are important for planning and providing services (Chamberlain 1999; Phelan & Link 1999; Metraux, Culhane, Raphael, White, Pearson, Hirsch, Ferrell, Rice, Ritter & Cleghorn 2001).

However, point-in-time studies have a number of weaknesses. The most serious problem is that point-in-time studies implicitly treat homelessness as a static condition rather than a dynamic one. Because of this, point-in-time studies struggle with the issue of temporal order and can tell us little about what happens once people are homeless and even less about how people 'get out' and 'stay out' of the homeless population (Fitzpatrick 2000; Metraux et al. 2001). Without this information, point-in-time studies tend to create the erroneous impression that homelessness is a relatively homogeneous experience.

In addition, because of their static nature, point-in-time studies are 'inherently biased' (Metraux et al. 2001:345) towards over sampling the long-term homeless. This is because the likelihood of 'capturing' the long-term homeless is higher than the likelihood of capturing someone who is homeless for only a short period¹ (Link, Susser, Stueve, Phelan, Moore &

¹ For example, a person who is homeless for one month has roughly a 30/365 chance of being surveyed on any given day of the year. In contrast, a person who has been homeless for a year or more has a much higher chance of being surveyed (365/365).

Struening 1994; Ringwalt, Greene, Robertson & McPheeters 1998; Phelan & Link 1999; Metraux et al. 2001). The disproportionate representation of the long-term homeless means that the characteristics commonly associated with this group (such as mental health problems and problematic substance use) will also be over-represented. A result is that point-in-time studies have a tendency to reinforce the view that homelessness occurs because of 'character weaknesses'.

It is generally recognised that the best approach to overcome these problems is through longitudinal research. In the international literature there has been a marked shift towards tracking what happens to the homeless over time and to assessing what factors contribute to success or otherwise in achieving housing stability. Recent examples include a large-scale longitudinal study in Sweden (Stenberg, Kareholt & Carroll 1995) and smaller, more localised projects in America and Britain (Sosin, Piliavan & Westerfelt 1990; Piliavin et al. 1993; Craig, Hodson, Woodward & Richardson 1996; Piliavin, Wright, Mare & Westerfelt 1996; Culhane & Kuhn 1998; Dworsky & Piliavin 2000; Fitzpatrick 2000).

There is little longitudinal data available in Australia despite the importance of understanding the dynamics of homelessness through longitudinal research being well recognised (Flinders Institute of Public Policy and Management 1999; The National Evaluation Team 1999; Adkins et al. 2003; LenMac Consulting 2005). The absence of Australian longitudinal research therefore provides an important starting point for this thesis.

The research for this thesis was undertaken in the State of Victoria (Australia). Although Victoria's social and economic conditions are unique, in the context of homelessness there is little difference between Victoria and other states in Australia. Consequently, the research should provide important evidence that is relevant to other parts of the country. However, with little Australian evidence to rely on, the study draws heavily from overseas research - in particular from the U.S and Britain - where there is a larger collection of longitudinal studies. Overseas studies provide many useful theoretical, conceptual and methodological insights and it should also be noted that in Britain and the U.S the 'new homeless' appeared at much the same time as in Australia (Marcuse 1996).

Using overseas literature can be problematic because the social and economic conditions in these countries are different from Australian conditions. This means that it cannot be assumed that any relationship between the conditions that lead to homelessness, the experience of homelessness and routes out of homelessness identified overseas, will be relevant here.

Nevertheless, using overseas literature draws attention to the different ways homelessness is defined in different countries. Defining homelessness is a central dilemma facing any homeless research and to understand the dynamics of homelessness it is important to be able to determine where homelessness starts and where it ends. This requires an operational definition of homelessness.

Definitions of homelessness are generally highly contested and there has been considerable debate in Australia (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1992; Neil & Fopp 1993; Crane & Brannock 1996; Chamberlain & Johnson 2001) and overseas (Watson 1984; Redburn & Buss 1986; Argeriou et al. 1995; Cordray & Pion 1997; Hopper 1997; Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi 1999; Springer 2000; Watson 2001; Pleace 2005). In the last decade, however, there has been an emerging consensus in Australia about how homelessness should be defined (House of Representatives 1995; Chamberlain 1999; LenMac Consulting 2005). The preferred approach is known as the cultural definition of homelessness and it is based on the arguments put forward by Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1992). Although it is best known as the definition used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to enumerate the homeless population (Chamberlain 1999), the cultural definition has been applied to the dynamic analysis of homelessness in a small but growing number of studies (Casey 2001; Chamberlain & Johnson 2002a; MacKenzie & Chamberlain 2003).

The cultural definition is based on the view that housing and homelessness are socially constructed and historically contingent concepts and that these cultural concepts provide a guide to the minimum community housing standards. People who live in housing that falls below the minimum community standards are defined as homeless. According to this approach people who double up with friends or family, are in emergency accommodation

or boarding houses, are all homeless because their housing falls below a minimum community standard. The cultural definition identifies three segments in the homeless population. They are:

1. Primary homelessness – people without conventional accommodation living in the streets, in deserted buildings, railway carriages, under bridges, in parks etc;
2. Secondary homelessness – people moving between various forms of temporary shelter including friends, emergency accommodation, refuges, hostels and boarding houses;
3. Tertiary homelessness – people living permanently in single rooms in private boarding houses without their own bathroom or kitchen and without security of tenure.

This is a broad or maximalist approach (Jacobs et al. 1999) and it provides a practical framework for classifying people as housed or homeless at a given point in time.

With the research question established and a definitional framework in place, it is also important to recognise that homelessness can be understood in different ways - each of which reflects different epistemological and theoretical concerns. These different perspectives provide different views of the social world and consequently it is important to understand the sociological orientation informing this study.

1.4 Research orientation

In linking together and looking at the interaction between becoming homeless, being homeless and exiting homelessness, a core principle of this research is that homelessness is better understood diachronically, that is as a process that evolves over time. In looking at the relationship between these three stages diachronically, my theoretical approach is grounded in the view that social action cannot be adequately understood outside the social context in which it occurs. This is generally understood as adopting a social constructivist approach.

In the social constructivist tradition social actors do not merely respond to external stimuli, but react to and interpret various social contexts and identities in ways that make sense to them. This distinction is important as it is commonly but incorrectly assumed that people respond to similar social contexts in similar ways. In fact, how people make sense of their social context depends on, among other things, their biographies, how they view themselves and how they think other people view them (Cooley 1964).

Within this framework a way of responding to the research question is to use 'pathways' into homelessness as the primary analytical framework. I use the pathways metaphor to discern whether there are distinct 'patterns of interaction' (Clapham 2003) or lines of conduct among different groups of people who are at different stages in their homeless careers.

The pathways concept is broadly analogous to the career idea put forward by Becker (1963) and Goffman (1961). Like the careers concept, pathways are a useful tool for highlighting how actors deal with structural factors, as well as organising temporal information including individual changes in behavioural and cognitive orientation. Studies that use the pathways idea provide useful descriptions of the experiences of different homeless subgroups - such as young people (Fitzpatrick 2000; Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society 2001), older people (Crane 1999), families (Weitzman et al. 1990), and women (O'Dwyer 1997; Casey 2001)

While the career idea is a useful means of illuminating the 'temporal sequence and activity in almost any sphere of social life' (Snow & Anderson 1993:272) another benefit of thinking this way is its two-sidedness (Goffman 1961:119). The concept of a career or pathway:

Allows one to move back and forth between the personal and the public, between the self and the significant society.

This draws attention to my primary theoretical concern which is explaining the interaction of structural factors and individual agency. I identify five 'typical' entry pathways using Max Weber' (1949) notion of 'ideal types' – they being a mental health pathway, a

domestic violence pathway, a substance use pathway, a housing crisis pathway and a youth pathway. I go on to show that irrespective of the path people travel into homelessness, there are three issues that everyone has to contend with; the breakdown in existing routines; dealing with the stigma of being homeless; and how people deal with the homeless subculture. I use these three issues to examine the way people negotiate, interpret and reproduce various social structural factors in different ways with different consequences.

The first issue that comes up is how, in the process of becoming homeless, people deal with the disruption to their existing routines. I borrow the idea of routinization from Giddens theory of structuration (1984) to examine this issue. Giddens acknowledges the importance of day-to-day interaction, or what he calls encounters, and he suggests these encounters typically occur as routines. He goes on to say that:

What from the angle of the fleeting moment might appear brief and trivial takes on more substance when seen as inherent in the iterative nature of social life. The routinization of encounters is of major significance in binding the fleeting moment to social reproduction (Giddens 1984:72).

Routines provide an insight into the way individual actors are constrained and enabled by different structural factors at different times. Further, routines are important in terms of identity because routines position people into a network of social relations. These networks carry certain social obligations that are linked to a social identity (Giddens 1984:83). Routine is thus a vital link given its mediating position between the individual and society.

The second issue is stigma and how people deal with it irrespective of their pathway into homelessness. The way people attempt to remake their day-to-day lives and re-organise their social interactions once they are homeless occurs in the context of homelessness being a stigmatised identity. Goffman's (1963) ideas on stigma and stigma management strategies such as 'passing' and 'distancing' provide the theoretical basis for my approach.

However, it is important to note that people respond to stigma in different ways (Oyserman & Swim 2001; Shih 2004). Take for instance the example of women

experiencing homelessness as a result of domestic violence. Most were acutely aware of the stigma of homelessness and what it 'said about you as a mother'. The findings presented in this thesis show that most women responded to this stigma by attempting to retain as many elements of normality in their daily lives as they could. When they spoke about homelessness they perpetuated stereotypical images of the homeless as drunks, 'druggies' or in some way dysfunctional and, by definition, different from them. In contrast, many young people inverted the stigma of homelessness so that they connected to, and identified with, other people in similar circumstances. This typically resulted in their involvement with the homeless subculture where they adapted their behaviour and identity and this commonly locked them into the homeless population for significant periods of time.

The third issue is how homeless people respond to other homeless people. I use the term homeless subculture to refer to the 'distinctive melange of behaviours' that arise from their common predicament (Snow & Anderson 1993:39). How homeless people relate to the homeless subculture has an important bearing on what happens to them when they are homeless, and also has important consequences in terms of changes to peoples cognitive and behavioural orientation. Typically, these changes are assessed against the diachronic principle:

. . . which holds that, all else being equal, behavioural patterns and cognitive orientation ought to vary with length of exposure to any particular set of objects or circumstances (Snow & Anderson 1993:43).

This approach is premised on the argument that the extent of behavioural and cognitive change is determined by the length of time a person is homeless. However, my intention in linking routine, stigma, identity and the homeless subculture into a theoretical framework is to focus attention on the way people's pre-homeless experiences and their pathway into homelessness mediate the experience of homelessness - including the amount of time people are homeless. In positioning routine, stigma, social identity and the homeless subculture as the central theoretical constructs, the thesis aims to develop an understanding

of what drives different processes of identification and resistance to homelessness, and how these processes inform the routes people take out of homelessness.

1.5 Thesis structure

This study is interested in establishing the connection between how people become homeless and what subsequently happens to them. I structure the thesis around a three-stage model: the period leading to homelessness, which I term *becoming* homeless; the lived experience of homelessness, which I term *being* homeless; and the third stage which is *exiting* homelessness².

The first three chapters provide important contextual information. Chapter two outlines the longitudinal research strategy upon which the findings are based. It describes how and where 103 households were recruited, discusses the reasons for undertaking two rounds of interviews 12 months apart, and concludes with a discussion of the implications of sample attrition that occurred in the second round of interviews.

Chapter 3 engages my key theoretical ideas. Theoretical approaches to homelessness tend to be polarised – there are those that focus on structural factors and those that focus on human agency (individual) behaviour. In this chapter I argue that both approaches are insufficient on their own and that to make sense of homelessness theoretical explanations must be able to move between structure and agency. The way I do this is to use Giddens (1984) idea of routinization and Goffman's (1963) ideas on stigma and social identity to examine patterns of interaction between different structural factors and individual agents on each of the five entry pathways.

The empirical analysis starts in Chapter 4 which focuses on the first stage – becoming homeless. Chapter 4 presents five typical pathways into homelessness. They are domestic violence, housing crisis, mental health, substance use and people who have their

² This three stage approach closely follows Goffman's schemata for mental patients (1961:122).

first experience of homelessness before turning 18 years old. These five pathways form the conceptual architecture for analysing the accounts of homeless people in subsequent chapters. The chapter focuses on how the process of becoming homeless disrupts existing routines and the different ways people manage this disruption. It also examines how people respond to the prospect of being linked to a socially devalued or stigmatised social identity.

The next four chapters focus on the second stage - being homeless,. Each chapter examines the similarities and differences in the experiences of the five groups once they are homeless and how each group relates to the homeless subculture. Chapter 5 analyses the experiences of people who become homeless because of the effects of substance use. This chapter focuses on the way their routines embed them in the homeless subculture and how this can trap them in the homeless population for significant periods of time.

Chapter 6 focuses on the way people with mental health problems negotiate the experience of being homeless. This chapter demonstrates that those in this group do not identify with homelessness as a way of life, but they remain homeless for longer than any other group because they are marginalised by other homeless people and mainstream society as well. They are the most isolated of the five groups.

Chapter 7 explores the experiences of people from the housing crisis and domestic violence pathways together. While the processes leading to homelessness for these two groups are different, their experiences of homelessness are similar. This chapter examines the way both groups manage the stigma of being homeless by attempting to 'pass' as normal, and thereby avoid being tainted by the socially devalued identity that is attached to homelessness. This chapter argues that 'passing' is a crucial strategy underpinning the relatively short homeless experiences of these two groups.

Chapter 8 examines the experiences of people who became homeless for the first time before they were 18 years old. Two different groups on this pathway are identified. There are those who remain connected to their school and this group (dissenters) typically have short homeless experiences. In contrast, the second group (escapers) were distinguished by their involvement with the state care and protection system and they tended

to quickly move into the homeless subculture where they adapted their behaviour and cognitive orientation. This chapter concludes with a discussion about movement from one pathway into another.

Chapter 9 examines the exit patterns of the five groups. Using data from the second round of interviews (N=79) the chapter demonstrates that the two groups (people on the housing crisis and domestic violence pathways) who reported the fewest problems prior to becoming homeless (and who also reported the lowest levels of behavioural and cognitive adaptation) also had the highest rates of housing stability. The chapter argues that to assist these two groups providing affordable housing is the most critical issue.

For people in the three long-term homeless groups (substance use, mental illness and youth) the situation is more complex because most exhibited patterns of episodic homelessness which highlighted the difficulty some people had 'staying out' of the homeless population. This chapter demonstrates that many people developed additional problems through their involvement with the homeless subculture and this makes it difficult to 'get out' and also 'stay out'. When people in these pathways 'get out' of homelessness they generally find they have few connections to the mainstream, and consequently feel isolated and bored. Many subsequently experience further episodes of homelessness. In order to 'stay out' of the homeless population these groups generally require ongoing support to address the physical and psychological effects of long periods in the homeless population, as well as affordable, appropriately located housing.

The final chapter presents an overview of the key findings of the thesis. It also offers a number of policy related suggestions in addition to outlining a possible research strategy that could extend the research and assess the findings put forward in this thesis.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduces the idea that homelessness is a dynamic process and that not enough is known about how the different paths people travel into, through, and out of homelessness relate to one another. Along the way two core principles were articulated. The first is that homelessness is best understood as a process. The second is that behaviour is best understood by considering the social context in which it occurs.

The chapter then sets out the central research question which asks if there is a connection between how people become homeless and what subsequently happens to them. I use pathways into homelessness as the analytical framework to systematically examine the connection between becoming, being and exiting homelessness. My theoretical framework examines the interaction between structure and agency by considering how people dealt with the disruption to their existing routines, how people dealt with the stigma of homelessness and how they responded to the homeless subculture. The final section of this chapter outlines the structure of the thesis.

A sample of homeless households was required to answer the primary research question. While it was important that people in the sample could provide information about their experiences leading to homelessness as well as their experiences of homelessness, it was vital the sample included people who were about to, or in the process of exiting homelessness. This complicated the process of drawing a sample and in the following chapter I explain how this was done.

2 Establishing the research strategy

2.1 Introduction

In the early 1980s the appearance of young people, women and families in the homeless population stirred public concerns and political action. Social researchers also started to pay attention to homelessness. At the time most researchers applied point-in-time methods and while this approach has its strengths, it is 'methodologically inadequate' for examining the dynamic patterning of homelessness (Sosin et al 1990:158). Consequently, for this study to investigate the relationship between people's pathways into homelessness, their experiences whilst in the population and their routes out, the research strategy must be capable of investigating complex cause and effect relationships and explain processes that occur across time. In the social sciences generally, and in the study of homelessness specifically, longitudinal studies are considered an effective method to do this.

This chapter outlines the research strategy. It begins with a description of the homeless service system in Australia and Victoria through which the participants were recruited. It then presents the rationale for using a combination of retrospective and prospective longitudinal methods as a means of studying people's pathway into, through and out of homelessness. Following this it discusses how the sample was recruited, the interview tools used to elicit data and the characteristics of the interviews. Finally, it considers the implications of sample attrition in the second interview and outlines the strategies used to reduce attrition rates.

2.2 The Australian homeless service system

There are a number of ways to gain access to people experiencing homelessness. A common approach here and overseas involves recruiting people through homeless agencies

(Hirst 1989; Smith 1995; Hallebone 1997; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1998; Reid, Speed, Miller, Cooke & Crofts 1998; Teeson et al. 2000; Babidge, Buhrich & Butler 2001; Horn & Cooke 2001; Robinson 2003). This was the approach I adopted.

In Australia, the primary government response to homelessness is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). SAAP is a joint Commonwealth/State/Territory initiative. SAAP was formed in 1985 when eight separate programs were amalgamated (SAAP Data and Advisory Committee 2000:1)³. The Commonwealth legislation governing SAAP states the aim of the program:

. . . is to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services in order to help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness achieve the maximum degree of self-reliance and independence (Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 Cth).

SAAP provides funding to a range of non-government organisations so they can assist homeless people. SAAP funded services provide individual case management to their clients which can be short term, or, in limited circumstances, ongoing. SAAP agencies generally manage their own crisis and/or transitional accommodation to support their clients, although sometimes homeless people are supported in squats, the streets or in boarding houses.

In 2004/2005 there were 1,294 SAAP agencies across Australia with a total recurrent funding of \$311,800,000 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2006). The funding model is based on historical arrangements with State and Territory Governments and current population sizes. Victoria has 24.9 per cent of the population and just under 20 per cent of the recurrent federal funding. In 2004/2005 this represented \$62 million.

In Victoria the homeless service system is slightly different from the rest of the country as support is separated from housing management. This primarily has to do with the

³ Federal Government assistance for the homeless was reorganised into the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) by the Australian Labour Party (ALP) in 1985. SAAP drew together a number of smaller programs into a single joint Commonwealth/State program. SAAP was not devised, nor is it part of housing policy *per se*, for its core funds are from social welfare sections of Government Departments. Instead SAAP represent a response to 'special needs for personal support services' (Paris 1993). Nevertheless, SAAP became and remains the 'centre piece of the Federal Governments response to acute housing crisis and homelessness' (Fopp 1996).

introduction of the Transitional Housing Management Program (THM) in 1997. The aim of the Transitional Housing Program:

. . . was to create a substantial clearing house of accessible accommodation for people who were homeless. By providing stable housing it was argued that patterns of successful tenancies could be built and individuals and families longer term housing needs (and solutions) could be identified (Newman 2004).

In 1997 the Victorian Government appointed 15 Transitional Housing Managers (THMs) to manage approximately 1,000 transitional properties. The amount of stock has subsequently increased to over 3,500 (Newman 2004). Workers from a wide range of non-government welfare organisations support tenants in transitional housing, although most of the support (70 per cent) comes from services funded through SAAP (Victorian Homelessness Strategy Ministerial Advisory Committee 2001).

Respondents for this research were recruited from four THMs and one crisis accommodation service (Appendix A). These agencies were spread across Victoria with two agencies in the inner city, one in suburban Melbourne, one in a regional city (Geelong) and one in country Victoria (Leongatha). The rationale for selecting five geographically distinct services was to compare rural and urban homelessness. Initially, this was considered important. However, during the research it became apparent that there was little difference in the client profiles in different communities.

The role of THMs, support workers and crisis services is to assist people out of homelessness – they have what Snow and Anderson (1993:87-94) call a ‘restorative response’. By recruiting from these sites I could interview respondents who had been homeless, as well as people who were, ostensibly, in the process of exiting homelessness.

2.3 Longitudinal approaches

The processes that connect becoming, being and exiting homelessness to one another are best understood by examining movement between each stage. This requires an approach capable of capturing changes that occur over time. While there are a number of ways to

collect this type of data, the appropriateness of longitudinal research is now well recognised in American, Australian and European research literature (Sosin et al. 1990; Stenberg et al. 1995; Culhane & Hornburg 1997; Wong 1997; Culhane & Kuhn 1998; The National Evaluation Team 1999:91; Adkins et al. 2003; Robinson 2003).

There are two reasons why longitudinal methods are suited to this study. First, longitudinal approaches are superior for studying cause and effects relations (Wall & Williams 1970; Menard 1991). In the case of homelessness, where causality is complex (Pleace 2005) and temporal sequence frequently misunderstood, longitudinal analysis can assist in distinguishing those factors that lead to, or 'cause' homelessness, from those factors that influence its persistence (Wong 1997:138; Menard 1991:3). That is, researchers can use longitudinal data to establish a better understanding of:

. . . the conditions associated with entering and escaping from homelessness, whether homelessness is a chronic or brief phenomenon, the consequences of becoming homeless, and the conditions that prevent homelessness either from re-occurring or occurring at all (Shlay & Rossi 1992:145-146).

Second, by clarifying temporal order, longitudinal methods enable researchers to better identify the contingencies that influence movement along different pathways. A longitudinal approach can provide better insights into the development of specific behavioural and cognitive patterns by tracking the influence of different factors over time. It is then possible to establish if different patterns are linked to different pathways into and through homelessness (Menard 1991; Wong 1997:139; Wong & Piliavin 1997:410; Wright, Caspi, Moffitt & Silvia 1998:95). From there it is possible to establish how different behavioural and cognitive responses to homelessness mediate the way individuals try to 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness. Furthermore, as homelessness is commonly characterised by repeated movement into and out of homelessness over many years, the importance of examining homelessness and housing insecurity over time is further reinforced (Neil & Fopp 1993).

Scott Menard (1991:15) provides a convincing argument in support of the capacity of longitudinal methods to illuminate the reasons why people in similar social and economic

circumstances might have such different experiences of homelessness, and how these connect to different pathways out of homelessness. He states that:

A . . . compelling need for longitudinal data arises if we wish to study 'career' patterns of behaviour. . . Such studies have in common a concern with patterns of entry, continuity, and exit from the behaviour upon which the career is based, and with the correlates and potential causes associated with changes or discontinuities in the behaviour. . . It is only with longitudinal data, and more specifically panel data, that many of the questions regarding developmental career patterns may be answered.

Longitudinal data is necessary to investigate the relationship between becoming, being and exiting homelessness. However, the way these stages connected to one another meant that the research strategy had to be capable of looking backwards in time, assessing current circumstances, as well as looking forward in time. Consequently, a mixed longitudinal design was developed and in the following sections the two elements – retrospective and prospective – of the research strategy are described.

2.3.1 Retrospective strategy

A common practice in longitudinal studies of homelessness is to collect retrospective data. (Link et al. 1994; Phelan & Link 1999; May 2000). In this research retrospective data was used to bring into sharper focus the dynamics of the relationship between becoming and being homeless- the first two stages.

The first interview asked retrospective questions to create a unique housing biography. The biographical approach involved recording an individual's housing and homeless history on a large grid. Each column represented the period of time in a particular form of accommodation. Below that the type of accommodation, the location and the reason for leaving were recorded. Such biographical ordering of housing and homeless transitions has been shown to be an effective way of understanding homeless careers (O'Dwyer 1997; Crane & Warnes 2000; Fitzpatrick 2000; May 2000; Robert 2002; Clapham 2003; Robinson 2003).

The use of historical information can, however, have distorting effects because of selective memory and interpretation⁴. Where possible I cross-checked the information contained in the housing biography to improve the accuracy and validity of the data and to counteract the tendency of 'people to overstate the length and continuity of their homeless episodes' (Culhane & Kuhn 1998:25). The cross-check involved reading the respondents a list of different dwelling places and accommodation types so that they could review and revise their housing/homeless history. The second interview provided the opportunity to further cross check the data.

2.3.2 Prospective strategy

The prospective approach considers changes that occur in the period between the first and second interview. This approach was used to establish their accommodation history once they left transitional accommodation. The prospective approach is preferred in most longitudinal studies involving the homeless (Sosin et al. 1990; Craig et al. 1996; Wong & Piliavin 1997; Dworsky & Piliavin 2000). With a prospective approach it is recognised that longer overall time-frames and 'shorter intervals between interviews . . . are associated with more reliable data' (Wong 1997:145). However, institutional and funding requirements determined the overall time-frame, the length of time between interviews (the observation period)⁵ and the total number of interviews (or waves). Typically, observation periods are between three (Rossiter et al. 2003) and six months (Sosin et al. 1990) with time-frames ranging from six months to a number of years. The time-frame for this study was 9-12 months with two interviews for each participant. This was comparable to approaches used in other longitudinal studies of homelessness (Craig et al. 1996; Fitzpatrick 2000).

⁴ Panel conditioning is a problem with surveys generally. Although the willingness of respondents to provide the 'right response' (Menard 1991:38) always poses a threat to the validity of the data in all social research, with the focus being on changes to housing conditions the effects of panel conditioning are likely to be low.

⁵ In a two-wave study the time frame and the observation period are identical. This distinction is only relevant in studies with three or more waves.

A panel design was used to illuminate individual and group changes in the period between the first and second interviews. In a panel design the same set of cases is retained throughout the study and no attempt is made to replace participants lost during the period of field research (Menard 1991).

2.4 Establishing a sample

At the start of 2003 the five agencies managed 786 tenancies. Because the study was interested in 'what happened' to people after leaving transitional accommodation, the sampling procedure was designed to maximise the time between exiting transitional accommodation and the second interview. A series of technical rules based on the exit patterns of each agency were developed to 'screen out' those unlikely to exit transitional accommodation within three months of the first interview. These rules also identified those households at risk of eviction. The implementation of these screening rules produced a sample frame of 198 tenancies (Figure 2.1). A detailed description of the screening rules is contained in Appendix B.

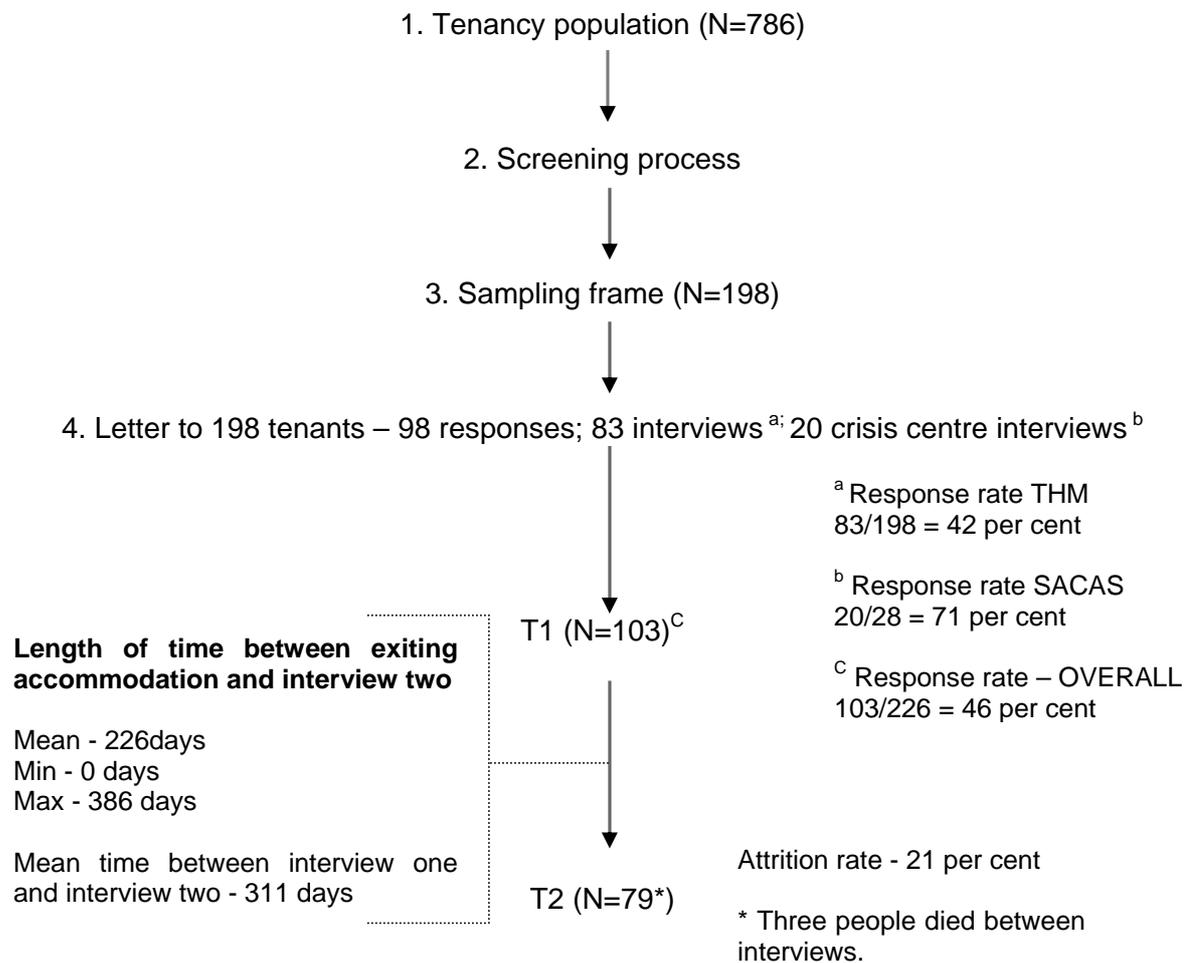
Due to the requirements of the Privacy Act (1988) the sampling frame was developed using non-identifying data⁶ and this created problems in directly contacting members of the sample frame⁷. What I did to overcome this problem was to forward the identification codes to the relevant tenancy administration team who matched the identification code to a tenant's name and address. The tenancy administration teams then sent identical letters to potential participants (Appendix C). This letter explained the project and contained a 'Consent to Contact' form. Participants consented by filling in this form and returning it to the researcher

⁶ Transitional properties are managed by tenancy administration workers. In their role as landlords, tenancy workers are responsible for property maintenance, rent collection and liaising with support workers. Tenancy administration workers at each agency created a de-identified tenancy file that contained an identification (ID) code, tenancy start date, days in arrears and local government area (LGA). This contained enough information to identify the sampling frame.

⁷ Some consideration was given to recruiting through support agencies to overcome the restrictions of privacy legislation. It was felt that this could bias the sample through selective screening or lead to bias as a result of concern about support retribution.

in a stamped self-addressed enveloped. A separate plain English statement explaining the project was also included (Appendix D). In total, 198 letters were sent to transitional tenants and 98 responded. Of these 98, interviews were conducted with 83 households. Another 20 participants were recruited directly from the crisis accommodation centre⁸. This resulted in a sample of 103. A full description of the social characteristics of the sample is contained in Appendix E.

Figure 2.1 Sampling process map



⁸ A different protocol was developed for the crisis centre because of the higher turnover (maximum length of stay is generally around six weeks compared to nine months for transitional accommodation). The Plain English Statement was circulated to all tenants (N=28) on a selected date. People who were interested contacted crisis centre staff who then forwarded client details directly to me. Potential respondents were then contacted and interviews arranged. Twenty interviews took place.

2.5 Data collection and organisation

The first interview schedule (see Appendix F) was organised around five themes: family history, accommodation history, social connectedness, education and employment. The second interview (Appendix G) included additional questions designed to elicit more in-depth information about people's experiences since leaving transitional accommodation. Also, given the complex nature of many housing histories, the second interview provided an opportunity to cross-check material elicited in the first interview.

Both interview schedules collected quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were coded into SPSS v11.5 for statistical analysis. These data are generally presented in percentages using bi-variate analysis, although occasionally, when the sub-samples are small, the data are presented in raw numbers. While multivariate analysis, along with other more sophisticated statistical treatments of homelessness can be found in the literature (see for example Early & Olsen 1998; Dworsky & Piliavin 2000), the sample in this study was too small to apply these techniques meaningfully.

The study relied heavily on qualitative data. Qualitative data is a useful way of explicating and bringing 'alive' complex social processes (Rossi 1989:1; Snow & Anderson 1993; Dalton & Rowe 2002:3; Robinson 2003). The biographical approach allowed people to describe the issues and events that led up to their first experience of homelessness and their experiences of homelessness, in their own terms. Both interviews produced rich, detailed, and in many cases, intimate and highly sensitive information about people's experiences. Consequently it was important to protect the confidentiality of the respondents.

The orthodox approach is to change people's names and certain key details. However, many of the respondents and their situations were well known to the agencies involved in recruitment. In these cases changing names would have been insufficient to guarantee confidentiality. The technique I used to address this problem was to create composite cases based on Connell's approach in his book *Teachers' Work* (1985). Connell created 15 composite cases to convey a 'sense of biography' (1985:3) and to increase

understanding of the 'social processes' that structured interactions with other teachers and the school system. The idea is a compromise between confidentiality and biography but its usefulness is indicated by others who have used it to analyse the lives of marginalised people (Perkins & Bennett 1985; Rossi 1989).

I created 14 such composite cases. Every detail and quote comes from the interviews and each case was constructed from information drawn from people classified on the same pathway. This means that Keith, Michelle and John on the substance use pathway, Sandra and Lyn on the domestic violence pathway, Frank, Sally and Lee on the housing crisis pathway, Nan, Toni, Andrew and Robbie on the youth pathway and Tim and Maggie mental health pathway, are not real people but are composite characters that embody common experiences and distinct patterns of interaction.

2.5.1 Procedures

The study was submitted to the RMIT University Ethics Sub-Committee for approval before the first round of interviews commenced. Most of the interviews were face to face (97 per cent) and conducted at the respondent's transitional property (88 per cent). Before the interview began I would introduce myself and provide a summary of my background. Participants were then provided with an informed consent form to read and sign (Appendix H). I read through each point to ensure that the participants had a clear understanding that they were agreeing to provide detailed personal information that would be used for research only. I also explained the aims of the research to each participant and offered them the opportunity to ask questions or raise any concerns.

The consent form also described how confidentiality would be maintained. Respondents were informed that the study would not present data that could be used to identify them, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time and have any unprocessed data returned to them. They were also informed that data records were kept in a locked filing cabinet within a secure room and building.

Another issue that had to be addressed was the power differential embedded in the participants status as clients of homeless agencies, and my status as a researcher working with these agencies. I made it clear from the start that refusal to participate would have no impact on the services they received and that participation would not lead to the provision of additional services or higher priority in the provision of future services.

I was also aware that we might be touching on subjects that were distressful for the participants. I informed participants that they were under no obligation to answer all the questions and if any questions were too sensitive they were advised to say they would not answer these questions.

Participants were paid \$40 for the first interview and \$60 for the second interview. Funding was provided by one of the participating agencies. While the use of payments or honorariums to retain participants has been criticised because it can lead to selection bias (Booth 1999:77), the common practice in Australian and overseas social and community research is to pay participants (Sosin et al. 1990; Koegel, Melamid & Burnam 1995:1643 ; Piliavin et al. 1996; Cohen, Ramirez, Teresi, Gallagher & Sokolovsky 1997; Horn & Cooke 2001; Wong & Piliavin 2001; Robinson 2003).

With these protocols in place, one hundred and three homeless households across Victoria were interviewed over a three month period commencing in February 2003. Interviews lasted anywhere between 45 minutes and two hours. At the end of each interview I transcribed key information and quotes onto a single homeless career summary sheet (Appendix I). This information was particularly helpful when I met people for the second interview as it helped remind me of their stories and this made the second interview more personal.

2.6 Follow up, attrition and other methodological problems

While longitudinal studies are suited to dynamic phenomena, the relatively small number of longitudinal studies highlights some inherent problems with the longitudinal approach. First,

in comparison to point-in-time studies, longitudinal studies can be expensive and time consuming. In addition, tracking homeless people over time is a difficult task and this raises the methodological problem of sample attrition.

Sample attrition refers to the loss of respondents over time and is a recognised risk in longitudinal research among mobile and marginalised populations (Sosin et al. 1990; De Vaus 1995; Hough, Tarke, Renker, Shields & Glatstein 1996; Sullivan, Rumpitz, Campbell, Eby & Davidson II 1996; Wong & Piliavin 1997; Dworsky & Piliavin 2000; Wong & Piliavin 2001). The systematic loss of any group of people can distort the analysis of factors that contribute to successful exits from homelessness.

International research on this problem suggests that people who remain engaged with longitudinal projects are often different from those who drop-out of the project (Sullivan et al. 1996:263; Wong & Piliavin 1997). In a study of the relationship between psychological stresses and homelessness, Wong and Piliavin (1997:1033) found that 'study participants who were lost due to attrition . . . differed from the follow-up sample in a number of ways'. Compared to the participants, they found those who dropped out were 'less well educated, more likely to have been homeless for one year or more . . . have fewer contacts with relatives and friends, and reported to have few close relationships' (Wong and Piliavin 1997:1033-1034).

In prospective longitudinal studies of the homeless and other vulnerable populations, the reported attrition rates range from over 40 per cent in Sosin, Piliavin and Westerfelt's (1990) two wave longitudinal study of homeless people in Minneapolis⁹, to 15 per cent¹⁰ in Wong and Piliavin's (1997) study of homeless-domiciled transitions. However, these are American studies and the only comparable Australian¹¹ longitudinal study is Project I (Mallett et al. 2003). Project I differs from this study in that its primary focus was young people

⁹ The attrition rates varied slightly with 42.4 per cent and 40 per cent for their recent arrivals sample and for the cross section sample respectively.

¹⁰ This rate is confusing as the time span between interviews ranged from 92 days to 678 days (1997:411), which in a subsequent paper Wong and Piliavin (2001:1033) explain as a result of 'search and scheduling problems'. The substantive implications of these methodological problems are unclear and ignored by the researchers.

¹¹ Project I is an American funded project.

between 12 and 20 years of age who were at risk of, or who had experienced homelessness. Nevertheless, 165 homeless young people in Melbourne were initially interviewed and after three months 72 per cent (N=119) had been retained (Rice, Milburn, Rotheram-Borus, Mallett & Rosenthal 2005).

In this research three strategies were employed during the first interview to minimise possible sample attrition. First, to develop rapport with the respondents, every effort was made to undertake face-to-face interviews. Engaging with the respondents was also complemented by my professional background which included many years working with people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

Second, the single most important strategy was the development of a broad range of 'anchor points' at the first interview. Anchor points are items of information 'about where, or who may know where a research participant may be found' (Hough et al. 1996:884). The prevailing view is that as much information on as many as possible anchor points should be gathered at both the benchmark and subsequent interviews (Menard 1991:36). For this study the anchor points included the names of family members, friends or services who could be contacted to get a message to the participants. Adopting an idea from Sullivan et al (1996:267) every respondent was also given a card that included my name, mobile phone number and the date of the next interview.

The third strategy relied on technology to contact respondents. Two methods - mobile phones and hotmail addresses (email) - were useful. For many people their mobile phone provided a future point of contact in a world of constant change and movement. However, of the 36 respondents who provided a mobile number, just under one fifth (19 percent) of these phone numbers were inactive by the second interview. In addition, a small group of people (N=8) used mobile phones to send SMS messages to me as the date of their second interview approached. Hotmail (email) addresses were another form of technology that was used to stay in contact with a small number of respondents (N=6). With these

strategies in place, 79 respondents were successfully re-interviewed approximately nine months¹² later, resulting in a 21¹³ per cent attrition rate.

Comparing those who remained in the study (the second interview group, N=79) with those that did not (the attrition group, N=21) revealed some differences between the two groups, although they were modest (Appendix J). Generally, while the attrition group were more likely to be single, were slightly younger and less likely to have completed year 12, there were few other differences between the two groups.

A concern was that the attrition rate would be higher among the long term homeless because other longitudinal studies have reported the long term homeless are more likely to be 'lost' between interviews (Wong & Piliavin 1997; Dworsky & Piliavin 2000). This was not the case and proportionally more short-term homeless dropped out between interview waves than people who had experienced long term homelessness. While it is hard to determine the precise reasons why this occurred, a plausible explanation is that some people wanted to leave their past behind them, reflecting a desire to distance themselves from their homeless experiences¹⁴.

2.7 Next step

In the first chapter I made the point that homelessness is best considered diachronically. Longitudinal research is an inherently diachronic approach and consequently it is a suitable method for answering the research question. Like any research method, longitudinal approaches have their limitations, but as a way of untangling complex temporal processes it is recognised as an effective approach.

¹² The average elapsed time between the first interview (T1) and the second interview (T2) was 311 days. On average 226 days had elapsed between the time people left transitional accommodation and the second interview.

¹³ The original sample was 103, but three people died before the second interview.

¹⁴ Two people who had been homeless for only a short period of time commented they were reluctant to do the second interview for precisely these reasons. Eventually, they decided to undertake the interview for two reasons. First, they had committed to the project. Second, they thought their experiences might be helpful to address what they saw as problems in the transitional program.

The framework for this study differs from most other longitudinal studies of homelessness in its use of both retrospective and prospective approaches. This approach provided a way of connecting different processes and experiences linked to becoming homeless, with being homeless and pathways out of homelessness. The biggest problem facing any researcher using longitudinal methods is sample attrition. The strategies implemented in this study to reduce sample attrition were reasonably successful as the attrition rate of 21 per cent is reasonably low in comparison to similar longitudinal studies.

With the research question and strategy in place, the next step involves establishing the theoretical framework for thinking about the relationship between becoming, being and exiting homelessness. As becoming homeless involves thinking about the reasons that led people into the homeless population, a logical starting point is the issue of causality. The theoretical framework is then extended so that it provides a means of analysing what happens to people when they are homeless, and how they 'get out' and 'stay out' of the homeless population. How I did this is the focus of the following chapter.

3 Theoretical framework

The question of why homelessness exists as a major social problem has been confused with the question of who is most likely to become homeless (Bassuk et al. 1997: 241).

3.1 Introduction

Prior to the 1980s homelessness was largely explained by the absence of social relationships rather than a lack of accommodation (La Gory, Ritchey & Fitzpatrick 1991). Drawing on Robert Merton's (1968) theory of structural functionalism, American sociologists Theodore Caplow, Howard Bahr and Davis Sternberg use the idea of chronic social isolation or disaffiliation to describe homelessness as 'a condition of detachment from society characterised by the absence or the attenuation of the affiliative bonds that link settled persons to a network of interconnected social structures' (Caplow, Bahr & Sternberg 1968:494). The disaffiliation thesis emphasises the role of human agency in that 'certain adults withdraw from normative conduct . . . and choose to live at the borders of society' (Sosin 1992:171).

As the homeless population began to change in the 80s, explanations of homelessness shifted and became increasingly framed in terms of the relative importance of structural factors. More recently, many social researchers have questioned the separation of structural factors and human agency and suggested that future research should focus their attention on explanations that move between the two (Hutson & Liddiard 1994; Koegel et al. 1995; Metraux & Culhane 1999; May 2000; Adkins et al. 2003; Clapham 2003).

This chapter presents the theoretical framework I use to examine the connection between patterns of entry into homelessness with movements through and out of homelessness. The chapter starts with a discussion of cause and then turns its attention to structural explanations of homelessness and those approaches that emphasise human agency. The chapter goes on to argue that explanations that focus on structure or agency,

are on their own, insufficient, and that explanations must be able to move between structural factors and human agency.

Despite efforts to bridge structure and agency, studies of homelessness have failed to explain how structure and agency interact. As a consequence there is little evidence explaining the implications of different patterns of interaction in terms of how individuals experience homelessness, and the way people try to 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness. I use elements of Giddens (1984) theory of structuration to overcome these problems by:

1. Understanding structures more broadly to include 'non-material' structures;
2. Arguing that structures can enable as well as constrain social action;
3. Using the pathways concept to analyse patterns of interaction within and between homeless subgroups and different social structures over time;
4. Framing the pathways idea using Giddens (1984) concept of routinization.

Pathways are an ideal type method used in many studies of homelessness. However, homeless pathways have largely been distinguished along demographic lines. I argue that this approach needs to be re-considered with greater emphasis on the issues that lead to the first experience of homelessness.

Using the idea of routinization, or the process by which something is made to be normal or routine, the chapter goes on to argue that variations in homelessness can be explained by recognising that people either 'reject' or 'embrace' homelessness depending on how they view and respond to the stigma attached to homelessness, and how they respond to the homeless subculture. How people respond to these two structures locates them in different social contexts where different routines emerge. These routines have consequences for people when they are homeless, as well as having different consequences in terms of 'getting out' and 'staying out' of the homeless population.

3.2 The issue of causality

Historically, sociology has always struggled with the issue of causality. The early sociology of Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) was strongly influenced by the natural sciences, in particular cause and effect analysis. While the impact of the ‘scientific’ approach on sociological thinking has been significant (Van Krieken, Smith, Habibis, McDonald, Haralambos & Holborn 2000) its appropriateness for social analysis has generated considerable debate.

Among those who debate the relevance of the scientific approach are social researchers who contend that homelessness is a ‘complex’ social phenomenon (Williams 2001; Fitzpatrick 2005; Pleace 2005). By ‘complex’, studies generally mean that there are multiple ‘causes’ of homelessness. The complexity of social systems, social relations and social problems like homelessness, is derived, in part, from their fluid nature, or what Giddens calls their ‘open-endedness’ (Giddens 1984:597). Sociologists have long been aware that such open-endedness makes it difficult to establish causal relationships in the same way that it is possible to establish ‘cause’ in the natural sciences. This does not mean that the idea of cause is redundant. Rather, it suggests that social theory must reflect on the fact that men and women are actively engaged in making their own lives and consciously reflect upon events and social processes. In a famous passage from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* Marx wrote that:

[People] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but in circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past (Marx 1969:360).

Marx was drawing attention to the fact that while people make their own history, they are constrained by the way power is exercised in societies. This is sometimes referred to as the debate about the relative importance of structure and agency (Jones 1997; Clapham 2003).

This is also a well rehearsed debate in the homeless literature and authors have shown that there are ‘two polarised camps’ with researchers tending to opt for either structural explanations or individualistic (agency) explanations (Jones 1987; Blasi 1990;

Shlay & Rossi 1992; Neil & Fopp 1993; Koegel et al. 1995:1642; Hallebone 1997; Jones 1997; Neale 1997; May 2000). The following section outlines the characteristics of both structural and individual explanations of homelessness.

3.3 Structure and agency

3.3.1 Structural explanations

Australian studies of homelessness largely rest on structural explanations (Neil & Fopp 1993; Fopp 1998; Bartholomew 1999; Horn 2002). The contention of such studies is that the major causes of homelessness are to be found at the 'level of societal structures' (Clapham 2003:119). These structuralist arguments rest on the premise that human behaviour (or action) is ultimately determined by social structures whose impact and effects extend across individuals and across time. Five structural factors commonly linked to homelessness are poverty (Huth 1997; Avramov 1999; Burt 1999; Chamberlain & Johnson 2002a), housing and labour market conditions (Neil & Fopp 1993; Marcuse 1996; Bartholomew 1999; Horn 2002), de-institutionalisation (Hallebone 1997; Victorian Homelessness Strategy Ministerial Advisory Committee 2001) and increasing rates of family dissolution (House of Representatives 1995; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1998).

I focus on three specific problems with structural explanations. The first is that structural explanations fail to explain why, among people who share similar social and economic positions, some people become homeless and others do not. The second problem is that structural explanations of homelessness typically focus on structures that have a 'material' aspect to them and this reflects a tendency to treat structures as independent of human action. The third problem I intend to focus on is that structures are commonly treated solely as constraints on human actions. In the following section I work through each of these problems in turn.

When it comes to explaining movements into, through and out of homelessness, the first problem with structural explanations is that they are unclear on the reasons why certain structural factors result in homelessness for some people, when others who are in similar social and economic positions, manage to avoid homelessness. For instance, poverty is the 'single most common characteristic' reported in the homeless population (Anderson & Christian 2003:107) but not everyone who experiences poverty becomes homeless.

Similarly, studies that focus on the cost of housing for low income households (or the level of housing stress¹⁵) fail to adequately explain who is least able to compete for scarce housing resources and consequently why some low income people are more vulnerable to homelessness than others (For example see Berry & Hall 2001; Wulff, Yates & Burke 2001; Harding, Phillips & Kelly 2004).

If we also take into account the episodic nature of homelessness, the problem for many formerly homeless households is not so much finding housing, but keeping it. This means that while many households can, and do exit homelessness, sustaining housing or 'staying out' is problematic for some. This raises the question of why some people are more susceptible to re-occurring homelessness than others. This is connected to the issue of affordability, and, in as much as affordability is linked to housing supply, it is also linked to income and employment levels. As far back as the 1920s American sociologist Nels Anderson argued that:

All the problems of the homeless man go back in one way or another to the conditions of his work . . . To deal with him even as an individual, society must deal with the economic forces which have formed his behaviour (Anderson 1923:121).

In Australia there is little empirical research that directly examines the nexus between employment and homelessness. Nevertheless, there are those who argue that the primary reason homelessness has increased here (Neil & Fopp 1993; Hallebone 1997) and overseas (Elliott & Krivo 1991; Burt 1992) is because of changes to the labour market, the most

¹⁵ The most basic and widely adopted measure of housing stress is calculated by determining how many households in the bottom 40 per cent of income earners are paying more than 30 per cent of total household income on housing costs (National Housing Strategy 1991)

'obvious stemming from the poverty brought about by the increased level of unemployment' (Neil & Fopp 1993:44). However, this 'common sense' assumption is problematic as recent evidence shows that unemployment has declined by over 100,000 in the last decade (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003;2005), yet there has been little, if any, reduction in the number of homeless people (Chamberlain 1999; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003).

Similarly, some studies and reports take it as axiomatic that de-institutionalisation has contributed to the rise in homelessness over the last decade (Hallebone 1997; Crane & Warnes 2000; Victorian Homelessness Strategy 2002). However, the link between de-institutionalisation and homelessness has not been empirically established here or overseas (see Jencks (1994) for a critique of this argument). While it is an intuitively appealing explanation, it is difficult to ascertain why de-institutionalisation has resulted in homelessness for some people with mental health problems when others in similar social and economic positions remain housed.

Along with poverty, the state of housing and labour markets and de-institutionalisation, another important factor specifically linked to the surge in youth homelessness and the appearance of women and families in the homeless population, is the increased rate of family breakdown. Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998) argue that increasing divorce rates and changes to household structures increase the number of young people 'at risk' of homelessness. They suggest many young people caught in the middle of changes to family life struggle to adjust, and as tension builds at home, problems become more pronounced. Some of these problems are linked to neglect and physical and sexual abuse. While some people faced with these problems leave home and find their way into the homeless population, others, however, do not.

Changes to household structures increase the vulnerability of all family members, not just young people. For instance, the heightened vulnerability of single parent families to homelessness, 85 per cent of which are headed by women (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005:15), has been used to argue that poverty is increasingly being feminized and that the

cause of homelessness is not social inequality in any Marxist sense, but patriarchy (Watson 1984; Watson & Austerberry 1986; Watson 1988;2001).

However, explaining women's homelessness as a result of a single causal mechanism such as patriarchy does not hold up to scrutiny. Joanne Neale (1997) and Susan Fitzpatrick (2005:8) point out that homeless women have special institutional access arrangements in the UK and the claim that female homelessness tends to be hidden ignores the evidence that women, not men, are more likely to use services. In Australia, Chamberlain and Mackenzie (2003:4) make a similar observation. They note that because of the 'perceived vulnerability of homeless women, their access to services is often facilitated'.

These concerns highlight the broader point that homelessness is contingent on the production and reproduction of a range of social structures by individuals through their social practices. As Neale (1997:53) notes, the emphasis on a single social structure such as patriarchy denies women 'their agency . . . capable of effecting change'. This criticism is relevant to any structural account that focuses on a single causal mechanism and ignores the role of individuals (agency).

While structural explanations can help us to understand the societal context in which homelessness occurs, they do little to illuminate the ways different people negotiate the experience of homelessness. Likewise, structural explanations tell us little about the consequences of different responses to the experience of homelessness in terms of 'getting out' and 'staying out' of homelessness. As May (2000:614) argues, the problem with structural explanations of homelessness is that 'the specifics of how that structural position translates into homelessness are largely left unexplored'.

A second problem with structural accounts of homelessness is that they generally focus on structures that have a material or physical aspect to them. The focus on housing and labour markets, rates of household dissolution and poverty reflects a tendency to treat structures as something physical or independent of human action. However, Giddens (1984) argues that structures are not physical things as such, but rather can be better understood as

being constituted by 'rules and resources'¹⁶ (Giddens 1984:169) that structure the nature of all social practices. For instance, a housing market is not a 'physical thing' and although it has a material reality, it is comprised of relationships which are mediated or structured by the availability of resources, and through different legal and financial rules.

In Australia researchers have generally focused on structures that have a material aspect. In doing so, researchers have ignored the role of other structures such as stigma which takes the form of negative community attitudes towards the homeless, the mentally ill and people who use illicit substances. I overcome this tendency to think of structures as only material 'things' by identifying a number of additional 'non-material' or cultural structures. By 'non-material' I refer to cultural structures that have no tangible presence in the sense that a house or a job has a material reality. Others have made a similar distinction. Porpora (1998) criticises Giddens' emphasis on rules and resources. Porpora argues that of more fundamental importance are material social relationships such as the distribution of income and job opportunities. Housing opportunities could also be added to this. One can argue that Giddens implicitly recognised this distinction by contrasting 'virtual' structures (the rules) which only have a presence in their 'instantiations' (Giddens 1984:17) with those 'deeply embedded' (p.17) structures that have a 'space-time' or material presence – structures Giddens calls institutions. While this distinction is a subtle one - as both material and non-material structures have causal effects - I use it to draw attention to these 'other' structures, rather than to challenge the ontological basis of Giddens work as Porpora (1998) and others (Bryant & Jary 1991; Bryant 1995) do.

There are two features of homelessness research which can be recognised as non-material structures. First, many studies of persistent homelessness refer to a process of acculturation that occurs as people start to engage with the homeless subculture (Wallace 1965; Grigsby, Baumann, Gregorich & Roberts-Grey 1990; Piliavin et al. 1994; Wolch, Dear

¹⁶ There are two aspects to rules – normative elements and codes of signification. There are also two kinds of resources - authoritative resources and allocative resources. The former are derived from coordination of human activity and the latter system from the control of material aspects (Giddens 1984)

& Akita 1998). The homeless subculture is not a physical structure, but consists of rules, values, practices and shared experiences that influence the nature of homeless people's interactions with other homeless people, with people who are housed and, ultimately, their experience of homelessness.

Second, homelessness is widely understood as a stigmatised identity in Western countries (Neil & Fopp 1993; Phelan, Link, Moore & Stueve 1997; Laing 2000b; Robinson 2003; Roschelle & Kaufman 2004). As Goffman (1963) in his seminal work on stigma reminds us, stigma is a cultural construct or 'non-material' structure in that stigma reflects historically and culturally conditioned social relationships. For people facing or experiencing homelessness, stigma is real in that they have to deal with the devalued identity attached to homelessness as much as they have to deal with shortages in the supply of affordable housing. Both of these non-material structures are discussed in greater detail in subsequent pages.

There are two further non-material structures I intend to examine. The first I term adverse childhood experiences. By this I refer to reports of physical and/or sexual abuse as a young person (under 16) and/or experiences in the state care and protection system. I elaborate on this issue in subsequent chapters, but the relevant point to make here is that I consider these experiences to have a structural origin, because as Fopp (1992:26) points out, they are 'inflicted on young people'.

The final non-material structure is family support. A lack of family support has been identified in many studies of homelessness as a 'key factor making some individuals more vulnerable than others to homelessness' (Snow & Anderson 1993:260). While the line between material and non-material structures is a fine one, I treat family support as a non-material structure for three reasons. First, it is external to individuals. Second, family support involves emotional as well as material support. Third, changes in the level and type of family support can influence the way individuals interact with other social structures.

Thinking about the idea of 'structure' in this way provides better guidance in understanding how different patterns of interactions are reproduced over time. In Table 3.1

the six material structures and six non-material structures which form the theoretical framework are identified.

Table 3.1 Material and non-material structures

Material structures	Non-material structures
Housing market conditions	Homeless subculture
Labour market conditions	Stigma - homelessness
Poverty	Stigma - mental illness
Deinstitutionalisation	Stigma - illicit substance use
Homeless service system	Adverse childhood experiences
Household dissolution	Family support

A third problem with structural explanations is that structures are commonly treated solely as constraints that place '*limits on the range of options open to an actor*' (Giddens 1984:177, original italics). This has obscured the point that structures also enable or 'open up certain possibilities of action' (Giddens 1984:173). In moving to a position that recognises social structures can enable as well as constrain action, Giddens theorised that structures vary according to the 'context' in which they are experienced, and the nature of a 'given sequence of action or strip of interaction' (Giddens 1984:177). This means that the same structure can operate as a constraining factor at one time, and as an enabling factor at another. As an example, family support can be critical in enabling people with mental health problems to remain in stable housing. If family support is reduced or removed entirely (through the death of a parent for instance), people with mental health problems can have difficulty dealing with the social practices necessary to maintain accommodation such as regular rent and bill payments. In this way the lack of family support operates as a constraint on their housing opportunities.

Thinking about social structures as both enabling and constraining provides a framework for explaining how patterns of interactions vary among individuals on different pathways. Further, as patterns of interactions and the social practices that support them are

repeated, they 'reproduce familiar forms of social life' (Giddens 1984:131) such as homelessness.

The idea of routinization¹⁷, or the process by which something is made to be everyday, normal or routine, is a 'fundamental concept' of British sociologist Anthony Giddens theory of structuration (Giddens 1984:xxiii). Structuration theory in general, and routinization more specifically, draws attention to the way individuals actively engage with and shape the social system in which they exist through their daily routines; and the way that daily activities (routines) of actors are both constrained and enabled by structural factors. While routines position individuals in certain social contexts, routines also emphasise the 'personality of the agent as he or she moves along the path of daily activity' (Giddens 1984:60). Routines are, more or less, the rhythm or the flow of daily life; they are the familiar, reassuring processes that position us in a range of social contexts such as the workplace, school, family, friends and neighbourhoods (Giddens 1984:85).

The importance of routine in everyday life features in a number of studies. In their study of resistance to everyday life, Cohen and Taylor (1978:69) demonstrate that security is obtained from sameness and repetition. Routines are thus a vital psychological mechanism whereby a sense of trust or ontological security is nurtured and sustained through the regular rhythm of social life. The idea of ontological security is an important part of Giddens theory of structuration. For Giddens:

Ordinary day-to-day life – in greater or lesser degrees according to the context and the vagaries of individual personality – involves an *ontological security* expressing an *autonomy of bodily control* within *predictable routines* (Giddens 1984:50, italics in the original).

Routines frequently change, and most changes, such as when children go to school for the first time, are predictable. Going to school for the first time involves disruption for both parent and child but, over time, parents and children re-establish new routines and interactions associated with the new locale, in this instance, school. However, Giddens

¹⁷ The concepts of routine and routinization stem from the work of Max Weber. In German the original terms are *Alltag*, which stands for the everyday, and *Veralltaglichung*, which literally means the process by which something is made to be everyday (Berger & Berger 1976)

theorised that when we experience a 'critical situation' (Giddens 1984:51) such as becoming homeless, daily life is so seriously disrupted that trust in the predictability, continuity and permanence of our social context can be broken. Whether the disruption occurs because of changes in external conditions or because of the actions of individuals, what commonly follows is a period of 'heightened anxiety' (Giddens 1984:64) as people try to adjust to their new social circumstances and the new social identity attached to those circumstances.

Becoming homeless is a 'critical situation' for many households, but this is not always the case. It is important to note that the diverse causes of homelessness can produce different responses in the process of becoming homeless. For instance, for some young people escaping abusive family relationships, becoming homeless is not a critical situation in that the social context they are leaving is rarely characterised by any form of ontological security. Thus, it follows that the level of anxiety and the degree to which homelessness is a critical situation, is mediated by the biographies people bring with them. Nevertheless, whether the experience of becoming homeless constitutes a critical disruption or not, pre-existing routines are broken during the process and people have to rebuild their routines in an entirely new social context.

Because behaviour and structure are intertwined in people's routines, people are dependent on existing structures, and at the same time, can alter structures through their activities or practices - that is, structures do not exist outside of social action but exist because of it. This approach recasts the relationship between structure and agency from one characterised by dualism (e.g; structure and agency as independent of each other) to a mutually dependent duality. This emphasises the interaction between structure and agency, with each being determined and determining at the same time. This is the essence of what Giddens calls the duality of structure. Giddens sums up his position thus:

Human societies or social systems would plainly not exist without human agency. But it is not the case that actors create social systems: they reproduce or transform them, remaking what is already made in the continuity of practice (Giddens 1984:171).

Giddens theory of structuration rests on the idea that people are influenced by the social structures and cultural traditions of their society, yet they are actively engaged in making their own history. The most important element being that people can make considered choices (that is, they are knowledgeable agents), but these choices are made within a range of options determined by existing structures that both constrain and enable action.

In conceptualising social structures this way, combined with an emphasis on the 'purposive, reasoning behaviour of agents' (Giddens 1984:179), my interpretation of Giddens also addresses the problem of structural determinism in explanations of homelessness. This is important because variations in the experience of homelessness reminds us that what happens to people who are socially and economically disadvantaged is not pre-determined. Families negotiate unemployment and poverty in different ways; teenagers and parents negotiate conflict in diverse ways; and people respond to housing problems in different ways. With these issues in mind, it is important to consider explanations that take the notion of human agency as their central theme – namely, accounts of homelessness that emphasise the active role of individuals in creating social reality.

3.3.2 Individual explanations: emphasising agency

In contrast to structural explanations, there are those who argue that studying human behaviour requires first and foremost an explanatory framework based on individual characteristics. While individual theories take a number of forms, what is common to most is that they emphasise the active role of the individual actor in making decisions and being responsible for their own situation. Unlike structural accounts, this approach emphasises that people have 'as an inherent aspect of what they do, the capacity to understand what they do while they are doing it' (Giddens 1984:xxii).

Individual explanations that focus on homelessness are generally predicated on a belief that homelessness is 'reducible to the force of innate or acquired personal deficits'

(Pinkney & Ewing 2006:64). Individual explanations focus understanding and practice onto reforming individuals as the way to ameliorate social problems. The problem here is that these individual explanations commonly ignore the context in which individual problems occur. As a result they present a 'truncated, decontextualised and overly pathological picture of the homeless' (Snow, Anderson & Koegel 1994:469). Individual explanations, particularly behaviouralist studies, lack a sense of social structure and, more importantly, 'a theory of the social causes of such individual problems' (Ritzer 1988:31). Thus, while individual vulnerabilities can contribute to homelessness, the social context for homeless people is also shaped by their opportunities.

Elliott and Krivo (1991), Snow, Anderson & Koegel (1994) and Bartholomew (1999) argue that raising individual character flaws to the primary analytical level diverts attention away from structural factors 'and [this] ultimately reinforces stereotypes about the homeless population' (Bartholomew 1999:12). This line of reasoning also suggests that individual explanations abrogate the State of responsibility for the provision of basic needs, and consequently can be linked to the reproduction of the status quo (Iyengar 1990).

Although there are problems with some individual explanations, homelessness is a lived experience and any complete account must reflect on the issue of agency or individual action. As Plese (1998:56) notes, the causes of homelessness are 'never one thing or another, sometimes the structural factors seem all important, sometimes it is . . . factors that seem almost unique to each individual'. This raises the point that the agency/structure dichotomy hides the 'interactive relationship between the two' (Katz 1993:441). As Jones (1997:100) points out, both structural and individual approaches in 'their different ways oversimplify the problem and obstruct its solution'.

3.3.3 Integrating structure and agency

Social researchers have responded to this problem by weaving together structure and agency into a third way or 'middle road' (Jones 1997:100). This 'middle road' approach

rejects the idea that homelessness can be unproblematically reduced to structural or individual factors. This approach does not close down the possibility that structural or individual factors on their own may cause homelessness, but it does emphasise how the social processes leading to homelessness (as well as the experience of homelessness and routes out of homelessness), are mediated through the interaction of agency and structure. As Koegel et al. (1995:1642) point out, to understand contemporary homelessness, 'both perspectives are needed'.

At the heart of the theoretical model proposed here is the argument that while people are influenced by the social structures and cultural traditions of their society, they are, at the same time, actively engaged in making their own life history. The inherent strength of thinking this way is that the precise combinations of structure and agency can vary from person to person, from place to place, and from time to time with different consequences.

The diverse reasons that result in homelessness and variations in people's experience of homelessness presents social researchers interested in the structure / agency relationship with many challenges. I have applied Max Weber's (1949) notion of 'ideal types' to identify the salient features of the various pathways into homelessness to address this problem. Ideal types are a particularly useful way of looking at 'infinitely differentiated and highly contradictory phenomenon (Weber 1949:96) and are a practical means by which social scientists can 'make the characteristic features of . . . [a] relationship pragmatically clear and understandable' (Weber 1949:90). The suitability of ideal types as a means of examining homeless careers and pathways has been demonstrated (Hutson & Liddiard 1994; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1998; Fitzpatrick 2000; Chamberlain & Johnson 2002a). The five 'typical' pathways into homelessness I identify are: mental health problems, domestic violence, housing crisis, substance use and youth. The five pathways are not causal accounts as such, but typifications that simplify the diversity of experiences in such a way that the interaction between structural and individual factors can be seen more clearly.

3.4 Pathways

The use of the pathways concept by homeless researchers is predicated on the view that current approaches that conceptualise homelessness in terms of homeless careers underplay movements into and out of homelessness. This is because career models assume a degree of 'linearity' and 'inevitability' (see for instance Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1998; Chamberlain & Johnson 2002a). This approach ignores the different experience people have of homelessness, as well as findings from longitudinal studies that suggest the most common pattern 'seems to be one of residential insecurity rather than continuous homelessness over long periods of time' (Sosin et al. 1990:171).

While the career idea is a useful means of examining temporal order, Anderson and Christian (2003), along with a number of other homeless researchers from both Australia and overseas, suggest the pathways approach is better. This is because the pathways approach emphasises the sameness of some careers and, at the same time, is a means for distinguishing differences in careers (Weitzman et al. 1990; Butler & Weatherly 1995; O'Dwyer 1997; Anderson & Tulloch 2000; Scottish Executive Central Research Unit 2000; Casey 2001; Clapham 2002;2003).

Furthermore, studies that use the pathways concept generally recognise that the social practices that characterise becoming, being and exiting homelessness have both an agency and structural dimension. By examining changes in social relationships and social practices, the pathways approach provides a means of illuminating 'not just the relative importance of biographic and structural factors, but also of their interaction' (Pinkney & Ewing 2006:86). Although homeless studies do this with varying degrees of success, the point is that the link between structure and agency is uppermost in the minds of researchers who use the pathways approach.

Apart from an interest in the interaction between individual action and structural forces, researchers using the pathways approach generally share two assumptions. Firstly, a clearer sense of sequencing and interaction can be developed by locating the experience

of homelessness in the broader context of an individual's life history (or biography). The second assumption is that biographical data gives a stronger voice to the lived experience of homelessness.

There are, however, problems with the pathways approach. First, the principle basis for subdividing different homeless pathways generally follows demographic lines (Table 3.2). There are studies that focus on age pathways, studies that focus on gender pathways, studies that focus on the pathways different household types travel and a smaller body of studies that focus on the issues that 'cause' homelessness, such as mental health problems or substance use. As these studies generally include a demographic delineation such as gender or age, I classify them as 'mixed'.

Table 3.2 Selection of homeless studies that use the pathways idea

Author	Country	Key variable	Method(s)
Morris et al. (2005)	Aus	Age	Single interview
Mallett et al. (2003)	Aus/U.S	Age	Longitudinal
Anderson & Tulloch (2000)	U.K	Age	Literature review
Fitzpatrick (2000)	U.K	Age	Longitudinal
Crane (1999)	U.K	Age	Single interview
Adkins et al. (2003)	Aus	Gender	Literature review
Casey (2001)	Aus	Gender	Single interview
Chung et al. (2000)	Aus	Gender	Literature review
Bulter and Weatherly (1995)	U.S	Gender	Single interview
Tomas & Ditmar (1995)	U.K	Gender	Single interview
Mulroy and Lane (1992)	U.S	Household type	Literature review
Weitzman et al. (1990)	U.S	Household type	Survey data
Mackenzie & Chamberlain (2003)	Aus	Mixed	Administrative
Chamberlain & Johnson (2002a)	Aus	Mixed	Administrative
O'Dwyer (1997)	Aus	Mixed	Retrospective

There are five reasons to re-think the use of demographic characteristics as the basis for conceptualising pathways. First, it relies on the assumption that people of the same age, gender or household type have similar experiences of homelessness. It is well recognised that not all women become homeless for the same reasons or have the same experience of

homelessness. The same applies to men. Second, how different demographic factors interact is unclear – for instance, what is the relationship between age, gender, household type and the reasons for homelessness? Third, the focus on the characteristics of people means that connections between the three stages – becoming, being and exiting - are not emphasised and rarely made. Consequently, it is difficult to tell from existing homeless pathways studies whether the way people become homeless has a bearing on what subsequently happens to them. Finally, although people have tried to use the pathways concept as a link between structure and agency, researchers have generally ended up using it in a purely descriptive way - individual biographies are described and structural factors identified, but the interaction between them is generally ignored and untheorised (see for instance Anderson & Tulloch 2000). In fact, as Susan Fitzpatrick notes, many studies avoid the issue by presenting ‘an undifferentiated list, with neither the relationship to each other nor to a wider explanatory framework rigorously investigated’ (Fitzpatrick 2005:1). What this means is that researchers who use the pathways approach appear to have lost sight of the pathways idea as a means of examining the dynamic patterning of homelessness.

Clapham (2002; 2003) has probably proposed the most sophisticated way of addressing these problems. Clapham’s pathways approach emphasises the ‘continually changing set of relationships and interactions’ (Clapham 2003:122) that people experience when they are homeless. He focuses on the way discourse mediates or ‘shapes the nature of services for homeless people and the actions of both staff and homeless people themselves’ (Clapham 2003:119). Clapham’s key point is that among homeless people ‘patterns of interaction’ (Clapham 2003:122) are largely shaped by certain structures (public and policy discourse) that ‘influences the shape of intervention designed to ‘deal with’ the problems of homelessness’ (Clapham 2003:125) as well as the ‘interaction between service providers and homeless people’ (Clapham 2003:122).

However, Clapham makes no attempt to use the pathways concept to distinguish between different groups of homeless people, the agency of individuals and the different structural conditions they experience. Because Clapham’s approach fails to recognise the

importance of systematically identifying and examining the social structures which are the most important for different groups of homeless people, it ignores the implications of different material and non-material structures on the length of time people are homeless. Moreover, Clapham's approach focuses solely on the experience of homelessness and this means the issue of how people's path into homelessness connects to their experience of homelessness is also ignored. Finally, Clapham's emphasis on discourse and policy misses the point that social policy constructs only part of the environment homeless people engage with and that a range of factors, both structural and biographical, shape people's responses to homelessness.

My purpose is to use the pathways approach to distinguish between the paths different groups of people travel into homelessness and to examine the different social structures they encounter and reproduce along the way. I use the five ideal type pathways into homelessness as the analytical framework for the thesis to establish the connection between pathways into homelessness and pathways out of homelessness. Using the five entry pathways as the analytical framework is important because it provides the capacity to distinguish between those processes that lead to homelessness and those processes that emerge as a result of being homeless. Clarifying temporal order is essential to identify the connections between pre-homeless experiences and the experience of homelessness and, likewise, the impact of both of these experiences in terms of 'getting out' and 'staying out' of homelessness.

In the next chapter I will argue that the material and non-material structures identified in Table 3.1 come together in different ways in each of the five pathways, in the main acting as constraining factors, but occasionally as enabling factors. I am also going to draw attention to how individuals negotiate these pathways and although most people do not travel the pathways in exactly the same way, there are typical patterns of interaction that can be identified.

Whichever pathway people travel on, becoming homeless involves a disruption to existing routines and new routines begin to form once they are homeless. The form these

routines take is influenced by the way people deal with a range of social structures, but in every case people have to deal with both the stigma of homelessness and other people who are in similar circumstances (the homeless subculture). I focus on these two structures to emphasise similarities and differences in the way people on each pathway experience becoming and being homeless. In order to explain how homelessness becomes routinized for some households and not for others, the following two sections outline the theoretical framework I use to explain the role both stigma and the homeless subculture play in people's experience of homelessness.

3.4.1 Stigma

Stigma is a non-material structure in that it structures social relations and influences the daily activities of agents. The attempt by those who have become homeless to re-establish predictability and continuity in their lives, occurs within the context of a stigmatised social identity (La Gory et al. 1991:212; Phelan et al. 1997; Roschelle & Kaufman 2004). As Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak & Brokaw (2005:306) point out, people who experience homelessness interpret and respond to meanings 'already inscribed . . . in socially and historically structured environments'.

When people become homeless, homelessness commonly becomes a 'pivotal category'¹⁸ in terms of their social identity (Roschelle & Kaufman 2004). This can mediate social interaction in one of two ways. One, the social location of homelessness as a stigmatised identity influences how people construct and manage their behaviour on the basis of the meaning *they* have assigned to that identity. Second, the social identity of an individual and the social location that identity occupies, influences how others interpret his or her behaviour irrespective of what the behaviour actually is.

¹⁸ Goffman (1963:17) uses the term pivotal fact.

Taking up Cooley's famous idea of the 'looking glass self'¹⁹ (Cooley 1964:184), according to which identities are defined in the way that individuals see *themselves* reflected through their social interactions, Peter Burke (1991) theorises that individuals seek to maintain a balance between their view of themselves (what is termed their identity standard) and their perception of how others see them (their reflected appraisal). The idea of reflected appraisal is important in terms of how 'individuals actively construct identity and present themselves to others' (Kaufman & Johnson 2004: 808). In essence, reflected appraisals sensitise us to the process whereby people try to reduce any inconsistency between their identity standard and how others see them.

In the context of homelessness being a stigmatised identity, routinization tends to occur in one of two ways. First, many people try to avoid the prejudicial responses by disengaging with, or distancing themselves from the spoiled identity linked to homelessness. Research has found that one way individuals try to avoid prejudicial responses is to hide their stigma and pass as 'part of the dominant group and thereby feign normalcy' (Kaufman & Johnson 2004: 812). The idea of 'passing' is central to the way some individuals try to reduce the inconsistency between their standard identity as 'normal' and their lived experience of being homeless.

Implicit in the practice of passing is that people have internalised the negative views of the dominant group, or what I loosely term throughout the thesis as the mainstream (see Oyserman & Swim 2001), and base their identity standard on these views. With its emphasis on avoiding other homeless people (and their locales) passing creates different patterns of interaction and this highlights one form of routinization. For some groups the way their daily routines are constructed reflect conscious decisions and concrete social practices through which they resist homelessness. Routines, and the social context that sustains them, are therefore implicated in the way people manage a stigmatised identity (Goffman 1963).

¹⁹ 'Each to each a looking glass, reflects the other that doth pass' (Cooley 1964:184).

However, while the way stigma is managed is often directed towards acceptance (Goffman 1963:19), in the context of homelessness, a crucial distinction is whether acceptance is sought from the mainstream or other homeless people. Recent research shows that many people who experience stigma (insiders) commonly have a different view of stigma to what 'outsiders' imagine. From this perspective some 'insider' groups seek 'to make sense of the social world and attain positive outcomes, not simply avoid negative ones' (Oyserman & Swim 2001:1). That is, rather than distancing themselves, some people respond to stigma in a way that involves connecting with others in similar circumstances.

This highlights a second form of routinization. Individuals who 'embrace' homelessness commonly become involved in a homeless subculture. Through interaction with other people in similar situations, a homeless subculture provides 'an essentially non-stigmatising reference group and a source of interpersonal validation' (Snow & Anderson 1993:173). Goffman notes that:

Without something to belong to, we have no stable self, and yet total commitment and attachment to any social unit implies a kind of selflessness. Our sense of being a person can come from being drawn into a wider social unit; our sense of selfhood can arise through the little ways in which we resist the pull. Our status is backed by the solid building of the world, while our sense of personal identity often resides in the cracks (Goffman 1961: 280).

Validation represents a basic instrumental function critical to the development and maintenance of some level of ontological security. In providing predictability and social validation, involvement in the homeless subculture can suppress the ontological insecurity typically associated with being homeless (Neil & Fopp 1993:9). Through interaction with the homeless subculture, new routines emerge and through these routines 'homelessness starts to become normal' (Cullen & Marshall 1999:35) or everyday. Over time, routines and the actions that support them embed people behaviourally and cognitively in the homeless subculture.

The important point to emphasise is that people respond to stigma differently. Goffman (1963) argues that how stigma is managed depends on the type of stigma and he

identified two types – the obvious, which he labelled the discredited, versus the non-obvious which he termed the discreditable.

According to Goffman the point of distinguishing between the two is that for the discredited the issue revolves around managing tensions in their social interactions, while for the discreditable the main issue in managing their stigma involves managing information so that their stigma is not revealed. While stigmatised individuals are likely to experience both situations, I use the distinction to draw attention to the different social practices of people on each of the pathways. The reasons why people respond in different ways to the homeless subculture needs to be explained if we are to understand the connection between pathways into homelessness and what subsequently happens to people when they are homeless.

3.4.2 The homeless subculture

The idea that some people ‘embrace’ homelessness is a central theme in studies that focus on the homeless subculture. I refer to this approach as the social identification perspective and it explains prolonged or chronic homelessness as a function of increasing acceptance of the norms and values of the homeless population. According to this approach the primary factor that prolongs homelessness is identification with, and ultimately, acceptance of homelessness as a way of life. As Snow and Anderson note:

. . . as people spend time on the streets they come to see ever more clearly how it is possible to exist in a fashion that is likely to become routinized (Snow & Anderson 1993: 182).

People who engage with the homeless subculture adapt behaviourally and cognitively over time and eventually homelessness becomes routinized or normal. This makes it increasingly difficult to ‘get out’ and ‘stay out’ of homelessness and such individuals are said to have become chronically homeless (see Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1998; Wolch et al., 1998).

This approach has a long lineage. In 1936 Edwin Sutherland and Harvey Locke wrote their influential account *Twenty Thousand Homeless Men: A Study of Unemployed*

Men in the Chicago Shelters. They argued that most individuals who used emergency accommodation initially did so with the expectation of it being a temporary arrangement. They theorised that a process of 'shelterization' took place over time - the longer men stayed in the shelter, the more dispirited they became by the impact of repeated rejection by employers, which in turn lowered their resistance to the lassitude and resignation that characterised the sub-culture of the shelter. According to Sutherland and Locke (1936) this process resulted in people retreating from their traditional social roles and avoiding their social obligations, at the same time as they increasingly identified with the norms, values and attitudes of other shelter residents.

In late 50s Samuel Wallace (1965) applied the theory of sub-cultural identification to the problem of skid row. Over a four month period in 1958, Wallace undertook a participant observation study of the Minneapolis skid row area. He recognised poverty, on its own, was an insufficient explanation for why some men live on skid row 'when equally impoverished males . . . live outside the skid row community (Wallace 1964:127). Wallace was also particularly critical of explanations that focused on alcoholism, unemployment and criminal activity, pointing out that many of these problems arose as a consequence of skid row life.

Wallace, whose work was influenced by the ideas of Howard Becker (1963), theorised that increasing participation and identification with the skid row way of life was a product of two distinct social processes, rejection and attraction. He established a three stage model that outlined the process leading to entrenchment in skid row. The first was exposure to skid row, which was followed by participation in the skid row community. The final stage involved increasing conformity to skid row values and the rejection of societal values (Wallace 1965:164).

Wallace's work is important in terms of understanding the role of the homeless subculture in shaping the experience of homelessness. In Australia the social identification approach is reflected in the work of Chris Chamberlain and David Mackenzie (1998). Their research into the homeless careers of young people outlines four distinct stages and three biographical transitions from the onset of homelessness to chronic homelessness. At this

final point individuals are deeply embedded in the homeless subculture, identify with a homeless way of life and getting out of homelessness is more complicated.

Embracing or identifying with homelessness and the emergence of adaptive 'survival' responses are commonly theorised as a function of the amount of time spent homeless (Snow & Anderson 1993). However, current research indicates that the path people travel into homelessness also influences their behaviour once they are homeless. In their longitudinal study of homeless young people, Mallett et al. (2003) found that drug use was mediated by experiences prior to homelessness. Among those who had no history of drug use at the first interview, most (though not all) were still drug free one year later.

Similar findings have also been reported by other researchers who have argued that behavioural adaptations such as prostitution (Hutson & Liddiard 1994) and self harm (Pears & Noller 1995) are linked to experiences of childhood abuse and not the amount of time people had been homeless. These findings are supported by other studies that indicate the elevated presence of certain pre-homeless experiences among the long term homeless population. These experiences include time in the state care and protection system, abuse (Bassuk et al. 1997; Roman & Wolfe 1997) and parental drug use (Baron 1999). This is not to pre-determine the career trajectories of people with these experiences or backgrounds, but rather to highlight the importance of understanding biography and social context in terms of explaining the different paths people travel through and out of homelessness.

Although the homeless subculture remains a critical concept in terms of explaining the experience of homelessness, researchers have not always explicitly defined what they mean by the homeless subculture (Hoch & Slayton 1989; Westerfelt 1990; Piliavin et al. 1993; Piliavin et al. 1996; Baldwin 1998; Wolch et al. 1998). If, at a generic level, subcultures are made up of distinct norms, values, behaviours and social practices, this raises the question of what norms, values, behaviours and social practices define the homeless subculture. David Snow and Leon Anderson's (1993) ethnographic study of street life in Austin, Texas, provides a useful starting point. They identified a distinct subculture that shaped the behaviour of homeless people with respect to their day-to-day engagement with

other homeless people, the mainstream society, and the welfare agencies established to assist them. They suggest the homeless subculture:

. . . is not a subculture in the conventional sense, though, in that it is neither anchored in nor embodies a distinctive set of shared values. Rather . . . its distinctiveness resides in a patterned set of behaviours, routines and orientations that are adaptive responses to the predicament of homelessness itself and to the associated conditions of street life (Snow and Anderson 1993:76).

Snow and Anderson's definition draws attention to the way interactions among people experiencing homelessness are both patterned and routinised. However, these patterns and routines do not simply occur because of a shared set of values or beliefs, but also because of their 'common predicament' which gives rise to 'an identifiably unique set of behaviours, daily routines and cognitive orientations' (Snow & Anderson 1993:39).

While the identification approach provides a basis for understanding persistent homelessness, career paths do not necessarily move in the same direction and it is important to be able to explain why people on certain pathways identify with homelessness while other people do not. Consequently, an explicit framework for the homeless subculture is needed to examine the reasons and extent to which people engage with others in similar social circumstances, as well as the consequences of different responses to the homeless subculture. This is the focus of the final section of the chapter.

3.4.3 The homeless subculture: a framework

In Table 3.1, I pointed out that the homeless subculture was a non-material structure. While there is no definitive account of the homeless subculture, five themes appear in many accounts and these themes form the basis of my framework. The five themes or indicators are: cognitive orientation, present orientation, resource sharing, adaptive responses and the use of the homeless service system (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 A framework for assessing the homeless subculture

Indicator	Measure
1. Cognitive orientation	1. Know homeless people 2. Homeless friends 3. Frequency of contact with other homeless people 4. Describe yourself as homeless 5. Identify with other homeless people 6. Anything in common with the homeless 7. Believes there is a negative stigma attached to homeless
2. Present orientation	1. Exit planning (housing) 2. Problem resolution
3. Resource sharing	1. Material (money, cigarettes) 2. Survival information – rules; hierarchies
4. Adaptive responses	1. Criminal activity (incarceration) 2. Substance use
5. Use of the HSS	1. Number of times in crisis or transitional accommodation

I term the first indicator cognitive orientation, and it is the broadest indicator of the five. A number of measures have been used by researchers to loosely determine the extent to which people 'embrace' or identify with homelessness. Grigsby et al. (1990:152) argue that the establishment of new social ties 'in an ecologically adaptive manner' is a critical element in the process of becoming 'acculturated to homelessness as a functional way of life'. I use three measures to establish the extent to which people's social networks include other homeless people. These are:

1. Whether people know other homeless people;
2. Whether they have friends who are homeless and;
3. Their frequency of contact with other homeless people.

I then use four measures to establish the extent to which people identify with others in similar circumstances. These are:

1. Whether people have described themselves as homeless;
2. Identify with the homeless people;
3. Whether they have anything in common with the homeless; and

4. If they believe there is a stigma attached to homelessness.

In subsequent chapters I combine these measures to form an identity index. This index is used to highlight differences in cognitive orientations among individuals across the five pathways and whether changes occur over time and as their social context changes.

Agencies that work with homeless people report that one attribute of the homeless subculture is its focus on 'day to day existence' (Bedford Street Outreach Service 1997:5). This generally means there is 'little or no planning' and there is always a 'last minute immediacy or urgency about their needs'. Snow and Anderson (1993:170) characterise this day-to-day, moment-by-moment existence as a 'present orientation'. The degree to which people exhibit a present orientation is the second indicator of involvement with the homeless subculture and two measures are used to loosely 'quantify' the degree of present orientation. In the first interview information was elicited on the type of housing people were planning to exit to, as well as people's thoughts on whether their 'problems' would be resolved by the time they exited transitional accommodation.

A third indicator of engagement with the homeless subculture is sharing resources with other people in similar circumstances. Resources can be material ones such as cigarettes, drinks, money or clothes but can also include sharing information and knowledge. These last two are important in terms of cultural reproduction.

I term the fourth indicator adaptive responses. While involvement with the homeless subculture can provide psychological and material support, some adaptive behaviours, such as substance use, can reduce the capacity and the opportunities to secure and maintain permanent accommodation. These adaptive responses highlight the internal contradiction that while acculturation to homelessness can *help* people to cope with homelessness, certain adaptations can be 'doubly disadvantageous with respect to making a permanent exit from homelessness' (Neil & Fopp 1993:10. See also Grigsby et al. 1990). Furthermore, financing problematic substance use can lead to other adaptations such as crime.

The final indicator of engagement with the homeless subculture is patterns of service usage in the homeless service system. As part of a broader welfare system the extent, nature and style of services available to the homeless has always been an important factor in the day-to-day lives of homeless people (Hirst 1989; Snow & Anderson 1993; Smith 1995). Apart from its formal role in assisting people out of homelessness (its restorative function) it is also important to consider the way in which the homeless service system might reproduce the homeless subculture.

This framework guides the subsequent empirical analysis and is used to identify common patterns and variations in the way individuals on each of the five pathways respond to being homeless, whether these responses change over time and whether they influence routes out of homelessness.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have set out the theoretical framework for the study. I have argued that to explain the connection between how people become homeless and what subsequently happens to them, explanations of homelessness need to move between structural factors and individual agency. Using an interpretation of Giddens (1984) I argue that we need to understand that structural factors come in material and non-material forms and can operate as both constraining factors and enabling factors. Six material and six non-material structures are identified. I then argue that biographical information can be used to understand the way actors interpret and negotiate these structures and create their experience of homelessness, as well as the way people try to 'get out' and 'stay out'.

The pathways approach is then introduced as a means of framing different 'patterns of interaction' (Clapham 2003:122). I argue that three issues always come up, irrespective of which pathway people travel, and how people respond to these issues has consequences in terms of what happens to them. The first issue is how people deal with the breakdown of their routines (and ontological security) in the process of becoming homeless. I introduce the

idea of routinization to draw attention to the way daily activities (or routines) are both constrained and enabled by structural factors, and that different routines locate individuals in different positions relative to a range of structural factors.

The second issue that always comes up is how individuals interpret their situation, in particular how they respond to the stigma of homelessness. I argue that there are those that 'reject' or 'resist' homelessness and those who embrace it. In contrast to existing theoretical approaches that argue the degree to which people embrace homelessness is conditioned by the duration of their homeless experience, I argue that both embracement and rejection are also mediated by persons' pre-homeless experiences and their specific pathway into homelessness.

The final issue is how people relate to others in similar social circumstances. I introduce the idea of the homeless subculture as a non-material structure to examine different patterns of interactions with other homeless people. I then examine in what way these changes influence the way individuals manage their exit from the homeless population.

In the following chapters I apply this framework to analyse pathways into, through and out of homelessness. I demonstrate that different processes of identification and resistance to homelessness occur and these reflect the different biographical experiences that characterise people's experiences on each of the five onset pathways. My argument is that the way people become homeless effectively 'establish[es] the foundation for later development' (Goffman 1963:45). While these foundations shape the 'careers available to the stigmatized' (Goffman 1963:45) there is always some variation because individual actors manage situations in different ways with different consequences. Nevertheless, shared experiences have implications in terms of the likelihood that people will adapt to homelessness as a way of life, the length of time people will be homeless, and, ultimately, how people attempt to 'get out' and 'stay out' of the homeless population.

With the theoretical and conceptual framework in place and the research question established, the following chapter examines the different ways people on each of the five 'typical' entry pathways manage the initial disruption of becoming homeless.

4 Pathways into homelessness

Routes into homelessness may best be understood at a micro level (Weitzman et al. 1990:125).

4.1 Introduction

A core argument of this research is that homelessness can most usefully be understood as a process with three different stages - becoming homeless, being homeless and exiting homelessness - and changing patterns of interaction by homeless people with material and non-material structures. Setting up the analysis in this way is necessary if the connection between how people become homeless and what subsequently happens to them is to be satisfactorily explained.

The shift from housed to homeless happens rapidly for some people, while for others the process is protracted. Whether it happens quickly or slowly, the way people interact produce and reproduce various social structures in their interactions with other individuals begins to change in the process of becoming homeless.

This chapter has three purposes. The first is to describe the five pathways into homelessness. Using experiences drawn from people in each of the five entry pathways I demonstrate that as day-to-day life starts to change, routines are disrupted. I go on to show that individuals manage the disruption to their routines in different ways depending on the nature of their problems and the biographies they bring with them.

The second is to use my theoretical framework to point out the relevant material and non-material structural factors on each pathway and the role these structures have for different people. I demonstrate that some structures are relevant to the five pathways, while others are relevant only to specific pathways. On each pathway we begin to see some non-material structures such as stigma, and I use the initial reaction some people have to the stigma they experience in the process of becoming homeless to set up the analysis of different experiences of homelessness in subsequent chapters.

The third purpose is to show that although individuals negotiate social structures in different ways, similarities in their behavioural patterns occur across each of the five pathways. I argue that these patterns have implications for how the process of becoming homeless unfolds, and also for what happens to people while they are in the homeless population.

This chapter will examine each of the five pathways in turn commencing with the narrowest or smallest of these pathways - mental health problems. The second pathway examined is that of domestic violence and the third route is because of poverty and financial crisis, what I have labelled the housing crisis pathway. The fourth pathway into homelessness I have connected to problematic substance use. The final route examined is people who have their first experience of homelessness before they are 18. This is described as the youth pathway.

4.2 Mental health problems

The vulnerability of someone with such a disorder is considerable . . . As social and economic supports fall away, it becomes increasingly likely for a person to become homeless (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1993:556).

The first entry pathway for examination involves people who reported mental health problems prior to the onset of homelessness. In the sample of 103, six people had a history of mental health problems which led to the onset of homelessness, making this the smallest of the five entry pathways.

In this section of the chapter I describe the social characteristics of the six people on this pathway and then I provide a brief description of their lives before any mental health issues emerged. For those people who experienced mental illness as a precursor to homelessness I argue that there are three relevant structural factors. The first is the stigma attached to mental illness and how people manage their new 'status'. When mental health problems emerge it is not inevitable that people are excluded from mainstream institutions

such as work, housing or the family. Social attitudes towards the mentally ill structure the extent to which people with mental health problems experience social exclusion. These attitudes underpin the changing patterns of interaction with the labour and housing markets and also with other people. From this point of view, mental illness involves structural changes because it involves the re-organisation of relationships (and interactions) that typically connect people to the broader community. The third factor is family support.

This group were among the better educated members of the sample with four of the six completing Year 12. For most of this group their health problems emerged in their early 20s and most had their first experience of homelessness a short time after (mean age for the first experience of homelessness is 25 years). Because this group had, on average, become homeless in their mid 20s, most had maintained independent housing for some time, primarily in private rental, although one person was in the process of purchasing a house before their illness started. At the same time there was some evidence of housing instability with four out of the six reporting they had previously been evicted from rental housing. However, in each case this had occurred in the process of becoming homeless and could be directly linked to their emerging health concerns. Similarly, there was evidence of stable work histories for four of the six in this group with employment mainly in blue collar occupations. The two people that had never worked were also the youngest two members on this pathway. These two people also had little experience in the housing market. Finally, most were single (N=5) and everyone was in receipt of government benefits prior to becoming homeless.

In the first interview, discussion focused on life prior to homelessness. Everyone thought they had lived 'normal' lives prior to the onset of their mental health problems. While there was a sense that getting by was a struggle for some, there were distinct routines that connected these six people to the mainstream. These routines were typically mediated through family and friends, through their involvement in the housing market and to a lesser extent, the labour market.

While the experience of mental health problems is lived in different ways, Tim and Maggie's stories capture the changing patterns of interaction that individuals with mental health problems experience in their move from housed to homeless.

Tim is a 43 year old single male who has never married. He first became homeless at 32 years of age. Tim is University trained in horticulture, and worked in the field until his late 20s. Tim described his life up to that point as:

Pretty normal, I mean I wasn't unhappy or anything. I'd been working at the same place for about six years I think.

For most people in this group, the first signs that life was changing were subtle. Tim's problems emerged just prior to his 30th birthday. Tim recalled that he:

. . . had problems remembering things . . . when my boss had a go at me, I thought stuff him and had a go back. Then I started to get a bit paranoid.

Maggie is a 26 year old single woman who lived on her own in a small privately rented flat in the inner city. Maggie commented that her problems:

. . . happened suddenly. I'd been assaulted at a train station. After that I was anxious whenever I went out in public, 'specially at night but I thought it was because of the assault.

Maggie was 19 at the time and not long after had an episode and was 'scared shitless and totally freaked out'. These early episodes signalled the start of more significant changes. Maggie found she:

Couldn't sleep at night . . . If I couldn't sleep I would play music and this created problems with my neighbours.

When Tim's letter box was destroyed, he confronted some of his neighbours children who taunted him, calling him 'mad' and 'a nutter'. Tim became agitated and at one stage he:

. . . grabbed hold of one of them. I was shaking with anger and I threw him to the ground. I'd thought I'd hurt him. I'd never been violent before and it shocked me.

As these individuals attempted to make sense of the changes occurring in their lives, they also had to deal with the changes that were occurring in the nature of their relationships in the housing and labour markets. Both markets are highly structured and the social

practices through which people interact with these markets are based on numerous rules. People with mental health problems have distinct careers in that the unpredictable and episodic nature of their health problems can make it difficult to abide by the 'rules' that structure the social practices in each market. For instance, Maggie's housing problems started when she:

. . . stopped opening the mail. It just piled up in the corner. The bigger the pile got the worse I felt.

Maggie's problems were further compounded when she stopped answering the phone:

It was stupid but I was terrified I would get bad news or something. I buried me head in the sand and got kicked in the arse, that's for sure.

Tim's problems started when his employer issued him with a warning. The warning came 'as a shock' and Tim reacted with a mixture of anger and anxiety:

I felt betrayed. I'd worked hard and then when things weren't going that well for me he tried to heave me off [sack him].

In these early stages people in this group reported that they felt like they were losing control as existing routines were interrupted and established relationships were reshaped. While there were different experiences of these disruptions, the end result was much the same - everyone reported increasing anxiety and self-doubt. The sense of losing control was compounded by the fact that the source of their problems was perceived to be external – that is, their problems were caused by other people (employers or the kids next door) or agencies (e.g., Centrelink) over whom they had no control.

The stigma of 'being mentally ill' was the second structure that people on this pathway had to contend with. Among individual actors the most common response was to internalise social attitudes towards the mentally ill. This had a significant bearing on what happened to these people while they were homeless. For instance, everyone reported they had feared diagnosis and that their fears were underpinned by an acute concern with being 'given' a stigmatised social identity. In Maggie's words to be mentally ill was to be a loser, 'a worthless nothing'.

People with mental health problems commonly deny they have any problems (National Youth Coalition for Housing 1999; Harvey, Evert, Herrman, Pinzone & Gurele 2002). Although denial is a complex process, it is a response to the structure of stigma which mentally ill people employ to reduce public opprobrium. In this context Tim viewed his behaviour as entirely rational:

Wouldn't you? You just want to be normal, not branded a loser. I don't have anything against the mentally ill, I just had never thought of myself that way.

Trying to assist people with mental health problems can be complicated when they are in denial and it typically means they do not get the material, medical or social assistance they require.

Despite their own problems, there was little affinity or empathy towards other people with mental health problems. This emphasises the paradox that while the mentally ill felt marginalised, their attitudes towards other mentally ill people perpetuated the same stereotypes that they actively resisted. A direct result of this is that people started to exist in a nether world – neither of the mainstream or belonging to any other group, and this contributed to their growing isolation. Snow and Anderson (1993:52) refer to this as status ambiguity. For most people this marked the beginning of their transition from being a member of the mainstream to being an 'outsider'. It is at this point that tensions can begin to emerge.

Although Tim's problems at work stemmed, in part, from his refusal to acknowledge any problems with his mental health, it was only when Tim received a second warning that the tension in his relationship with his employer triggered an acute episode. Tim said that he:

. . . totally lost the plot. I can't remember the details but I locked myself up at home and didn't move for about two weeks. I just sat there watching telly. I started to think about suicide more and more and cut myself off from the world.

Tim was dismissed soon afterwards.

While mental health problems made maintaining employment difficult, for those people who were unemployed social security procedures were complex and difficult to

negotiate and this could result in problems with income payments. When people's material security is threatened this tends to exacerbate existing health problems and amplify feelings of marginalisation and isolation.

With reduced or insufficient income, both Maggie and Tim faced mounting bills and growing rental arrears. At this point Tim's family became involved. Family support is the third external factor (or structure) that plays a key role in the experiences of this group. Not everyone who has mental health problems has family support, but for those that do, family and friends can provide a buffer that can delay or prevent the situation escalating.

However, family and friends have their limits. Tim refused to accept his families assistance as he felt betrayed by them when they said:

. . . I needed help, that I was ill. They tried to trick me into seeing a doctor.

Tim's refusal to acknowledge his problems put a great strain on his family. Furthermore, Tim's suspicion that his family were conspiring against him began to grow when he refused to take his medication:

They just wanted me to take the medication. I didn't want to. The stuff they give you is awful . . . anyway I refused and they said take it or you are on your own.

By refusing treatment Tim's health problems got worse and his relationship with his family began to collapse.

Maggie's housing problems were compounded because she had few existing supports. Maggie didn't 'have many friends' and no family to assist her or advocate on her behalf. As a result, when Maggie's income benefit was reduced for 'missing an appointment or something' her situation reached a critical point. This could have been prevented if she had support, but without it Maggie felt like she was:

. . . in a washing machine just getting thrown about all over the place. I felt totally fucking lost and unsure. I didn't really know what was happening. I didn't know what to do. I know I felt like giving up.

Nearly 12 months after her first 'episode' the police knocked on her door to inform her they would be processing the eviction order sometime in the next 24 hours. According to

Maggie, this was the first she had heard of it. Confronted by homelessness, Maggie overdosed on prescription pills and ended up in hospital 'confused and shocked'. When she was discharged three days later the eviction had proceeded and Maggie found she had no home to go to. Maggie, lonely and vulnerable, now had to deal with her homelessness as well as her health problems.

As Tim had more substantial social and financial support the process was more protracted. Six months after losing his job Tim lost his accommodation and was 'forced' to accept his families offer of assistance to move into the family home on a permanent basis. However, six months later Tim's father died and the family home was sold. His friends and family tried to have him 'committed' and once again he felt angry, abandoned and betrayed. Tim was convinced 'they wanted me out of the way'.

With less than one week before settlement on the family home, Tim returned to find the place emptied of its contents. For Tim this was the 'final straw' – marginalised by his family and excluded from mainstream society, he 'flipped out'. Tim recalled he:

Didn't know what to do. I was angry and scared. I'd never been in this position before.

With worsening mental health problems and few, if any friends or family willing to assist them, individuals on this pathway started to move into boarding houses, caravan parks or onto the streets where they were acutely vulnerable to exploitation. Tim spent his first night homeless huddled up in the laundry of a block of flats:

Not far from dad's place. About five in the morning a torch shining in my eyes woke me up. It was a security guard. A resident had rung and complained. He kicked me out anyway.

For Tim, Maggie and the other people on this pathway into homelessness, life was going to get worse.

4.3 Domestic violence

The second pathway into homelessness is characterised by physical and sexual violence, psychological abuse and economic deprivation in relationships between adult partners (married or de-facto). This is commonly understood as domestic violence (Laing 2000b). When domestic violence occurs it is usually perpetrated by a man against a woman and it is nearly always women, often accompanied by children, who leave home (Laing 2000a;2000b; Gregory 2001; Adkins et al. 2003).

In this section of this chapter I begin with a brief description of the characteristics of the 14 people in this group. Following this I argue that there are three structural factors encountered by people on this pathway. The first is violence. These people did not choose to be in violent relationships and because violence is inflicted on them, it is a critical structure they had to contend with. The second structural factor respondents on this pathway had to deal with was the stigma resulting from domestic violence. The third structural factor was low income due to women's poorer labour market opportunities.

In the sample, 14 cases were identified where domestic violence preceded homelessness, and 13 of the 14 people on the domestic violence pathway were women. Given that these homeless people were predominately women and entered the homeless population at a later age in relation to people on the other pathways, it was no surprise that of the 14 cases, 12 were families (86 per cent) and these households had 26 children under the age of 18 with a mean age of 8 years. The remaining two households were recorded as single person households, although in both cases children had been removed by state authorities or were in the care of other family members. These two women saw themselves as doubly stigmatised – they had been forced out of their homes and also believed they were viewed as irresponsible parents, as 'bad mothers' incapable of taking care of their children.

The picture of domestic life that emerged during the first interview with these women was that prior to the onset of violence, life had been about work and raising a family. Most had left school early with 80 per cent leaving before or at the end of year 10. While all of the

interview participants had worked at some point in their lives, for most this was about earning additional income to help make ends meet. In the housing biographies of eight of the women there was some degree of residential instability prior to becoming homeless. Each of these households reported they had previously been evicted, with some more than once, although problems with their housing were typically due to affordability issues rather than domestic violence.

While there was variation in the experience of domestic violence, Lyn and Sandra are representative of the women in this category. Both women were in their 30s and had children. Neither Sandra nor Lyn had paid employment at the time they became homeless, although Sandra was a qualified hairdresser. Lyn had been with her partner for seven years and lived in suburban Melbourne. Sandra had been married for 10 years and lived in country Victoria.

Prior to experiencing domestic violence many women reported periods of relative stability in their family life. Lyn recounted that for the first two years of her marriage:

. . . everything was OK. We had some arguments and we struggled a bit, but John was working and we'd started to think about buying a home.

Like most families, domestic stability was reflected in the predictability of day-to-day life. While both Lyn and Sandra's aspirations were modest, they were firmly located in the larger socio-cultural context, that is a job, family and a home. Home was not merely a physical space, but a 'site of constancy in the social and material environment', a place 'in which the day-to-day routines of human existence are performed . . . a base around which identities are constructed' (Dupuis & Thorns 1998:43). For Lyn, this domestic stability began to change when her partner was retrenched and struggled to find a new job:

He did bits and pieces for about six months or so, but he was getting disillusioned and quite depressed. He started to drink more, he became abusive.

The onset of domestic violence changes patterns of interaction in family life. Relationships that were based primarily on affection and co-operation are transformed into relationships based on fear and coercion. Past relationships providing security, continuity and

predictability are removed. Thus domestic violence involves structural changes because it involves the re-organisation of relationships with family members.

In most cases physical violence was preceded by verbal and psychological abuse and this slowly eroded any form of security and constancy in the lives of these women and their children. Over a 12 month period Lyn noted that John's behaviour became increasingly erratic and the family tried to avoid him when he was drunk:

. . . the kids were terrified of him and would try to steer clear of him. Jade would stay in her room for hours.

As the verbal abuse became more frequent and intense it generally signalled the onset of physical violence. When Lyn complained she did not have enough money for food and that his drinking was a problem, John physically assaulted her for the first time and Lyn recognised that her world had changed forever. Nevertheless she still:

. . . didn't know what to do. I was terrified, he had never touched me before. He had turned into a monster. I cried for days.

Once the situation became physically violent, women spoke about becoming prisoners in their own homes. The breakdown of normal patterns of interaction within the family turned home from a secure place, into a site of domination and powerlessness. In Sandra's case her partner started to treat her:

. . . like a fucking slave. I was his cook and his cleaner.

While women tried to resist the physical and emotional domination, fear of retribution and a lack of alternatives shaped their reactions. Lyn:

. . . desperately wanted to talk to someone but I was so afraid John would find out and take it out on me and the kids.

For the other families the situation was more extreme and the fear even greater. After one violent assault left her with a broken nose and two black eyes, Sandra remembered the:

. . . look on the nurse's face when I told her I'd tripped . . . she knew I was lying.

Covering up the perpetrator's behaviour was a common theme and when Sandra returned home from the hospital her partner:

Didn't give a flying fuck about me . . . he was only interested in what I'd told the hospital staff. He threatened to kill me if I told anyone.

While fear prevented many women from seeking assistance, equally important was the acute sense of shame and embarrassment felt by many women who experienced domestic violence. Lyn tried to conceal the problem from her friends and neighbours:

I didn't want them to know what was happening. I tried to pretend it was all OK.

In these early stages people commonly refused to accept their situation. Part of this denial stems from the perceived reflection of domestic violence on the social and self-identity of the victims. This draws attention to the second structural factor relevant to this group which is the stigma that is attached to domestic violence. The irony that women who were the victims of violence also had to deal with the stigma of being in violent households, reminds us that these experiences occur on what Watson (2001) calls 'gendered terrain in which women's housing needs and experiences remain marginalised'. For Sandra and others, their response was to try and maintain the appearance of normality:

All my friends thought we were a good couple, well at the start they did anyway. I tried to make everything look better than it was I suppose.

Ultimately, attempts to conceal their problems were in vain. Hiding family conflict was difficult because physical signs such as bruising did not go unnoticed and the noise of violent quarrels and children screaming meant that people soon suspected 'things weren't going OK'. Lyn assumed that her neighbours and friends ' . . . knew we had problems but we all tried to pretend things were OK'. These feelings were particularly strong for women living in rural areas. Cibich (2001:49) argues this occurs because rural communities are often tight-knit and geographic isolation makes hiding the situation even more difficult. Sandra's situation reflected this:

It was obvious people knew. No-one dropped in anymore and on the street people would avoid me or have to be somewhere else when they saw me.

Their embarrassment stemmed from one of two sources. The first was the fear that authorities would remove children from their care. Sandra's sister had 'lost' her children and the thought of losing her children:

. . . terrified me. I wanted to be seen as a good mother. I didn't want people to think I couldn't raise my kids.

The second concern centred on the disruption to their children's schooling and their after-school routines. These concerns emphasise the importance of a stable environment for children, as well as drawing out broader issues connected to their social identities as mothers. Lyn reported that she:

Didn't want the other parents to find out . . . to think I was a bad mother.

Women experiencing domestic violence have to deal with the stigma of being battered and for those with children, the stigma of being 'unworthy mothers' as well. As their relationships became more unpredictable and violence more common, the self-esteem and confidence of many women began to diminish. Many felt they had contributed in some way to the problem and consequently that they had failed their children. Lynn felt she had 'betrayed the kids. I felt I was a lousy Mum'

For women involved in domestic violence, the loss of control and the negative social stigma resulted in the abandonment of many, if not all of their social networks (Adkins et al. 2003). These changing patterns of social interaction increase the vulnerability of women in violent relationships and this in turn increases their susceptibility to homelessness.

In this context the question is often asked why women experiencing domestic violence stay when it was clear 'the family was falling apart'. Lyn had threatened to walk out on John but didn't know where to go or who could help. In addition, many wanted to believe that the situation could change and return to normal. Deep down Lyn hoped that:

John could and would change. All we needed was a bit of luck for John to get a job. I didn't want to accept that our relationship was in bad shape.

Making a decision to leave was made harder by repeated promises of change and convincing expressions of remorse. Lyn said that on numerous occasions:

John promised to change. . . he begged us to forgive him and we did, time and time again. It was hard not to with the kids and all that.

While deep emotional connections mediated Lyn's responses, the thought of leaving started to dominate her thoughts more and more:

I wanted out. I wanted to take the kids and find somewhere peaceful and quiet. I felt paralysed though – I just couldn't seem to figure out what to do.

On the basis of interviews undertaken in this research, when families are in turmoil and relationships between adult family members sour, issues of stigma and embarrassment combined with escalating tension and violence, pull these women in different directions – some withdrew, some ran, while others tried to pretend there were no problems at home.

The third structural factor that influenced the behaviour of these women was the lack of economic resources. While violence against women cuts across all social classes, the service providers interviewed by Murray (2002:45) draw attention to the crucial point that those women who become homeless tend to be 'drawn from poorer economic backgrounds'.

After another violent episode, Sandra was desperate to escape. Sandra took her children and stayed with her mother but after two weeks they:

. . . couldn't stay at mums any longer, and I was too embarrassed to ask our friends. I tried to get private rental but could not find anything that I could afford. I went home and the abuse soon started again.

The decision to return to their 'home' was made in the context that most women had no independent financial resources and most had left all of their possessions behind. Sandra had 'walked out' on four or five occasions over a space of twelve months. In each instance she returned home because she could not find affordable accommodation and she continued to believe that things would get better.

The cycle of violence in abusive relationships has been well documented with studies suggesting that anywhere between one third and one half of those women who leave return to abusive situations (Metraux & Culhane 1999; Chung, Kennedy, O'Brien & Wendt 2000; Laing 2000a;2000b; Chung et al. 2001; Edwards 2001; Lawrence 2001). While there was variation in the intensity, frequency and duration of violence, the dominant pattern in these 14

cases was 'in and out' behaviour. For many this had occurred over a number of years. In the early stages of the domestic violence career, many women wanted to reconcile with their partners. These women had invested in the relationship and wanted the relationship to continue so long as the violence stopped. However, for most the problems did not stop and Lyn eventually recognised that she had to:

. . . get out of there forever, it was getting worse. He had promised to change but didn't.

Not only did a lack of economic independence make leaving difficult, each time Sandra left her partner tracked her down and she returned home, lured by the promise of change. But after:

. . . he hit Josh (their three year old son) we left. I'd had enough. We weren't coming back.

When physical violence was directed at their children it signalled for both Lyn and Sandra, an end to their relationship. Not only did these 14 women have to come to terms with being victims of domestic violence, the collapse of their relationships and the breakdown in their routines, now they had to deal with the prospect of being homeless, a prospect that 'terrified' them almost as much as the violence at home.

4.4 Housing crisis

Many low income people, especially families with children, have to survive on insufficient nutrition, are unable to heat their homes in winter, are often unable to afford medication, and are denied most forms of recreation (Economic Planning Advisory Council 1988).

For 24 households their entry into the homeless population was precipitated by a series of financial crises. These crises took many forms but their cumulative impact stretched the financial capacity of these households to breaking point. Events that many households in the community could absorb pushed these low income households into a financial spiral that generally ended in eviction and ultimately, homelessness. This emphasises the point that the key structures that bring about the housing problems of people on this pathway are primarily economic. While all of the 103 households in the sample had to contend with housing and labour market conditions, what gave this pathway its special characteristics was the overwhelming influence of these two structures. This is the housing crisis pathway and it is modelled on the ideas outlined by Chamberlain and Johnson (2002a), Wasson and Hill (1998) and Mulroy and Lane (1992).

In the first part of this section I describe the experience of these 24 households prior to any housing problems emerging. I then examine the ways housing crisis manifests itself. Although there is variation on this pathway, I examine three typical ways through which housing crisis comes about. The first results from job loss, the second is due to sustained poverty and the third stems from the gentrification of inner city housing markets.

Of the five pathways this group had the most diverse characteristics. Overall families accounted for 58 per cent, with sole parent families accounting for a significant majority of these (79 per cent). Most people experienced homelessness for the first time in their early 30s (mean age 31), although the age people first experienced homelessness varied considerably with ages ranging from 19 to 50. While employment featured in many biographies, everyone at the first interview said that government benefits were their sole source of income. Most had been on government benefits for some time (mean duration 16

months). There were few reported problems with drugs or alcohol, no reported problems with violence and there were no reports of mental health problems preceding homelessness.

Frank, Sally, Lee and John are representative of the people in this group who experienced a housing crisis and became homeless. Frank was a trained butcher who, because of a workplace injury nearly a decade ago, was on a disability pension. Frank was 47 years old and single because his partner had died soon after his accident. He had no children and lived, long term, in a small flat in the inner city. Frank was a heavy smoker, and by his own admission was in poor health.

Lee and John were high school sweethearts and were married soon after they left school. Lee (32) and John (36) had three children, with two of them in primary school and one in Year 8. Prior to their homelessness Lee and John had always rented privately in the south eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

Sally was a 29 year old single mother with three year old twins. The father of the twins left her six months after their birth and Sally had raised the children on her own for two and half years. Sally had also lived in private rental and she had never been in paid employment.

For 13 out of the 24 households, their pre-homeless phase was characterised by stable housing over a number of years. This was particularly apparent among dual parent families where it was common to find at least one person with a relatively stable work history. Housing stability was reflected in the predictability of day-to-day life and it was common to see life structured around the constraints of 'normality' – family, school and work. Lee and John's lives:

. . . revolved around the kids. Taking them to school, out to their friends, making the kids lunches, doing laundry. Just normal stuff, nothing fancy.

Although there were stresses, stable housing provided constancy, a sense of control and a secure base where family life and day-to-day routines were nurtured. However, as Neil and Fopp (1993:94) point out, it is common for people in poverty to experience intermittent financial crisis. This was the case for nearly half of this group whose life had

been a struggle at times as the effects of poverty sporadically disrupted their lives. There was substantial evidence that a significant minority of people in this group (N=11) had experienced recurring housing problems over many years and it was common to see housing careers punctuated by evictions and repeated loss of accommodation. Sally had been:

. . . in three or four places in the last seven years or so. Every time I'd get settled something would happen – one time the place was sold and at the next the owner wanted his sister to have the place.

This pre-homeless pattern of residential instability reminds us that some people are vulnerable to homelessness simply because of their low income.

The dominant reason these households became homeless was linked to their financial position. This vulnerability manifested itself in a number of different ways due to individual differences. In many cases the source of their financial problems emanated from outside the housing system. In these cases the event that precipitated homelessness could generally be traced to the loss of a job. This was the case with Lee and John.

Since leaving school John had always worked and for the last six years he had been with the same company as a tree lopper. When the company folded John's initial reaction was that:

It'd sort itself out. I didn't expect any problems finding something. I wasn't that choosey.

After four months John still hadn't found a job and given that John and Lee's housing had been geared to a working income, they began to struggle financially without it. Lee said the family had:

Never been late with the rent but now we were struggling to pay our bills. We owed nearly \$900 in back rent.

After seven months John had only done a bit of part time work and the families' problems were becoming acute:

We got behind in the rent. We'd cut back on so many things, but Edward needed school books and the kids needed uniforms. We had to borrow money from John's parents.

As the financial pressures became more acute many households were forced to adapt and a common response was to reduce household expenses. However, in what were already tight household budgets there was little scope for savings, and, as a way of reducing costs, many households looked for cheaper accommodation. After 12 months John still had no work and they decided to look for a cheaper place when the family received a threatening letter from the landlord. Although they found a cheaper property, the costs of moving put them under greater financial pressure:

We didn't think it through and it cost us more than we expected - there were all these costs connecting the phone and the electricity . . . we did most of the moving ourselves but it still cost a couple of hundred bucks for the truck.

Whatever financial reserves these households had, and they seldom had much, were eroded by the cost of moving house. What made the situation worse for families was that moving invariably disrupted the children's schooling and took the family away from the community where they had established social connections. As the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1989:101) noted, acute residential instability (as opposed to frequent moving by choice or design) impacts on the emotional and psychological resources of every household member. This was clearly evident in this group.

With their normal routines in disarray and increasing isolation plus accumulating financial problems, arguments became 'more common' as the emotional reserves of the family were stretched. Lee felt like:

. . . everything was slipping away. A lot of things came up at once – bills, school, Edward's teeth - and we found it harder and harder to cope.

Sally's case highlights the impact of sustained poverty on people's housing stability and on their sense of connectedness and belonging. Sally lost contact with many of her friends because of her frequent moves over the years:

I haven't seen anyone for months. I used to be more social but sort of drifted away from my friends. What with twins and living out here its, well, lonely.

In addition, Sally's modest tenancy record forced her to look for cheaper accommodation and this took her into areas where she had no history or connections:

The only reason we're out here is that I could afford a place. Before we moved out here I didn't even know the place existed to tell you the truth.

This meant that the vital supports that could have assisted Sally when she had a problem were not available. Sally's housing had always been 'a struggle' and now with twins her expenses just seemed to grow:

They were sick all the time, nothing major just gripes and that. It was always both of them too.

Sally gradually sank into debt. She owed about \$400 to the local chemist, had outstanding gas and electricity bills, and she owed money to her sister as well:

You look around the house, see the food getting low, bills due here, bills due there, its hard to know what to do.

When Sally responded to the chemist's demand that she pay the outstanding amount, it meant:

I couldn't pay the rent on time. John [the landlord] was alright about it, but I could tell he wasn't happy.

No matter what Sally did she lived in a state of perpetual financial crisis and this meant that any routine she established was constantly disrupted, creating further anxiety. Studies of homelessness frequently make the point that single parent families on low incomes are vulnerable to homelessness and it does not take much to push them into crisis (Mulroy & Lane 1992; Stretch & Kreuger 1992; Neil & Fopp 1993; Steinbock 1995; Shinn 1997; Victorian Homelessness Strategy Ministerial Advisory Committee 2001). Sally's flat was cold and draughty and with sick twins she ran a small heater for most of the day during winter. When the first bill arrived:

It was massive. There was definitely something dodgy about the electricity and I complained . . . it didn't do anything though I still had an electricity bill that I couldn't afford.

When problems emerge for households in poverty, bills mount and debts accumulate and people often have to make a decision about which bills to pay. While people react in different ways the consequences are similar. Sally had to make a decision whether to pay

the rent or have the electricity cut off. Sally paid the electricity bill and this time her landlord was less sympathetic when her rent was overdue:

He sent a notice . . . it was pretty clear – pay up or get out. I couldn't afford the rent and I couldn't afford to leave.

Similarly, in their new place Lee and John remained in financial crisis and while they focused on maintaining their housing, this came at a price:

We'd slipped into arrears again so we didn't pay the phone bill and the phone was cut off. It wasn't so much the phone being cut off that worried us, it was that our daughter went nuts . . . she was embarrassed . . . everyone has a phone.

Three decades ago the Henderson Poverty Inquiry noted the:

. . . effects of a very low income mean that families are placed under constant stress which makes the family members particularly vulnerable . . . Second, when trouble does occur, the effects are likely to be far reaching for the low income family which has fewer resources to resolve it (Henderson 1975: 202).

Five decades ago George Orwell noted that:

It is altogether curious your first contact with poverty . . . You thought it would be simple; it is extraordinarily complicated (Orwell 1953:17).

The same holds true today.

The gentrification of inner city housing markets was the third way a housing crisis manifested itself. In the inner city the impact of gentrification has contributed to increasing land values and rents, and people on fixed low incomes are particularly vulnerable to being squeezed out of the housing market (Ryder 2005; Yates & Wood 2005).

This was Frank's experience. Frank had been a tenant in the same flat for 10 years. As Frank's health problems worsened he found it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. Nevertheless he would:

. . . manage somehow. I always paid my bills, maybe a bit late sometimes, but I always paid my bills.

When Frank received a 90 day Notice To Vacate (NTV) because the block of flats was going to be redeveloped, initially he was:

Annoyed more than anything else. I'd grown used to my place and knew lots of people. I didn't want to move.

When he started to look for another place he was:

Shocked . . . I looked around couldn't find anything cheap enough. I was paying \$120 a week and there was nothing under \$160. It may not sound like much, but \$40, where was I supposed to get that?

People on low incomes who are affected by gentrification generally have few housing options. Frank contacted the Office of Housing with less than a month to go before he was meant to move out but they told him:

They couldn't do anything until I was homeless. What use is that. They have it the wrong way around.

Frank became increasingly anxious and distraught. When he was 'knocked back for the umpteenth time' on a flat he 'couldn't really afford', Frank realised he faced the prospect of becoming homeless. In his late 40s, in poor health and a long term inner city resident, Frank was unsure what to do. Frank's tenancy was extended for a month but after that he was forced out and he moved in with his sister on a temporary basis. His sister lived:

. . . on the other side of the city. I didn't know anyone, it was cramped and I had a flat full of furniture to store.

Whether people's problems were related to the housing market or to insufficient income or a combination of both, these processes can unfold at different rates. Some people moved from being housed to homeless in a short space of time, but for most it took much longer. Most fought to maintain their housing using a variety of strategies such as borrowing money from family and friends, cutting costs, using credit cards, moving, leaving bills unpaid, selling household goods and, very occasionally, crime. While the strategies varied by age and household type, they all represented an attempt to maintain housing and resist the onset of homelessness. While it emphasises the resilience and resourcefulness of these people, without additional income, cheaper housing or family support these strategies simply delayed the inevitable.

It is important to make the point that for most households it took more than a single crisis to precipitate homelessness. In fact, what separates these households from other similarly economically vulnerable households is that they were eventually overwhelmed by a

series of problems, a 'run of bad luck', or a sustained 'reversal of fortunes' as Rossi (1989:94) puts it. While the final event or issue may appear innocuous (a heating bill for instance), it is compounding financial problems steadily stripping away the financial resources that defines the experiences of this group of 24 people.

With debts accumulating and without access to additional resources, all it took was an additional set back to precipitate the first episode of homelessness. Sally had been driving an unregistered car and when the:

. . . cops pulled me up they put a canary [un-roadworthy certificate] on the car. They told me I had some outstanding fines. I'd already borrowed money and owed heaps. My credit card was maxed out [at its limit]. I mean I had no options.

No matter what the final catalyst was, the housing situation for everyone in this group eventually reached a critical point where the constraints of the housing market and poverty overwhelmed people. With nowhere to go and eviction imminent, a significant minority (42 per cent) abandoned their property. Sally knew she:

. . . was going to get evicted anyway and I was already on the landlord black list as well²⁰ and I had no chance of getting into public housing.

Sally had accepted she was going to be evicted and she had started to make alternative, albeit, temporary, arrangements:

A mate said she would put me and the kids up in her flat for a month or so. Knowing that I did a runner.

Sally and her twins spent the night on the lounge room floor in a single bedroom flat. While Sally 'did a runner' the majority (58 per cent) of the group were 'formally' evicted. For Lee and John the day the eviction order was served:

Will stay with us forever. We woke up and knew we had nowhere to go. Everything was in boxes . . . I can honestly say I had never felt so despairing . . . John was shell shocked.

²⁰ To screen prospective tenants real estate agents increasingly rely on Residential Tenancy Databases (RTDs). These databases maintain information on tenants to assist property managers to 'assess risk and identify potential problems' (Wood 2004)

That night Lee, John and their children had their first experience of homelessness. It would leave a lasting impression on them all.

4.5 Substance use

There is a need to shed light on the development of drug careers, and in respect of homelessness, on the role in which access to, or absence of, adequate housing has played in these careers (Bessant, Coupland, Dalton, Maher, Rowe & Watts 2002:23).

John is a 26 year old single male. John was originally from Perth. He had left school when he was 16, travelling and working around Australia until he was 20 years old. He settled in Melbourne doing intermittent work with a printing firm as well as occasionally working on the production line at a tobacco factory. John also had a heroin problem and when we first met he told me that 'no one sets out to become a junkie'.

John's experiences remind us that most people on this pathway had relatively normal lives prior to developing a drug dependency. In the first part of this section I describe people's lives prior to their problems with drugs. I then go to demonstrate that the experiences leading to homeless for this group were distinct. I argue that this occurs because they had to contend with the interaction of two structural factors. The first structural factor people have to contend with is the negative community attitude towards illicit drug use. Because this structure is specific to this group it creates different interactions with the second structural factor, the labour market. I argue that the way these factors interact is mediated through individual biographies and that this produces the distinct homeless career trajectory of the drug user.

John was one of 18 adults in the sample whose involvement with drugs was the dominant factor that led to their homelessness. Five of these respondents also reported alcohol problems. However, four of these respondents said their alcohol problems emerged after an ongoing drug problem. Given the prevalence of injecting drug use has increased significantly in recent years, with some estimating lifetime prevalence rates have increased

from 0.5 per cent of the population in 1988 to two per cent in 1998 (McAllister & Makkai 2001), I focus on those cases where drug use resulted in homelessness.

Along with John, the experiences of Michelle and Keith were representative of people whose problematic substance use led to homelessness. Michelle was a 39 year old graphic artist whose life had been 'somewhat bohemian'. Michelle and her partner had been together, on and off, for 10 years and they had lived together for most of that time in the inner city. By the time she was 30 Michelle had a successful career and a heroin habit.

Michelle went to a private school and both her parents were professionals. This sensitises us to one distinctive feature of this pathway. In the sample of 103, there were 83 cases where the families' occupational background could be established and the overwhelming majority (90 per cent) were from blue-collar families. In contrast nearly one third of this group of dependent drug users (29 per cent) reported that they grew up in white-collar families. This is important because people from higher socio-economic backgrounds typically have access to more resources and it is these resources that generally prevent homelessness. However, these cases show that the resources of middle class are finite, and while they can prolong the pre-homeless phase, ultimately, when substance use 'controls the day', they cannot prevent it.

Keith (27) was a single male who was a qualified plumber. By the time he was 24 Keith had been working for a major plumbing company for eight years and had been living in the same flat for four years. He also had a problem with heroin.

John, Michelle and Keith all had stable, independent accommodation histories prior to becoming homeless. For this group drug use began when they were introduced to it by their friends in their early 20s. Keith was about 19 when he went to a friend's place who suggested he give 'harry' [heroin] a go:

I hadn't been tempted before but it didn't seem to be doing Terry any harm. We went into the bathroom. I'd never injected anything so Terry did it for me. I was crook for a while, but after that it was grouse.

Michelle was about 23 when she was introduced to heroin through her best friend's boyfriend:

I'd been around there dozens of times with her, but wasn't really interested. One night he offered some. I was hesitant but Tess had a go, so I thought why not. I was just curious I suppose.

In the same way that not everyone who drinks becomes an alcoholic, many people experiment with heroin but not everyone become an addict. Surveys of heroin users here and overseas suggest the ratio of occasional users to frequent users is around 8:1 (Marks 1989). The group of users interviewed for this research were definitely the frequent users.

As some people overcame their initial fears they started to progress from occasional to more frequent users. Keith:

. . . was scoring every week or so, but I could go without it. There were a few of us who were using and we all worked . . . it didn't seem like an issue at the time. I'd only do it on the weekends.

Apart from the pattern of stable accommodation, in most cases, there was also evidence of stable work histories. In fact, many people spoke of how they managed to maintain a 'casual habit' for many years before they became homeless. These people worked and held onto their accommodation while using drugs, like heroin or speed. Michelle said that she and her partner:

Had been using for about 5 or 6 years before we had any real problems. I'd worked the whole time and no-one apart from a few close friends knew that I did it. It was sort of a secret.

While the illegal nature of drug use provided a basis for keeping it a secret, most people were keen to avoid being associated with, or labelled a 'junkie', a strongly stigmatised social identity even among users (Rowe 2002b). These practices demonstrate a strong recognition among users of the negative community attitudes towards illicit substance use. This structure is relevant to people on this pathway in that it sets the limits or boundaries in which individual actors engage in a process of re-interpreting community attitudes with respect to their own self interest(s). Keith said he 'wasn't a junkie or anything like that . . . I could take it or leave it'. For Keith, having a job distinguished him from the junkies. It also

provided Keith with a buffer that enabled him to maintain his accommodation and at the same time to continue casual use. At this stage Keith's substance use could be incorporated into his daily routines without drastically altering them.

For the 10 people in this group who had jobs when they started using heroin, the process of becoming homeless typically extended over number of years. In contrast, those people who were on government benefits and therefore on lower incomes, tended to slip into crisis more rapidly. Over time, however, the pattern that emerged for both the employed and unemployed was that casual use escalated to the point where drugs dominated daily life. This marks a significant point in their drug career. By the time he was 24 Keith had:

. . . been using on and off for about 4 years, maybe a bit less, but a fair time anyhow. Anyway I'd started to use a lot more frequently.

As drug use escalated it moved from casual use to problematic use, in that it consumed a majority of available income and consequently 'shaped the day'(Mallett et al. 2003). When drugs dominate day-to-day life, routines that link people to a range of social and economic structures cannot be maintained. As life becomes increasingly chaotic and focused on 'scoring' the first major material change emerged. For those who were working (N=10) their drug dependency made it increasingly difficult to maintain normal work routines.

The labour market remains a highly structured market in that it has highly formalised and regulated practices such as starting times, required hours and specific job responsibilities. The unpredictability of using and scoring created different and ultimately unsustainable patterns of interaction with the labour market. Exclusion from the labour market is common among homeless people, but the way individuals actors engage in, or respond to this process varies according to individual biographies and the issues that people bring with them.

Michelle's drug use became problematic when she:

. . . started to miss work. When I was there my work was getting pretty sloppy. I tried to keep it together.

After four years of casual use Keith was now scoring:

Four, five times a week maybe, maybe more. Anyways, I'd fuck off from work sometimes and my boss and I started to have a few problems.

Two days before his 25th birthday the company let Keith go. Without work both Keith and Michelle were in the same financial position as John, and it did not take long before they all had problems with their accommodation. John, who was on government benefits, said he could not:

. . . pay the rent. I thought I could get on top of it, but it didn't work out that way . . . I starting to get involved in a bit of dealing, a few burgs [burglaries] and that sort of thing to keep me going but it just sort'a got out of control.

Over time 'traditional' routines were broken down and many social relationships disintegrated as people looked for way to 'fund their habit'. For Michelle this included:

Stealing stuff from my parents place . . . all sorts of stuff – cash, jewellery, even booze and pills. They caught me red handed. It broke them up real bad.

Michelle's drug use moved from a private activity, limited to a small circle of close friends, into her family's world. With her relationship to her family broken and few pre-homeless friendships remaining, Michelle's social networks were comprised almost entirely of other users. In this context the behaviour that was the source of their problems were normalised. For Michelle using dominated all of her social interactions. Similarly, using heroin consumed all of Keith's economic resources and when he found himself in massive arrears he decided to:

. . . move in with three other blokes into a flat. . . I knew it was a shooting gallery. All I did every day seemed to revolve around drugs – scoring and using.

While some people resorted to stealing, others sold their personal belongings to fund their habit. Over a four month period Keith sold all his plumbing equipment. Not only did this limit Keith's work options, he sold his gear for:

. . . peanuts. I was so desperate I sold tools worth thousands of dollars for nothing.

Michelle and her partner tried to hold onto their accommodation but they had:

Already sold everything . . . we were living a hand to mouth existence.

If drug use becomes problematic, people are usually caught between maintaining their accommodation and maintaining an expensive habit. For this group the habit won. Two days before John and his flat mates were due to be evicted for 'massive arrears' John left:

I didn't have any money but I knew a squat where a few people were staying, so I headed down there. It was a pretty ordinary scene down there . . . fits everywhere, shit all over the place.

Keith and Michelle also lost their accommodation. Michelle found it:

. . . hard to believe how far down we had fallen. We had hit rock bottom. I was too embarrassed to try and get any help so we spent the night on the beach.

By the time this group entered the homeless population, patterns of interaction with the labour market, the housing markets and their non-using peers had changed and they were already immersed in a using subculture. Keith slept on a filthy couch in a property being used by an 'ex'-junkie, but Keith's only concern was 'getting some gear everything else, even housing, was secondary'. For all of them, their routines would be shaped by the need to raise money and the consuming nature of their drug dependency. Both aspects would combine to compromise their ability to 'get out' and 'stay out' of the homeless population.

4.6 Youth homelessness

The progression of some young people from early homelessness to long term alienation . . . is not difficult to understand (Sykes 1993:115).

. . . a period of time spent in a child welfare or juvenile justice institution, or otherwise detached by the welfare system from the natural family, seems to increase significantly a child's chances of becoming homeless (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989:109).

The final entry pathway is the largest with 41 people reporting they had their first experience of homelessness before they were 18. Of these 41 people, two fifths (39 per cent) were 15 or younger when they first experienced homelessness, with the youngest reporting she was 11. At the time of the first interview the mean age of this group was 24 and most (83 per cent) were between 18 and 37 years of age. Most of the people on this pathway were on government benefits (95 per cent), two thirds were single (66 per cent) and one fifth (20 per cent) had never been employed. In general they had missed a lot of schooling and nearly two thirds (61 per cent) had left school by the end of year 10. Just under a third had a history (albeit chaotic) of independent accommodation, prior to the onset of homelessness -although these were typically the older respondents.

In the following section I start by setting the context in which youth homelessness has emerged as a distinct social issue. Then I identify two distinct groups within this pathway. I term the first group 'dissenters' and the second groups 'escapers'. Each group negotiates the process of becoming homelessness differently, reflecting their different biographical backgrounds and the different structures with which they have to contend. I identify family rules as the most relevant structure to the dissenters. I then identify three structural factors that are relevant to 'escapers'. These are adverse childhood experiences, their poor labour market positions and the stigma of coming from a dysfunctional family.

In 1973 Alan Jordan's (1994:79) landmark research on homeless men in inner-city Melbourne identified the emergence of 'a more-or-less distinct population of homeless adolescents and young adults with a mode age of 22 or 23'. Nevertheless, the prevailing view of youth homelessness at the time was of an isolated problem 'affecting few' rather than

a social problem of 'serious proportions'. This view remained unchallenged for a decade (Sykes 1993:v).

In the early 1980s advocates and service providers noticed that demand for their services was changing, with increasing numbers of young people seeking assistance and this prompted significant service system reform in 1985 (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989:7; Victorian Government 1992:7). However, it was not until 1989, with the release of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC) report *Our Homeless Children* (1989), that youth homelessness emerged as a significant public issue in Australia. The report, generally known as the Burdekin Report, received extensive media coverage and commentary (Fopp 1989) and generated widespread public debate about youth homelessness.

On the release of the Burdekin report the *Sydney Morning Herald's* proclaimed that:

In the eastern suburbs a vast majority have homes to go to; they are often children of middle class parents . . . The children choose to live on the streets' (25/2/89 cited in Sykes 1993:84).

This statement reflects two common misconceptions. The first is that most homeless young people are middle class. The available empirical evidence is unambiguous on this point - most young homeless people come from backgrounds suggestive of acute poverty and not from middle class families (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989; National Clearing House for Youth Studies 1989; O'Connor 1989; Sykes 1993; House of Representatives 1995; Craig & Hodson 1998; Roschelle & Kaufman 2004).

The second misconception is that young homeless people are homeless because they want to be (Sykes 1993:87). The notion of choice invokes a particular morality in which the young person, irrespective of the context in which they leave home, 'must accept responsibility for any difficulties they subsequently encounter' (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:58). While a small minority of young people will be attracted by the excitement of the streets, in their study of 602 homeless young people Yoder, Whitbeck and Hoyt (2001:53) reported that 'many youths are running from dysfunctional and abusive families rather than to anything'.

This is consistent with the findings from many other studies both from Australia and overseas (Hirst 1989; O'Connor 1989; House of Representatives 1995; Koegel et al. 1995; Smith 1995; Herman, Susser, Struening & Link 1997). Attempting to understand youth homelessness based on the idea of choice without contextualising the conditions that shape that choice, is to ignore an array of empirical evidence that contradict this explanation. Hirst (1989:3) wrote that the young people she interviewed:

. . . have not left home to join friends in the city, escape strict rules about watching television, or because they do not want to do their homework . . . These young people rarely choose to leave a comfortable home or a stable life for life on the streets or the refuge roundabout. If they had left as a matter of free choice just to further their experience they would have soon returned home.

Clearly, to make sense of the reasons why young people leave home requires a better explanation than choice.

The literature describes a range of factors that mediate young people's entry into the homeless population – family type, sexual preference, mental health status and ethnicity are four commonly cited triggers. Local research findings frequently cite family conflict as a 'cause' of youth homelessness (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989:271; Hier, Korboot & Schweitzer 1990; Sykes 1993; House of Representatives 1995; Meadowcroft & Charman 2000). The Burdekin report noted that family conflict 'features strongly in most studies of young people leaving home' (1989:88) and the National Committee for the Evaluation of Youth Services Support Scheme (1983) found that 78 per cent of young people had experienced some form of conflict prior to leaving home, with the rate increasing to over 85 per cent for those who left home before they were 16. In his study of 100 homeless young people, O'Connor (1989:2) expressed indirect agreement when he reported that 'family conflict is the unifying theme in all of the accounts'. In my sample there was variation in the way young people left home, but family problems were always the underlying issue.

Conflict at home can vary in extent, frequency and duration. Family conflict has been used to describe a range of issues from arguments between siblings to sexual abuse. While

conflict may lead to homelessness, conflict may be a symptom of deeper problems such as abuse or neglect. Framed in this way, family conflict is a broad and difficult concept to operationalise. However, O'Connor (1989:30) argues that considering family conflict as the root cause of homelessness is incorrect when there is abuse or neglect. Similarly, Hutson and Liddiard's (1994:59) study of youth homelessness in London makes an explicit distinction between family conflict and physical and sexual abuse when they make the point that 'family conflict can be instrumental in forcing a young person to leave as can physical or sexual abuse'. This emphasises the importance of distinguishing between family conflict and physical or sexual abuse – both are important to be sure, but they are very different.

In this section I make the conceptual distinction between young people whose family conflict was underpinned by normative resistance to parental controls and restrictions, and those where 'family conflict' was underpinned by physical or sexual abuse and/or involvement in the state care and protection system. The reason for doing this is that studies of youth homelessness have consistently shown adverse childhood experiences to be powerful predictors of adult homelessness (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989; O'Connor 1989; Koegel et al. 1995; Bassuk et al. 1997; Herman et al. 1997; Roman & Wolfe 1997; Caton, Hasin, Shrout, Opler, Hirshfield, Dominguez & Felix 2000). This argument is grounded in the belief that children who experience out-of-home care or sexual and/or physical abuse have fewer, or at least weaker, familial resources available to them when problems occur.

I group these specific childhood events under the rubric of 'adverse childhood experiences'. Of the 41 people on this pathway, 32 reported adverse childhood experiences. Most of the 32 (94 per cent) had histories of institutional, foster or residential care. All of them had backgrounds characterised by high residential mobility, little familial or social stability, and most had experienced abusive family relations over many years. Home, for this group, was not associated with security and safety, but linked to violence, material and psychological deprivation and ongoing disruption. For most, family relations were dysfunctional and in many cases their families had simply disintegrated around them. As

Crane and Brannock (1996) note, for many homeless young people, home effectively leaves them. I refer to this group as 'escapers' and Robbie, Toni and Andrew's biographies were representative of this group.

This left a smaller group of nine people who reported no adverse childhood experiences prior to becoming homeless. For these people their responses to what they perceived to be excessive parental control had created tension within their family and this had escalated to the point where a return home was unlikely, if not impossible. I refer to this group of nine as 'dissenters'.

At this point it is necessary to make a qualification regarding the proportions in each group. Although less than one quarter of those on the youth pathway were classified as 'dissenters' this should not be interpreted as meaning they are a minority in the youth homeless population. There is strong evidence to suggest this group is the largest in the youth homeless population and the proportion would be considerably greater in a larger sample drawn from additional sources (Randall 1980; Hutson & Liddiard 1994). Although correctly quantifying the two groups is important, the core processes underlying the lived experiences of both groups - how they respond to the stigma of homelessness and how they interact with the homeless subculture – can still be analysed even though the escapers are over-represented. In the following sections I deal with the experiences of the dissenters and the escapers.

4.6.1 Dissenters

The nine dissenters were all living in the family home prior to becoming homeless. The primary structure that 'dissenters' had to contend with were family values and rules. While family values and household rules may vary from house to house, it is the rejection of the normatively prescribed rules which are at the heart of this group's problems.

Although there is variation among the dissenters, Nan's experiences leading to homelessness were typical. Nan is sixteen, single and still at school. Nan's family came

from Vietnam when she was three. When she was eleven her mother died and three years later her father remarried. Nan clashed with her step mother and around the time she was 15, Nan started to spend nights at her friend's places without her parent's permission.

Nan's case illustrates two issues commonly reported among young homeless people. First, for second generation young Australian's, problems at home sometimes occur as a result of a tension between the parent's traditional values and the values the young people were developing at school. Nan's father did not like her staying out without permission, or going out on weeknights. According to Nan he was 'very strict compared to my friends parents'. In some cases it is the young persons emerging identity that conflicts with the 'traditional family values' (MacKenzie & Chamberlain 2003:19).

In other cases problems occur as a result of young people directly questioning and challenging the authority of their parents, and rebelling against what they perceived as excessive parent control. This was emphasised in cases where parents tried to restrict or control the son or daughters choice of partner. These cases were a minority, but in each case there was what Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998) describe as 'in and out' behaviour. This is where young people would stay out for a few nights and then return home for a period of time before repeating the pattern. Eventually Nan was given an ultimatum – accept her parent's authority or leave. Nan left.

4.6.2 Escapers

The experiences of 'escapers' preceding homelessness was different from that of the 'dissenters'. I argue that this occurs because the escapers had to deal with three different structures. The first is dealing with physical and/or psychological abuse, or what I have termed adverse childhood experiences. The second structural factor involves dealing with the stigma of coming from a dysfunctional family. The third structural factor escapers have to contend with is their poor position in the labour market. I go onto to suggest that it is how

these factors interact, and at the same time how they are mediated through individual biographies, that produces the distinct career trajectory of the escapers.

Toni, Andrew and Robbie's experiences are typical of this group. Toni is 17 and she has a two-year old daughter who is currently in foster care. Toni's parents were both under 18 when she was born and they split up by the time she was seven. Toni lived with her mother in the western suburbs of Melbourne and her mother had a mental health problem as well as an addiction to prescription pills. As a result, Toni was in and out of foster care from the time she was eight until she was 13. She has two sisters and a brother (all younger) who are in a similar position. From the time Toni was nine she had to deal with the unpredictable behaviour of her mother. Occasionally her mum would:

Forget about us. She'd disappear for a few days on end and then come home with someone. I learnt to be pretty independent from early on.

Toni and the rest of the family had to deal with their mother's erratic behaviour as well as temporary additions to the household. As the eldest, Toni found it particularly hard when her mother would:

Come home with these creeps. They'd try and boss me around, you know be the dad, all full of authority and shit.

Across the group of escapers there was strong evidence of sustained housing instability prior to becoming homeless. Toni was always being:

. . . moved from one place to another. I'd stay with mum for a while then things would get too much and I'd be fostered out for a while. Then back to mums . . . it went on like that for years.

Not only was there little domestic stability in their lives, for many, home was a site of danger and drama. Mallett (2004) suggests that the predictability, constancy, safety and security that depicts many idealised notions of home, were rarely identified by this group.

Andrew's experiences are reflective of this. Andrew is a 23 year old single male. He grew up in Melbourne's south eastern suburbs and he was the second eldest of six children. Andrew's mother was addicted to heroin, as well as alcohol. Andrew had been physically abused on a number of occasions by his step father. Andrew had also been in foster care on

numerous occasions. For Andrew it was the combined effects of being physically assaulted and having drug dependent parents that proved to be the catalyst:

Mum had real problems with heroin and it got her in a heap of shit. Barry (his step dad) was a fucking looser. He took advantage of her all the time.

Like Andrew, many of the escapers started to avoid going home, eventually staying out overnight to avoid the problems at home. This 'in and out' behaviour typically precedes a permanent break from home. Andrew's 'in and out' behaviour started when she was 13:

You'd sleep in a clothes bin for a night. It was better than home.

Andrew and others moved back and forth. When the problems at home got out of control Andrew would leave. In Andrew's eyes his mother didn't really:

. . . give a fuck man. I could've been dead and she wouldn't have known, probably wouldn't have cared either.

Apart from having to deal with physical abuse, Andrew was one of the 10 participants in the youth pathway who reported using heroin and/or speed before the onset of homelessness. All of these cases involved escapers who had been introduced to drugs by one or both parents (including de facto partners) or when they were under the care of statutory authorities. In Andrew's case his:

. . . mum and Barry were into smack. I'd been smoking dope since I was about 10 and by the time I was 13 I'd used smack. I even scored for them.

He also said that:

Barry got me to carry some shit for him when we were in public . . . he didn't want to get caught with smack on him so he got a fucking 14 year old to look after it.

Andrew's case highlights the complex and corrosive experiences that precede homelessness for many young people. While one quarter engaged in drug use before they became homeless, the setting in which it occurred was one over which they had little control. When drug use is normal in family life or an institutional setting, young people are highly vulnerable. This was also Robbie's experience. Robbie is 37. His mother died when he was two and his father was murdered when he was six. Robbie was put in the care of an uncle

who sexually abused him when he was nine. Robbie was made a ward of the state and while in the care of the state he was physically and sexually abused. When he was 10 Robbie had his first encounter with the law and he has since developed a long history of custodial experiences. Robbie was in a Juvenile Justice facility when he was first introduced to smack. Drugs were 'a part of life' in these facilities and Robbie made the point that almost everyone was 'into it . . . it were impossible to avoid'.

While Robbie's is an extreme situation in many ways, in every case the disruption and the drugs, the violence and the associated residential instability meant their schooling suffered. For young people schooling is a primary connection to the mainstream. While low rates of high school completion were evident across most of the sample, problems at school had specific ramifications for 'escapers'. Andrew thought it was:

Fucking bizarre that I'd go to school after seeing me step-dad bash mum or I'd leave home and mum would be half way blotted out already. You'd go to school and pretend everything was cool.

But he already felt an acute sense of difference between himself and the rest of his school friends:

I'd see kids who had it easy complain about fucking anything. They had everything going for them. It made me sick.

Others felt isolated and stigmatised. Robbie found it a struggle to reconcile his home life with his school life:

. . . one day I'd be totally out of it, you know, and the next I'd be in school sitting next to some twat who thought smoking was out there.

Toni found that when people discovered she had been, or was in, foster care she:

Could say anything and it didn't matter a scrap. I was a foster kid and that said enough to most people. It made them uncomfortable.

In view of their own problems many escapers looked to other people who had similar experiences for support. This meant that rather than following the idealised, normatively prescribed pathway from school to work, this group had to negotiate identities that were developing in the context of violent, abusive or neglectful situations – situations that were not

necessarily of their making yet situations that structured their subsequent actions. This created tension as 'normal' identities, while desired, appeared impossible to achieve.

Andrew wished he:

Could'a stayed at school. I'd go along and listen to people talking about their lives and the problems they were having at home and all that and I'd think shit have they got it easy . . . I wanted to have what they did.

With few resources available to them most eventually made a permanent break from home. When Andrew was abused in foster care he decided to leave for good. Surrounded by violence, denied access to mainstream institutions such as school and with life constantly in a state of flux, most found the transition to homelessness was relatively seamless. Although there was some naivety about where to go and what to do, most were already 'streetwise'. For Toni becoming homeless represented:

Another fuck up in a long fucking line of them.

For Andrew the decision not to go back home raised mixed feelings for him. Relieved to be out of the fire he still:

. . . felt like I'd been shafted. I mean why the fuck was I homeless.

At one level the problems escapers had experienced at home made the transition to homelessness less problematic than for other groups. Nevertheless, life got even harder for all of these young people once they became homeless.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on becoming homeless, the first stage in the experience of homelessness. It has been structured around the examination of five typical entry pathways into homelessness. It provides the empirical foundation upon which the connection between the *way* people become homeless and *what* subsequently happens to them can be established. While these entry pathways are ideal types, they demonstrate how individual biographies are reflexive in that individuals make decisions and choices. They also illustrate

how those choices are shaped by structural factors that in the main constrain the opportunities faced by people on the different pathways.

The analysis demonstrated that there were distinct patterns of behaviour on each pathway. These distinct patterns reflect the different issues people had to deal with, the different biographies that people brought with them and the different structural factors they had to contend with. On each pathway the transition from housed to homeless disrupted peoples routines, although the disruption was lived in diverse ways as people related to material and non-material structures in different ways.

The primary connection between the five pathways was that everyone had few housing options because of their low income and this reminds us that poverty is at the centre of every experience of homelessness (Avramov 1999). However, the findings warn against crude economic explanations. It is not accurate to say that economic structures on their own determine the processes through which people become homeless – these structures are important but their impact is mediated by other structures and individual agency.

The first pathway I examined was the mental health pathway. Although mental health problems can affect anyone in the community, those who become homeless tend to have the fewest economic and social supports to draw upon. There will always be variations in the way people with mental health problems become homeless, but the data show there are common patterns. Prior to becoming homeless the six people on this pathway reported they had normal lives that involved work (for some) and stable, independent housing for most. As their problems started to emerge, individuals experienced increasing anxiety as the psychological and social impact of their health problems grew.

The six people on this pathway responded to the stigma of mental illness by denying they had any problems. This denial was structured by the negative community attitudes towards mental illness that had been internalised by many people. In response to the actions of others a pattern of progressive exclusion and withdrawal from all forms of social interaction emerged. This resulted in the breakdown of existing routines, and at this point we can see how interactions with the housing and labour market(s) -the second set of structural

factors - became increasingly problematic. The third structural factor relevant to people on this pathway was family support. For many, it was family support that enabled them to remain housed. However, if family support breaks down, homelessness generally follows soon after. For this group, their pathway into homelessness involved distinct changes in their interactions with these three structures. In chapter 7, I explore how these changing patterns of interaction relate to what happened to them while they were homeless.

The second group I examined were those people who experienced domestic violence as the precursor to homelessness. There were three structural factors that influenced the experiences of the 14 people on this pathway. The first structural factor was violence. Violence is a structure in the sense that it is inflicted on people and is out of their direct control. For women who experience domestic violence the process generally begins with verbal and psychological abuse before escalating to physical violence. While this process can unfold at varying rates, for everyone in this group routines began to change and most women found themselves in a double bind – fearful, on the one hand of retribution from their partners, and on the other, constrained by the ‘shame’ they felt for their situation.

This draws attention to the second structural factor which was the explicit recognition of the stigma attached to living in a violent home. Many attempted to deal with this stigma by ‘covering’ up their problems. This was done by actively reshaping who they interacted with on a day-to-day basis. As home was radically re-defined from a place characterised by security and predictability to one characterised by violence and turmoil, many women left ‘home’ on a number of occasions.

This draws our attention to the third structural factor which is the weak labour market position of these women. Without sufficient economic resources many were forced to return home. After an initial period of contrition from the perpetrators, the violence generally returned. However, the final straw for many women was when the target of the violence shifted to their children. This precipitated a permanent break.

For people in the housing crisis pathway the structural factors were primarily economic in that it was a process of compounding financial problems that progressively

moved them to the edges of the housing markets. The initial disruption came in many forms – some people lost their jobs, for others it was the impact of gentrification, or breakdown in housing arrangements, or a run of bad luck. However, their problems could always be linked back to insufficient income to maintain day-to-day expenses. As people's situation worsened, day-to-day life became full of anxiety and stress and many families came close to breaking up. When people on low incomes have their incomes reduced or when household costs increase, the data suggest they employ a range of strategies to 'get by'. However, unless they find a way to improve their financial position, most end up losing their accommodation. Of all the groups, the prospect of becoming homeless created the most insecurity and disruption among this group and this possibly reflected the more stable backgrounds and biographies of the people on this pathway.

In contrast, the 18 people who reported problematic substance use experienced the least anxiety and disruption in the process of becoming homeless. This was the most socially diverse group of people, with a small number coming from middle class backgrounds. Most of this group started using drugs in their early 20s and many sustained casual habits for many years. People kept their drug use quiet and this practice reflects an explicit recognition of, and reaction to the negative community attitudes towards people who use illicit drugs, the first structural factor people had to contend with.

As individual's drug dependency increased, so too did their consumption - and this disrupted existing routines and altered their relationship to the labour market. The changing position of this group in relation to the labour market was the second structural factor. At this point most were involved in a drug using culture which shaped and structured day-to-day life. Increasing participation in the using culture typically led to the loss of their accommodation and this effectively signalled their arrival in the homeless population.

For people in the youth pathway, the root source of their problems was family conflict. There was variation in what constitutes family conflict and I identify two distinct groups within this pathway. I have termed the first group dissenters (N=9) and for this group the primary structural factor influencing the careers of this subgroup were the contested nature of internal

family rules. Although there was significant variation in the way that conflict manifested itself in each case they were a reaction to perceived excessive parental control.

The second and much larger group, the escapers (N=32), experienced physical and sexual abuse at home and in most cases they had histories of involvement with the state care and protection system. For the escapers, three structures play a critical role. First, adverse childhood experiences influenced the way this group managed the process of becoming homeless. People certainly made a conscious decision to leave home, but that decision is typically made when there are no other options. Second, most left school early and this situated them at the bottom of the labour market. The third structural factor 'escapers' had to deal with was the stigma of coming from a dysfunctional family.

The five pathways reveal how different issues exert considerable influence on how the process of 'becoming homeless' unfolds. What they all show is how precariously balanced the 'ordinary' lives of poor people can be and how little it takes to tip a household over into the homeless population.

In the next four chapters I will connect the five typical pathways identified in this chapter to an examination of the experiences of people once they are homeless – that is, the second stage of homelessness. I use the homeless subculture model and the idea of stigma outlined in chapter 3 to emphasise differences and similarities among the five pathways. I start with the substance abuse pathways because the experiences of this group most clearly illustrate the experiences of people who engage with the homeless subculture. This provides a sound basis on which to compare and contrast the experiences of the remaining four pathways.

5 On the 'go': Homeless careers of substance users

. . . the nature of dependency and the life of the drugtaker cannot be understood merely in terms of the drug . . . The social reaction against the drugtaker, the policies which are designed to control the drug, have remarkable effects on the role within which the drugtaker finds himself . . . Criminal exploitation, police harassment, therapeutic correction, social stigmatization all give rise to a culture partly defensive against these agencies, partly introjecting and accepting their notions of him . . . (Young 1971: 32).

5.1 Introduction

An important argument that runs through this thesis is that different experiences of homelessness can be better understood by examining the way that people's biographies combined with their pathway into homeless to structure their patterns of interactions.

In the previous chapter I established five typical pathways into homelessness. I demonstrated that people in these pathways negotiate the process of becoming homeless in different ways and that different structural factors are relevant to each pathway.

In the next four chapters I examine the way people in the different pathways respond to homelessness. The interaction of structure and agency remains a central concern and I focus on two specific structures with which every household has to contend once they are homeless.

The first is how individual agents on each pathway, through their interactions, respond to and reproduce the homeless subculture. In the following chapters I am going to show that people on certain pathways engage strongly with the homeless subculture, whereas people on other pathways largely avoid the subculture.

The second structure that everyone has to contend with is the stigma of being homeless. I show that people respond to this stigma in different ways – some people invert the stigma of homelessness in such a way that it becomes a positive social identity for them. Other people distance themselves from the devalued social identity attached to homelessness and in these cases the point of reference remains the 'mainstream' community.

How people respond to these two structures is relevant to the way people reform their routines. People on some pathways rebuild their day-to-day routines within the context of the homeless subculture, whereas people on other pathways rebuild their routines largely outside of the subculture in an attempt to maintain a sense of 'normality'.

The final part of each chapter explains why people on certain pathways experience much longer periods of homelessness than others.

This chapter examines the experiences of people who came into the homeless population because of substance use. The chapter starts by describing the way this group encounter the homeless subculture and I show that they tend to move quickly and easily into the homeless subculture. The chapter then considers how this group reconstruct their routines within the context of the homeless subculture. I demonstrate that the homeless subculture has a clear 'present orientation' and this exerts a strong influence on people's routines. Furthermore, as people get to know other homeless people they learn about the rules of the homeless subculture – and while these rules are loose - they structure day-to-day life in the homeless subculture. Following this, I use data from the first interview to demonstrate that where criminal activity is reported it generally occurs after homelessness. The next section considers the issue of stigma. I argue that people on the substance use pathway routinely encountered discrimination because of their appearance. As a result, these people re-arranged their routines so that they avoided the 'mainstream' and engaged with other homeless people.

In the final part of the chapter I consider the length of time people spend in the homeless population. I explain why people with substance use issues typically become entrenched in the homeless population.

5.2 Involvement in the homeless subculture

According to Milburn (1990:64) people who use illicit substances commonly exploit close friends and family members and, as a result, many become alienated from them. In the

process of becoming homeless new social networks had formed and by the time their housing was lost most people on this pathway were linked in with what Dwyer (2001:13) terms the 'using culture'.

Although the transition from housed to homeless was chaotic among individuals on this pathway, there was little evidence of anxiety and stress. One possible reason for this is that most of this group were already involved in a using culture or what is sometimes called 'the scene' (Moore 2004). There is a clear overlap between the 'scene' and the homeless subculture in that they both provide support and a sense of belonging.

Without their own accommodation, a common practice was to 'couch surf' between people who also had 'habits'. Keith's experience illustrates this clearly:

I ended up staying with some friends for a couple of weeks. I didn't know them all that well . . . they were, you know, part of the scene.

Similarly, in the first couple of months that John was homeless he tended to stay with people that he had:

. . . helped out with Harry [heroin]. They were just a place to flop until something else came up.

Michelle made the point that when she was housed she had assisted people in much the same position.

Couch surfing was characterised by short stays and people regularly moved from one place to another. The extent to which people couch surfed was influenced by the size of their social networks but eventually everyone ran out of 'friends' to stay with. When this happened it was common to see people move into boarding houses²¹, often with financial assistance from welfare services. This marks an important stage in their homeless careers.

When people cannot find a couch to crash on, boarding houses are one of the few accommodation options they have – their week by week payments means that large sums of money are not required upfront, there were few, if any, reference checks and most people

²¹ I use the term boarding house in a generic sense. I include rooming houses, private lodgings and community rooming houses.

had few, if any, possessions. Like most people Michelle was pragmatic about boarding houses. She:

. . . hated them, but I'd stay in 'em for a month or so until they kicked me out.

When she was kicked out, sometimes owing large amounts of rent, Michelle would start to 'do the circuit'. 'Doing the circuit' of boarding houses was common and it didn't take long before:

You'd recognize a few faces and sometimes hook up with them.

Profiles of boarding house residents regularly portray a highly marginalised population with disproportionate levels of physical and mental health problems. Substance use problems are also commonly reported in both Australia and overseas (Hoch & Slayton 1989; Bartholomew 1999; Jope 2000; Harvey et al. 2002). It was in boarding houses that people met others in similar circumstances and this was the basis for the formation of new social networks. Although many of these networks were loose, regularly forming and dispersing, the crucial point is that boarding houses are a common locale through which a broad confluence of sub-cultural activity flowed. Keith said that he just:

. . . slipped into it. It was obvious there were heaps of people on the go. If you wanted something it wasn't hard to come by.

'Slipping into it' emphasises the relatively smooth transition for this group who, because of their experiences in the process of becoming homeless had, to a certain extent, been 'prepared' for the physical and social environment of boarding houses.

The transition from housed to homeless while relatively smooth, was not without problems. John's opinion reflected the polarised attitudes towards boarding houses. Like others, John fluctuated between viewing boarding houses as 'shit holes' to the view that they were 'exciting' because they provided access to a range of social networks and activities:

There was always something going on. You had to be on your toes though.

Along with boarding houses, the homeless service system is another institution where people encounter the homeless subculture. The homeless service system also plays an

important role in the dynamics of people’s homeless careers. This can be seen in Table 5.1 which indicates that three quarters of the sample (N=103) reported that they had previously been in transitional accommodation. However, there was variation in the use of the homeless service system across the five pathways and the data converge around two distinct clusters.

Table 5.1 Previously housed in transitional accommodation (per cent)

Pathway	Substance use (N=18)	Youth (N=41)	Mental illness (N=6)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Previously housed	94	95	100	43	38	75



CLUSTER ONE
(95 per cent)



CLUSTER TWO
(39 per cent)

The first cluster is comprised of three pathways (substance use, mental illness and youth). In this cluster over 90 per cent of the respondents had previously been housed in transitional accommodation. In the second cluster (housing crisis and domestic violence) the pattern was significantly different with approximately 40 per cent reporting that they had been in transitional accommodation previously.

Although the initial stages of homelessness typically start with couch surfing, people soon started to use boarding houses and welfare services and this is where they encounter the homeless subculture. It is in this social setting where they start to learn the implicit rules and practices that structure interactions within the homeless subculture, including the widespread acceptance of substance use as a normal recreational activity. The homeless subculture is characterised by ‘here and now’ orientation which is similar to the ‘here and now’ orientation of the using culture. Recognising that both subcultures share a similar temporal orientation is vital in terms of understanding why people with drug dependencies are disproportionately represented among the long term homeless (Mallett et al. 2003)

5.3 What is the subculture like and how are routines established?

The routine involved in supporting one's drug use provides structure and purpose for the day (Hogan 2001).

There were three interrelated sets of practices that shaped the routines of homeless people with substance use problems: scoring, using, and finding somewhere to sleep. These three factors created a 'present orientation'. When people have a present orientation it means that the contingencies of homeless life take precedence. Issues such as like organising permanent housing - which in a tight housing market requires additional resources, planning, transport and luck to arrange - get pushed to one side. As John said:

Between trying to find a place for the night and getting gear it's fucking hard to do anything else.

With a focus on getting the next meal, getting money together, finding some accommodation, and getting the next hit, there were thoughts about the longer term, but people were overwhelmed by what Snow and Anderson (1993:182) describe as the 'consuming character of the immediate present'. Constantly waking up surrounding by the detritus of drug use Keith said:

. . . smack determined everything I did . . . it controlled me.

When they were asked about their future and getting out of homelessness an indication of this group's present orientation emerged. Only one third thought their drug problem would be resolved by the time they left transitional accommodation (Table 5.2) and only one fifth had thought about their housing arrangements after transitional accommodation (Table 5.3).

Table 5.2 Likelihood of resolving key issues before exiting transitional housing (per cent)

	Substance use (N=18)	Sample (N=103)
Yes	33	58
No	50	30
Unsure	17	12
TOTAL	100	100

Table 5.3 Have planned exit housing (per cent)

Thought about exit housing	Substance use (N=18)	Sample (N=103)
Yes	22	50
No	67	44
Unsure	11	6
TOTAL	100	100

This is not to say that people on this pathway did not aspire to a conventional home or a job, or that they did not think about getting out of homelessness. Rather, what the data pointed to is that ‘using’, the social context in which it occurs and the routines that sustain it, limits the social and economic opportunities available to this group. Furthermore, repeated setbacks, violent experiences, poor health and low self esteem tended to emphasise a future that held little promise. With little sense of the future, this group’s priorities were firmly located in the ‘here and now’. This is ultimately destructive in that their social context is structured by social practices that are damaging both physically and psychologically. Without little sense of the future, the chance of getting out of the homeless population is reduced. Once this cycle commenced it is difficult to break.

The ‘present orientation’ of this group was a strong characteristic and, during the first interview it became apparent that friendships or associations with other homeless people and homeless drug users were also important in their daily routines. During the course of any given day interactions with other homeless people resulted in the sharing of resources, another aspect of the homeless subculture. This could involve passing on information about services, what they offered, what they could and could not do, what individual workers were like, but it also included information about where to stay, where to get money and how to avoid ‘the jacks’ [the police].

Resource sharing in the form of knowledge and information was passed from experienced homeless people to new comers, as well as between friends and acquaintances. This information commonly formed the basis for many routines. When he was staying in one boarding house Keith found out:

. . . that most evenings a place down the road threw out unused food – bread mainly.

And he was told if he couldn't pay the rent at one boarding house, it was best to approach welfare agencies early in the week because that was when they:

. . . had more money available 'cause they'd run out by the end of the week.

As discernable routines formed, a level of continuity and predictability also emerged. John and his mate Joe would regularly:

. . . catch the tram into the city and get food from the Salvos. From there things would sort'a work themselves out.

Keith knew that if he went for a meal at the local mission he would always find someone to 'hook up with'.

Information also filtered through a loose network of boarding house residents. One time when Keith was in the Miami, a notorious inner city boarding house:

. . . word came around there were cleaning jobs available at Colonial Stadium [a nearby football stadium] . . . by the time I got there it looked like half the Miami was there . . .

It was also common to see people at Centrelink. Michelle would regularly go there and after:

. . . we had filled in a few forms a few of us would go chasing.

What these situations draw attention to is that the 'euphoria of using' constitutes only part of each day. What structured the day and shaped many social interactions was what Rowe (2002b) terms 'the business of raising money'. This 'business' has a significant influence on peoples day-to-day life because the cost of illicit drugs is so high that people on low incomes have to devote large amounts of time to securing money. A result is that everything else tended to fall by the wayside. For Andrew it was still the case that:

Pretty much from the moment I wake up I think about getting gear, about how I can get some money and score.

People employed a range of strategies to raise the money they needed to survive and at the same time, maintain their habit. Some shoplifted, while others talked about the scams

they would pull to get money. Many of these scams were learnt from other homeless people in the course of hanging around with them. Keith mentioned that:

You'd spend a lot of the time hanging around and you'd hear about what was happening . . . heaps of it was bullshit of course, but you'd hear some good stuff.

John learnt the '\$50 trick' from a bloke in a crisis accommodation facility. The trick involved asking a shop attendant to change a 50 dollar bill – when the shop attendant offered the change you grabbed it and 'ran as fast as you could'. The scam worked well until John went back to a store he had previously scammed:

This bloke eyed me off for a while, and when I pulled out a \$50 bill his face froze . . . I knew immediately that something was wrong and bolted.

This was just one scam. Some worked as drivers or lookouts on burglaries, others would do 'houses' themselves, while some turned to sex work. Significantly, most people did not identify or see themselves as criminals. Crime was viewed in the context of the cost of heroin and their low income. Michelle was angered by this:

If smack didn't cost so much I wouldn't have done some of the shit things I done.

Within the context of using an illegal drug, people in this group were criminalised and further marginalised because they engaged in illegal activities to get the money they required to support their drug dependency. Nevertheless, over time people started to specialise and this was, to a certain extent, mediated by their age and their gender. Keith did 'burgs' (burglaries) while Michelle started to 'lay in the car' – meaning she worked as a street prostitute using her 'client's cars'. This was extremely risky and Michelle knew one working girl who had been killed. Although men did turn to sex work, it was confined to a minority of younger men (Kennedy & Fitzpatrick 2001see).

The most common way to get money was to deal in drugs. Michelle said she 'started selling to get by . . . little bits here and there'. While some people had 'dealt' prior to becoming homeless it was much more common for people to start dealing once they had become homeless. There was a clear crossover between the role of the user and the dealer. Early on it was mainly small scale dealing and it was common to hear stories of 'fresh faces'

being targeted because they were easy to rip off. John was upfront about how he would prey on new kids. At one level he would help them and gain their trust by sharing resources and information that helped them deal with homelessness, but he also took advantage of them. John knew that 'drugs were the key, they were seen as cool'.

For people like John, dealing commonly lead to increased consumption and this was a 'big mistake'. When John got some heroin on 'tick [credit]' and 'blasted' it up his arm, he thought he would be able to 'cover my arse'. He couldn't do so and one morning while he was staying at a boarding house he was woken by a loud:

. . . fuckin' crash and then there's a fuckin' gun at my head. That's frightening man, you don't want that to happen too often.

Similarly Keith was reminded that dealing was not a particularly safe activity, particularly when, on one occasion he cut the gear 'too heavily': After selling it he:

. . . copped a hiding. I thought they were fresh faces and wouldn't know.

These experiences taught them much. Even though drug use and dealing can spill over into the public domain creating occasional moral panics (Rowe 2002a), using is generally hidden from public view and much of what happens occurs out of sight of the authorities and the public. In an unregulated market this means, of course, that when problems arise, typically around quantity or quality, there is no recourse other than violence. John reflected that whereas he would have 'done anything' previously to get his fix, after the incident with the gun he played it much smarter – 'by the rules'.

This sensitises us to the 'structure' of the homeless subculture. On one level the homeless subculture appears fluid and chaotic and this creates the superficial impression that the subculture has no real form or structure. Yet the existence of rules that regulate behaviour, albeit loosely, indicates that the homeless subculture does have a distinct structure that shapes the social practices of many homeless people. As Giddens (1979:10) points out to perform a social practice 'participants must necessarily draw on a set of rules; these rules can be seen to give structure to the practices they help to organise'.

The 'rules' became routinized practices as the knowledge and information that shaped day-to-day life was passed from the experienced to the inexperienced and from friend to friend. This is the way that the homeless subculture regenerates or re-produces itself. Although subcultural practices may be loosely defined and often implied, they nevertheless provide structure and coherence to the day-to-day lives of many homeless people.

It is important to emphasise that these rules do not determine the lives of homeless people – like all social actors, homeless people with a drug dependency intervene in the world and affect changes in that world. By reflecting and assessing what they are doing, people behaved in different ways and this can alter patterns of social interactions and the structures that support them. This reminds us that agents and structures are not separate. They constantly interact, thereby maintaining and reproducing existing patterns of interactions, as well as creating new practices.

Knowledge of the rules didn't just happen because these rules were not published anywhere or maintained by anyone in particular. This means that people are particularly vulnerable early in their homeless careers. John knew he was 'lucky to survive' a number of incidents as a result of unknowingly transgressing the rules. This emphasises the point that sharing resources is more than sharing material resources. Sharing resources includes implicit, though not necessarily consistent information, about the rules that 'govern' the homeless subculture. Robbie, from the youth pathway, recounted that when he first started sleeping out people tried to 'protect him' by telling him 'how it worked' and what 'not to do'.

Not knowing the rules could get you into serious trouble. Keith recalled the time he saw a young fellow assaulted by a group of boarding house residents. The young fellow had:

. . . done the wrong thing and got what was coming to him - he'd fucked up big time.

Keith had also found out the hard way. He was attacked and, for a short time, ostracised for stealing from a room at a boarding house. Ripping off other people is part of the homeless

subculture, but there are subtle differences and unless you knew 'the rules' the results could be undesirable. Keith was assaulted because the room he broke into contained a family and this transgressed the unwritten rule that you:

Leave families alone . . . it's the kids you see. People who fuck around with children are the lowest.

When Keith 'rolled a crazy' at the same place 'no-one gave a fuck'.

While scoring, using and raising money play a vital role in shaping daily routines, finding a place to stay also consumed a great deal of time. Many respondents mentioned they had used crisis facilities regularly. Transitional accommodation was harder to get, but this was actively sought as well. 'Getting a place' was 'part of the game' and Michelle said it was well known on the street that to get accommodation you sometimes had to play a role. The longer you spent in the homeless population the more knowledgeable you became about welfare organisations and the more skilled you became at crafting a story:

You'd swear all of these things. That you were going to do this, that you were going to do that, just to get some money or a place where you could hit up.

The paradox of 'making up stories' was obvious to Michelle who found it was 'weird given our lives were so fucked up that we had to make up stories'.

Without understanding the material constraints homeless people face, patterns of repeatedly using welfare services and the practice of 'telling stories', are commonly presented by conservative commentators such as Saunders (2004) as dependence on, or abuse of the welfare system. However, when this behaviour is examined in its resource depleted context there is a clear rationality that has little to do with welfare dependency or personality defects. Perhaps the most incisive comment relates to the putative restorative function of the homeless service system. Keith said that:

When you've got nothing – no money, no accommodation, no hope of getting a job – you have to [tell stories]. They presume you want to give up. They just don't understand it's just not like that.

This draws attention to how drug dependency re-defines relationships with non-users, as well as with the housing and labour markets. These relationships do not change or revert

back to normal immediately after a person stops using. As many people would find, when they were ‘clean’ they would have to fight against the effects of long absences from the work force, a poor rental history and coming to terms with having few, if any, social connections in the mainstream. These factors are significant barriers to ‘getting out’ and ‘staying out’ of the homeless population.

Nevertheless, over time it was clear that accessing welfare services became a normal part of day-to-day life, or a routinized practice. The data in Table 5.4 indicate that most people on this pathway had been in transitional accommodation on multiple occasions. Overall, there was a pattern of multiple stays in transitional accommodation, although once again, the data converge around two distinct clusters. The first cluster includes the substance use, youth and mental health pathways. People on these pathways had been in transitional accommodation, on average, five times. This is nearly three times the level found among people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways.

Table 5.4 Mean number of times in transitional accommodation by pathway

Pathway	Substance use (N=18)	Youth (N=41)	Mental illness (N=6)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Mean times housed	4.4	5.5	3.3	2.2	1.6	3.8



CLUSTER ONE
(mean times housed 5.0)



CLUSTER TWO
(mean times housed 1.8)

Some people found it difficult to stabilise their situation while they were in emergency accommodation. This was because of the link it maintained to other homeless people and the homeless subculture. John’s experience illustrates this:

I moved in with Ned and as I got to know him we started to do stuff together . . . we eventually got kicked out because they found some fits in the place.

The third time John was accommodated he was ‘desperate to get clean’. Trying to stay clean was hard enough but he had to share, once again, with a person who was still using. Not surprisingly John found that:

. . . just being around 'harry' [heroin] was too much. Within a month or so I was back to where I was before I moved in.

In Michelle's case, rather than helping her 'get out', her experiences of emergency accommodation also maintained her connection to the homeless subculture. Michelle's current transitional property was 'well known' and people would 'drop in all the time' and she thought the whole thing was:

. . . laughable, this place is right in the heart of the action.

In these instances, transitional accommodation could perpetuate substance use rather than disrupt it.

As people became more involved with the homeless subculture, some, like John, got involved in violent crime. While it bought higher rewards the risks were greater:

When we knocked over a dealer the word was out on the street fucking quickly. You have to know how to keep quiet otherwise you're fucked.

While cases like this were rare and were sometimes part of an elaborate fiction, they draw attention to the point that as people's dependency increased it led to increasingly desperate measures to secure money. As people became more deeply embedded in the homeless subculture, they became less fearful, rules were flouted and their perception of themselves began to change. At this point it was common to see things spiral out of control. John got to the point where he was:

Doing crazy things, fucking crazy things. When this cunt put a knife to my face I told the him to stab me because I was already fucking dead.

5.4 Crime and the streets

Although there is strong agreement about a relationship between heroin use and crime, the nature of that relationship continues to arouse considerable debate (Henderson, Ross, Darke, Teeson & Lynskey 2002). There is a strong perception of a causal link between crime and homelessness with many studies pointing to high rates of criminal activity and incarceration among the homeless (O'Connor, Wurmser, Brown & Smith 1972; O'Connor

1989; Rossi 1989; Neale 1997; Baldry, MacDonald, Maplestone & Peeters 2002). The data in Table 5.5 show that just under one quarter of the sample (23 per cent) had been incarcerated at some time in their lives. People on the substance abuse pathway were twice as likely to have been incarcerated, with 55 per cent reporting they had been incarcerated at some point in their lives. However, of the 10 people on this pathway who reported they had been incarcerated, eight spent time in prison after they had experienced homelessness. This is consistent with the view that among homeless people most criminal activity is primarily an adaptive response, albeit a response that is strongly mediated by the cost of using.

Table 5.5 Incarceration by onset pathway (per cent)

	Substance use (N=18)	Youth (N=41)	Mental illness (N=6)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Prior to homelessness	11	2	17	-	4	5
After becoming homeless	44	22	-	-	8	18
Lifetime prevalence	55	24	17	-	12	23

While the high rate of incarceration among people on this pathway appears to establish the connection between substance use, crime and homelessness, there are two reasons to be wary about making simplistic causal connections. First, it ignores the role prohibition has in keeping the price of heroin high and that much of the crime linked to heroin and other illicit drugs could be avoided if people had access to legal and affordable drugs. Second, homeless people, particularly visible groups like substance users, are likely to attract police attention and this can increase rates of incarceration for activities not necessarily linked to substance use or homelessness. Keith recounted how at one time he was:

. . . fined for not having a train ticket. When they asked for my address I told them I didn't have one. It got out of control and they called the cops.

Over time some people cycled between homelessness and prison and this became a feature of their lives. Over three quarters (80 per cent) of those who had been imprisoned,

had been imprisoned more than once. Drugs generally underpinned the cycle, but it was exacerbated by a lack of affordable and appropriate accommodation to exit to and a lack of support once they were out (Baldry et al. 2002; Bessant et al. 2002; Metraux & Culhane 2004). John, who was on a bond for possession, was put inside for six months after he was caught robbing a house. When John left prison he went straight back to the streets:

They opened the doors and pushed me out. I went straight back and 'got on' that afternoon.

Few people left prison with their heroin problems addressed or with much thought given to their housing needs.

In between cycling in and out of prison, people started to sleep rough more frequently. The use of squats, for instance, is common among homeless people with a drug dependency (Rowe 2002b). Keith commented that:

. . . squats were good because they were private. You could get on and not worry so much.

At the same time squats could expose people to all sorts of dangers. John said that when they found a squat:

You'd try and keep it quiet but word would get around pretty quickly.

And that squats could quickly turn into:

Shooting galleries . . . there were 1000s of fits on the ground at my last squat. It was fucking full on at times, what with everyone looking to get on all the time.

And Michelle, who used squats less frequently, said that when squats got well known:

We'd move from squat to squat - sometimes the coppers would leave us alone, other times they'd raid us.

And that:

There could be 20 people in a single squat . . . they weren't all users either. There be some old fellas and some nutters, but mainly it was junkies though.

A number of women mentioned that they tried to avoid squats by moving in with men.

O'Dwyer (1997) labels this form of adaptation 'shacking up'. Even though 'shacking up' was

aimed at providing security and shelter, it tended to reinforce their vulnerability. Michelle said she:

. . . hooked up with Terry because I had nowhere to stay. . . I'd known him for a while as we often scored together.

Although 'shacking up' provided a roof over her head, it also put Michelle at risk of violence and exploitation. One day 'Terry' turned on Michelle:

. . . in a violent rage and beat me up so bad I got taken to hospital.

When people could not find somewhere to sleep, sleeping rough was a common response and virtually everyone (89 per cent) reported that they had 'slept rough' at some point in their homeless careers (Table 5.6). Again, the data converge into two clusters with the people in the substance use, mental health and youth pathways all reporting similarly high rates of sleeping rough.

Table 5.6 Reports of 'sleeping rough' by onset pathway (per cent)

Pathway	Substance use (N=18)	Youth (N=41)	Mental illness (N=6)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Slept rough	89	71	83	14	21	55



CLUSTER ONE
(77 per cent)



CLUSTER TWO
(18 per cent)

In contrast, the incidence of sleeping rough reported among people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways was approximately a quarter of the rate of the first cluster. The variation in the reported rates of sleeping rough highlights the way that different patterns of social interaction and different social practices can emerge from within the same broad set of structural factors. This point further emphasises the active role agents play in interpreting their situation in ways that made sense to them.

For many people who have a drug dependency it is not the focus on 'using' that leads to sleeping rough. Sleeping rough typically occurs as a result of acute social and economic resource depletion. Although 'using' occasionally took precedence over accommodation,

sleeping rough generally happened only after people had unsuccessfully tried to access crisis accommodation or rehabilitation services but were unable to because they were full (Thomson Goodall and Associates 1999a) or there were waiting lists (NSW Ombudsman 2004). Homeless people with a drug dependency are at the very bottom of the housing market.

5.5 Managing stigma

I now turn my attention to the way people on the substance use pathway managed the stigma of being homeless and being drug dependent. Homelessness is associated with particular images – bad body smell and dishevelled appearance are among the enduring images of skid row that continue to resonate in the public mind. Stereotypes commonly associated with substance abuse include poor skin, missing teeth, sallow complexion and track marks. These are overt, visual symbols that carry social information about people and mark them out as outsiders or ‘social outcasts’ - as discredited.

People on this pathway found that increasing amounts of time on the street and long term drug use did impact on their health status and their physical appearance. These changes to their health status are significant in terms of understanding their homeless careers. For a small number (N=2) mental health problems emerged as a consequence of extended drug use and this was noticeable when there was a heroin drought and people turned to other drugs, such as speed. During one such dry spell Keith noticed a number of users who went on ‘speed benders’ and ‘lost the plot’. Others used drugs such as temazepam and the physical impact was shocking. John witnessed the results of injecting temazepam and commented that:

I won't shoot that shit up, no fucking way man. I know one bloke who lost a couple of fingers.

The physical effects of long term drug use also included malnourishment, hepatitis C, poor skin and rotting teeth. These overt signs marked them out as ‘junkies’ and it was the

physical signs of drug use that created the most problems interacting with the mainstream. Michelle said that at times she 'felt invisible' and that people looked right 'through her'. Michelle was shocked when she saw some:

. . . photos. I didn't recognise myself at first. I looked so old.

In their interactions with the mainstream, homeless people with substance use problems attributed the discrimination they encountered to the physical signs of their dependency. These visual cues shaped their interactions and underpinned much of the discrimination they encountered. The discrimination they experienced was not about their physical attributes *per se*, but was shaped by the social identity attached to illicit drug use and the relationship of that social identity to mainstream normative structures. Being a homeless drug user is a socially devalued identity in that it implies a rejection of mainstream values and practices. The overt physical signs of drug use provided information that enabled people to formalise their discrimination in a quick and remarkably consistent fashion. Link and Phelan (2001:369) describe this as a form of 'cognitive efficiency' and Keith experienced this when he applied for a rental property:

I'm sure they just threw the application in the bin. The woman behind the counter took one look at me and that was it.

Michelle said that every time she went to the supermarket or a department store 'they'd check my bags out'. Similarly, John said that at one time he was reluctant to go out because every time he did it felt like the 'cops pull me over because of the way I look. They think I'm using or holding'. The way this group looked and what it 'said about them' exerted a significant influence on the nature of their interactions with the mainstream. As a result of routinely encountering discriminatory practices these people developed routines to avoid situations where this might happen. This tended to cement existing social relationships within the homeless subculture.

A central tenet of the social identification perspective is the longer people remain in the homeless population, the more likely they are to identify with homelessness as 'a way of

life' (Wallace 1965). Identification with homelessness is further strengthened by the fact that as people became embedded in the homeless subculture, most lost contact with the 'normal' world. People began to identify with homelessness as a way of life as their friendships became increasingly concentrated among other homeless people.

An identification index was constructed (see Chapter 3) based on people's responses to seven questions. The seven questions were 1) whether they knew other homeless people, 2) whether they had any friends who were homeless, 3) their frequency of contact with other homeless people, 4) whether they had ever described themselves as homeless, 5) whether they identified with homeless people, 6) whether they saw themselves as having anything in common with homeless people, and 7) if they believed there was a stigma attached to being homeless. The index was used to determine the level of identification with homelessness and to establish if the level of identification was mediated by people's experiences prior to becoming homeless and their pathways into homelessness. Where the score was close to one (e.g., 0.89) this indicated high identification with the homeless subculture. Where it was close to zero this indicated the reverse. The average identity index score among the people on the substance use pathway was 0.79. This was above the average score across the entire sample which was 0.59.

The high rate (0.79) reported by people on the substance use pathway suggests that repeated rejection, discrimination and poor self-image resulted in people finding support by being with others who had experienced similar discrimination and who could also relate to their lives. Michelle found some solace in the fact that:

At least other homeless people know how hard it is . . . I feel better with them because they don't put me down . . . they know the shit I been through.

John's thoughts echoed the same theme:

They [other homeless people] don't stare down at you . . . they understand what it's like and don't judge you because of it.

This emphasises the importance of the homeless subculture in providing support and a sense of belonging. With strengthening connections to the homeless subculture

increasingly shaping day-to-day social interactions, many social practices started to become routinized over time. The homeless subculture and the routines that support it, provide, on the one hand, meaning and purpose, but on the other, they create an ongoing tension between belonging to a group and exploiting the very group they 'belong to'. Negotiating the tension between the supportive and the predatory elements of the homeless subculture eventually wore people down, and this reduces the desire to get out. At this point many appeared to have become chronically homeless.

5.6 Implications for career duration

This section examines the length of time that people spend in the homeless population. Although it was difficult to establish precisely how long people had been homeless, the housing biographies were sufficiently accurate to calculate the cumulative duration (in months) for each household in the sample.

Once cumulative duration had been calculated I classified people as either short-term, medium-term and long-term homeless. The distinction between short-term and long-term experiences is often made in homeless literature (Rossi 1989; Piliavin et al. 1993; Culhane & Hornburg 1997; Leal, Galanter, Dermatis & Westreich 1998) as well as in a number of related fields such as housing (Wulff & Maher 1998), substance abuse (Quaglio, Lugoboni, Sarti, Talamini & DesJarlais 2003) and poverty (O'Neill, Bassi & Wolf 1987).

Making these distinctions is not without difficulties as there is considerable disagreement about what constitutes a short-term experience – some people argue a short-term problem is three months or less (Rossi 1989), some six months or less (Rossiter et al. 2003) and others 12 months or less (Leal et al. 1998). Similarly there is debate about what constitutes a long-term experience with some suggesting 12 months as a starting point (Winkleby, Rockhill, Jatulis & Fortmann 1992; Leal et al. 1998; Phelan & Link 1999; Wong & Piliavin 2001), some favouring two years (Rossi 1989; Piliavin et al. 1993; Snow & Anderson 1993) and some as much as nine years or more (Coleman 2001).

While any distinction is, ultimately, a matter for judgement, for the purposes of this research, short-term homelessness was classified as less than three months of homelessness in a lifetime. This decision was based on the judgement that more than 90 days without secure accommodation is not a short-term homelessness. With regard to long-term homelessness there is an emerging academic convention that 12 months is an appropriate threshold and I have adopted this approach as well²². This left a middle period – those that had homeless careers lasting between 4 – 12 months – a duration I refer to as medium-term homelessness. The idea of a transitional zone is important because it addresses the problem of being classified in the short-term population one day and in the long-term population the next.

The sample of 103 households showed considerable variation in the amount of time people had been homeless. The data on homeless duration in Table 5.7 show that, once again, patterns coalesce around the same two clusters with people on the substance use, mental illness and youth pathways reporting significantly longer experiences of homelessness than people in the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways.

Once people on the substance use pathway are homeless they tended to remain homeless for a significant period of time. The reasons for this are complex but the duration of these careers is strongly influenced by the way that prolonged drug use and frequent engagement with other homeless drug users produces a present orientation which makes it difficult to organise rehabilitation or arrange housing. Without immediate access to rehabilitation services the opportunity for successfully intervening in these careers is frequently lost.

While there were frequent attempts to 'get out', these attempts had typically failed. It is not that 'drug use' prevents people getting out of homelessness, but rather the way problematic substance use links people into the homeless subculture, through which many

²² A framework using two years as the point marking the start of a long term careers was also developed. Using this classification I found no difference in the temporal patterns. Using different temporal measures is not uncommon. Piliavin et al (1993: 591) used two and three year thresholds to designate long term homelessness. Their analysis revealed little difference between the two thresholds.

developed specific survival routines and adaptive practices that made engaging with the mainstream problematic and consequently perpetuated their homelessness.

Table 5.7 Temporal classification by pathway (per cent)

	Substance use (N=18)	Youth (N=41)	Mental illness (N=6)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Short term (0 - 3 mth)	6	7	-	29	46	18
Medium term (4-11 mth)	6	3	17	43	33	17
Long term (12+ mth)	88	90	83	28	21	65
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mean months	55	41	73	7.5	8.5	33

CLUSTER ONE
Mean months 48

CLUSTER TWO
Mean months 8

While the homeless subculture provided some support, security and a degree of personal validation, it was limited and partial and ultimately homelessness became a deeply destructive experience. Many were engulfed by nihilism, anomie and anger. John, who had been homeless for six years, ‘didn’t give a fuck’ because he knew that whatever happened, he had ‘been there already’. Keith, who had ‘been through it all’ said ‘why complain it all stays the same’. Like most of the people on this pathway Keith, Michelle, and John had become chronically homeless and for them ‘getting out’ and ‘staying out’ of homelessness would prove to be difficult, but not impossible.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that people who become homeless because of substance use typically become entrenched in the homeless population. While there will always be variation in how people respond to homelessness, it is clear that most people on this pathway moved into the homeless subculture quickly. This occurred because most people were already involved in ‘the scene’ which has many overlaps with the homeless

subculture. People used the homeless service system in a pragmatic way and their experience demonstrates that the way the homeless service system is set up and the way people use the homeless service system, plays a critical role in reproducing the homeless subculture. People who travelled on this pathway generally lived in the 'here and now' and this made it difficult to organise or focus on housing or work and many resorted to illegal activities to raise the money they needed to get by. When these practices become routinized it tends to reflect a strong identification with other drug using homeless people and an acceptance of homelessness as a way of life. The homeless experiences of the 18 people on this pathway were structured by the physical signs of their prolonged drug use which in turn was used to single them out and deny them access to resources.

In trying to illuminate the nexus between substance use and homelessness, explanations have shown an implicit tendency to characterise homeless people with substance abuse problems as either inadequate or flawed, or to link substance use to self medication in response to mental health or early life trauma. Without denying that these issues exist for some homeless people, the point that is often overlooked is that this group has extensive social networks, they collaborate in many joint activities and many positively identified with homelessness as a way of life. Without romanticising the life of homeless drug users, accounts that characterise them as passive, dependent or isolated are inadequate.

The concept of a homeless subculture is useful as it focuses attention on shared practices that structure day-to-day life, as well as sensitising us to variations, contestations and contradictions within the normative structures of the homeless subculture. These social practices are mediated through a complex interaction of depleted housing options, the socio-economic treatment of narcotics as illicit drugs and how individual actors make sense of, and remake their devalued social identities.

It is important to reaffirm that these experiences relate to the people whose problems occurred prior to becoming homeless. Without presuming complete homogeneity among this group, the similarities in their experiences, actions and practices suggest there is a strong link between how the people on this pathway became homeless and what subsequently

happens to them. As I go on to show in subsequent chapters, people who become homeless because of substance use represent only one quarter of those who report substance use problems. This means the majority of homeless drug dependent people in my sample developed problems after they had experienced homelessness. In subsequent chapters I pursue the question of whether the different temporal sequences have any bearing on career trajectory.

6 Homeless careers of the mentally ill

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the homeless experiences of the six people on the mental health pathway. This chapter argues that to make the connection between this group's experience leading to homelessness and their experiences of homelessness, it is important to keep paying attention to the way in which the actions of individuals with mental health problems are shaped by the structural properties of the housing and labour markets.

In addition, the chapter argues that it is necessary to consider how people with mental health problems respond to the stigma of homelessness, as well as considering how other homeless people respond to homeless people with mental health problems. I argue that people with mental health problems respond to and reproduce the stigma of homelessness in different ways than do homeless people on the substance use pathway. I show that homeless people with mental health problems set up different day-to-day routines which result in a different experience of homelessness and of 'getting out' and 'staying out' of homelessness.

The chapter starts by examining the way the mentally ill managed their entry into the homeless population with few, if any, social networks. Most end up in boarding houses early on in their careers. Once in boarding houses they encounter violence and intimidation and the chapter identifies two actions this group take to minimise their vulnerability. The first response was to move frequently between boarding houses. As boarding house options diminish over time, the second response to avoid problems is to withdraw from social contact.

I also show that homeless people with mental health problems withdraw in order to differentiate themselves from other homeless people and to deal with the stigma of being homeless. In the process of withdrawing they invert the 'homeless' hierarchy to create their

own social order. It is the case, however, that both actions - frequent movement between boarding houses and withdrawal from social contact - result in routines that reproduce the conditions that maintain and sustain their marginalisation.

In the final part of the chapter I demonstrate that people who enter the homeless population because of mental health problems have the longest experience of homelessness. However, I show that this group does not identify with other homeless people or homelessness as a way of life. This raises questions about the applicability of the identification thesis to people who have mental health problems.

6.2 Abrupt break

In the process of becoming homeless, the six individuals who had mental health problems had lost most of their possessions and they all had to deal with being uprooted from their social environment with few social or economic resources. While this was happening they also had to manage their health problems. Maggie, who suffered an episode of 'manic depression'²³ soon after becoming homeless, didn't know what to do:

I didn't have many friends and was pretty much on my own. When they [the hospital] discharged me I had nowhere to go.

In the previous chapter we saw that the initial entry into the homeless population for people in the substance use pathway was buffered by their existing networks in the 'scene'. In contrast, people with mental health problems have no such networks and this, combined with the ongoing denial of their health problems, means their homelessness usually begins with an abrupt break. For two people in this group their homeless careers began by sleeping rough. Tim spent a couple of weeks sleeping rough on the beach. As it was summer Tim thought:

It wasn't that bad. It wasn't cold or anything.

²³ This was Maggie's term. Maggie was probably using the popular term for bi-polar disorder.

After a fortnight on the beach, Tim became increasingly concerned for his safety. Where he had been sleeping wasn't:

. . . far from a spot where a bunch of people drank at night. You'd hear them going on, but it was the fighting that got me.

Although he felt unsafe, Tim's main recollection was that he was overwhelmed by feelings of 'anger and frustration'. This, in combination with his rejection of the labels 'mentally ill' and 'homeless', reduced his desire to seek assistance.

The more common pattern, however, was to move directly into boarding houses and this created its own problems. Maggie remembered the first night she spent in a boarding house:

. . . the noise and the smell of urine and vomit. It was terribly frightening. It had this awful vibe about it, its hard to explain but, well I spent the night waiting for the morning to come.

In the initial stages of their homeless careers, people had to deal with the anxiety of having nowhere safe or permanent to stay. Feelings of alienation and isolation were compounded by the fact there was little predictability or permanency in their lives. Maggie found that after a short time in a boarding house she:

Didn't know what to do. I didn't expect it. I'd always, always had somewhere to stay.

Initially, boarding houses were viewed as temporary accommodation and even after a couple of months Maggie recalled that she kept on hoping that it 'would get better. I didn't expect to spend so much time there'. The sense that boarding houses were a temporary option contributed to the problem of establishing day-to-day routines.

With no continuity and little predictability in their daily lives, accommodation problems were exacerbated by the fact that the cost of living in boarding houses consumed a large part of their income. Because of their poor position in the labour market everyone relied on government benefits. With the cost of a room or a dormitory bed in boarding houses ranging from \$120 - \$160 a week, people were spending over 50 per cent of their income on

substandard accommodation²⁴. This made it impossible to save money to secure better accommodation. Maggie's frustration was clearly evident:

I'd spend nearly all of my pension on these shit holes. Some were meant to provide food. I tell you its not food . . . one place used newspaper in the toilet.

Apart from their high costs it was common to hear stories of places 'full of bedbugs' and 'cockroaches', rotten food, unhygienic conditions and the remains of drug use. It is well known that boarding houses can be unsafe (Bartholomew 1999).

6.3 Marginalisation

Studies of boarding house residents have reported that people with mental health problems are frequently taken advantage of by other residents (Harvey et al. 2002). Tim, who found his own way into a boarding house within a month of becoming homeless, recalled that on his second night:

A couple knocked on my door and asked for some cigarettes. They sort of moved into the room and pinched my wallet. The thing was I didn't see them again and was never sure if they lived there or not.

In the early stages of their homeless careers Tim and Maggie reported that they were frequently preyed on by other residents who often had drug problems. Boarding house residents often target the mentally ill, exploiting their loneliness and desire for social contact. Tim recounted how a young woman befriended him. Tim lent her money on a number of occasions and although she promised to repay him, she never did:

She just disappeared and took some of my stuff.

Tim admitted this happened to him on more than one occasion and this contributed to his low self-esteem. Tim spoke of other experiences in boarding houses which further emphasised his vulnerability:

²⁴ The two primary sources of government income were Newstart (N=1) and the Disability Support pension (DSP) (N=5). Newstart payments are \$202.25 per week; DSP payments are \$244.45 a week. Source: <http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/>

You had to be alert . . . those friggin junkies would pinch anything. I lost a radio and a backpack and my food was always being taken.

Maggie witnessed a number of violent situations and frequently felt intimidated by other residents. At one boarding house two male residents approached her:

. . . making obscene gestures and that sort of stuff . . . I felt very afraid cause they knew my room where I was living.

Some landlords also took advantage of this group's vulnerability. At one place when Tim reported to the landlord that the shower was not working:

. . . he (the landlord) told me I could go and live anywhere I wanted to. Meaning shut up or fuck off.

At another place, Tim had to pay a \$50 key deposit and when he left the landlord refused to return it, claiming it was 'to clean my room'.

This group responded in two distinct ways to the social practices of landlords and other residents,. The first response was to try to find better accommodation. The second response was to withdraw from social situations where they felt vulnerable.

First, this group regularly moved between boarding houses throughout their homeless careers, although the pattern was more pronounced in the early stages. Moving between places rarely resulted in improved living conditions and often created additional problems. Frequent changes of address meant that Centrelink²⁵ obligations were regularly missed and for those not on the Disability Support Pension (DSP) this led to problems with income payments. Tim's payments had been reduced on two previous occasions because he had failed to turn up for appointments. Fluctuating health problems make maintaining appointments difficult and this meant that Tim was punished because of the very problem which caused him to require support and income assistance in the first place:

. . . they (Centrelink staff) didn't want to help at all. Well, it sort of got out of control from that point, and well, anyway I ended up without any money and couldn't pay rent.

²⁵ Centrelink is an Australian Government agency that delivers a range of services to the community. A primary service is providing income support to the unemployed, people with disabilities, low income families and people over 65 years of age.

Another result of frequent moving was that it took them into unknown areas where they had few social connections. For instance, links with mental health services that had been established in one region were difficult to transfer to another area and as a result they commonly lapsed. When this happened it was common for people to stop taking their medication altogether and this tended to exacerbate their mental health problems. When he did not take his medication, Tim's paranoia incapacitated him for days to the point where, afraid to come out, he retreated to his room to reconstruct his world:

I spent a lot of time thinking, trying to sort it all out. I thought the world was going to self destruct. I felt like, if I had my own space away from all the shit out there, I would be able to work it out.

Despite disclaimers about her health, Maggie acknowledged she found it hard when she stopped taking her medication:

There was no one to help me when it got out of control and I'd generally end up in trouble when it happened.

As people cycled in and out of hospital, maintaining accommodation was frequently compromised. Maggie reported that:

One time I was in [psychiatric hospital] for nearly two months. When I got out I went back to the Royal [a boarding house] but all my stuff had been given away. There was nothing I could do.

The experience of hospital was traumatic, with Tim commenting that 'they fill you up and set you free'. It was on being 'set free' that the vulnerability of this group was most clearly exposed. When they were discharged they often had nowhere to go, they were 'full of pills' and would end up on the street looking for boarding house accommodation. In the inner city, however, boarding house numbers have declined significantly since the 1970s (Jope 2000; Beverly Klinger & Associates 2003) which places additional pressure on vulnerable people to accept 'unacceptable conditions'.

The second response to the violence and exploitation of the boarding house environment was to withdraw from social contact. Maggie tried to blend in with her surroundings and make herself as unobtrusive as possible:

There were certain times I'd make myself scarce . . . payday was always crazy and I learnt to avoid junkies who were hanging out.

While Maggie's experience emphasises the dangers women face in boarding houses, Tim was also frequently exposed to dangerous situations:

Someone would wake you up at 2:00 am looking for someone to drink with or whatever . . . they'd bang on your door, on everyone's doors and you'd hear people screaming at them, telling em to piss off.

Tim found that if he:

. . . stayed quiet, no-one would bother me . . . there was always noise, but I avoided it.

The process of withdrawing changed the way this group interacted with both material and non-material structures. For instance, relationships in the housing and labour markets were virtually non-existent and this led to their reliance on boarding houses for accommodation. Once they were in boarding houses they withdrew even further to avoid victimisation and exploitation.

Previous accounts of the process of 'withdrawing' among homeless people in both Australia (DeHoog 1972; Jordon 1994) and overseas (Bahr 1973) have relied on Robert Merton's (1968) idea of retreatism. Merton suggested that retreatism 'arises from the continued failure' to achieve socially sanctioned goals (Merton 1968:207). He goes on to say that continued failure leads to 'Defeatism, quietism and resignation [that] are manifested in escape mechanisms which ultimately lead him to "escape" from the requirements of society' (Merton 1968:207). According to Merton, people who fall into this category include 'psychotics, autists, pariahs, outcasts, vagrants, tramps, chronic drunkards and drug addicts' (Merton 1968:207)²⁶.

The point that is missed in this account is that the process of withdrawal and the resulting social isolation has little to do with failure to achieve socially approved goals. Instead, other homeless people, especially users, take advantage of the mentally ill which leads to them withdrawing. Patterns of interaction are strongly influenced by the fact that

²⁶ Merton was quite explicit that these were not static categories as people 'may, in other words, shift to other modes of adaptation' (1968:207, n37)

individual actors recognise their own vulnerability and in trying to minimise it, perpetuate their vulnerability. Also, although there is always variation in the way people respond to individuals who have mental health issues, among other homeless people the common pattern was to exploit the mentally ill.

6.4 Managing stigma

There is a tendency to view stigmatised identities such as the homeless and the mentally ill in a uniform manner. This can be understood as an outsider's perspective (Oyserman & Swim 2001). Within the homeless population there is, however, considerable variation in how other homeless people are viewed. These different views form the basis of a social hierarchy within the homeless population. While there was strong identification with other homeless people among some groups, there was also a clear stratification of the homeless population based on what Goffman (1963:107) identified as 'the attitudes the normals take'.

Keith, who became homeless because of substance use, had spent a lot of time in boarding houses. He commented on the 'crazies' and 'the nutters' who would spend all day:

Laughing and talking to themselves . . . there was always a few of them in any of the boarding houses I've stayed in.

Similarly, Toni who had shared a transitional house with another young woman thought people with mental health problems were 'fuck-ups'. These responses from homeless people towards other homeless people who had mental health problems highlight two issues. First, they reaffirm Phelan et al's. (1997:4) finding that 'mental illness is one of the most stigmatised conditions'. Second, they show how homeless people stratify the homeless population and place the mentally ill at the bottom.

Confronted by these attitudes from other homeless people, Tim reported that although he knew homeless people, he did not consider them friends. The lack of interaction and identification with other homeless people was a uniform characteristic of this group. When asked if they had anything in common with the homeless, only one person said he did.

These attitudes were also evident in their efforts to manage their identity. Whereas identification with the homeless was high in the substance use pathway, only one person in the mental health pathway reported that they identified with other homeless people, and only two people described themselves as homeless.

In the previous chapter I applied an index based on seven questions to establish the extent to which people identified with other homeless people and with a homeless way of life. The overall average was 0.59 and for the mentally ill the average was 0.27. This is consistent with other findings that show people with mental health problems have fewer social networks than do other people (Davidson & Stayner 1997; Albert, Becker, McCrone & Thornicroft 1998; Harvey et al. 2002).

Instead of identifying with other homeless people, people on the mental health pathway inverted the social hierarchy. Tim believed that the other residents 'deserved the place . . . they were only interested in drinking or drugs anyway'. To make sense of their isolation the inversion of the homeless hierarchy is an important social practice, and they drew on and re-interpreted stereotypes of the homeless to do this. Maggie thought her problems would vanish if she could 'find a better place and get away from these people'. This group actively differentiated themselves from other homeless people by denying their own problems and emphasising the flaws of others.

6.5 Entrenchment

By minimising their direct involvement with other homeless people I assumed that this group would show few signs of adapting into the homeless subculture where drug and alcohol use, and the business of raising money were a part of day-to-day life. This assumption turned out to be partially correct. While no-one developed alcohol problems and only one person reported a period of incarceration after they became homeless, two people reported they began to use drugs after they became homeless. In both instances it appears drugs were a form of self medication used to 'blot out the day', and these two people moved in and out of

the homeless subculture – some times engaging with it, at other times withdrawing from it altogether.

In both of these cases there were high levels of mobility, in particular the use of squats. This is consistent with Harvey et al's. (2002:34) findings that the type of drug(s) used by homeless mentally ill people appears to be influenced by the accommodation they are in. Harvey et al. (2002:34) found that a 'high proportion of people living in marginal accommodation were using hard drugs such as LSD, speed and heroin'.

Nevertheless, only a minority of people adapted their behaviour. The more common experience for this group was avoiding the homeless subculture altogether. The low identification index shows that people on this pathway resisted the devalued socially identity linked to mental illness and homelessness. In the previous chapter I illustrated the way that using, scoring and the business of raising money gives structure and coherence to the day-to-day lives of people on the substance abuse pathway. Among people on the mental health pathway what gives structure to their daily lives is the way they respond to their exclusion from the mainstream and to the intimidation, abuse and threats of other homeless people. It is important to stress that it is not their health issues that create problems, but the way those problems are interpreted by other homeless people and form the basis for distinct forms of social action by others.

People with mental health problems re-built their routines in different ways than do other homeless people. Routines were commonly constructed around agencies that provide food and/or material relief. Table 6.1 shows that people with mental health problems relied on these agencies more heavily than any other group. Everyone on this pathway has used material aid services at least once in the month preceding the first interview.

Table 6.1 Use of material aid services (food vouchers, etc), by onset pathway (per cent)

Onset pathway	Mental illness (N=6)	Substance use (N=18)	Youth (N=41)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
In last month	100	56	52	7	32	44
Over a month ago	-	33	34	57	57	36
Never	-	11	14	36	29	19
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100

Circuits of these agencies formed an important part of their daily routines. The importance of these agencies extended beyond the material assistance they provided and was tied to the fact they provided a safe haven and a fixed reference point. Tim would regularly go to:

. . . Sacred Heart for a meal. It was ok down there. No-one hassled me

At night he would:

. . . go down to the Vinnies (St Vincent de Paul) van for some food

Apart from the security of knowing these agencies were there for them, the use of these services was part of a strategy directed towards ‘fill[ing] in the day’. When he was well, Tim would spend ‘many hours’ in the library ‘doing research’. At other times he would ride trains all day to stay warm and ‘look at the city’. Similarly, Maggie fed the ducks at the local park every day and she worried constantly over who would look after them if she wasn’t around. In fact, it was clear that everyone carved out social space where they felt in control and with that came unique, but important routines.

Although these routines bought the mentally ill into contact with other people, both housed and homeless, there was rarely any sustained interaction. While the routines of people on the mental health pathway enabled them to create their own space and endure homelessness, these routines tended to entrench them in their current circumstances.

Food and material relief agencies were regularly used, but there was much less contact with office based housing or support services. This is consistent with studies from

the U.S that have found the routines of the homeless street people seldom intersect with agencies whose goals are purely restorative (Snow, Baker, Anderson & Martin 1986; Auerswald & Eyre 2002). This study had similar findings with respect to homeless people who have mental health problems. While all of the respondents in this group had previously been in transitional accommodation - on average three times (see chapter 5, Table 5.4) - restorative agencies were used less often compared to the substance use group who had previously been accommodated, on average, four times.

One explanation for the low level of service utilisation relative to the length of their homeless careers is that many restorative services are unable to cope with people who have mental health problems. There was evidence to support this contention - nearly everyone (N=5) reported they had been barred from a service at one stage or another. Maggie was barred from one agency because she 'had a go at some condescending little shit'.

There has been much debate in recent years about increasing complexity in the homeless population and the exclusion of certain homeless groups by agencies funded to assist the homeless (NSW Ombudsman 2004). This debate has typically been framed in terms of 'service-resistant' or 'complex' clients. In the U.S some researchers have suggested it has more to do with 'service-resistant service providers'. In his study of 50 chronically homeless people with mental health problems in Los Angeles, Paul Koegel (1992:12-13) observed that they were:

. . . struck, as have been others, by the extent to which people dismissed as service resistant do want services but, in seeking them, have failed to get what they want and thus do not return, or have found that services are set such that accessing them is too difficult, too costly or too frustrating. When one includes all these contextual factors in the analysis, it become possible to talk about 'service-resistant service providers' and 'service-resistant service settings', rather than simply service-resistant clients'.

Maggie's experiences suggest she had encountered the sort of 'service-resistant service providers' Koegal was referring to. When a housing service arranged and paid for accommodation at a local boarding house, which Maggie described as abysmal, she was annoyed by the attitude of the workers who made out they were 'doing you a favour'. Maggie soon realised that many services were 'quick to judge and slow to understand'. Maggies

reported that it was easier to avoid these services, rather than suffer the indignity of being treated like a 'no hoper',

A second problem was that continuity was frequently compromised by staff turnover. Tim talked about one service he liked and would regularly visit. When a particular worker that he liked left he didn't go back:

You feel like your sort'a getting somewhere and they go and you're handballed down the line.

6.6 Making sense and acceptance

A close examination of the accommodation biographies of people who became homeless because of mental health problems revealed decreasing movement between boarding houses the longer they spent in the homeless population. Over time this group started to settle into the rhythm of boarding house life. With few, if any housing or employment options, Maggie said you could:

. . . get used to it, it didn't worry me half as much so long as I had my own room.

Getting 'used to it' signalled increasing acceptance of their housing situation. Tim found that living in a boarding house:

. . . was OK. You got used to it. After a while the smell or noise didn't bother me so much.

And that:

On a good day it was OK. If I was feeling well I could mangle it and it wasn't so bad. But when things got bad, you know when I was ill, or, well it was harder, it was difficult to cope.

Tim found that as he got used to boarding house life he began to arrange his day around the rhythm of boarding house life:

It [the bathroom] didn't worry me as much. There was no one around at 10:00 [am] and so I'd go then. It was cleaner then as well.

Conspicuous in the biographical material was that everyone had spent at least a spell living continuously in a boarding house for six months or more. Under the cultural definition of homelessness this means they could be classified in the tertiary homeless population²⁷ (see chapter 1). Table 6.2 shows that one fifth of the sample (N=20) had spent six months or more living in the same boarding houses, but amongst people on the mental health pathway, everyone had lived in a boarding house for at least six months at some point in time. This suggests they had accepted living in boarding houses.

Table 6.2 Spent at least six month living continuously in same boarding house (per cent)

Onset pathway	Mental illness (N=6)	Substance use (N=18)	Youth (N=41)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Per cent	100	33	17	-	4	19

The decision to treat boarding houses as a permanent accommodation option did not occur because people started to like these places. The decision was made in the context of changing patterns of interaction with the housing and labour markets. As housing opportunities diminished, people internalised their new relationship to the housing market, which was then reflected in the changing perception of boarding houses as a temporary accommodation option to a permanent one.

These cognitive changes were also underpinned by an emerging sense that normal life was being denied to them. Maggie's sense of self-worth was compromised by her health problems and the social situation she found herself in. She felt like she did not deserve a 'normal life', that it was 'too much to expect decent housing'. In a similar vein Tim knew he:

. . . had come to the end of the road . . . I didn't understand why, but I knew. I did what I could to make the best of it – better the devil you know.

In the early stage of homelessness, people with mental health problems moved frequently between different boarding houses. As they came to accept their situation they

²⁷ Tertiary homelessness refers to those people living permanently in single rooms in private boarding houses without their own bathroom or kitchen and without security of tenure (see chapter 1)

tended to stay in individual boarding houses for longer periods and they began to deal with the problems they encountered in boarding houses in different ways. Maggie reported that whenever relationships between boarding house residents exploded she would:

Leave for a few nights and sleep out. I had a spot, which was pretty safe and when things got out of control I didn't mind staying there for a few nights.

Tim said he did the same thing. Tim's' initial pattern was of short, sporadic spells sleeping rough, but these spells became more frequent the longer Tim remained homeless. Tim found that:

Every couple of months things would flare up. It was easier to sometimes move out for a week or so until things settled down. I had a spot down by the river that no-one knew about.

He also slept rough because the conditions in some boarding houses were atrocious:

I was sick of living in lice and rat infested holes. In the last place I was bitten by bedbugs and you can still see the marks. It's easier to sleep out sometimes.

Sleeping rough is common but it is rarely permanent. Most people returned to stay in boarding houses because this was the only option they had.

6.7 Implications for career duration

Like people on the substance use pathway, people on the mental health pathway remained homeless for long periods of time. This group reported the longest homeless careers (mean duration 73 months) of the five groups. This finding is consistent with other studies that also report that people with mental health problems generally become entrenched in the homeless population (O'Dwyer 1997; Baldwin 1998; Leal et al. 1998).

In the previous chapter we saw that the routines of the substance use group were based on maintaining interactions with other homeless drug users. In contrast, the routines of homeless people with mental health are shaped by the way people in the mainstream and other homeless people reject and/or exploit them. The different routines of homeless people emphasise that people respond and react to material and non-material structures in ways

that are appropriate to their own ends and their own circumstances. While individuals interpret social structures in ways that make sense to them, the social and economic context in which the actions of people with mental health problems occur set up and maintain the pre-conditions for their ongoing exclusion.

People with mental health problems remain homeless for a long time despite the fact that they have few homeless friends and avoid many of the social practices that signal involvement in the homeless subculture. The social identification argument is that the longer people remain in the homeless population, the more likely they are to identify with other homeless people and homelessness as a way of life. This argument does not explain the experiences of this group. For people with mental health problems it is the way their vulnerability, isolation and insufficient incomes combine with the absence of family support and a dysfunctional housing market that works to keep them in the homeless population. And it is the way that individual actors responded to and reproduced these conditions that is crucial in terms of understanding why the career trajectories of people on this pathway are long and distinct.

6.8 Conclusion

What this chapter has shown is that the routines of homeless people with mental health problems are both constrained and enabled by the dual stigmas of mental illness and homelessness. People on this pathway respond to the actions of other people, housed and homeless, whose view of the mentally ill is often derogatory and laden with misconceived stereotypes. The people I interviewed lived the experience of these dual stigmas by denying their problems and withdrawing from social contact.

The experiences of homelessness that ultimately lead to this group's entrenchment in the homeless population reflected the different structures this group had to contend with and their different response to the homeless subculture and the stigma of being homeless. The social practices and patterns of interaction that lead to the entrenchment of this group in the

homeless population were different from the substance use pathway, yet the consequences were similar – both groups developed routines that emphasised their outsider status and in so doing reproduced the conditions that resulted in them becoming embedded in the homeless population.

Most versions of the social identification thesis emphasise that people remain homeless because they adapt into the homeless subculture. However, what the social identification thesis has missed is that different homeless groups relate to the homeless subculture in different ways with different consequences. In the case of those entering on the mental health pathway, they are marginalised by the mainstream and by other homeless people. People on the mental health pathway remain homeless because there are few exits points and insufficient support to assist them out of the homeless population. It is also the case that the way they internalise and reproduce negative social attitudes towards the mentally ill structures their experience of homelessness. While people in this group did not identify with homelessness as a way of life, they did adapt to homelessness in their own way all the same.

This chapter has argued that there is a strong connection between the way this group becomes homeless and what subsequently happens to them when they are homeless. While people always manage their circumstances in distinct ways, there are clear patterns in the way people with mental illness respond to the experience of homelessness.

This chapter has also raised some new issues. First, without a larger sample it is difficult to establish with any certainty whether the incidence of mental illness in the sample is typical of the broader homeless population. In both the literature and the public domain there are claims that a significant proportion of the homeless population have mental health problems²⁸. There are a number of problems with these claims. First, they typically draw their samples from sites where the incidence of mental illness is likely to be higher (Hodder,

²⁸ In late December 2004 (19/12/04) *The Age* newspaper in Melbourne, arguably the cities most respected broadsheet, headlined a story with “80 per cent of homeless have a mental disorder”. This story then became the basis for subsequent articles in *The Age* and other media outlets. In a sense it became true.

Teesson & Buhrich 1988). Second, what constitutes a mental health problem is problematic because different clinical and diagnostic tools produce different estimates. Then there is the problem where some claim substance use problems also constitute mental disorders - and this inflates the figures even further. Nevertheless, in the context of the small sample size plus a growing body of literature that challenges the representation of homelessness primarily in terms of mental illness, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the incidence of mental illness is generally overstated, particularly as an attribution of cause.

The issue of temporal order further complicates matters. The model I have described relates only to those six households who entered the homeless population with existing mental health problems. There were another 18 who reported mental health problems arose after they became homeless. This means that those on the mental health pathway represent about one quarter of all the people who reported problems with their mental health. Given that most people in the sample who reported mental health problems experienced mental health problems after they had been homeless, this raises questions about attributions of cause and the impact of homelessness. In subsequent chapters I examine whether there is variation in the careers of those who enter the homeless population with mental health problems and those who develop them as a result of being homeless. In the next chapter I consider the careers of people who experienced domestic violence and housing crisis as a precursor to homelessness.

7 Down, but not out: domestic violence and housing crisis

7.1 Introduction

Common stereotypes of the homeless are generally based on visible groups such as people with mental health or substance use problems (Harter et al. 2005). Some researchers argue that these groups are the just 'tip of the iceberg' (Appelbaum 1990:13) and that a large proportion of the homeless are actually hidden from public view. Families headed by women form the bulk of the hidden homeless (Vacha & Marin 1993; Wright et al. 1998; Watson 2001). Their relative invisibility stems from the fact they rarely sleep rough or provide visual cues to their housing status.

In this chapter I discuss the homeless experiences of the people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways. While the career trajectories of these two groups provide another perspective on the way homelessness is lived, resisted and reproduced, there are three specific reasons why these two groups are considered together.

First, in chapter four it was noted that, on average, both groups first became homeless in their early thirties. This is important as career duration has been linked to the age people first experience homelessness, with longer careers typically associated with a younger age (Piliavin et al. 1993; Wong 1997; Yoder et al. 2001).

Second, in both groups the majority of households were families. This is also important as it has been reported that families typically resist homelessness and have shorter homeless careers (Link et al. 1994; Wong & Piliavin 1997; Chamberlain & Johnson 2002a).

Third, the demographic profiles of these two groups are similar and their biographies reveal many common experiences such as histories of independent and stable housing.

For these two groups the condition of the housing and labour markets play a critical role in shaping the context in which individual actors make their decisions. However, to

understand why the homeless careers of people on these two pathways are different from the substance use and mental illness careers, it is necessary to understand the specific ways that individuals negotiate the stigma of homelessness; how their response to the stigma of homelessness structures their interactions with other people; and how both actions inform their day-to-day routines.

The purpose in setting up the argument in this way is twofold. First, it emphasises the importance of making connections between how people become homeless and how these experiences influence their response to homelessness. Second, it contrasts the homeless experiences of these two groups with people in the other pathways.

This chapter starts by examining the initial disruption of becoming homeless. Although there were some differences in the initial experience of homelessness, I show that both groups exhibit high levels of anxiety and share an expectation that homelessness will be a temporary experience. As they encounter barriers in the housing and labour markets, some households moved from doubling up into boarding houses and/or caravan parks before they entered transitional accommodation. Both groups resist homelessness and I identify three critical issues around which their resistance to homelessness is organised. The first is a concern for their children, the second a desire to reduce stress and the third is minimising the stigma of homelessness.

In the context of these three issues, I show that the stigma associated with homelessness structures social relations with other individuals, both homeless and housed, and routines are re-organised on the basis of trying to 'pass' as normal. In attempting to pass as normal, these new routines minimise involvement with other homeless people. The chapter goes on to show that an element of 'passing' involves explaining their housing problems in terms of 'bad luck'. The chapter illustrates the way that these two groups understand bad luck resembles structural explanations of homelessness. This, I argue, allows for the possibility of change, as well as providing a means of distinguishing themselves from other homeless people whose housing problems are understood to be a consequence of individual failings.

Few behavioural or cognitive adaptations emerge in either group because they engage very little with other homeless people. Consequently, many have a relatively short experience of homelessness. In the final part of the chapter I draw attention to movement from one pathway onto another – a process that typically occurs as a result of engaging with the homeless subculture.

The chapter concludes by arguing that economic structures play a critical role in these careers, but to understand why these careers take the direction they do, it is critical to understand the way that individual actors respond to and reproduce existing non-material structures such as stigma.

7.2 Families in crisis

One of the strongly recurring themes was the value placed on independence and self-reliance . . . For many seeking help . . . was an admission of failure, an inability to live up to an accepted standard (McCaughey 1987: 226).

After they were evicted for arrears, Lee and John's three children came home from school and were confronted by all of the families belongings in the street. Avoiding the gazes of their 'interested neighbours' John came close to breaking down at the time:

I tried to explain [to the children] what had happened, but couldn't. We told them we were going to stay at their Auntie's for a while.

Although people reacted in different ways to losing their homes, feelings of anxiety were common. Peppered throughout the interviews were statements like John's that emphasised the distress people experienced. This contrasts with people on the substance use pathway who moved from housed to homeless with relative ease. It also illustrates how the same 'critical situation' can be lived in different ways by different groups of people.

Sandra recalled how stressed she was and how her anxiety was exacerbated by the impact of homelessness on her children. She felt that people:

Simply don't know what its like to have no idea where your going to stay that night.

Similarly, Frank 'couldn't believe it had come to this' while it drove Lyn 'crazy' having nowhere to call home. For Sally being homeless was to be 'intellectually branded . . . a non achiever in a society that values achievement'.

While the two groups share many experiences, there was considerable difference in the initial experience of homelessness. Domestic violence has received significant government and community attention in the last decade with extensive community awareness programs, a raft of legislative changes and the establishment of formal links between government departments such as the police and domestic violence services. These developments are in response to concerns about the high incidence of family violence across the community (Chung et al. 2000; Access Economics 2004).

For women who experience domestic violence this means they are more likely than other homeless groups to receive assistance early in their homeless careers. While there will always be debate about the appropriate configuration of the domestic violence system and the level of resources dedicated to it, the point is that just over two thirds (N=10) of the women in the domestic violence pathway received assistance from services soon after leaving their homes. Some moved directly into refuges, while others, because of a shortage of places in refuges, were initially supported in hotels before moving into refuges, and then transitional accommodation.

The remaining domestic violence cases (N=4) and all of the households in the housing crisis pathway (N=24) either had little idea there were services to assist them, or were reluctant to use them. While a small number of these households spent their first night in a car or hotel (N=9) most turned to families or friends (N=19). Homeless families typically expect to resolve their problems quickly (McChesney 1990) and staying with friends or family members is a common 'first step'.

Nevertheless, expectations began to change as the difficulties of securing permanent accommodation became more apparent. After two months of regular searching Lee and John 'couldn't find anything'. With no resolution to their housing problems, overcrowded living conditions began to create pressure on relationships between family members and

friends. In some cases relationships were strained to breaking point. Sandra had taken her children to stay at her brother's place rather than contacting domestic violence services. As a result:

. . . there were six of us in a two bedroom house . . . I tried to help out and stay out of the way but its bloody hard with two kids.

The resources available to these households were limited and many of the people who they drew on for support were on low incomes themselves. This meant the support of families and friends dried up more rapidly than might have happened with a middle class family. Sally recognised that 'there's only so much people can do'. Sandra's temporary accommodation with her brother was cut short because:

he had his own problems to deal with and found it hard to cope with all of us.

Most homeless households moved on to avoid these stresses. In the process of moving from place to place some households put their belongings in storage and this increased the financial stress they were already experiencing. Other households could not afford to do this and, as a result, lost many possessions. This was particularly hard on families. Lee and John:

. . . moved about five times in three months - it was impossible to carry all of our stuff and we left it all over the place.

Planning was difficult when household(s) were on the move, a situation that a lack of affordable housing further exacerbated. A lack of accommodation at the bottom end of the housing market resulted in increased competition for accommodation and, with rejections common, this delayed people's exit from homelessness. For those people with poor housing histories this was a real problem. Sally had:

. . . a debt from the [housing] commission from years ago, and [real estate] agents can be choosey . . . I'm a single parent and too big a risk.

With few, if any housing options in the private market, long waiting lists to get into public housing, homeless households are commonly forced to stay in inappropriate accommodation. Stresses caused by overcrowding, combined with their exclusion from the

housing market and insufficient income, resulted in many households turning to boarding houses and caravan parks for accommodation. Sandra and her two children stayed with her brother for a while, then some friends, before they 'ended up in a caravan park'.

There was considerable ambivalence about these places. Sally could not come to terms with boarding houses and hated the fact that:

The shower or bathing facilities were disgraceful – they were full of scum. I spent most of my time worrying about the twins.

Sally found it hard to contain her anger that she had been 'assisted' into a boarding house by a welfare agency. This is a common practice despite the fact these places are recognised as unsuitable and particularly harmful for children (Bartholomew 1999:25).

Once they were in boarding houses or caravan parks it was easy to get stuck. After three weeks Sally:

. . . wanted to get out but I couldn't afford anything let alone find something . . . they were charging me nearly \$200 for a room with a wash basin.

Sally was 'beside herself' after six weeks in the same place, and she was worried that she was going to lose her children to 'the department'.²⁹

Once households started to use boarding houses or caravan parks, routines that had once connected them to specific people and places – the doctor, the shops, school, transport hubs, the minutiae of day-to-day life – rapidly atrophied. Disconnected from their old routines, many found it difficult to maintain the informal networks that define much of day-to-day life. For instance, there was no-one around to 'look after the kids', and individual households reported they were deprived of the daily gossip and everyday social interactions that had connected them to the ebb and flow of social life.

Unlike people on the substance use pathway, there was resistance to any interaction with other boarding house or caravan park residents. There were positive and negative outcomes attached to this. In previous chapters I pointed out that boarding houses are important sites where sub-cultural practices flourish. By resisting involvement with other

²⁹ The Department of Human Services (DHS).

boarding house residents, people who were homeless because of domestic violence or a housing crisis maintained their distance from the homeless subculture.

On the other hand, a lack of engagement meant that many households remained in a form of stasis waiting for 'things to sort themselves out'. However, if things didn't sort themselves out, everything tended to get worse. Frank's case is illustrative. For the first few months Frank spent in boarding houses he kept going to his old doctor who was 'miles away'. The travel across town created problems for Frank because it was costly and this resulted in him visiting his doctor less regularly than was necessary. Frank's health worsened while he was living in a boarding house. Five months after losing his flat Frank ended up in hospital with a chronic chest infection.

7.3 The impact on children

The constant movement between family, friends, boarding houses and caravan parks was particularly disruptive for families with school age children – sometimes new bus routes needed to be found, sometimes it was necessary to reschedule lifts with other parents, and for everyone it required notifying the school of repeated changes of address. Dealing with these issues made it difficult to conceal their housing problems. When households are under extreme pressure, such seemingly mundane and simple tasks can exacerbate the stress they are already experiencing.

Temporary accommodation arrangements resulted in some families changing their children's schools. Changing schools was the ultimate disruption as it broke existing social connections. Lyn had taken her daughter out of school to avoid being found by her violent ex-partner. Lyn said she felt like:

. . . the cards were stacked against us. Jade's school was miles from the refuge.

The negative consequences of violence at home and homelessness on the health, self-esteem and education of children is well documented (see Vissing 1990; Twaite &

Lampert 1997). What was obvious in these biographies was how homelessness disrupted children's established patterns of social interaction. Lee and John's children could not 'bring their friends home', and every time they moved their children seemed to 'lose some school work' and 'fall behind'. Many families reported that it made their children withdrawn and prone to problematic behaviour. This finding is consistent with other studies on the impact of homelessness on children (Redmond & Brackmann 1990). Lyn reported that her young daughter 'blamed me for everything that had gone wrong'.

Some families managed to maintain their children's attendance at the same school, despite the uncertainty in their lives. While this was strongly influenced by the proximity of their temporary accommodation to school, it was also underpinned by a determination to maintain a semblance of stability in their children's lives. For Lee and John school was:

The only lifeline . . . it is important that they finish their schooling so they don't have to go through this.

When Lee and John moved in with Lee's sisters (twice in less than three months) they had to drive an 80 km round trip twice a day to keep their children at the same school. While they wanted to keep things as normal as possible for them, the cost in fuel and the wear and tear on their car, meant this could not be maintained for long.

Constraints in the housing and employment markets created acute pressures on all of these households, both singles and families, but the consequences for some families were catastrophic. Most parents endured considerable deprivation to give their children the opportunity of a normal life. On occasion some went without food and all were denied 'luxuries' such as 'going out' or any other form of recreation. While most low income households, especially those with children, struggle to get by (McCaughey 1987; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989; McCaughey 1991;1992), for homeless families providing their children with the social, financial and personal support they required was greater .

For some families the stigma of being homeless, the relentless grind and anxiety of not having secure accommodation and the loss of important social contacts, pushed them

into such a deep crisis that they fell apart. Table 7.1 shows that of the 33 families in the sample that identified themselves as single parents at the first interview, 25 were single parent families when they first became homeless: eight dual parent families had fallen apart. While separation generally involved the man leaving the family, in some cases to seek work, in most cases it was because the relationship had faltered. This pattern was evident across all pathways but it was sharpest in the housing crisis pathway where the largest number of dual parent families had fallen apart (N=5).

Table 7.1 Household separation while homeless (N)

Pathway	Substance use (N=24)	Mental illness (N=6)	Youth (N=41)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Single parent – initial entry	1	1	5	12	6	25
Dual parent – initial entry	1	-	5	-	8	14
Single parent family's at T1	2	1	7	12	11	33
Dual parent at T1	-	-	3	-	3	6

Although separation is an extreme outcome, these findings suggest that for some families the effects of chronic poverty and homelessness were deeply implicated in family break down.

Even though homelessness resulted in some families breaking up, everyone reported a strong desire to get out of the homeless population. Among the people on these two pathways there appeared to be three interconnected factors that galvanised resistance to homelessness.

The first was a concern for children and this was specific to families, dual or single parent. Sandra was totally focussed on 'getting things right for the kids'. Sandra was 'embarrassed as a parent'. She felt like she had:

Let the kids down. I found it very difficult to talk to other parents for fear of them finding out. I felt very uncomfortable around them and avoided them when I could.

Similarly, Lee and John were not proud of the way they had ‘failed in their duty as parents’ given the deleterious impact of homelessness on their children:

The kids at school gave our kids a hard time and other parents looked down on us.

Lyn shared their concerns when she made the point she ‘was a good parent, but things just weren’t working out for me at that time’.

The second factor that galvanised their resistance to homelessness was the desire to reduce the stress caused by ongoing residential insecurity. Sally was prepared to ‘look anywhere or do anything’ for a place to live. However, trying to balance her family’s needs in the context of substandard housing was difficult. No matter how strong Sally’s determination to ‘get out’ of homelessness, she had to deal with conditions at the bottom end of the housing market. Sally ended up ‘looking at places in the middle of nowhere’ and most of them were ‘dives’. Sally remembered one place she ‘looked at had exposed wires coming out of the wall. I mean, with the kids’. Similarly, Sandra looked at ‘heaps’ of flats and her view was that ‘You wouldn’t let a dog live in some of the places I saw’.

The third factor was the stigma of being homeless. While some households had been assisted into boarding houses or caravan parks by welfare agencies, most had tried to resolve their problems themselves. The reluctance to use services was grounded in prejudicial stereotypes of people who use welfare services. This is not to imply there was no use of government or non-government welfare agencies – as we have seen in chapter 6 (Table 6.1) people on every pathway occasionally used material aid services. However, the values of independence and self reliance structured daily life even when it was clear assistance was necessary. John summed it up succinctly when he stated that:

I thought we’d be able to sort it out ourselves.

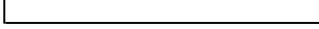
7.4 Transitional accommodation

People who travelled on these two pathways started to use welfare services as their social and housing situations became increasingly desperate. Table 7.2 shows that although a

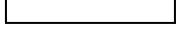
minority of these households had been in transitional accommodation previously, for nearly two thirds (61 per cent) it was their first time in transitional accommodation. This distinguishes them from the mental health, substance use and youth cluster where most people had been in transitional accommodation prior to their current stay.

Table 7.2 Percentage having their first stay in transitional accommodation.

Pathway	Substance use (N=18)	Mental illness (N=6)	Youth (N=41)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
per cent	6	-	5	57	62	25



CLUSTER ONE
(5 per cent)



CLUSTER TWO
(61 per cent)

Those who went to domestic violence services were, on balance, positive about the responsiveness of the system. In contrast, most people in the housing crisis group found the system to be confusing and irrational. Sally was astounded when the local housing office ‘basically said I’d have to be on the streets before they’d help’. Some found the assessment procedures demeaning and time consuming. Lee said that:

You have to crawl around to all these services . . . people don’t realise how much effort it is to get help.

Others struggled with the implicit pathologising they encountered. Frank’s contact with a local support service illustrates this:

They couldn’t help me because I didn’t have enough problems. It’s like you had to be a druggie.

Later on in the interview he said that ‘junkies get things on a silver platter’. Everyone encountered a system at full capacity. Sandra called a number of places and was told:

They were full. I was told my name was on a list and to ring back next week. So I did and they said ring back again in a weeks time.

For people in crisis, waiting lists often appear impersonal and irrational.

Every one eventually got into transitional accommodation, although there was some variation in the length of time it took to get into transitional accommodation (from 0 months to

7.5 months),. Once in transitional accommodation having a ‘stable base’ was important in terms of recovering stability and predictability. Having somewhere to stay enabled people to ‘settle down’ and to ‘stop worrying’ about their situation. People reported they started to feel better about themselves as the anxiety of the previous months began to disappear. Sally used her place as a basis for a fresh start and she commented that ‘you feel so much better about yourself when you have a place’.

Transitional accommodation provided a point of stability and this enabled most households to re-establish basic routines – children’s schooling could be stabilised, the chaos of constant movement stopped and people began to feel more positive about the future. Lyn, like others, felt she was ‘moving forward, slowly’.

Stable, albeit temporary accommodation, provided other benefits. One benefit was that it enabled contact with their domiciled friends. Table 7.3 shows that most people on the substance use, youth, domestic violence pathways and, to a lesser extent, the housing crisis pathway had visited family and/or friends in the month prior to the first interview. The data in Table 7.3 also reaffirms that people on the mental health pathway are socially isolated. There was, however, a distinct twist in the pattern. While there was little difference in the extent to which people on these four pathways visited family or friends, there was considerable variation in the extent to which people were comfortable to have their family or friends visit them while they were in emergency accommodation.

Table 7.3 Interactions with friends and family in the last month (per cent)

Pathway	Mental illness (N=6)	Substance use (N=18)	Youth (N=41)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Visited friends/family	-	94	93	86	50	77
Visited by friends/family	-	89	79	29	33	63

For people on the youth and substance use pathways such exposure was rarely a concern. In contrast, people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways preferred to visit people as this reduced the possibility of having their problems exposed.

Among these two groups a common practice was to selectively disclose their problems to their friends. They were more likely to have disclosed the full extent of their problems to people who visited them, but not to other people. This is illustrated by Sandra:

Only my really close friends come over, those that know what has happened. Not everyone knows and I'd prefer to keep it that way.

7.5 Bad luck

To invoke bad luck as a contributing factor in the process by which people become homeless seems strikingly incongruous with causal thinking in the social sciences . . . Yet to dismiss bad luck as a determinant of homelessness is not only to ignore what some homeless tell us, but it is to gloss over real experiences that do help to determine the path or trajectory on which some individuals find themselves (Snow & Anderson 1993:267).

AQ common response when people were asked about their housing problems was to define their problems in terms of external events and factors; to a run of bad luck or a series of mishaps. John had lost his job 'through no fault of my own' while Sandra was not to know her partner would turn out to be 'a complete arsehole'.

Luck, particularly bad luck, has always featured prominently in homeless discourse. Homeless people have traditionally been described as being down on their luck and the phrase 'down and out' means to be down on your luck. When applied to the less fortunate, the notion of bad luck has its roots even further back. In medieval times bad luck distinguished the hopeless but well intentioned, from the hopelessly corrupt, immoral, vagrant, criminal types. Luck was a way of distinguishing between the deserving and the undeserving poor (Katz 1993; Wagner 1997). This distinction is central to how people who had experienced domestic violence and housing crisis explained their homelessness, although the original distinction between deserving and undeserving was adapted to fit their own circumstances,

The debate about bad luck is generally constructed in a way that echoes the debate about structure and agency. For example, Tracy and Stoecker (1993:44) explain bad luck as 'a characteristic of the homeless themselves'. This is an agency account. Others have

explained this bad luck as a 'reversal of fortunes' (Rossi 1989:194) or a form of 'structural victimization' (Snow & Anderson 1993:207). The idea of structural victimization draws attention to the point that some people are vulnerable simply because of their position in the lower ranks of the income distribution scale and not necessarily because of certain personal characteristics. This is a structural account. To have no luck, to be down on your luck, to be unlucky is something that everyone experiences at some time, but the outcome of bad luck is tied to a person's social and economic position. While bad luck plays out at an individual level, the financial vulnerability it exposes is a structural factor and this is the central point made by a number of authors (Neil & Fopp 1993; Saunders 2002; Chamberlain & Johnson 2002a). Although, as noted by Snow and Anderson (1993:267), 'its effects are not the same for all its victims'.

Luck was a point around which their resistance to homelessness was organised. Using bad luck to account for their housing problems meant three things. First, using luck to account for their problems distinguished them from the un-deserving who were homeless because they 'chose to be'; because they were 'lazy', 'dirty' or 'crazy' people who drank too much or took too many drugs – they were bums, losers and junkies and consequently undeserving.

Second, using bad luck to explain their problems meant the cause of their problems were located outside of their direct control. Frank summed it up neatly when he said the reason he was still homeless after six months was that he couldn't find 'anything I can afford. If there was more housing I wouldn't be here'.

Third, using luck to explain their problems allowed for the possibility of change. All Lee and John needed was for a 'few things to go our way' while Frank expected his luck to 'turn at any moment'. These subtle, but important distinctions are at the core of these homeless careers.

7.6 Distancing

For people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways, the experience of homelessness was a radical departure from their normative ideals and their self conception and overt efforts were made to resist and to distance themselves from the homeless. I use the term distancing to emphasise the processes through which individual agents actively positioned themselves, symbolically and physically, into a position more congruent with their identity standard. Distancing was grounded in prevailing cultural frames and by the normative expectation of a return to a 'normal life'. This normative prescription was articulated in a number of ways – a job, a home, friends. A 'normal life' had symbolic and material significance which countered any sense they were different, abnormal or in some way dysfunctional households.

Few people saw any similarities between themselves and the homeless and, in some cases, they actively despised the homeless and were openly hostile. Sandra described boarding house residents as 'weirdos and junkies'. Sandra was judgmental towards all homeless people, apparently blind to the contradiction that she was also enjoying the 'benefits' of transitional accommodation:

Look at this place. It's fully furnished, it's in a great location and its cheap. There's no incentive for them to change when you can get a place like this.

Lee and John's thoughts, though less strident, echoed the same theme:

When we first got this place I didn't know what to expect . . . I was half expecting a bunch of deros to be sitting at the front door.

Differentiating between the deserving and the undeserving homeless perpetuated the view that people who experience homelessness are homeless because of their own shortcomings or because they choose to be. The actions of these groups replicated the broader 'them and us' stigma processes that underpin mainstream treatment of the homeless (Link & Phelan 2001). John implied as much when he said:

Things went bad for sure, but I didn't expect to end up here. It's not like we wanted to be here.

By treating 'other' homeless people as undeserving, responsibility was shifted onto the individual. Further, by denying structural issues any causal efficacy, the status quo was legitimised. This conservative reaction towards homeless people was rooted in prevailing cultural values and, ironically, by accepting these values and the practices that support them, these two groups were active in their own exclusion and ultimately implicated in the ongoing marginalisation of homeless people.

This conservative reaction is important in terms of the reproduction of homelessness. The symbolic and material patterns of conduct that accompanied their reaction to the homeless, while creating a distinction between their homelessness and other forms of homelessness, reproduced the very stigma they were attempting to avoid.

For instance, living in accommodation set up for homeless people required constant negotiation because it challenged self conceptions tied to normalcy, independence and self reliance, as well as emphasising their new devalued social identity. This tension was heightened in some interactions with their new local community. When Sally moved into her 'new' place:

The neighbours keep their distance. Apparently this place has a history – I heard the last tenants were full on. I suppose they thought I'd be the same.

To Frank's dismay he encountered much the same:

Everyone in the street knew the house was an emergency property. They put me in a box and no matter what I did I was just a loser in their eyes.

Their experiences remind us that stigma can structure social relations in ways that individuals find difficult to manage. In these instances, stigma was already inscribed in the physical environment of transitional accommodation. In the following section I consider how these two groups responded to this.

7.7 Managing stigma: passing as normal

This stigmatised individual exhibits a tendency to stratify his 'own' according to the degree to which the stigma is apparent and unobtrusive. He can then take up in regard to those who are more evidently stigmatised than himself the attitudes the normal take to him (Goffman 1963:130-131).

In Chapter 3 I introduced Goffman's idea of the discredited and the discreditable and in chapter 5 I discussed how substance users were discredited in that they had to deal with the physical effects of using. In contrast, there was little to visually distinguish people on the housing crisis and domestic violence pathways from the domiciled. With few visual cues, people who have experienced housing crisis and domestic violence are more adequately captured by Goffman's idea of the discreditable. For the discreditable, the main issue they face in managing their stigma is the how they manage information (Goffman 1963:51).

A range of strategies can be used to 'pass' and one strategy this group used was to develop disidentifiers (Goffman 1963:60). Disidentifiers are actions, behaviours or attitudes that signal 'normality', and for most it was stereotypical notions of the homeless that informed the dis-identifiers they selected. Frank tried to stay well dressed because he saw the homeless as 'dirty and unkempt'. Similarly, Sandra made sure her children were well presented because they had 'some pride in our appearance'. Sally planted flowers in the garden and painted some rooms because she wanted it to 'look like a normal house'. John looked for work everyday because he wasn't going to sit on his arse all day 'like they do'. A common tendency in stigma research is to characterise people as passive victims of the stigmatised identity. The way this group actively manipulated their environment reminds us that people can 'artfully dodge or constructively challenge stigmatizing processes' (Link & Phelan 2001:378).

Many daily routines were organised around attempts to disguise or conceal their homelessness and pass as normal. For many women this followed on from attempts to conceal the physical violence they had experienced in their previous relationships. The motivation for passing as normal was to avoid being tainted by the stigma of homelessness –

in the eyes of women who have experienced domestic violence to be homeless implied you were somehow deficient, abnormal or dysfunctional and at the bottom of the social order.

People on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways scored 0.24 and 0.25 respectively in the identification index. This was about half the overall rate (0.59) and a little under a third of the substance use pathway (0.79). This indicates clearly that people in these pathways did not identify with homelessness - this group reported they had little in common with the homeless, they had few, if any, homeless friends, and they knew few, if any, homeless people. This group distanced themselves symbolically and physically from other homeless people and consequently minimised contact with the homeless subculture. They also retained contact with domiciled friends. Both actions are important in terms of explaining why the duration of homelessness was so different for people on these two pathways, in comparison to the experiences of people on the other pathways.

7.8 Implications for career duration

Detachment from the homeless subculture reduced the likelihood of becoming trapped in the homeless population. This was evident in the mean cumulative career duration which was seven months and nine months for people who had experienced domestic violence and housing crisis respectively. The duration of these careers was approximately one tenth of the length of the mentally ill careers and about one seventh of the length of substance use careers. In short, the temporal experience of people in both pathways point towards shorter homeless careers.

Using the tripartite classification we can see that approximately three-quarters of the households had been homeless for less than 12 months, although there is some variation across these two pathways, This runs counter to the overall pattern in the sample where the majority of people were concentrated in the long term homeless classification (Table 7.4).

Table 7.4 Temporal classification of select pathways (per cent)

Pathway	Substance use (N=18)	Mental Illness (N=6)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Short term (0 - 3 mths)	6] ¹²	-] ¹⁷	29] ⁷²	46] ⁷⁹	18
Medium term (4-11 mths)	6] ¹²	17] ¹⁷	43] ⁷²	33] ⁷⁹	17
Long term (12+ mths)	88	83	28	21	65
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100
Mean months	55	73	7.5	8.5	33

However, there was a small group on these two pathways who had been homeless for over 12 months (N=9). The prolonged homelessness of two of these households was a direct consequence of a tight housing market. Sally, who had been homeless for nearly 16 months, had tried everything to get another place and was at risk of being evicted from her transitional property because she could not secure an 'exit'. After stabilising her life, Sally was tired of the endless search:

I tried so many places and they just don't take single parents. I know my record is being held against me.

Sally's poor rental history, combined with her status as a single mother on welfare payments, meant that in a competition for scarce resources, Sally always missed out. With the threat of eviction hanging over her head Sally was increasingly anxious once again – all her gains seemed to be for nothing.

The remaining seven cases were all single person households. Of the nine households classified as long term homeless, three quarters (78 per cent) were single person households. In each case there was evidence of behavioural adaptations that suggests that single people adapted their behaviour to the experience of homelessness in different ways than families.

7.9 Movement between pathways

As some people adapted to homelessness over time they moved from one pathway onto another. This movement occurred at different rates, but it generally reflected increasing involvement in the homeless subculture. The identity index for these seven long term households was 0.58, double the rate reported across both pathways. This suggests that with the passage of time, single person households are more likely to re-construct their identities around being homeless – that is through repeated encounters with the homeless they are more likely to accept the identity of a homeless person. Snow and Anderson (1993) reported similar findings in their study of the street homeless in Austin, Texas. As this group of single people became involved in the homeless subculture it increased the probability of them becoming involved with drugs and becoming entrenched in the homeless population.

Movement between pathways sensitizes us to the fact that no career is pre-determined and that these 'ideal' pathways are heuristic devices. While the level of movement among people on these two pathways is modest, it nevertheless highlights how variables such as household type affect how people experience homelessness.

Apart from the small group who got involved with the homeless subculture, few households had problems other than domestic violence and/or poverty. A lack of affordable, appropriately located accommodation was the major structural factors driving career duration for these households. When domestic violence and poverty are the main problems it is possible to intervene successfully if the appropriate resources are available (Chung et al. 2001:21).

7.10 Conclusion

People who experience domestic violence and housing crisis display little affinity with the homeless. This, in turn, translates into fewer cognitive or behavioural adaptations. Their

actions and behaviour suggest theories of identification are inadequate in terms of explaining the career trajectories of people in these two pathways.

What structures the resistance of this group is the social identity attached to homelessness, and the way this stigmatised identity interacts with, and is informed by, their past experiences in the domiciled population. From what we have seen, one way to gain a better appreciation of these homeless careers is to look at the way they manipulate their social environment and social interactions to pass as 'normal' members of the community, and the way this serves to preserve and protect their self worth.

Research has commonly focused on the negative consequences of stigma – stigmatised individuals have more difficulty gaining access to resources, their self esteem and self confidence diminishes, and they regularly confront prejudice and discrimination (Link & Phelan 2001; Kaufman & Johnson 2004; Shih 2004). Furthermore, it is clear from looking at the way homelessness is experienced by many people that the stigma attached to homelessness can and does have many deleterious consequences. However, as these two groups demonstrate, the 'deeply discrediting' (Goffman 1963:3) qualities of being homeless can be manipulated at a micro level and form the basis for re-inclusion into a non-stigmatised position in society. Link and Phelan (2001:378) make the point that some stigmatised groups:

Actively use available resources to resist stigmatising tendencies of the more powerful group and that, to the extent that they do, it is inappropriate to portray them as passive recipients of stigma.

This captures the experiences of homelessness for many of the people who became homeless because of domestic violence or housing crisis.

The homeless careers of people who have experienced domestic violence or housing crisis can be differentiated on a number of levels. However, it is the collective response of attempting to 'pass' as normal, and in so doing avoid contact with other homeless people generally - and the homeless subculture specifically - that provides a crucial insight into the reasons why these two groups have distinct career trajectories.

A consequence of passing is that there were few behavioural or cognitive adaptations and this makes 'getting out' less complicated than for those who have become acculturated to homelessness. Nevertheless, unless the material structural conditions improve, no matter how effectively individuals manage non-material structures such as stigma, these households typically remain trapped at or below the poverty line. This means that they remain precariously positioned in relation to both the labour and housing markets and consequently remain vulnerable to further episodes of homelessness.

Although both groups have to overcome significant challenges and obstacles to get out of the homeless population, compared to young homeless people, their situation is less complicated. In the following chapter I look at the homeless careers of young people and examine why they have different homeless career trajectories.

8 Making the transition to adult homelessness

8.1 Introduction

Since youth homelessness emerged in the late 1970s, it has attracted significant public, academic and policy attention. Despite this, youth homelessness remains deeply ingrained in the social landscape. In the sample of 103 there were 41 people who first experienced homelessness before they were 18.

In Australia, the U.S and the U.K some researchers have argued that young homeless people go through a series of biographical transitions if they remain in the homeless population (Hutson & Liddiard 1984; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1998; Auerswald & Eyre 2002). The arguments of these authors centre on the idea that if young people become immersed in the homeless subculture they are likely to become acculturated to a homeless way of life. This argument provides a useful way of thinking about different points of intervention. It is, however, insufficient in so much as it fails to explore the reasons why some young people identify with the homeless subculture when others do not. This point is important for five reasons.

First, it is well recognised that not all young homeless people become chronically homeless (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1998; Ringwalt et al. 1998; Avramov 1999; Burt 1999). Using estimates from an analysis of an inner city and a suburban youth agency, Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998:63) suggest that between 14 per cent and 27 per cent of young homeless people become chronically homeless.

Second, in previous chapters I have argued that how people respond to the social practices that structure the homeless subculture is mediated by their experiences leading to homelessness. These experiences contain vital clues as to how people perceive themselves and how they respond to the stigma associated with being homeless.

Third, the management of the nexus between stigma and identity directly informs social relationships and daily routines. This follows from my argument in previous chapters where I have shown that different social relationships produce different routines which can have bearing on career duration.

Fourth, what we have seen of the homeless subculture thus far comes primarily from the perspective of people with substance use problems - and their experiences emphasise certain elements of the homeless subculture, in particular 'using'. However, as I identified in chapter 3 (Table 3.3) there are other aspects to the homeless subculture that also need to be considered.

Finally, in chapter 4 I pointed out that the social practices of young homeless people are influenced by material structures such as the condition of the housing and labour market and their relationships to other family members. In this chapter I show that once they are homeless, young people respond to non-material structures such as the stigma of homelessness and the homeless subculture in different ways with different consequences.

The chapter starts by describing the initial experiences of people in the youth pathway. Earlier (chapter 4), I pointed out that two different groups travelled this pathway - dissenters and escapers – and that each group responded to the 'same' critical disruption of becoming homeless in different ways. The chapter then considers the role school plays in the careers of young homeless people and I demonstrate that for the dissenters, remaining at school was an important factor that enabled them to remain connected to the mainstream.

Following from this the chapter considers the ways that dissenters and escapers respond to other homeless people. The social practices of the dissenters are built around avoiding other homeless people and attempting to 'pass' as normal. In contrast, the escapers move into the homeless subculture quickly and, consequently, their 'new' routines are primarily re-constructed in the context of the homeless subculture. I demonstrate that this can lead to a range of behavioural and cognitive adaptations. I argue that the different social practices of these two groups are reflected in the different amounts of time they are homeless. In the final part of the chapter I raise the issue of movement between pathways

8.2 At the start

According to Auserwald and Eyre (2002) the initial experience of homelessness is characterised by feelings of 'outsiderness' and this includes an overpowering sense of loneliness and disorientation. This is similar to the idea of a critical disruption which was introduced in earlier chapters (chapter 1 and 3). Nevertheless, both ideas capture the initial experiences of the dissenters.

Dissenters were naïve about homelessness and most were 'scared shitless'. Two dissenters reported they had no idea what to do and with nowhere to go they slept rough, but this practice was uncommon. The more common pattern, and one that has been identified in previous studies of youth homelessness (Smith 1995; Crane & Brannock 1996), was to couch surf, stay with relatives or go directly into emergency accommodation. Although Nan had left home on a number of occasions, when she made a break from home she admitted to being 'terrified' about what might happen to her – fears of violence and of becoming a street kid flashed through her mind. Nan stayed with relatives for a short period before she got into transitional accommodation.

When she was in transitional accommodation Nan said she felt 'on her own' and 'embarrassed' that she didn't have a 'real home'. The embarrassment was most acute for Nan when she was at school and what Nan feared most was being labelled a 'looser'.

The relationships dissenters had with other young people was influenced by the stigma of homelessness. Dissenters typically 'kept it [their homelessness] quiet' or 'to themselves'. Nan 'kept quiet' because other students 'could be cruel if they knew you were homeless'. Keeping quiet is one form of 'passing' and was a common practice amongst the dissenters. 'Keeping it quiet' challenges the perception that among homeless young people homelessness is a valued social category. In 'keeping it quiet' dissenter's actions signal a departure from accounts that characterise young homeless people as leaving home on a whim; as willing and active agents in their own demise. These nine dissenters were forced

out of home because of ongoing conflict with their parents and they became homeless because there was nowhere for them to go.

In contrast, escapers entered the homeless population with an already stigmatised identity. Escapers reported that from an early age they had felt discarded by their families and by society – they were from ‘failed’ or ‘fucked up families’. This feeling of rejection was not passively accepted. In response to their exclusion from and rejection by the mainstream and their families, escapers openly recognised their ‘outsiderness’. Escapers did not hide the fact they were homeless. This is a clear point of departure between the dissenters and the escapers. Most escapers, like Robbie, ‘didn’t give a fuck who knows’. These different reactions signal an early, albeit tentative, acceptance of homelessness and this was central to the way the escapers attempted to make sense of their situation. For many escapers, having experienced what Auerswald and Eyre (2002:1501) describe as ‘catastrophic family dynamics’ for a significant part of their lives, homelessness could appear to be a ‘better option’. In this sense the disruption associated with becoming homeless was much less for the escapers - in Andrew’s case being homeless meant he didn’t have to ‘worry about getting thrashed every night’.

8.3 The role of school

A number of studies show that most homeless teenagers have their first experience of homelessness while they are still at school (O’Connor 1989; MacKenzie & Chamberlain 1995; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1998). This was confirmed by the biographies of the dissenters and escapers but there were significant differences in the level of education obtained by each of these groups. Table 8.1 shows that over three quarters of the dissenters were in, or had completed Year 11 or above. Amongst the escapers only 15 per cent had progressed beyond year 10.

Comparing these rates to the sample we see that dissenters are over-represented among those who were in or had completed Year 11 and above, while the escapers were

under-represented. Table 8.1 also shows that the escapers first experienced homelessness at a younger age than dissenters. This is consistent with other findings (Craig & Hodson 1998) that show homeless people who report adverse childhood experiences typically have lower educational attainments than their homeless and domiciled counterparts.

Table 8.1 Highest level of education – dissenters and escapers (per cent); age first homeless and homeless career duration (months)

Year Level	Dissenters ³⁰ (N=9)	Escapers ³¹ (N=32)	Sample (N=103)
Year 12	45	6	23
Year 11	33	9	15
Year 10	11	34	30
Year 9	11	22	18
Year 8	-	29	10
Year 7	-	-	4
TOTAL	100	100	100
Age first homeless (ave)	16.9	15.7	24.0
Mths homeless (ave)	17	48	33

The final line in Table 8.1 shows that escapers had been homeless for much longer than the dissenters. This finding is important in the context of Jon Smith's (1995) study of 83 young homeless people. Smith makes the point that the age people leave school has a significant bearing on the homeless career trajectories of young people. He suggests that:

Educational attainment affects young people's experiences of homelessness. In particular, it appears that the earlier young people left school, the longer they were likely to remain homeless (Smith 1995:35).

School provided the dissenters with stability and also provided them with an opportunity to 'get ahead'. School sustained their involvement with the mainstream and this operated as a buffer between the dissenters and other homeless people. This is important when trying to account for the different career trajectories of the dissenters and escapers.

³⁰ At the first interview five dissenters were still at school - two were at University, two were in year 11 and one was in year 10

³¹ At the first interview five escapers were still at school - one was in year 11, two were in year 10 and two were in year nine.

Nan was lucky in many ways. Apart from a short period where she stayed with relatives Nan was assisted directly into transitional accommodation. This happened because her school became aware of her problems at home at an early stage and when she was 'kicked out' they helped her to get assistance from a local agency.

In Australian policy debates, there is considerable emphasis on providing early intervention to young people (Crago 1991; Crane & Brannock 1996; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1998; Thomson Goodall and Associates Pty Ltd 1999b; Dwyer & Wyn 2001). For most young people this means providing assistance early in their homeless careers by giving them the opportunity to address the problems at home, as well as remaining at school. Where a return home is unlikely, then staying at school is considered an important goal in its own right. Early intervention works if schools are connected to early intervention services and have the wherewithal to assist young people who are experiencing troubles at home. It also requires young people to overcome their embarrassment and this is not always easy. Nan 'found it hard to talk about' her problems but she was fortunate to have a school friend who had been through a similar experience.

In contrast, the family life of escapers was characterised by chronic instability and trauma. This generally resulted in frequent disruptions to their schooling. Andrew recalled that he:

. . . moved houses all the time when I was growing up. I was in eight schools

Although there was variation in the length of time between becoming homeless and leaving school, by the time escapers entered the homeless population truancy was common and if assistance was not provided at this point, it did not take long before truancy gave way to withdrawal from school.

For escapers the withdrawal from school marks an important point in their homeless careers – having left school early, become homeless at a young age, escapers had no family support, no work experience and little education. In this context, escapers were more likely

to be attracted to the homeless subculture because it mitigated their devalued social identities by providing a social space where they felt 'accepted'.

8.4 The homeless subculture: avoiding it, engaging with it

8.4.1 Dissenters

Dissenters had mixed views of homelessness. A small number stated that the freedom of homelessness was 'cool' and that they enjoyed being viewed as something of 'a rebel', but a strong, normatively conservative identity standard prevailed among the people in this sub-group. This identity standard was underpinned by the view that people are homeless because they chose to be, or because of individual failings such as drug or alcohol abuse. This perception of homelessness suggests that dissenters had internalised the values and beliefs of the dominant culture and in the process they reproduced the 'them' and 'us' distinction.

This created a certain amount of tension as people struggled with their 'housing problems'. Some felt embarrassed about their situation and adopted 'passing' strategies that were similar to those employed by people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways. Nan's passing strategies were, for instance, built on a series of dis-identifiers that perpetuated common stereotypes of the homeless. Nan stressed on a number of occasions how important it was to 'fit in', to be 'well dressed', 'on time' and to avoid talking about her situation in public lest others find out.

School was also an important institution for the dissenters in terms of their daily routines and their social identity. School linked them into predictable routines that provided continuity and certainty in their lives. School was linked to a specific social identity that countered, to a certain degree, the stigma of homelessness. For the dissenters, being a student remained the 'pivotal category' in terms of their identity. Nan believed that being at school demonstrated that she was 'still a normal person' and this implicitly placed her higher

in the social order. For the dissenters school was also seen as important in terms of their future. This sensitises us to the temporal orientation of the dissenters which was markedly different from the escapers. Table 8.2 shows that two thirds of the dissenters had thought about the housing they planned to move into once when they left transitional accommodation. In contrast less than half of the escapers had thought about their exit housing arrangements.

Table 8.2 Thought about exit housing by youth subgroup, by pathway (per cent)

Thought about exit housing	Dissenters (N=9)	Escapers (N=32)	Youth TOTAL (N=41)	Substance use (N=18)	Mental illness (N=6)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Yes	67	44	49	22	66	50	71	50
No	22	53	46	67	17	43	29	44
Unsure	11	3	5	11	17	7	-	6
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

While I have made a distinction between escapers and dissenters, there was evidence that a small number of dissenters also 'enjoyed' the freedom of the street. This was only a small group (N=3) but they had 'slipped through the net' at school as Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998) describe it. Once they left school, these three dissenters began to engage with other homeless people and over time they were drawn into the homeless subculture. Their lives began to resemble the escapers when this occurred.

8.4.2 Escapers

For a number of reasons escapers received little assistance from their school. Many of the escapers were in their late 20s and early 30s and first became homeless before early intervention programs had started. Some were resistant to external assistance because they felt they had already been 'fucked around' by people in the school system. For others, it had been a long time since they left school and they found it difficult to recall exactly what had happened to them at school.

Once escapers were out of school and in the homeless population there was little to do except hang around. Hanging around is a commonly reported behaviour among homeless young people (Mallett et al. 2003) and it was a way to meet other people in similar positions. According to Robbie it only took a short time before you were soon 'sucked' into the scene, or the homeless subculture. Andrew said he hung around the local shops and soon:

. . . started to recognise a few faces . . . and mucked around with them.

Toni said that meeting other homeless young people was important as it provided basic information on how to get by. She met some people in the local 'pinball³² parlour' and:

. . . started to hang around with them – they knew about the services, where to get food, money.

As escapers experience of homelessness progressed, people started to share material resources with other homeless people. These resources included cigarettes, food and drink, as well as sharing information about how to survive.

Friendships with other homeless people helped to dissipate concerns about being homeless. People spoke about 'looking after their own', of people 'looking out for you'. The central theme was that other homeless people could empathise with you and understand your plight. Toni said that when she mixed with other homeless kids she 'felt better' knowing there were others in a similar position.

The importance of other homeless people validating their identity and their experiences was obvious. Mixing with other homeless people provided a feeling of belonging. Rather than resist the stigma of being homeless, Toni, Andrew and Robbie incorporated homelessness into their identity, creating a sense of purpose and belonging.

Social validation helped to make up for their rejection from mainstream institutions such as family, school, and the housing and labour markets. However, to survive homelessness you needed to be 'street smart'. The knowledge and social practices that

³² Pinball parlour.

constitute being 'street smart' are an important aspect in the overall process of acculturation into the homeless subculture. This process starts early and some of the basic techniques and strategies that enabled them to survive homelessness were learnt during the initial period of couch surfing and hanging around. For instance, Robbie quickly learnt to 'carry as little as possible' and this meant he hid his few possessions where no one else could find them. It also meant he carried as little identifying information on him as was possible.

The process of becoming street smart was then accelerated when people started to use the homeless service system. In youth refuges it was common to see the inexperienced mix with the experienced. Relationships between homeless people at different points in their homeless careers are one way that sub-cultural practices are reproduced. After spending time in juvenile justice facilities and a string of out-of-home care arrangements, Robbie thought refuges were a 'joke' because they were full 'of tossers who didn't know squat'. Hirst (1989), Smith (1995) and Mallett et al. (2003) make the point that youth refuges and night shelters are important sites for reproducing sub-cultural practices and knowledge – that is they are an elemental part of the process of acculturation. Smith notes that:

Life in services for homeless people and on the streets, where respondents met other homeless people, is an important part of the process whereby respondents both moved into a lifestyle and a culture of homelessness and picked up information needed to survive. This theme of companionship and learning the "ropes" from other homeless people is repeated throughout the interviews (Smith 1995:94).

Refuges were familiar to those who had been in juvenile justice or other forms of institutional care – the rules, the language and the attitudes they encountered, while not identical, were underpinned by a common thread of rejection and exclusion. Toni had been couch surfing for about three months before she got into a youth refuge where she:

. . . learnt heaps. All the others had been homeless for a while and they sort of showed me the ropes.

In refuges, the most important information was about the 'rules' that related to basic social interaction(s) rather than information about how to get material resources. Toni quickly learnt that 'everyone gets sized up pretty quickly . . . you need a thick skin'. And a theme that emerged repeatedly was the need to 'watch ya back'. Robbie pointed out that:

Everyone is after what they can get and says anything to get it.

While Andrew said that :

You had to be careful . . . you look the wrong way at someone and it can cause all sorts of grief and drama.

Interactions with other homeless people emphasised the importance of looking after yourself. This helps explain the transitory nature of many friendships between homeless people. On the one hand, friendships with other homeless people provided important support and validation. On the other hand, friends could turn on one another with, at times, surprising viciousness and little warning.

For many escapers their experience of homelessness was characterised by periodic use of the homeless service system, and knowing how to 'get in' was important. The level of service utilisation in the youth pathway was the highest (mean 5.5) in the sample. The average number of times escapers had been accommodated was 5.9. In contrast, the nine dissenters had been accommodated, on average, 3.8 times. The key point is that the homeless service system formed a key part in the lives of both groups but for slightly different reasons and with different consequences.

In chapter five I pointed out that when patterns of repeat service usage are de-contextualised there is a tendency to view repeat service use as welfare dependency with all the negative connotations that carries. The homeless service system is an important site where a range of social practices developed as people adapted their behaviour to 'fit the system'. In the following section I consider the issue of throughput to illustrate how systemic imperatives structured the level of service utilisation and, by extension, the homeless careers of both dissenters and escapers.

8.5 Throughput

Over the last decade or so welfare practices have been influenced by corporate notions of efficiency (Burke 1994) and productivity (Pinkney & Ewing 2006). Many critics have pointed out that these ideas are generally misplaced in the welfare context, but they continue,

nevertheless, to influence policy development and program evaluation. Throughput, or the number of people accommodated in one place over a specified period - generally a year - is one measure used as a proxy for efficiency.

Throughput is not inherently a bad measure but factors such as the availability of affordable, secure housing, which are beyond the control of agencies, can compromise its utility. Hirst's report *Forced Exit* (1989) highlights that high throughput is pointless if people leave emergency accommodation to go into substandard accommodation or back into the homeless population. Hirst (1989) identified a pattern where young people had been evicted or required to leave youth refuges before their issues had been addressed, and they would then go into another refuge, and go through the same process. Hirst (1989:4) termed the process the 'refuge roundabout' and I have used the term 'revolving door' in previous chapters to describe the same process. The Burdekin report (1989:44) goes further. It argues that agencies that 'shuffle around people' are actively participating in 'chronic homelessness'.

The logic underlying throughput appears to be based on the erroneous view that homelessness is typically a short term crisis or 'emergency situation requiring emergency solution' (Hirst 1989:4). As we have seen, some households have relatively short experiences of homelessness and require minimal on-going support. For others, however, the physical and psychological impact of being homeless, combined with problems securing a reasonable income, means that resolving homelessness takes time. This was the case for the escapers. Robbie spoke of being evicted and kicked out of 'numerous' refuges. In some instances young people acknowledged their own behaviour was to blame. At other times young people reported the practices in refuges worked in such a way that failed to recognise the difficulty it takes to resolve their problems. The emphasis on throughput commonly compromised the restorative capacity of many of the agencies that people in the sample had been accommodated in. Robbie knew his problems could not be solved 'in six fucking weeks' while Toni's had 'heaps of shit to deal with' and she knew it 'wasn't goin to be fixed

up overnight'. This resulted in frustration which was commonly directed at workers and 'the system'.

Even though the periodic use of the emergency accommodation continued throughout their homeless careers, just under three quarters of the escapers (72 per cent) reported that they had been barred from services. Table 8.3 shows that the escapers were almost twice as likely as dissenters to have been barred from services. Further, the data show that people on the youth, substance use and mental health pathways were nearly three times more likely to be banned from services than people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways – once again the data converge around the same two clusters.

Table 8.3 Reports of being 'barred' from homeless services by onset pathway (per cent)

Pathway	Substance use (N=18)	Youth dissenters (N=9)	Youth escapers (N=32)	Mental illness (N=6)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Barred	55	45	72	100	21	29	55

Youth pathway - 68 per cent
Youth pathway - 68 per cent

CLUSTER ONE
66 per cent
CLUSTER TWO
26 per cent

Many escapers started to rely on boarding houses because of the combination of reduced access to the homeless service system, problems accessing housing because of their age and a lack of experience, and a declining number of non-homeless friends who could provide temporary accommodation. If leaving school is the first critical point in the escapers homeless careers, using boarding houses represents a second critical juncture. Toni remembered the first time she went to a boarding house as 'totally weird . . . it was like you were stepping into another world'.

In boarding houses, young people mixed with residents who had adapted to homelessness and were more 'street smart'. In order to gain acceptance from the older residents, young homeless people engaged in a range of social practices that were overtly antithetical to the mainstream. Some people took 'the piss' out of the rigidity of the 'normals'

and their 9-5 routines, while others emphasised the freedom offered by life on the street.

Andrew mentioned that he liked :

. . . the freedom, the chance to do my own thing with no-one around to hassle me.

Other respondents repeatedly emphasised the risks they took to gain acceptance among other homeless people and their expertise in managing these risks. Robbie mentioned an occasion where a group of his friends had 'pinched food and stuff' from a local supermarket.

As they were leaving the police arrived. Robbie said that:

We fucked them right up (the cops) . . . they chased us for about an hour, but we know how to get away.

Goffman (1963:29) refers to this sort of behaviour as 'hostile bravado', a practice he argues in which people try to outdo each other in a display of nonchalance about their stigmatised identity. In a similar vein, Anderson (1990:175) argues that these sort of strategies, what he calls 'going for bad', allow disempowered kids to gain acceptance. Having been through 'the system', this sort of bravado was common among the escapers. It structured relationships among the escapers, between escapers and other homeless people, and between escapers and the mainstream.

Early on in their homeless careers, however, understanding the 'social structure' of the homeless subculture was limited and 'bravado' could create problems. Andrew acknowledged this when he said he 'thought I knew it all'. It was only after he was 'taken for a ride', quite literally as an unwilling look-out on an armed robbery, did he realise that he had a lot to learn, that he was 'green'.

The aim of these social practices is to lessen the stigma and empower individuals, although they commonly end up maintaining an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. This recreates the stigma of homelessness. Many of the social practices of the escapers produced similar contradictions and while these practices enabled them to survive homelessness, they also constrained their capacity to 'get out' of homelessness.

Although many of the social practices that make up the homeless subculture represent a rejection of mainstream practices, it is also the case that many social practices

were drawn from the mainstream.. For instance, values such as independence and resourcefulness were held in high regard. However, these values were commonly manipulated to fit the social setting in which they found themselves. Andrew told the story of how he:

. . . heard [an agency] had money for white goods . . . three of us got fridges and sold em. Made a couple of hundred bucks out of that.

Cashing in the fridges was considered a great scam and there was substantial kudos for thinking it up and getting away with it.

The inversion of mainstream values was also evident in the structure of the hierarchy in the homeless subculture. In the homeless subculture, anyone who had done time was virtually guaranteed a higher position. Robbie said:

You'd hear that so and so had been in jail for rollin' someone or doing a job or something like that . . . it was prestige like.

As escapers became immersed in the homeless subculture, their social networks began to change as they made friendships with other homeless people. At the same time, they were becoming clearer about the rules and the hierarchies that structure the homeless subculture, as well as becoming equipped with a broader array of survival strategies. At this point many escapers reported that they felt they had things in common with the homeless and that being homeless had started 'to become normal'.

The identity index score of people in the youth pathway was 0.87, and this was the highest rate reported across the five pathways. There was only a small difference between the escapers and the dissenters (0.89 and 0.79 respectively) although this could be attributed to the experiences of a small group of dissenters (N=3) who became involved in the homeless subculture where they learnt to engage with other homeless people. Nevertheless, the core point remains that escapers identified with other homeless people and with homelessness as a way of life.

When people interact with other homeless people they start to replicate existing social practices. In the homeless subculture, using drugs is one such practice. In chapter 4

we saw that drugs have a profound impact on the career trajectories of some homeless people. As Mallett et al. (2003) and others (Baron 1999; Auserwald & Erye 2002) have found, young homeless people are no different in this regard.

8.6 'Using'

The use of drugs was one practice that was central to the process of acculturation and acceptance into the homeless subculture. Toni pointed out that other homeless people were 'not interested if you weren't using'.

In chapter 4 I pointed out that 10 of the escapers had some experience with heroin before they were homeless. In a minority of these cases (N=4), young people identified a parent or step parent's drug use as a factor that contributed to them leaving home. For instance, Andrew's mother used heroin and he scored for her on a number of occasions. Where young people are exposed to parental substance use, Baron (1999) found that this increases the risk that the young people will use themselves.

For the remaining six people their involvement with drugs came via state institutions. Robbie started to use in residential care where 'people shot up right in front of me'. Toni also blamed the Department for introducing me to smack'. In understanding the processes that shape the homeless careers of the escapers, three points need to be made. First, most of this group had typically only 'tasted' smack prior to becoming homeless - at best they were casual users rather than regular users. Second, if there were no problems at home it is unlikely Robbie and Toni would have been in the care of the Department of Human Services and consequently exposed to heroin. Third, their problems with drugs got worse once they were homeless. Thus, substance use was primarily a consequence of homelessness rather than a cause.

Along with this group of 10 people there were another 20 people on the youth pathway who became involved with drugs after they were homeless. The pressure to conform to the values of the homeless subculture can be seen in the different adaptive

patterns of the escapers and the dissenters. Of the 30 people in the youth pathway who developed substance use problems after they became homeless, escapers were disproportionately represented with 85 per cent (N=27) reporting that they had developed substance use problems. Given the backgrounds of the escapers and their involvement with the homeless subculture, a high rate was expected. In contrast, a third of the dissenters developed substance use problems (N=3). This means that fewer dissenters adapted their behaviour or identity in comparison to the escapers. While this can be linked to their different experiences leading to homelessness, it is through the practice of distancing themselves from other homeless people that they avoided the normative pressures that shaped the social practices that constitute the homeless subculture. The three dissenters who were 'sucked into' the homeless subculture developed substance use problems and their homeless careers resembled the escapers.

For most of these 30 people, their involvement with drugs happened in the first six months they were homeless. Researchers have noted that drugs are an important part of the 'process of initiation into street life' (Auerswald & Eyre 2002:1503). Many young people were surprised at how prevalent drugs were. Andrew, who smoked pot and 'drank a bit' before he was homeless, couldn't believe how common drugs were among homeless people:

Everyone was into drugs – I mean everyone. That's all anyone talked about really - how to get drugs, what the gear was like, who had some.

Toni commented on how older people would target new comers, offering them 'free gear to get em hooked'. In chapter 5 I identified that some people with substance use problems would target young kids. John, who became homeless because of substance use issues, was upfront about how he targeted newly homeless people because they were 'easy'.

Toni said that the only time she received drugs for free was when she first started using and how this:

Made me think the aim was to get me hooked . . . I didn't think much about it at the time . . . but looking back I can see how they sort of took advantage of me.

Similarly, a number of young people were introduced to drugs when they were in the homeless service system. This confirms Mallett et al's. (2003:82) findings which show that some young homeless people are 'exposed to and started using harder drugs, such as heroin, while housed in refuges and/or supported accommodation'

Using drugs immersed people in the homeless subculture and there were three general factors that characterised the biographies of young people who developed substance use problems. First, drugs were a way of dealing with grind of homelessness. Robbie, echoing Merton's retreatist thesis, said that 'out there drugs is all you got . . . drugs is your family, your friend'. However, if 'using' was solely about coping then it would be reasonable to expect a more even distribution of problematic drug use across the sample. This was not the case.

Second, drugs were used as a means of self discovery or enjoyment and many people said they liked 'the feeling'. The third aspect was the use of drugs as a means of dealing with traumatic life experiences such as abuse. The development of problematic drug use resulted from the interaction of one or all of these three factors within a social context where drug use was virtually a precondition of belonging. Whether the catalyst for these adaptive behaviours was belonging, an act of resentment directed towards the mainstream, or to cope with the daily demands of being homeless, using is a part of being homeless and for many young people it is hard to avoid.

There were strong normative pressures to use in the homeless subculture if you didn't 'use' you were excluded from the scene and treated with some suspicion – an outsider among outsiders. This suggests that being part of the scene and belonging were significant influences on the actions of individual actors. This challenges Neil and Fopp's (1993:16) claim that peer pressure is not an issue among young homeless people who use drugs.

Once they had started to use, it was clear that over time many began to use more frequently. Andrew spoke of how he and his friends would share food, smokes and information; how they would talk about what was going on, who was new, who they hadn't

seen, but mostly how they talked about 'getting drugs and getting money to buy them'. Eventually Andrew's day-to-day routine was dominated by using and scoring.

When young people start using it commonly locks them into the homeless subculture (Baron 1999) and their temporal orientation becomes focused on the here and now as their routines are directed towards scoring and the 'business of raising money'. At this point 'getting out' of homelessness is a secondary issue. Unless young people are assisted early in their homeless careers, for many of them homelessness is a pathway to substance use. When this happens their lives begin to resemble that of people in the substance use pathways and many make the transition to adult homelessness. This raises the issue of movement from one pathway to another.

8.7 Movement between pathways

For the 27 escapers and three dissenters who developed substance use problems after they became homeless, their routines and social interactions started to mirror the patterns of those people on the substance use pathway. For people like Robbie, Toni and Andrew using was an elemental part of their transition into the adult homeless population.

Among homeless young people drug use is a common behavioural change - although there were other changes in this group that had an equally significant impact on their homeless careers. For 11 people in the youth pathway the emergence of mental health problems created new difficulties for them. Of these 11 there were only two reports where mental health issues were the only problem, with the majority (N=9) reporting they had substance use problems as well.

Where both substance use and mental illness occurred, different responses to the stigma of homelessness, drug use and mental illness can be seen in the variability of their routines. The data show that people with dual problems moved back and forth between the homeless subculture and social isolation over considerable periods of time. In each

situation we see different patterns of interaction with other people, both housed and homeless.

When people with dual problems are using they are typically part of the homeless subculture, at its periphery to be sure, but nevertheless part of a broader social group. When their mental health deteriorates, they are preyed upon and shunned in much the same way people on the mental health pathways are. During these periods they tend to withdraw and become isolated. Robbie had witnessed many people 'burn out' and was sympathetic, but ultimately if they couldn't handle the drugs that was 'their problem'.

The impact of homelessness on young people is significant. If we take reports of substance use and mental illness together, four fifths (N=32³³) of the young people developed problems after they became homeless. The adaptive patterns that emerged among homeless young people have implications in terms of the amount of time people were homeless. Among those who support the social identification thesis, it commonly thought that duration mediates adaptation – that is the longer a person is homeless the more likely they are to adapt their behaviour. My data suggest the relationship can flow in both directions and that the influence of peoples pathways into homelessness need to be considered as well.

Among the dissenters there was variation in career duration. Table 8.4 shows that just under half (44 per cent) had been homeless for less than one year with one third (33 per cent) being homeless for less than three months. There is a possibility that some dissenters were captured early in their careers, hence the higher number in the short and medium term classifications. However, there is no obvious reason why dissenters would be different from homeless people on other pathways in this respect. There were five dissenters that had long term problems - although two of the five had been in supported accommodation the entire time because they could not find affordable accommodation to exit to. The remaining three dissenters that had been homeless for over a year identified with other homeless people and

³³ There were 21 people who reported substance use issues only, two people who reported mental health issues only and nine people reported both substance use and mental health issues (21+2+9=32).

accepted homelessness as an identity. Consequently, their experiences of homelessness were closer to other escapers than other dissenters.

Table 8.4 Temporal classification of dissenters and escapers (per cent)

	Dissenters (N=9)	Escapers (N=32)	TOTAL (N=103)
Short term (0 - 3 mths)	33	-	18
Medium term (4-11 mths)	11	-	17
Long term (12+ mths)	56	100	65
TOTAL	100	100	100

Among the escapers everyone had been homeless for over 12 months. Most had been homeless for many years. Some escapers were into their 30s and had been in and out of the homeless population on many occasions. This is consistent with other findings that have established an empirical connection between the presence of adverse childhood experiences and long homeless careers (Koegel et al. 1995; Herman et al. 1997).

For escapers like Andrew, the transition from youth to adult homeless meant that by the time he was 26 he was embedded in the homeless subculture and homelessness had become 'normal' for him. Robbie, who had his first experience of homelessness when he was 14, was the most deeply embedded in the homeless subculture. With a sporadic employment and housing history and a long history of substance use, Robbie was still in the system at 37 and he made the point that '20 years later and I'm still here'.

8.8 Temporal order and movement: the other pathways

Movement onto other pathways was most pronounced in the youth pathway but there was movement among people on the other four pathways. In chapter 5 I pointed out that two people in the substance use pathway developed mental health problems after they became homeless. Similarly, in chapter 6 I pointed out that one third of the mental health group developed a substance use problem after becoming homeless.

Among those people whose pathway into homelessness was domestic violence or a housing crisis the level of movement was lower, with just over one quarter (10 out of 38) of the people in these two pathways developing substance use or mental health problems - five people developed mental health problems and seven people developed substance use problems, although two of these people reported they had mental health problems as well.

In chapter 1 I made the point that the temporal sequence of events has largely been ignored by homeless researchers and that as a result the disproportionate representation of mental health and substance use in the homeless population has typically been cast in causal terms. Table 8.5 shows that whereas six per cent of the sample identified mental health problems as the cause of their initial homelessness, another 17 per cent (or 18 people) reported that they had developed mental health issues after they became homeless. While it is difficult to say whether these problems would have emerged anyway, these people reported that the constant struggle to find somewhere to stay, a lack of security and predictability, combined with the stigma attached to homelessness, was damaging to their psychological well being to the extent they required hospitalisation. This is three times the number of people who became homeless because of mental illness and suggests that the over representation of mental health problems reported in the homeless population occurs for two reasons.

Table 8.5 Prevalence of mental health issues by temporal sequence (per cent)

	Substance use (N=18)	Youth (N=41)	Mental illness (N=6)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Prior to homelessness	-	-	100	-	-	6
After becoming homeless	11	27	-	7	17	17
Lifetime prevalence	11	27	100	7	17	23

First, irrespective of temporal order, if people have mental health problems when they are homeless they tend to be chronically marginalised by both the mainstream and other homeless people. With few cultural, social or economic resources they end up trapped in the

homeless population as a result. Second, the data indicate that there is a significant risk of developing mental health problems after they become homeless, although this is typically mediated by drug use. This challenges the stereotype that commonly presents mental illness as a primary cause of homelessness. In this sample, for most homeless people with mental health problems, their health problems emerged after they became homeless.

A similar pattern emerged around substance use. Table 8.6 shows that although 17 per cent of the sample (N=18) reported substance use problems prior to the onset of homelessness, another 38 per cent, or twice as many people (N=39), developed substance use problems after they had been homeless. The elevated presence of substance use can be pinned down to two reasons.

Table 8.6 Substance use by temporal sequence by onset pathway (per cent)

	Substance use (N=18)	Youth (N=41)	Mental illness (N=6)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Prior to homelessness	100	-	-	-	-	17
After becoming homeless	-	73	33	7	21	38
Lifetime prevalence	100	73	33	7	12	55

First, although substance use was a more common causative factor than mental illness in this sample, the data show that people who become involved in the homeless subculture are more likely to develop substance use problems. This is consistent with the view that people who come into contact with the homeless subculture are the most at risk of developing new 'problems' such as substance use and this 'tends to perpetuate the problem of homelessness' (Wolch et al. 1998: 447).

Second, while substance use is a common problem with over 55 per cent of the sample reporting they have had problems with drug use, in this sample these problems were more commonly a consequence than a cause. Substance use locks people into the homeless population and conversely, people without these problems typically exit earlier. As a result, this leads to the heavy concentration of people with substance use (and mental

health problems) in the long term population. The twin effects of adapting to, and becoming locked in, increases the visible presence of this group and this has mistakenly been interpreted as the cause of their homelessness.

The extent of these changes can be seen more clearly when both issues are combined. At the onset of homelessness one quarter of the sample reported either mental health or substance use problems (N=24). Table 8.7 shows that by the time of the first interview just under two thirds (N=66) of the sample reported they had developed one or both of these problems.

Table 8.7 Life time prevalence of substance use, mental health problems (N)

	Substance use (N=18)	Youth (N=41)	Mental illness (N=6)	Domestic violence (N=14)	Housing crisis (N=24)	TOTAL (N=103)
Substance use only	16	21	-	-	5	42
Mental health only		2	4	-	3	9
Both	2	9	2	1	1	15
TOTAL	18	32	6	1	9	66

Although temporal sequence is important from a number of levels, whether problems were existing ones or emerged as a result of homelessness, the consequences are much the same because 'getting out' becomes difficult and the probability of a long homeless career increases. For young people in particular, this has consequences that continue to shape their biographies well into their adult lives.

8.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the experiences of people who first became homeless before they were 18. The chapter emphasises the different ways young homeless people respond to the stigma of homelessness and the homeless subculture and the impact this has on the length of time they are homeless. The different responses to the stigma of homelessness remind us that stigma is not an individual attribute but a 'language of relationship' '(Goffman

1963:3). This also reminds us that young homeless people are not a homogeneous group and while there are similar patterns of action and interaction, there is also variation.

The chapter suggests that young people's experience of homelessness can be characterised in two broad ways - some resist homelessness while others adapt to it. I argue that these different responses can be better understood by connecting them to the different sets of biographical experiences young people bring with them. For the dissenters, their response to homelessness was typified by a resistance towards a homeless identity and other homeless people. This resistance was framed by stereotypical notions of the homeless as failures.

For the dissenters, school was a critical location in that it created a sense of belonging. In addition it provided a different socio-cultural context that enabled people in this group to maintain and develop social relationships that connected them to the mainstream. This is important in terms of understanding the actions and decisions of this group. School provided an effective buffer between the dissenters and other homeless young people and by remaining outside of the homeless subculture they were less likely to exhibit behavioural or cognitive changes that typically exacerbate homelessness. It was also clear their familial experiences were less damaging than the experiences of the escapers. Consequently, the homeless careers of the dissenters were, in the main, much shorter when compared to the escapers.

Even though the dominant pattern among dissenters was to avoid the homeless subculture, there was evidence to show that some made the transition and had become involved with the homeless subculture. When this happens there is a tendency to become entrenched in the homeless population.

In contrast, the escapers initially perceived homelessness as a 'better' alternative than home. Many inverted the stigma of homelessness to provide a sense of belonging with and connection to other homeless people. This reminds us that actors consciously reflect on their social situation and are always actively engaged in making their own lives. Nevertheless, the inversion of stigma and the social practices that supported it came at a

heavy price that included chronic exclusion from the housing and labour markets. The much higher rate of adaptation among the escapers, particularly the high development of substance use problems, suggests that early family experiences have a significant bearing on their homeless careers. Their lives show signs of being permeated by violence from within and outside the family. From a young age many experienced exclusion and rejection and this is one reason why escapers showed a stronger inclination to become involved with the homeless subculture where substance use was common.

While the homeless subculture has positive benefits, identification with homelessness and engagement with the homeless subculture emphasises how social context and social networks can 'foster social learning and normative pressures that act as barriers to exits from homelessness' (Grigsby et al. 1990:153). Furthermore, the experiences of the escapers are consistent with findings from overseas that identify adverse childhood experiences as a predictor of long homeless careers.

The way in which some young homeless people make the transition to adult homelessness can be more clearly seen by examining, over time, the experiences of people who became homeless before they were 18, irrespective of their current age. In setting up the analysis in this way the findings suggest that early intervention and prevention programs are likely to have a number of additional impacts beyond addressing homelessness. If early intervention programs are targeted at young people, particularly those in the state care and protection system, they can assist in decreasing the number of people who require drug and alcohol rehabilitation services and mental health assistance.

As Auserwald and Erye (2002:1507-8) note 'the lives of the marginalised and homeless are not simply chaotic, but instead follow reproducible patterns'. Even though there are reproducible lines of conduct among the people on each pathway, the issue of movement between pathways draws attention to two important issues. First, it is important to delineate between subgroups such as escapers and dissenters in order to identify commonalities and differences that can enable more effective interventions (Hier et al. 1990). Clearly school, and what I refer to as the 'out-of-home care' system, are two sites where

intervention is essential, and where different intervention strategies are required. Second, movement between pathways emphasises the fluidity of these social categories. This reinforces Fine's (1992) point that categorical typologies can obscure complex social interaction. Pathways are ideal types that enable us to understand the world, but reality is always much more complex.

9 'Getting out' and 'staying out': exiting homelessness

In terms of policy formation, not only must we determine how to prevent homelessness . . . we must also determine how to keep people from re-entering homelessness once they become housed (Neil & Fopp 1993:9).

9.1 Introduction

In the preceding four chapters I have used the experiences of individuals on each of the five pathways to illustrate the different ways people can respond to homelessness. My argument has been that there is a connection between how people become homeless and what happens to them while they are homeless. In this chapter my attention turns to the final part of the research question which is whether there is a connection between how people become homeless and how they try to 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness.

Using data from 79 households who were re-interviewed approximately nine months after they had left transitional accommodation, I use my theoretical framework to examine the way that different material and non-material structures come together to contribute to housing stability for some formerly homeless households, and reproduce homelessness for others. The way these structures come together is mediated through individual actors and their actions. Consequently, it is important to understand, at the level of agency, how individuals make sense of the context in which they make their decisions and how this influences, and is influenced by their interaction with other homeless people and people who are housed.

The chapter starts by examining the role different housing types play in preventing the re-occurrence of homelessness. The chapter then examines how many of the 79 households moved from transitional accommodation into private rental or social (subsidised) housing; how many of these people were still housed at the second interview; and whether there were any differences in the level of housing stability by the type of housing that people exited to. The chapter indicates that housing type does play a role in preventing the re-occurrence of homelessness - although the data also indicate that for some homeless

people, affordable housing on its own is insufficient to prevent the re-occurrence of homelessness.

The next part of the chapter examines the housing stability of people on each of the five entry pathways. The data show that although the level of housing stability is unevenly distributed across the sample there are two clear patterns. The first pattern indicated that some people had managed to 'get out' and stay out' of homelessness in the period between interviews. 'Staying out' was concentrated among people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways, as well as the dissenters. In contrast, the second pattern indicated that some people never 'got out' of homelessness after they left transitional accommodation, or had failed to 'stay out' of the homeless population in the period between the two interviews. This pattern was concentrated among the escapers, as well as people on the substance use and mental health pathways.

The chapter examines the experiences of people who 'stayed out' first. People on the housing crisis and domestic violence pathways were the most likely to have successfully remained out of homelessness. Affordable housing is the key for these individuals and because they have little involvement with other homeless people and had relatively short homeless careers, there is little need for extensive ongoing support. The chapter also considers the distancing strategies of the people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways. It notes that their distancing strategies are premised on re-connecting them to their social networks in the mainstream. Nevertheless, because of their poor position in the labour and housing markets, people in both of these groups remain vulnerable to further housing problems.

The chapter then considers the experiences of the dissenters. Like individuals on the housing crisis and domestic violence pathways, the dissenters did not become involved in the homeless subculture. The dissenters had fewer problems remaining housed than did their counterparts, the escapers, with the majority of the dissenter's peer networks comprised of young people at school and in conventional accommodation. A small number of escapers

(n=9) did 'get out' and 'stay out', and the final part of this section examines the factors that resulted in housing stability for this small group.

The next part of this chapter examines the experiences of those people who did not 'get out' of homelessness as well as and those people who failed to 'stay out' of homelessness in the period between the two interviews. The first part of this section considers the factors that make exiting homelessness difficult for people with mental health issues. I show that housing is hard to maintain when they have fluctuating health problems, a lack of external support and a poor position in the labour market. I argue that people with mental health issues remain acutely vulnerable to further episodes of homelessness without ongoing support and affordable housing.

The chapter then examines the experiences the escapers and people on the substance use pathway. The chapter argues that many adapted to homelessness as a way of life because of their involvement with other homeless people life. As a result to get out of homelessness individuals in these two groups use a distancing strategy that attempts to create distance between themselves and their homeless peers. This strategy is referred to as 'associational distancing' (Snow & Anderson 1993). As a practice, associational distancing commonly results in their isolation and boredom. For some this leads to further episodes of homelessness. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the implications of episodic homelessness in terms of cognitive change generally, and identification with a homeless way of life specifically.

The chapter shows that while access to affordable housing plays an important role in preventing the re-occurrence of homelessness, people on each of the five pathways actively negotiate the route out of homelessness in different ways with different results. The chapter concludes that different groups of homeless people require different levels and types of assistance, and that the assistance they need can be linked to their pathway into homelessness and their experiences while they were homeless.

9.2 Housing

Research has provided affirmative evidence of the salutatory effects of independent housing on increasing residential stability . . . among homeless individuals (Wong 2002: 271).

Housing is a common place to start when thinking about how people 'get out' of homelessness. Edgar and Doherty (2001) and McNaughton (2004) argue that housing is a basic part of the process of social reintegration and, in one form or another, appropriate, affordable housing has consistently been linked to increased residential stability among formerly homeless people (Coopers and Lybrand W D Scott 1985; Wallace & Bassuk 1991; Wong 1997; Horn 2002).

However, findings from longitudinal studies of the homeless in the U.S challenge the assumption that homelessness 'ends as soon as any type of dwelling is obtained' (Sosin et al. 1990:171). In the U.S, homeless researchers generally use a literal or 'street' definition of homelessness. This means that boarding houses, staying with friends and doubling-up with family members are treated as exits from homelessness. Longitudinal studies have found that exits of this sort happen so frequently that any analysis that classifies these forms of accommodation as an 'exit' from homelessness runs the risk of 'numerical domination' by these 'superficial exits' (Sosin et al. 1990:166). In previous chapters I have also shown that some homeless people use these forms of accommodation on a temporary basis and move between them with regularity.

The issue of 'superficial exits' raises three issues. The first involves determining what sort of accommodation constitutes an exit from homelessness (Neil & Fopp 1993). Using the cultural definition of homelessness, private rental, social housing³⁴ and owner occupier are the three forms of accommodation considered to be 'housed'. Any other form of

³⁴ I use the term social housing to cover all forms of subsidised housing. In Australia there are two main forms of subsidised housing. The first is known as public housing. Public housing is run by state housing authorities and tenants contribute a fixed percentage of their income on rent. Community housing is the other form of subsidised housing. Tenants also pay a fixed percentage on rent but these properties are managed by local community organisations.

accommodation is treated as homeless. Consequently, 'superficial exits' to boarding houses, emergency accommodation or friend's places are treated as movement within the homeless population.

However, successfully exiting homelessness is not just about housing type. A second issue is housing affordability. Housing affordability is a central issue raised in a number of international studies that have focused on the role different housing types play in preventing the re-occurrence of homelessness.

In their examination of the predictors of housing stability among families who stayed in New York's homeless shelters, Mary Beth Shinn and her colleagues (1998) re-interviewed 564 families five years after they had exited from the shelter. They found that 'subsidised housing was the primary predictor of housing stability among formerly homeless families' (Shinn et al. 1998:5). They reported that 'the odds of stability were 20.6 times greater for those who received subsidised housing than for those who did not' (Shinn et al. 1998:5).

Using administrative data from emergency shelters, Wong, Culhane and Kuhn (1997) established that returns to the emergency shelter varied by 'discharge' type. They reported the highest re-entry rate (37 per cent) occurred when people were discharged to unknown housing arrangements. This rate of re-entry was five times higher compared to households who were discharged to subsidised housing (7.6 per cent). They assert their 'data clearly indicate that subsidised housing is linked with a substantially lower rate of re-admission' (Wong et al. 1997:459).

The aim of Stretch and Kreuger's (1992) study of the homeless in St Louis was to identify correlates linked to repeat episodes of homelessness (rather than sustained exits). They found non-subsidised housing was one of three variables associated with higher rates of return³⁵. Similarly, Metraux and Culhane's (1999) study of family dynamics, housing and

³⁵ The other two were the length of the observation period and if people were living in doubling up arrangements.

homeless careers noted three characteristics that increased the risk of shelter re-admission for women³⁶. Their findings did, however, suggest:

. . . that preventing subsequent shelter stays does not necessarily involve directly addressing these issues. The extremely strong association between housing exits and decreased risk of shelter returns offers affirmation for those who regard homelessness primarily as a housing issue.

In their two-wave longitudinal study of homeless households, Sosin et al. (1990) reported that re-entry rates varied by the type of housing people exited to. They found the lowest re-entry rate among those who exited to semi-independent housing (36 per cent)³⁷, although they did not distinguish between private and subsidised housing. The highest rate of re-entry occurred when people exited to institutional arrangements (100 per cent) followed by those who exited to private dependent dwelling (63 per cent).

In a three-wave longitudinal study, Irene Wong and Irving Piliavin (1997:420) found that housing subsidies were associated with 'lowering the hazard of homeless spell return'. Using a bivariate probit model to analyse the same data-set, Dworsky and Piliavin (2000) reassert the type of exit housing 'significantly affects the likelihood of becoming homeless again', with those exiting to private³⁸ residences 'significantly less likely to become homeless again' (2000:207). Importantly, they also tested the impact of age and employment and found these factors to be:

. . . indirectly related to the likelihood of homeless spell returns through their relationship to type of homeless spell exit. The important implication, once again, is that the type of homeless spell exit appears to be a critical factor in determining whether formerly homeless individuals and families remain housed or become homeless again (Dworsky & Piliavin 2000:211).

The common finding in these studies is that affordable housing is an important pre-condition in preventing the reoccurrence of homelessness.

³⁶ These are younger women who are pregnant, women reporting a history of domestic violence, and women whose children are elsewhere or who rejoin them in a shelter.

³⁷ Semi-independent was defined as private dwellings where individuals pay rent. The three other categories were private dependent dwelling (living with others and paying no rent), public dependent dwelling (publicly assisted board-and-lodging facilities) and institutional setting (psychiatric hospitals, treatment programs and jails).

³⁸ They do not distinguish between subsidised housing and private rental.

The third issue involves establishing what timeframe constitutes a 'successful' exit. There is little agreement on this issue. Some researchers argue that 30 days is a sufficient timeframe (Piliavin et al. 1996; Wong et al. 1997; Wong & Piliavin 1997; Dworsky & Piliavin 2000), others argue that six months is a useful operational measure (Caton 1990 see also Craig, Hodson, Woodward and Richardson, 1996) while some argue that two years is an appropriate measure (Horn & Cooke 2001). Whatever timeframe is preferred, it is, to a certain degree, an arbitrary decision. Nevertheless, a longer timeframe is better for distinguishing the processes that contribute to housing stability from those processes that contribute to ongoing instability. In this context I used the observation period between the first and second interviews as the de-facto timeframe.

Having set-up a framework to analyse 'exits' from homelessness, the next part of the chapter examines what happened to people after they left transitional accommodation. I start by focusing on the type of housing homeless people moved into and then I examine, by pathway, how many remained housed and how many were homeless again.

9.3 Housing outcomes: findings

103 households participated in the first round of interviews. At the time all were in transitional or crisis accommodation. I re-interviewed 79 of these households between nine and 12 months later. At the time of the second interview they had all left (exited) transitional accommodation. The following analysis focuses on these 79 households.

Table 9.1 shows that 72 per cent were housed when they left transitional accommodation. Most (84 per cent) of the housed were living in public housing (N=48) and the remaining 16 per cent were living in private rental housing (N=9).

Table 9.1 Housing status on leaving transitional accommodation

Housing status	N	%
Housed	57	72
Homeless	22	28
TOTAL	79	100

In Australia the role of the state in the direct provision of housing is minor with social housing accounting for six per cent of the total housing stock. In comparison, in England social housing accounts for 22 per cent of total housing stock, in France it is 23 per cent and in the Netherlands and Sweden it is 40 per cent (Burke & Hulse 2003). Australia's relatively low percentage of social housing is, however, higher than in the U.S where approximately two per cent of housing stock is publicly owned or managed (Salins 2006).

Funding for social housing in Australia has declined, both in real and nominal terms since 1991-1992. In the period between 1992-1993 and 2002-2003 funding declined by over 28 per cent (Wright-Howie 2004). This has contributed to an overall decline in public housing stock of 4.2 per cent since 1999-2000 (from 362, 967 to 348,012 units), with stock levels in Victoria declining by 1.8 per cent (65,996 to 64,849) over the same period (Wright-Howie 2004).

In Australia, demand for public housing continually exceeds supply and this generally means that getting into public housing takes a long time. The high percentage of people who moved directly into public housing reflects the fact that transitional tenants are given priority access to public housing through a policy known as the segmented waiting list. This policy was designed to overcome the barriers that homeless people commonly encounter in the housing market by providing 'quicker' access to affordable housing.

Table 9.2 shows that at the time of their second interview, 49 households (62 per cent) were still housed and just over a third (38 per cent) were homeless. This means that over the nine month period between interviews the number of households who were housed had declined by 10 per cent and the number who were homeless had increased by a corresponding amount.

Table 9.2 Housing status at the second interview

Housing status	N	%	% change between interviews-
Housed	49	62	-10
Homeless	30	38	+10
TOTAL	79	100	-

In relation to the type of housing that provided people with the greatest stability, at the second interview 90 per cent of the people who exited into social housing were still housed, while just over two thirds (67 per cent) of those who went into private rental, were still housed. While the small number of people makes it difficult to generalise, the data nevertheless provide support for those who argue that subsidised housing is an important factor in preventing the re-occurrence of homelessness.

The data also indicate that five people who exited to public housing became homeless again. Affordable housing is always important, but clearly for some people even with the provision of affordable housing, 'staying out' of homelessness was difficult. At the same time six households who had exited into private rental, and who were, on average, paying 39 per cent of their income on rent (as against 27 per cent among public renters) were still housed. This suggests that for some households, 'staying out' of homelessness is not just about affordable housing.

When the longer term housing outcomes of people in each of the five entry pathways were considered, it was found that the level of housing stability was unevenly spread across the sample. While just over 60 per cent of the sample was housed at the second interview, Table 9.3 shows that the number of households who remained or became homeless again was higher among individual on the substance use (44 per cent), mental health (50 per cent) and youth pathways (50 per cent). In contrast, 90 per cent of those on the domestic violence pathways and 79 per cent of those in the housing crisis pathways were housed at the follow-up interview.

Table 9.3 Housing status by pathway at the second interview (per cent)

Housing status	Substance use (N=16)	Mental illness (N=4)	Youth (N=30)	Domestic violence (N=10)	Housing crisis (N=19)	TOTAL (N=79)
Housed	56	50	50	90	79	62
Homeless	44	50	50	10	21	38
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100

CLUSTER ONE - housed (52 per cent)	CLUSTER TWO - housed (83 per cent)

Table 9.3 shows that the data converge into two familiar patterns. The data in the second cluster show that people on the housing crisis and domestic violence pathways appeared to be more successful in ‘getting out’ and ‘staying out’. Because the evidence of ‘staying out’ was strongest in the housing crisis and domestic violence pathways, the following section examines how people on these pathways reorganised their connections to the mainstream before assessing how this assisted them to maintain their housing.

9.4 Getting out and staying out

This section of the chapter focuses on ‘staying out’ of homelessness. The section starts by examining the experiences of people in the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways before considering the factors that enable the dissenters to ‘stay out’ of the homeless population. The final part of this section looks at the nine escapers who had also managed to ‘stay out’.

9.4.1 Domestic violence and housing crisis

In chapters 4 and 7 it was noted that for some individuals being homeless was a radical departure from their normative ideals. These households made considerable effort to manage ‘their’ social identity in ways that were congruent with their identity standard(s) and

to do this they distanced themselves from the homeless as a 'general social category' (Snow & Anderson 1993:215). This commonly took the form of 'passing'. Passing highlights the paradox that among some homeless people the stigma of homelessness forms an important part in the process of 'getting out'. This was the case with people on these two pathways.

While studies have repeatedly indicated the importance of affordable housing as a pre-condition to getting out of homelessness, Fischer (2000), along with Busch-Geertsema (2005), argues that providing homeless households with a house does not necessarily resolve their impoverishment. While this is an important point to keep in mind, it is also necessary to acknowledge the argument that housing provides people with a 'sense of personal efficacy' (La Gory et al. 1991:213). A sense of personal efficacy and self-worth was evident in a number of ways. Getting out of the homeless population was important for Sandra's self-esteem – being housed meant she no longer 'felt like a failure' and she felt more confident in her interactions with others. Sandra had 'put up pictures' in her home and was starting to 'invite friends around'.

How these households viewed themselves and how they thought others viewed them was linked to their housing status. Being housed located them physically and symbolically in the mainstream and this emphasised their 'normality'. Lee, who was on the housing crisis pathway, felt better now that she 'didn't have to pretend' everything was going well.

Being housed is also important in establishing routines. This was evident as people began to turn their attention to schooling, work and re-connecting to their social networks – that is, towards what they viewed as a normal life. Sandra spoke about how her family could now:

. . . plan things a bit better. I'm not always worrying about how we're going to get by.

Stable housing provided many simple, 'taken for granted' things such as an address and a phone number. John, who was on the housing crisis pathway, connected with his neighbour who also shared his passion for fishing. For the first time 'in ages' John said that 'things feel almost back to normal'. In stable housing people could learn transport routes and

times, recognise local shop keepers and get to know local residents. These may be small things, but they are the sort of mundane interactions that provide continuity, familiarity and predictability.

People also started to think about their future once they were established in their own housing. Lyn, who was on the domestic violence pathway, had been in public housing for nearly nine months and she wanted to 'progress to her own home' and start to 'move forward'. Lyn wanted to leave her housing problems behind her. Homelessness was a 'bad memory', one of those things that 'happen' and she did not want to dwell on it. Lyn, along with John, Lee and Sandra aspired to a 'traditional' housing career – according to Lyn to have your own home demonstrated that she was 'a normal person'.

For a significant majority of people in these two pathways (83 per cent), affordable housing - combined with the fact that few had developed additional problems while they were homeless and had maintained some form of connection to the 'mainstream' - meant that they had greater success in 'getting out' and staying out' of the homeless population.

Nevertheless, while the provision of affordable housing is important, issues with either the standard of accommodation (primarily in private rental) or the allocation of public housing properties in areas where they had few social networks, created new problems for a small number of people. Sally, who was on the housing crisis pathway, moved into public housing. Sally described the property as a 'concrete dog box' and complained that it was so small her children could 'not fit their toys in'. The house was miles from where she had previously lived and a long way from the shops. Sally had no car and without one, shopping and taking the twins to the doctor was difficult.

Frank's problem was that he was allocated a public housing unit in an area where he had no social networks. These units were for single people and most had previously been transitional tenants. The amount of late night activity concerned Frank, but his bigger problem was that he was 'on the wrong side of the city' and to see his family he regularly spent two hours on public transport. Even though Frank's place was affordable, without the close support of his family he was isolated and at risk of re-entering the homeless population.

After six months Frank 'fell over' and he was living in a crisis facility when I interviewed him the second time. Without taking location into account, Frank's experience reminds us that the provision of affordable housing alone is no guarantee that people will remain housed.

At the level of structure these problems also draw attention to the impact of the limited supply of, and access to, affordable housing. These problems suggest that unless there are changes to the supply of affordable housing, and/or increases in their income, those at the margins of the housing market are frequently forced to accept substandard or inappropriate accommodation. When this happens they remain vulnerable to further episodes of homelessness.

The transitional housing program attempts to get around this issue by prioritising access to public housing. However, when there are issues with the quality or location of accommodation, the goal of preventing the re-occurrence of homelessness can be compromised. Furthermore, priority access does not improve the supply of affordable housing and consequently competition among low income households remains intense and some people always miss out. This was reflected in the data from the second interview which indicate that not everyone on these two pathways 'gets out' or even 'stays out'. Some people became homeless again, while many single households moved onto other pathways as a result of their involvement in the homeless subculture. When an individual's social networks change their routines also change. This makes 'getting out' of homelessness more complicated and people tend to stay in the homeless population for a long time.

Nevertheless, the dominant pattern indicates that if people retain some connection to the mainstream they are less likely to adapt behaviourally or cognitively to homelessness. This makes it easier to 'get out' and 'stay out' of the homeless population but only if they can find secure and affordable housing.

9.4.2 Staying out: the dissenters

Among those individuals on the youth pathway half were housed at the second interview (Table 9.4). Table 9.4 shows that there was variation in the housing status of this group with a significant majority of dissenters (75 per cent) managing to 'get out' and 'stay out'. In comparison, just over 41 per cent of escapers were housed at the time of the second interview.

Table 9.4 Housing status at the second interview by youth pathway (per cent)

Housing status	Escapers (N=22)	Dissenters (N=8)	TOTAL (N=30)
Housed	41	75	50
Homeless	59	25	50
TOTAL	100	100	100

Staying at school and staying connected to a domiciled community were crucial in terms of enabling the dissenters to maintain their accommodation and 'stay out' of homelessness. In her study of young homeless people, Susan Fitzpatrick (2000:75) also argues that if young people are to quickly and successfully get out of the homeless population, avoiding the homeless subculture is important. The benefits of early intervention are clear – the negative affects of homelessness reported among the escapers were, in general terms, absent among the dissenters. Early intervention assisted the dissenters to stay connected to the broader community and it enabled them, in Nan's words, to focus on 'getting ahead'.

'Getting ahead' generally meant planning a future around school and a job. Nan had just enrolled in a hospitality course and was very excited about starting it. Nan was also hopeful that her problems with her parents would improve:

About a month ago I contacted them [her parents] to let them know I was OK and that school was going well. They seemed pleased about my course. It was good talking to them.

The dissenters desire to 'get ahead' was reflected in their relatively short experiences of homelessness and, similar to many people in the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways, the dissenters used the stigmatised status of homelessness as a catalyst for 'getting out'. At the level of agency this shows how people actively construct their everyday reality and how different groups construct different 'realities' to deal with the stigma of homelessness.

More dissenters were housed than escapers at the second interview (Table 9.4), but it is important to note that 41 per cent of the escapers (N=9) had also managed to maintain their housing in the period between the two interviews. It had not been easy for many of them and there were signs that some people were close to becoming homeless again. Andrew said that he felt lonely and unsure and he found that:

Every time I get a little something in the bank something happens. It's harder than I had imagined.

Andrew had been 'through the system' previously and had been housed twice before. On both occasions he had been evicted. This time Andrew had a 'great house' and good support and he commented that:

They seem pretty patient with me, I suppose. Anne (his worker) hangs in with me when I'm struggling.

Nevertheless, Andrew had few economic opportunities and this meant it was a constant struggle to stay afloat. Even with a house and support, for Andrew and others like him, it would take time before they could leave homelessness behind – being homeless had raised question about self worth and social position that were not easily answered or quickly addressed. With the experience of homelessness still reasonably fresh in his mind - 'you don't just forget about it' - Andrew was worried about 'being drawn back into that lifestyle'. For Andrew being an 'ex' still informed his life.

The data support the contention that the provision of affordable, appropriate housing is a critical element in the process of 'getting out' and 'staying out' of homelessness. On its own, however, housing is insufficient to ensure that every homeless person 'stays out' of

homelessness. While nine escapers had managed to 'stay out', the more common pattern among escapers was to have 'fallen over' or to have remained homeless throughout the observation period. At the same time, not all of the dissenters got out of homelessness. In chapter 8 it was pointed out that three dissenters had become involved with the homeless subculture. Of these three people, two were reinterviewed and both were homeless. For these two people their homeless experiences and their efforts to 'get out' resembled the experiences of the escapers.

A strong theme in a growing body of literature is that different homeless groups require different responses in order to resolve their homelessness (see Scottish Executive Central Research Unit 2000; Edgar & Doherty 2001; Anne Rosengard Associates 2002; McNaughton 2004). While housing is a central feature in these accounts, the core argument is that some formerly homeless households require more than housing to 'stay out' of the homeless population. This 'housing plus' approach emphasises the importance of providing different homeless groups with different types and levels of assistance to resolve both their material and personal needs. Homeless households commonly linked to a 'housing plus' approach include young people who have few independent living skills, people with substance use problems and people with mental health issues.

In the next section I examine how people in the mental health pathway tried to 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness. The section then examines the experiences of the escapers and people on the substance use pathway. In understanding why most of the escapers had difficulty 'getting out' and/or 'staying out' it is important to recall that many had moved onto the substance use and/or the mental health pathways. Explaining the career trajectories of the escapers requires an awareness of how their attempts to 'get out' were mediated by the lack of experience in the housing and labour markets, their adverse childhood experiences preceding homelessness, their connection to the homeless subculture, and the use of drugs as a routinized social practice. Given that the homeless careers of the escapers mirrored the substance use group, in the following section I deal with the experiences of both groups.

9.5 Still homeless

9.5.1 People on the mental health pathway

For people with mental health problems the process of getting out of homelessness was difficult. This was reflected in their long experiences of homelessness and by the fact that of the four people on this pathway who were re-interviewed, two were housed and two were homeless.

In chapters 4 and 6 I made the point that homeless people with mental health problems often lack family support. This often means they require extensive 'external' support and assistance to re-organise their relationships and maintain the routines that connect them to the mainstream. This is consistent with the findings of Morrissey and Dennis (1990) and Fischer (2000) who all argue that adequate follow-up and support is critical in preventing the reoccurrence of homelessness among homeless people with mental health issues. Assistance also needs to be flexible, and, according to Susser, Valencia, Conover, Felix, Tsai and Wyatt (1997) support needs to be intensive at the start of the exiting process.

People cannot simply leave mental illness behind them and this means that setbacks are common and overcoming homelessness can take a long time. Consequently, it is important that assistance is ongoing and that agencies are prepared to work with people during the good times as well as the bad. Maggie, who had been housed for six months had a good ongoing relationship with her worker. Maggie liked the fact:

She [her worker] drops in and calls me every week. For once I don't feel like I'm on a conveyor belt.

More importantly, Maggie had been hospitalised twice in the period between the interviews and her housing had been maintained. For Maggie, knowing that her accommodation was safe meant that dealing with fluctuations in her health was now 'much easier'.

People on the mental health pathway had difficulties 'staying out' of homelessness. The problem of 'staying out' challenge policy discourse which frame welfare interventions

around the ideas of 'self reliance', 'self sufficiency', 'independence' and 'full social and economic participation' (Department of Family and Community Services 2000; Fischer 2000; Victorian Homelessness Strategy Ministerial Advisory Committee 2001; Victorian Homelessness Strategy 2002). These ideas, while laudable, are not always realistic as they ignore the long terms effects of homelessness and mental illness, and the complications they create in maintaining long term housing stability.

Framing the resolution to homelessness in this way also misses the point that for a small minority of homeless households, full social and economic participation is difficult given the social stigma attached to mental illness, and the lack of resources dedicated to addressing the needs of the homeless mentally ill. Further, their fluctuating support needs make it difficult to participate in the labour market because the labour market is highly structured and routinized.

With good support, appropriate housing and realistic expectations, people with mental health problems can 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness. They will, however, always be vulnerable if they are not supported during periods of illness. This emphasises the point that people with mental health issues remain vulnerable even when they are in 'good housing'. And, unless community attitudes change, people with mental health problems will always be at the margins of society.

9.5.2 Escapers and substance users: the struggle to 'stay out'

Working with people with high levels of drug use is now a core business for homeless person services. However, the capacity of homeless services to provide effective pathways out of homelessness for active drug users is being challenged by the complexity of their needs (Cited in Bessant et al. 2002:6)

The homeless experiences of the escapers and people on the substance use pathway were similar as both groups had been homeless for long periods of time and were deeply embedded in the homeless subculture. In previous chapters that have dealt with the homeless experiences of these two groups, I have indicated that there was a high level of

identification with other homeless people and that both groups were deeply immersed in using - a practice which structured many of their social interactions and day-to-day routines.

A commonly reported finding is that people with substance use problems frequently relapse (Neale 2001; Rice et al. 2005). This pattern was evident in this sample where people spoke about how it was 'easy to slip back into old ways'. Michelle, who had been in and out of the homeless population for over 10 years, said that:

It's hard to resist – sometimes you lose the fight even though you don't wana go back there.

In the four chapters that deal with being homeless (chapters 5-8) my account focused solely on peoples' experiences when they were homeless. The problem of relapsing indirectly draws attention to the fact that many people in the sample had exited homelessness on more than one occasion. Career models of homelessness, such as Chamberlain and Mackenzie's (1998), tend to gloss over³⁹ movement in and out of homelessness, implying homelessness is more or less a continuous experience. However, longitudinal studies of the homeless have consistently identified a pattern of repeated entry into and exit from homelessness extending, in some cases, over many years (Sosin et al. 1990; Westerfelt 1990; Piliavin et al. 1994:3; Dworsky & Piliavin 2000; May 2000; Robinson 2003).

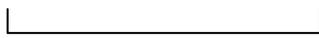
Patterns of repeated entry in and out of homelessness have been identified in many studies and these patterns have been described in a number of ways. Some researchers describe it as iterative homelessness (Robinson 2003), others as recurrent or recurring homelessness (Susser et al. 1997; Wong 1997; Metraux & Culhane 1999; Horn & Cooke 2001), some as a homeless repeat spells (Burt & Cohen 1989; Dworsky & Piliavin 2000) and by others as a pattern of 'residential instability' (Sosin et al. 1990). They all mean much the same thing and I have settled on the more common term of episodic homelessness (Caton 1990; O'Flaherty 1996; May 2000).

³⁹ There are exceptions. See: Snow and Anderson (1993); Auserwald and Eyre (2002).

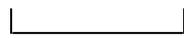
A close inspection of the 79 housing biographies revealed that episodic homelessness was a frequent experience. Table 9.5 shows that just over two thirds (67 per cent) of the sample reported that they had experienced more than one episode of homelessness.

Table 9.5 Episodic homelessness by onset pathway (per cent)

Evidence of episodic homelessness	Substance use (N=16)	Mental illness (N=4)	Youth (N=30)	Domestic violence (N=10)	Housing crisis (N=19)	TOTAL (N=79)
Yes	83	83	76	50	46	67



CLUSTER ONE
(78 per cent)



CLUSTER TWO
(48 per cent)

Table 9.5 shows that the higher levels of episodic homelessness were concentrated among individuals on three of the five pathways, with just over three quarters of the people on the substance abuse, mental illness and youth pathways reporting that they had experienced more than one episode of homelessness. In contrast, just under half of the people on the domestic violence (50 per cent) and housing crisis (46 per cent) pathways reported episodic homelessness.

While the problems leading to each homeless episode varied, they tended to reflect the interaction between the underlying issues that led to the first experience of homelessness and those issues that had emerged while people were homeless. The biographies also revealed that over time episodes of homelessness tended to increase in duration, reflecting increasingly precarious relationships with the housing and labour markets, as well as an increasing acceptance of a homeless way of life. The level of episodic homelessness was more pronounced in the three groups with the longest careers and this suggests that ‘staying out’ of homelessness is more difficult for people who have been involved in the homeless subculture.

Nonetheless, episodic homelessness presents something of a theoretical puzzle. I have argued that as a result of sustained engagement with other homeless people routines

are created that entrench people in the homeless subculture. I have also suggested that this results typically in identification and adaptation to a homeless way of life. Repeated attempts to 'get out' would therefore appear to be at odds with the underlying premise of the social identification thesis. The social identification thesis contends that the longer people are homeless the more they become acculturated to a homeless way of life. If this were the case, then it reasonably follows that among those people who identify with homelessness there would be little evidence of efforts to 'get out', yet the data in Table 9.5 suggest otherwise.

In this context, episodic homelessness highlights the contradiction that individuals who exhibit a strong identification with a homeless way of life, also resist homelessness. In order to understand this contradiction, I consider the distancing strategies of those people who became involved with the homeless subculture and who typically had long homeless careers. There were people from each pathway among those classified as long term homeless but because people from the substance use pathway and escapers were disproportionately represented among the long term homeless, the following section concentrates on their experiences.

Using the experiences of these two groups I examine the tension between identification with homelessness and resistance to it. I argue that because of their strong association with other homeless people, the distancing practices that underpin the resistance of the escapers and substance users are problematic because breaking the link with their homeless peers and their daily routines is difficult. Consequently many people struggle to 'get out' and for those that do, 'staying out' of homelessness is equally difficult.

9.5.3 Distancing strategies

By maintaining physical distance, the individual can restrict the tendency of others to build up a personal identification of him (Goffman 1963:122).

In the process of engaging with other homeless people many people began to identify with a homeless way of life. 'Getting out' of homelessness for people whose identity is linked to

their experience of homelessness means more than simply changing their housing status - 'getting out' and 'staying out' meant changing their social networks and reorienting their identity standards.

When people want to avoid the negative attention associated with a stigmatised identity, a common practice is to distance themselves from people who have that identity. We have seen that people in the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways distanced themselves from the homeless as a 'general social category' (Snow and Anderson 1993:215). In contrast, getting out of homelessness for individuals who had engaged with the homeless subculture and who identified with other homeless people, involved physically and psychologically removing themselves from their existing social networks which were comprised primarily of other homeless people. Snow and Anderson (1993:215) term this practice 'associational distancing'⁴⁰ and what is relevant here is that distancing involves re-shaping their social networks and breaking their routines. Establishing new social networks, breaking established routines and re-establishing new ones, is not straight forward and there are a number of reasons for this.

The practice of associational distancing was structured by the belief that to get a new life you had to leave the old one behind you, and to do that you had to 'leave the scene'. Keith was one of the substance use group who was still housed after exiting transitional accommodation. This was Keith's fourth attempt to get out. On previous occasions he had been 'sucked back to the action'. This time he attributed his success to 'removing myself from drug using environments'. Similarly, Andrew who had 'picked up a habit' when he was homeless said that if 'I hang around with them I'd be back on the drugs'.

However, distancing was not limited to 'steering clear' of other homeless people. Linked to the idea of associational distancing was the notion of 'being ready' to move on. This individual recognition indicated a desire to return to, or create a 'normal life'. The idea

⁴⁰ Snow and Anderson (1993) identify three distancing strategies homeless people use to construct or maintain an identity. In order to emphasise differences in the practices of peoples on each pathway I have used the term 'associational distancing' more narrowly than Snow and Anderson do. More specifically, I use it to illustrate the specific strategies of homeless people whose social networks include other homeless people.

of a normal life was not a fanciful construction. While the lifestyle of the long-term homeless stands very much outside the normative order, preferred identities tended to contain strong traces of that order.

Although many people spoke of 'being ready' this sentiment was stronger among people in their mid to late 30s. At this stage in their lives many people had experienced over a decade of chronic housing instability. A result of long periods of homelessness is that many people expressed weariness with the whole scene - being homeless was too fluid and too contradictory to provide a meaningful sense of belonging. For those who had substance use issues, heroin had lost its allure, the physical ravages were pronounced and many had seen friends and acquaintances die from overdoses or other drug related causes. They had also witnessed and experienced a great deal of violence. Having endured years without stable accommodation, they were 'sick and tired' of the constant hustling and scamming necessary to survive. While the homeless subculture helps some people to regain or develop a sense of belonging and purpose, ultimately the practices that sustain the homeless subculture fail to provide the sort of predictability and continuity that underpin emotional and psychological security. Robbie explicitly recognised this when he said the homeless subculture was:

A front, a scene, a show that steals your life and gives you back a piece of shit.

For many of the older members on these two pathways the thought of returning to the streets filled them with horror. Michelle said that 'if it happens it will be the last time, I can't go down again – I'm nearly 40'. There was a distinct transformation as people became, in Michelle's words, 'tired of swimming against the tide'.

Among people over 30 on the substance use and youth pathways, many said they wanted a 'simple life', and for many this represented a life without the grief and drama associated with the homeless subculture. Michelle wanted:

. . . some peace and quiet. I couldn't take that shit any more. I want my neighbours to look out for me, not hate me.

The catalyst for Michelle was the death of a friend, and at 39 Michelle knew she 'had to clean up her act' otherwise she too, would probably 'end up dead somewhere'.

For others their desire to 'get out' was galvanised by the stigma of having their children removed. In this sense children frequently provided the impetus for 'getting out'. Toni had been deeply embedded in the homeless subculture and she carried the emotional and physical scars of using and homelessness. By the second interview Toni had been continuously housed for the longest time in her life, and she was proud of the fact that her kids:

. . . had a roof over their heads and food in the cupboard – if I didn't have them (the children) I don't know where I'd be, probably back on the streets.

Parents are often motivated to 'get out' of homelessness by wanting to be with their children, but often there are significant barriers placed in front of them. Many had been involved with various parts of the welfare system and found themselves under some form of surveillance. Toni had to submit weekly urine samples 'to prove I'm not using'. As a result Toni was constantly reminded of her past and this made it difficult to 'leave it behind'.

Creating distance from homeless peers and the past is not easy. While appropriate housing is pivotal to the development of new social networks and routines, social networks and routines do not just happen when housing is provided. One of the problems faced by those who had been deeply immersed in the homeless subculture was that after they were out of the homeless population, few had friends in the mainstream and most battled boredom and social isolation. When people are isolated and bored the possibility of re-engaging with their homeless friends increases. This in turn increases the likelihood of becoming homeless again. As Rice et al. (2005) argue, it is important that the influence of homeless peers is taken into account to prevent ongoing or reoccurring homelessness.

Toni's experiences illustrate the tension felt by many escapers. Toni had mixed feelings – on the one hand she was housed and safe. Yet, on the other hand, Toni was bored, frustrated and increasingly depressed. Toni felt trapped:

I just want to do something else – I want to get out of here and meet other people. It all feels too familiar, and I feel trapped . . . what am I meant to do, this is all new to me.

It was not only isolation and boredom that contributed to the problem of staying housed. Another factor was embarrassment at seeing or hearing about old friends whose lives had followed a more traditional pathway. Walking around the local shopping centre one day Keith saw an old friend:

I was shattered. I could barely afford the rent and he had kids, a car, the whole family work thing. I was really angry and jealous too, I suppose.

When Keith attempted to distance himself from the homeless subculture, he found it difficult to re-engage with the mainstream. Keith's situation illustrates the problems many long term homeless people encounter when they try to 'stay out'. For these people the change from homeless to housed can easily fail without ongoing support to assist them in the process of social re-integration. For many the problem was that their emergent routines, so important in terms of creating predictability, continuity and security, were not deeply rooted. Consequently, these 'new' routines are easy to disrupt, particularly in the early stages of the process of 'getting out' of homelessness.

During the second interview it became clear that a number of people who had exited homelessness had also put considerable energy into finding work but without success. The reason for this was generally attributed to their poor employment histories. Their long term exclusion from the labour market continued even when they were housed and this meant that without sufficient income people remained acutely vulnerable to any financial setback. It also meant that they did not have the opportunity to develop new social networks that can occur in the workplace.

Earlier in this chapter I made the point that for some formerly homeless people, such as those with mental health issues, work is not relevant given their life circumstances. For other people, however, work is relevant to 'staying out'. However, people had to deal with conditions at the bottom end of the labour market which were highly competitive and typically tied to low paying casual work. People also had to deal with the way potential employers

reacted to their work histories. Robbie described his work record as 'a friggin black hole'. In a tight job market employers can be choosy and generally do not look favourably on people who have long 'unexplained' breaks in their employment records.

Having little in the way of material and emotional support, it was easy to slip back into old ways. Sometimes all it took was a small disruption and old patterns of interaction re-emerged. When I interviewed John for the second time he was homeless again. He told me that he had been doing well and had been on bupramorphine⁴¹ for about four months after the first interview. One day his script ran out and when he went to get a new one, his doctor was away and there were problems sorting out a new script. He 'lost it' with the new doctor and scored soon after. From there he 'was back on the gear in no time'. In John's case the lack of continuity with his doctor upset an embryonic routine that had distanced him from the homeless subculture. Once back among the homeless population he was on 'familiar turf'. He re-engaged with his old social networks and soon his daily routine was, once again, focused on the 'business of raising money'.

John's experience also emphasises that housing on its own does not address the long term effects of marginalisation or the effects of long term substance use. Some people reported that they found it hard to reconcile their past with the fact that 'life had gone by them' and for others, the internalised image of being a 'homeless junkie' was hard to shake. These experiences are difficult to overcome and it takes time to build a future and leave the past behind.

A theme that emerged in interviews with a number of the younger escapers is that they had little idea that a 'normal life' had its own stress and pressures. Normal life tended to be romanticised and there was an underlying sense that once they were housed life would be simple and easy. For many, particularly those with little experience of independent housing, being housed brought new problems and new stresses, and some soon found that 'life is not all smooth sailing even for the unblemished' (Baker and Smith 1939 cited in

⁴¹ A drug treatment for heroin addiction, similar to methadone.

Goffman 1963:21). When I interviewed Toni for the second time she said she was 'stoked' [happy] when she got a place. She also admitted, however, that living in her own home was 'harder than I expected, sometimes I feel like giving up but I don't want to go back down there'. Toni mentioned that 'no-one had told' her what to expect or what she needed to do to maintain her housing. Not only did Toni have insufficient knowledge about what it took to maintain housing, she also lacked confidence. This meant that she 'didn't want people to know I was unsure'. Although Toni was still housed she remained vulnerable because 'she let things drift'.

Over time, as pressures mounted and boredom and isolation grew, some people reverted to their old social networks. Once people re-engaged with the homeless subculture it generally resulted in them losing their accommodation. If they had re-engaged or remained engaged with the homeless subculture when they were in transitional accommodation, they rarely exited homelessness.

In a social setting where people have few connections with the mainstream, creating new social networks is essential if vulnerability to further episodes of homelessness is to be reduced. For instance, people negotiated the transition from homeless drug user to 'ex addict' in different ways. Some relied heavily on informal support from family while others required more structured approaches. Narcotics Anonymous provided John with support, structure and routine. For John, Narcotics Anonymous provided a new social network and this was important given that he had lost his previous social networks in the process of 'getting out'.

For Michelle, even though housing had made a difference to her life, a number of small things had also made a difference. At the second interview Michelle said that her life was considerably better than it had been 12 months ago. Not only was she housed, Michelle had new teeth and she no longer felt branded because of the way she looked:

I don't feel like people stare at me any more. I feel like I can make it this time, I really do.

Michelle found that by removing the physical signs that she linked to her past, her self-esteem had improved and now she felt more confident about making new social connections. She was, however, taking everything:

One step at a time. I ain't going to rush this. I've been here before and this time I'm out.

Michelle's abstinence and her stable housing meant that she no longer saw herself as a junkie or as homeless, but increasingly as a 'normal' person. It is at this point and not beforehand, that attention can start to be directed towards other issues like education, training and employment.

For others, a simple thing like having a pet assisted in the development of new social networks and routines. Keith was given a dog and he liked the routine of walking with it, the companionship, but most of all he liked the fact he:

. . . talked to other dogs owners down the park. It felt good. I was just another dog owner to them.

Addressing the cumulative impact and stigma of homelessness requires a range of responses. Once stable housing has been provided, it is important to nurture connections with the mainstream. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that creating these connections can take a great deal of time, effort and persistence. Assisting long term homeless people must take into account the physical and psychological impact of being homeless, as well as the problems that led to homelessness in the first place. John made the point that to work through the past and build a future you 'need a long term worker who helps you get to your goals – not half way there'. From both a policy and a practice perspective, John's statement emphasises that people cannot simply be 're-inserted' back into the mainstream. The reason for this is that without any connections to the 'real world' people were drawn back to the social environment where they had connections.

Many respondents reported they had previously been assisted 'out' of homelessness. The provision of housing was important but they had repeatedly fallen over without assistance to address years of trauma, neglect and exclusion. With complex and, in many

cases, traumatic histories, many people found that they had to ‘unpack the past’ before they could take control of their lives, rebuild their future and reintegrate themselves into the ‘real world’. The cumulative impact of a lifetime at the margins of society is significant and program designers need to be sensitive to this.

Nevertheless, attempts to ‘get out’, even unsuccessful ones, highlight the resilience of homeless people. Their experiences remind us that even after homeless careers that had lasted for many years (in some cases), people refused to give up and unconditionally accept homelessness. Unsuccessful attempts to get out of homelessness remind us that ‘even the long term homeless individuals cannot be written off definitely’ (Snow and Anderson 1993:27). Even after everything they had been through, strong links to mainstream normative structures remained – toned down to be sure, in need of nurturing certainly, but the connections were there, and importantly, they remained tenable. The key point that emerges from this analysis is that many homeless people ‘wanted out’, but many did not have the support or experience to know what was needed to ‘stay out’.

9.6 Changing context, changing social networks

It was clear that some people in the sample strongly identified with homelessness. It would be incorrect, however, to assume that once this cognitive transformation had occurred it was irreversible. The capacity and desire for change, along with aspirations of a better life, continually undermined any identification with homelessness as a permanent way of life.

Goffman’s (1963:51) notion of affiliation cycles highlights how identity can shift depending on the social context actors are located in:

Given the ambivalence built into individual’s attachment to his stigmatised category (a reasonable assumption) it is understandable that oscillations may occur in his support or identification with and participation among his own. There will be ‘affiliation cycles’ through which he comes to accept the special opportunities for in-group participation or comes to reject them after having accepted them before.

Table 9.6 shows that at the second interview there was considerable variation in the identity index scores of people on the five entry pathways. The data from the second

interview also shows considerable variation within pathways depending on whether people were housed or homeless. Among those who were housed the overall score at the second interview was 0.25. In comparison, among those people who were homeless the overall score was 0.70.

Table 9.6 Identity index by housing status, by pathway

Housing status	Substance use (N=16)	Mental illness (N=4)	Youth (N=30)	Domestic violence (N=10)	Housing crisis (N=19)	TOTAL (N=79)
Housed	0.35	0.21	0.31	0.16	0.19	0.25
Homeless	0.71	0.29	0.79	0.57	0.61	0.70
Combined	0.52	0.25	0.57	0.20	0.28	0.41

The difference between the housed and homelessness index scores was strongest in the substance use and youth pathways. The differences in the index scores within these two pathways shows that people do move between identities. This movement depends on, among other things, their social context and social networks. Toni, on the youth pathway, made the point that ‘I only know homeless people when I’m homeless’, while Keith, on the substance use pathway, was ‘careful to avoid them’. Not only had Keith ‘distanced’ himself physically, homeless people were now described as ‘them’, rather than ‘we’ or ‘I’ - terms which are commonly used by people who identify with the homeless. By recasting the homeless as the ‘other’, Keith was in the process of creating a new identity that distinguished him from the homeless, and from his past.

The data in Table 9.7 show that the overall identity index had declined from 0.59 at the first interview to 0.41 at the second interview. There was an overall decline recorded in four of the five pathways, with the most significant decline among those people in the youth and substance use pathways.

Table 9.7 Change in identity index between first and second interviews, by pathway

Housing status	Substance use (N=16)	Mental illness (N=4)	Youth (N=30)	Domestic violence (N=10)	Housing crisis (N=19)	TOTAL (N=79)
1 st interview index	0.79	0.27	0.87	0.24	0.25	0.59
2 nd interview index	0.52	0.25	0.57	0.20	0.28	0.41
Change from 1st to 2nd	-0.27	-0.02	-0.30	-0.04	+0.03	-0.18

This draws attention to the point that identity standards are constantly being negotiated and struggled over. Even after years of homelessness, normatively acceptable social identities still provided a clear point of reference for many. At the level of agency this is an important point because it helps to explain how individuals who are chronically excluded from the mainstream and who find support and meaning with other homeless people, manage to retain the capacity and desire to escape homelessness - even after protracted periods of time in the homeless population.

The data in these two tables support Tierney's (2000:547) view that homeless identities are contested, contradictory, relational and contingent. The contingent nature of these 'homeless identities' implies that the penetration of the homeless subculture is constrained by material and non-material structures that contain 'normative guidelines which reflect expectations of behaviour and attitude' (Clapham 2002:65). At the same time the data show that individual actors are not merely victims of structural forces outside of their control, but act on and interpret those structures in ways that can reproduce them, but also in ways that can transform them.

These patterns of episodic homelessness question the permanence of 'homeless' identities, suggesting as Zufferey and Kerr (2005:346) argue, that homeless identities are in 'continual flux, continually being constructed and reconstructed over time and place'. If homelessness is a 'contingent' identity, this emphasises the possibility of change and reminds us that the relationship between identity standards and our reflected appraisal is undergoing constant revision and reorganisation. In terms of 'getting out' and 'staying out',

this is important because it suggests that given the right material and emotional support, everyone who experiences homelessness can 'get out' and, importantly 'stay out'.

It is equally important to recognise that it is difficult to disengage from the homeless subculture when for many homeless people it was their primary social network. This makes re-integration into the mainstream problematic, when, in Andrew's words you have a past 'that you can't talk about or hide'. Once people were out of the homeless population, many people recognised that the prejudice directed towards the homeless continued. This translated into an issues of whether to 'tell or not to tell' (Goffman 1963:57). After being upfront Toni had decided it was best not to tell anyone she had been homeless. She said

People don't need to know the past . . . their attitudes changes, changes from who I am to a scumbag. All for being upfront and honest.

Keith did the same and his response emphasises how the stigma of homelessness is a basis around which many people organised their lives, even when they were no longer homeless. Keith didn't talk about his homelessness because:

. . . it puts it into people's heads that you must be a drugie or violent

For people who have experienced homelessness, managing information about their homeless experiences remains an ongoing process.

9.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that all formerly homeless people have a poor position in the housing market and this limits the opportunities they have to get out quickly. With insufficient income this makes it difficult for everyone to 'get out' and for many this also makes 'staying out' equally problematic. While low positions in the housing and labour market make it difficult to 'get out' and stay out', these are not the only structures that constrain the actions of homeless people.

My core argument is that to understand how homeless people 'get out' and 'stay out' it is important to think about their pathways into homelessness and their experience(s) in the

homeless population. Those people that distance themselves from homelessness as 'a general social category' typically stay out. In contrast, those who engage with other homeless people have much greater difficulty 'getting out' and 'staying out' of homelessness. Among individuals on each of the pathways there are different social practices and this reflects the way that different agent's biographies and different sets of structural factors come together and produce different housing outcomes.

Thinking about the way that the housing and labour markets, stigma and people's pre-homeless and homeless experiences come together, goes some of the way to addressing the existing limits in the way routes out of homelessness have been explained. On the one hand there are those who argue that the defining characteristic of the homeless is that they need a home (McChesney 1990; Metraux & Culhane 1999). On the other hand there are those who argue homelessness is 'rarely just a housing problem' (Baum & Burnes 1993). In the context of a more diverse homeless population, both responses are correct. This means that the central issue is determining which response is the best one for each homeless person.

Explaining how people 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness involves thinking about the different needs of different groups, and how these needs and experiences are connected to different ways of managing the process of exiting homelessness. These findings show quite clearly that what helps one group does not necessarily assist another group, a point also made by Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker (2000).

The data certainly indicate that everyone requires assistance to secure affordable, appropriate housing. At the same time the data show that people who became homeless because of domestic violence or because of a housing crisis are less likely to require ongoing assistance from support services. This is not to say that they require no ongoing support, but rather the extent and intensity of the support is, in general, much lower in comparison to the people on the other pathways. What this study also argues is that the practice of distancing in the form of 'passing' distinguishes these households and is central to

their higher success rate in staying housed. While there was variation, most were eager to move on and 'get on with their lives'.

For others, intensive and ongoing support is generally needed to address their issues. That most of the people who require ongoing support were on the youth, mental health and substance use pathways reinforces the view that how people become homeless, and how they experience homelessness are relevant to their pathway out of homelessness (Piliavin et al. 1993; Cohen et al. 1997; Adkins et al. 2003). Even if their housing problems are resolved, they may still re-enter the homeless population at some future date. This can occur for two reasons. First, many behavioural and cognitive adaptations take time to address and it is important for agencies to persist. Second, most have peer networks made up of other homeless people and without changes to these networks it is difficult to keep people housed.

While the practice of distancing helps to illuminate how people with longer term problems resist homelessness, associational distancing highlights the question of how stable homeless identities are. More specifically, it indicates that homelessness is not a categorical identity, but a contextual, relational and transitional identity. This suggests that distancing practices can, if properly nurtured, facilitate stable long term exits from homelessness no matter how chronically homeless people may appear to be.

It is also vital to recognise that associational distancing, in particular, is fraught with difficulties and unless there is something to 'fill the void' when people 'get out' of homelessness the risk of re-entering the homeless population remains high. Support workers and program managers need to be aware that relapse is common. Nevertheless, once people start the process of re-integration and have some success, the resulting improvement in self esteem and self confidence can make a real and tangible difference to their lives.

10 Conclusion

People who experience homelessness deal with uncertainty about their future, exclusion, discrimination, stigmatisation, poor health and violence. How homeless people respond to these issues varies and this has created problems in understanding and explaining the dynamic patterning of homelessness.

The central question posed by this research sought to address this problem by establishing if there was a connection between how people become homeless and what subsequently happens to them. In the homeless research literature there has been a tendency to respond to these issues by examining either the role of various structures or the actions of individuals. This thesis has argued that to explain the dynamic patterning of homelessness it is important to analyse the interaction of biographical factors and specific non-material and material structures that influence the trajectories of people on each of the five pathways. Using an interpretation of Giddens (1984) theory of structuration in which structures are both a medium and an outcome of social action, I argue that how people become homeless *is* connected to way they experience homelessness and how long they are homeless. The study also found that the experience of homelessness is connected to the way individuals 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness.

In this chapter there are four sections. The first summarises the main findings on becoming homeless, being homeless and exiting homelessness. The second section identifies the limitations of this research. In particular, it notes the problems associated with small sample sizes and short timeframes between interviews. This section also comments on the applicability of the identification thesis as a framework for understanding the dynamic patterning of homelessness. The third section considers what steps to take to address these limitations and suggests a number of ways to extend the research. The final section identifies policy and practice implications arising from the findings.

10.1.1 Becoming homeless

The principle finding relating to the process of becoming homeless was the identification of five typical pathways into homelessness. These entry pathways are ideal types and they demonstrate how individuals make decisions and choices that are structured by factors that, in the main, constrain the opportunities they have. On each of the five pathways these constraints were lived in different ways with different consequences.

The analysis demonstrated that there were distinct patterns of behaviour and interaction among the people on each pathway. These patterns reflect the different issues individuals had to deal with, the different biographies they brought with them and the different structural factors with which they had to contend. On each pathway the change from housed to homeless disrupted people's routines. The analysis indicated that the disruption of becoming homeless was lived in diverse ways because people related to, and reproduced material and non-material structures

The primary connection between people on each of the five pathways was that because of their low income everyone had few housing options. This is a crucial point and it reminds us that among people experiencing homelessness, poverty remains the common de-nominator. However, the findings warn against simple economic explanations. It is not accurate to say that economic structures on their own determine the processes through which people become homeless – these structures are important but their impact is mediated through other material and non-material structures and individual agency.

The pathways idea was used to analyse the way patterns of interaction changed as individuals on each pathway negotiated the process of becoming homeless. Along with exclusion from the housing and labour markets, people on the mental health pathway had to deal with negative community attitudes towards mental illness, a lack of family support and the stigma of being homeless. People on the domestic violence pathway had to contend with the changes to their family structure caused by violence, the stigma of living in a violent home, as well as the stigma of homelessness. The structures that people on the housing

crisis pathway had to contend with were principally economic, with a lack of income being the single most important factor. People on this pathway also had to deal with the stigma of homelessness. Individuals on the substance use pathway had to contend with negative attitudes towards illicit substance use as well as the way their substance use positioned them at the bottom of the housing and labour markets.

In the youth pathway I identified two distinct groups. The first group I term dissenters and for this group the primary structural factor influencing their careers were the contested nature of internal family rules. Although there was significant variation in these rules, what was common to each situation was that they were perceived to represent excessive parental control. The second group, the escapers, experienced physical and sexual abuse at home and in most cases they had histories of involvement with the State care and protection system. For the escapers three structures play a critical role. First, adverse childhood experiences influenced the way this group managed the process of becoming homeless. Second, most left school early and this situated them at the bottom of the labour market. The third structural factor 'escapers' had to deal with was the stigma of coming from a dysfunctional family.

In chapter 1 I pointed out that in Australia, homeless research has traditionally focused on a single career stage, in particular the cause(s) of homelessness. As a result research has often overlooked how becoming homeless, being homeless and exiting homelessness influence one another. This problem was addressed by combining retrospective and prospective longitudinal approaches. This is the primary methodological contribution of this research. The research also affirmed the utility of biographical or lifecycle approaches in terms of eliciting historical material.

10.1.2 Being homeless

People responded to homelessness in different, and at times, complex ways. This reinforces the point that individuals can make sense of similar situations in different ways. Although the

structural constraints people face influence the options available to them, it is also the case that the experience of homelessness is strongly textured by an individual's past experiences and the attributes they associate with homelessness.

The study focused on two non-material structures to analyse the way people on each of the five pathways responded to homelessness. The two non-material structures were the homeless subculture and stigma. There was variation in the way people responded to other homeless people and stigma, both across and within each pathway, but in every case social life was ordered around these two non-material structures. The research found that there were discernible patterns of interaction among people on each pathway which were reflected in their daily routines.

The research shows that people who became homeless because of domestic violence or housing crisis act in ways that emphasise their normality and disguise their homelessness. Individuals in these two groups had little involvement with other homeless people and there was little evidence that they adapted, behaviourally or cognitively, to the experience of homelessness. As a consequence these tended to be the briefest homeless careers although some people stayed in the homeless population for quite a long time because constraints in the housing and labour markets reduced the possibility of exiting homelessness quickly.

The research also identified two distinct groups on the youth pathway. The dissenters experience of homelessness resembled the experiences of people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways. Individuals in all three groups tried to maintain their connections with the mainstream. At the same time individuals on each of these pathways used the stigma of homelessness to distance themselves from the homeless as a 'general social category'. Paradoxically, their actions reproduced the stereotypes they were seeking to avoid.

The escapers were the second group on the youth pathway. In contrast to the dissenters, escaper experiences resembled those of the people who entered the homeless population on the substance use pathway. Escapers and individuals on the substance use

pathway generally became involved with other homeless people early in their homeless careers and individuals commonly adapted their behaviour and identity as a result. People in these two groups inverted the stigma linked to homelessness to create a sense of belonging. Both of these actions, inversion and identification, normalised behaviour that was a source of their exclusion. When these social practices become routinized making an escape from homelessness is difficult. As a consequence, these homeless careers typically lasted for a number of years.

The six people on the mental health pathway were isolated from and marginalised by individuals in conventional society and also other homeless people. The findings indicate that homeless people with mental health problems actively re-interpret negative community attitudes to meet their own interests, but as this generally involved denying their mental health problems, their actions ultimately reinforced their isolation. As a consequence of withdrawing and denial, people on this pathway reported the longest homeless careers in the sample.

We can see how the same structure(s) can be both constraining and enabling by analysing the way individuals on different pathways responded to the stigma of homelessness and to other homeless people,. This highlights the point that at the individual level, structures are contested and changed, accepted and reproduced. How this occurs depends on, among other things, people's biographical experiences preceding homelessness, how they became homeless, the social identity they attached to homelessness and how long they had been homeless for. Using the pathways idea we have seen that material and non-material structures are lived in different ways and this emphasises a high degree of creativity and activity among homeless and formerly homeless people.

Nevertheless, the pathways idea cannot explain everything and it is best thought of as a heuristic device that can help researchers to organise complex realities. If the pathways idea is applied too rigidly it can be overly deterministic and it is important to be sensitive to

the possibility that individuals negotiate similar situations in different ways with different consequences.

This point was evident in the form of movement between pathways. This movement draws attention to the fact that *within* each pathway there was variation in the way people responded to homelessness. Movement from one pathway onto another was illustrated when the temporal sequence of events was clarified.

It is well recognised in homeless research that cause and consequence are often confused. The importance of establishing the correct temporal sequence was demonstrated by the point that many of the people in the sample who reported a mental health and/or a substance use problem, developed these problems after they became homeless. This also reminds us that for some people the state of homelessness 'creates problems that impose new barriers to extrication' (Snow & Anderson 1993:299). Further, the findings show people with mental health or substance use issues have much greater difficulty 'getting out' of homelessness. Delayed exit rates among these groups results in their disproportionate representation in the homeless population. This has led some people to 'erroneously interpret' (Culhane, Metraux & Raphael 2000:3) high prevalence of substance use as a causal factor. We know this is not always the case.

The findings also question the view that people adapted their behaviour simply to cope with the day-to-day contingencies of homelessness (Neil & Fopp 1993). There is little doubt that coping with the stigma of homelessness and dealing with the daily struggle to secure material needs influences people's behaviour. However, there was wide variation in the way individuals responded to homelessness. What this emphasises is that people respond in different ways to the contingencies of homelessness. The study found that different responses to homelessness were linked to the extent an individual's social network included other homeless people and that the composition of these networks was influenced by the pathway individuals travelled into homelessness. Future research interested in examining variations in the dynamic patterning of homelessness may consider what factors

influence changes to the 'network structures' of homeless people and how changes in those networks influence, or are influenced, by movement in and out of the homeless population.

The interview material also indicated that people who experienced long term homelessness have intricate social networks and social practices. This directly challenges the view that homeless people are poorly socialised or passively accept their situation.

10.1.3 Exiting homelessness

Structural factors, such as the shortage of affordable accommodation, are commonly cited to explain the difficulties people have exiting homelessness. For some people the provision of affordable housing *is* a crucial factor in exiting homelessness and this was evidenced by the higher rate of housing stability among those people who exited to subsidised housing. Nevertheless, to understand why some homeless people 'stayed out' of homelessness when other homeless people who exited to subsidised housing did not, it is important to reflect on the fact that the experience of homelessness influences the ease or difficulty people have in 'getting out' and 'staying out' of homelessness.

The research indicated that affordable accommodation was essential to assist people to stay out of homelessness. However, for those individuals who had spent a long time in the homeless population and had adapted their behaviour and identity to survive homelessness, affordable housing on its own was insufficient. For these individuals it is essential that they receive ongoing assistance to help them resolve their problems, develop new social networks and overcome the isolation and boredom they sometimes experience when they leave homelessness. The crucial point that is often overlooked by policy makers and service providers is that the pace at which individual issues can be dealt with varies. If formerly homeless people are to remain housed, the pace of recovery cannot be forced.

The structural constraints that face homeless people are significant, and getting people 'back on their feet' is complicated. Individuals who became entrenched in the homeless population are commonly caught in a double bind – their interaction with other

homeless people provides a sense of belonging but it also creates new problems which in turn make 'getting out' and 'staying out' more difficult.

Thus, it is at the level of agency that we see how the more routinized the behaviour of homeless people becomes, the more complex 'getting out' of homelessness is. Nevertheless, 'getting out' was a recurring theme in all of the interviews. The study identified two distinct strategies individuals used as part of the process of 'getting out' and 'staying out' of the homeless population. Both strategies were linked to the idea of distancing, although each strategy was mediated by the extent to which individuals had become involved with other homeless people. Attempts to 'pass' as normal was a common strategy among people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathways. This reflects their refusal to engage with other homeless people. In contrast, 'associational' distancing or the practice of steering clear of homeless friends and acquaintances, was linked to those individuals who had become entrenched in the homeless subculture and whose social networks were mainly comprised of homeless people.

Central to both distancing strategies was the idea of 'normality'. 'Normality' is a heavily laden term and is rarely used in sociological research⁴². Normality did, however, inform the actions of many individuals in this sample who used it as a metaphor to signify a more comfortable and less stigmatised life. While there will always be variation as to what constitutes 'normality', in its broadest sense homeless people are surrounded by 'normality' on a daily basis – they see people going to work, coming from and going 'home', going out with family or friends and going to school. While many social practices isolated homeless people from the world of the 'normals', normality was a key theme that underpinned the aspirations and hopes of many homeless people in this sample. Among individuals on each

⁴² In his analysis of inmates in mental hospitals Goffman (1961:7) summarises his view of normalcy in the following way. 'It was then and still is my belief that any group of persons . . . develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it'. In his work on stigma Goffman's (1963:17n10) views on 'normality' expresses the sentiment I am trying to capture with the term normal. Goffman states that the notion of "normal human being" may have its source in the medical approach to humanity or the tendency of large scale bureaucratic organisations, such as the nation state, to treat all members in some respects as equals. Whatever its origins, it seems to provide the basic imagery which many laymen conceive of themselves'.

of the five pathways, 'normality' was a crucial point around which their resistance to homelessness was organised.

The search for normality reinforces the point that social practices of homeless people, often condemned by the public and the press as deviant or dysfunctional, make sense given the historical, cultural and economic contexts that structure the experience of homelessness. It also reminds us that without understanding the context in which these practices occur, homeless people are often judged by standards that have little relevance to their day-to-day lives.

10.2 Limitations

Distinguishing between the issues that led to homelessness from those that emerged after becoming homeless, draws attention to the deleterious impact of homelessness for some households. There was, however, variation in people's experiences of homelessness and this exposes limitations in the identification thesis which contends that the extent to which an individual identifies with a homeless way of life is determined by the amount of time they are homeless. The identification thesis was initially developed in the context of a relatively homogeneous population (skid row). With greater diversity in the homeless population, however, different patterns of identification occur, and these present difficulties for the identification thesis in its more 'traditional' form.

By considering how becoming homeless disrupts existing routines and how the stigma of homelessness influences the formation of new routines, it could be argued that a stronger theoretical framework for examining the dynamic patterning of homelessness can be developed. Focusing on routines and stigma leads us into the day-to-day lives of homeless people. At this level we see how people actively create their own reality by presenting themselves to the world through their routines in a way that is congruent with their identity standards. The situation is, however, often quite complex, and many people who strongly identified with homelessness and were embedded in the homeless subculture,

simultaneously accepted mainstream norms and standards. This emphasises the point that people move between identities as they move in and out of different social contexts. It also reminds us that homelessness is a contingent rather than a categorical identity.

The thesis relied on the pathways idea to frame the analysis. Pathways provide a useful means of explicating differences and similarities at the level of structure and agency. In chapter 3 I pointed out that material structures are commonly used to explain the causes of homelessness. Material structures such as the housing and labour markets play a central role in an individual's experiences leading to homelessness, the experience of homelessness and how people 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness. However, future research in Australia needs to pay attention to the influence of non-material structures and their interaction with material structures if we are to develop a better understanding of the reasons why homeless career trajectories vary. Stigma is one such non-material structure, but other factors include the rules, codes, and social hierarchy of the homeless subculture, along with issues such as community attitudes towards mental illness and violence in the home.

It is also important to recognise that individual responses varied to the stigma of homelessness. While most studies focus on the negative effects of stigma, this study shows that people respond to stigmatised statuses in different ways. In their study of stigma Miller and Kaiser (2001:75) argue that many stigmatised people continue to function 'as well as other people despite the fact they are disadvantaged'. This was true among many individuals interviewed for this study. Rather than presuming stigmatised individuals respond in similar ways, the study emphasises the need to get an insider's view of stigma in order to understand how different groups manipulate stigma to make sense of their world. Thinking about stigma in this way emphasises the active role people play in shaping their social reality and avoids treating the homeless as 'objects or victims of prejudice' (Oyserman & Swim 2001:11).

A methodological limitation of the study was the 9-12 month timeframe between the two interviews. This represents a short period in an individual's overall housing/homeless career. Conducting more interviews over a longer period would produce stronger results.

Without a longer timeframe it is also important to recognise the possibility that it was just another exit spell for some people who were housed at the second interview, rather than a 'successful' exit as such.

A second limitation was the recruitment of homeless people exclusively from homeless agencies. Many homeless people do not use homeless agencies and this has implications regarding the typicality of the sample.

A third limitation with the study was the small sample size. This also makes it difficult to tell how representative the sample is. The problem of sample size was noticeable in the second round where some of the subgroups were small. While small samples have limitations in terms of producing statistical generalisations, Wong (2002:272) argues that the generalisability of knowledge about the homeless population can be strengthened by the accumulation of findings from small studies. Consequently, to establish the validity of the different career models put forward in this thesis, it is best if the study is treated as an elaborate pilot. This raises the question of where to go from here.

10.3 The next step

A larger sample is necessary to confirm or refute the contributions made by this research, as well as providing evidence to quantify the proportion of people on each pathway. Although getting a large sample of homeless people can be difficult, time consuming and expensive, one approach that has been used in Australia (Chamberlain & Johnson 2001;2002a) and overseas with some success (Metraux & Culhane 1999; Culhane et al. 2000; Metraux et al. 2001; Metraux & Culhane 2004) is to analyse data collected by homeless agencies. Agencies that work with homeless people collect a wide range of data and have access to different segments of the homeless population. Many agencies now have computerised data collection systems and large data sets focusing on different client groups can be easily assembled and manipulated.

Administrative data is collected from the viewpoint of service providers and funding bodies, and while agencies collect a great deal of information, it generally lacks the richness or depth gained from one-on-one interviews. Administrative data can also be problematic in terms of understanding the temporal order of events, with workers typically focusing on the presenting issue(s) rather than eliciting biographical material relevant to individual pathways into homelessness. These limitations with administrative data can be addressed by augmenting quantitative data with in-depth interviews that focus on specific transition points in people's homeless pathways.

10.4 Practice and policy implications

If the patterns identified in this study are confirmed in the future, there are a range of practical and policy implications to consider. Here I focus on a few of the more significant ones.

At the level of practice, the data confirm the importance of listening to, and connecting homeless people's past to their present circumstances. In particular, the practices of front lines workers could be enriched by identifying those biographic factors that appear to have a strong influence on career trajectory. These could include the age a person first experienced homelessness, their pathway into homelessness, whether they have been in any form of out-of-home care, and whether they have experienced homelessness on more than one occasion. Linking these factors back to the presenting issues would enable a stronger assessment to be undertaken of homeless people's current and future needs, both material and non-material.

At the level of practice three other points stood out. The first is that funding bodies must accept the fact that getting people out of homelessness is often a lengthy and complex process. As Caton (1990:164) correctly points out, homelessness is a 'recurring feature of life at the margins' for many, and unless there is the right mix of support and financial assistance it does not take much to tip some formerly homeless people over. While getting

people out of homelessness is an important goal, it is also important to recognise that most people in this study remained at or below the poverty line once they got out of homelessness. There is little that agencies can do to change these structural constraints, although governments can.

Second, the reality is that homeless services are generally full so housing workers often refer homeless people to boarding houses which are widely used as temporary accommodation. Boarding houses are sites where people encounter other homeless people. As we have seen, homeless people relate to other homeless people in different ways, but for some individuals going into a boarding house decreases the chance they will quickly 'get out' of homelessness. Similarly, while shared transitional housing represents an effort to maximise limited resources, it frequently leads to the initiation of the newly homeless people into the homeless subculture. This is not to condemn agencies or workers, but to make the point that homeless organisations play an important role in the homeless careers of many people, but not always in the way that official rhetoric suggests.

Third, agencies try hard in difficult circumstances to get people out of homelessness and they do provide many people with assistance in securing accommodation. However, agencies have limited resources and generally cannot provide ongoing support. Without ongoing support, many formerly homeless people feel isolated and bored and this can compromise their capacity to 'stay out' of homelessness. Without a meaningful role to perform or new social networks to engage with, people commonly returned to their homeless networks for support. When this happens individuals are vulnerable to further episodes of homelessness.

At the level of policy three points stand out. First, in Australia there has been considerable emphasis on early intervention and this has primarily been targeted at young people and families. The benefits of early intervention are commonly understood in one of two ways. For the political right, the driving imperative is 'reduced government intervention and expenditure' (Chamberlain & Johnson 2002b). For the left, early intervention belongs to

what Billis (1981) calls the social conscience tradition. From this perspective, early intervention is premised as a strategy that maximises opportunities for a full and participatory social life. Irrespective of what political view is attached to early intervention, early intervention is ultimately predicated on the belief that homelessness is a process, and for some people, an immensely damaging one. For all of these reasons early intervention is an important strategy.

In Australia, early intervention has focused on schools and the benefits of working with young people at risk of homelessness are starting to become evident (Chamberlain & Johnson 2002b). For dissenters, early intervention programs assisted them to retain their connections to the mainstream and avoid the homeless subculture. For young people in particular, avoiding the homeless subculture is critical if they are to 'get out' and 'stay out' of homelessness (Fitzpatrick 2000:75).

This study confirmed that young people who have been involved with the state care and protection system (the escapers) were disproportionately represented among the long term homeless. Policy makers must develop, and appropriately fund, better approaches to ensure that young people leaving care, do not continue to 'graduate' into the homeless service system (Mendes & Moslehuddin 2004). Those who 'graduate' generally developed additional problems such as drug use and mental illness, and sometimes both. This made their situations difficult to resolve. Not only does increasing complexity result in greater demand on the homeless service system, it adds to a cycle of marginalisation that is difficult to overcome. There also needs to be further reform of the State care and protection system to prevent the damage many young people experience when they are *in* the care of the State.

The second policy point is that early intervention can reduce the possibility of individuals developing additional problems. While the aim of most early intervention programs is to reduce homelessness, there are indirect benefits that occur as a result of avoiding the 'effects' of being homeless. Obviously, this includes a decrease in the level of substance use problems, as well as reducing the negative impact on people's self esteem

and confidence. In many ways early intervention has benefits for a range of social welfare sectors, not just the homeless service system - although this will always be hard to quantify.

Similarly, many people developed problems with their mental health after they had been homeless. Preventing their exposure to homelessness may well have reduced the possibility of these problems emerging. For some people who developed mental health issues these may well have occurred anyway but the nature of homelessness is likely to have increased the possibility. While there was variation in the intensity and type of mental health problems people reported, the crucial and obvious point is that homelessness can be a deeply damaging and depressing experience. Great caution is needed when invoking the term mental illness. Researchers and policy makers must recognise the debilitating role being homeless plays. This means that greater attention needs to be focused on the social setting in which these issues are embedded, rather than simply attempting to enumerate the extent of the problem.

The third policy point relates to the problem of 'keeping people housed'. The development of the Support Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and the Transitional Housing Program was based on the assumption that homelessness is typically a short term crisis (Coleman 2001). For some households homelessness is a short experience but for many others, years of homelessness have shaped their routines, their behaviour and their attitudes towards the mainstream. For people who have become entrenched in the homeless population it takes time to reverse these patterns. Most people in this study who had been homeless for over 12 months had problems 'getting out' and also 'staying out'. Most agencies focus their resources on getting people out of homelessness and this makes sense. However, some people still have problems to overcome and the research indicates that unless people are assisted to 'stay out', many will become homeless again.

Snow and Anderson (1993:591) emphasises the point that progress to long term homelessness is typically a non-linear, discontinuous process. In the same vein, Fitzpatrick (2005) argues that future accounts of the structure/agency relationship need to be much more sensitive to the non-linearity of homeless careers. Policy makers also need to

recognise this pattern. Alongside prevention and early intervention, it is important to draw the attention of policy makers to the importance of maintaining people in their housing once they have 'got out' of homelessness.

In Australia there has been considerable effort directed towards developing a better understanding of homelessness. Much of this effort remains focused on developing detailed profiles of the homeless population. Unfortunately, this leads to an ongoing debate about who is most 'in need'. This politicises the problem of homelessness and invariably turns it into an issue of individual pathology or disability. When individual problems are de-contextualised it serves to obscure the role that social structures and social setting play in the creation and perpetuation of homelessness.

In this thesis I have attempted to show that exploring the dynamics of homelessness helps to make sense of the reasons why homelessness is difficult to resolve for some people, but less so for others. Further, the findings show that 'staying out' is a complex issue that requires more than the inversion of a preferred causal model. While the characteristics and the size of the homeless population are important concerns, hopefully I have shown that understanding what drives the dynamic patterning of homelessness can provide a useful basis for designing different interventions for different groups of homeless people.

No matter how people become or respond to homelessness, all homeless people have few material resources to draw on. This makes 'getting out' and 'staying out' anything but simple. Until this situation changes, people at the margins will always be vulnerable to homelessness. For the Australian community reducing this vulnerability remains a major challenge.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Agencies

In 1997 the Victorian Government appointed 15 transitional housing managers (THMs) across the state of Victoria. Four THMs were selected as recruitment sites. The fifth site was an inner city crisis accommodation service.

Argyle Housing Service

Argyle Housing Service (AHS)⁴³ is a program of HomeGround Services, a housing and homelessness support service that provides transitional housing, housing information and referral, outreach support, public tenancy support, emergency accommodation and mental health outreach support across the inner city and northern regions of Melbourne. AHS provides transitional housing and housing information and referral services within the inner city local government areas of Port Phillip, Stonnington, Yarra and parts of the City of Melbourne. AHS manages over 320 transitional housing properties.

WAYSS Ltd

Westernport Accommodation and Youth Support Service (WAYSS Ltd) is a housing and support service located in the outer southern metropolitan region of Melbourne. The services provided by WAYSS Ltd include transitional housing, housing information and referral, crisis and transitional support, and domestic violence outreach services. The WAYSS transitional housing service covers the local government areas of Greater Dandenong, Cardinia, Casey, Frankston, and the Mornington Peninsula. WAYSS Ltd manages 309 transitional properties.

Salvation Army Social housing Service – Barwon South West

Salvation Army Social Housing Service Barwon South West Region (SASH – BSW) is a homelessness and housing support service that provides transitional housing, housing information and referral, emergency accommodation, long term accommodation and crisis and transitional support. SASH-BSW transitional housing service manages 94 properties.

Salvation Army Gippscare

Salvation Army Gippscare is homelessness and housing support service that provides transitional housing, housing information and referral, emergency accommodation, long term accommodation and crisis and transitional support. Gippscare is a rural service located in Leongatha. Gippscare manages 33 properties which provided the recruitment site for this project.

Salvation Army Crisis Accommodation Centre (SACAC)

The Salvation Army Crisis Accommodation Centre (CAC) is part of the Salvation Army Crossroads Network which also incorporates the Crisis Contact Centre, the Inner South Domestic Violence Outreach Service and the Health Information Exchange. Located in the inner city (St Kilda) the CAC provides emergency (short-term) accommodation for young men aged 16-25 and young women aged 16-30.

⁴³ Formerly known as Argyle Street Housing Service, Argyle Housing Service is the THM arm of HomeGround Services, a housing and homelessness service that was formed in 2002 following the merge of Argyle Street Housing Service and Outreach Victoria.

Appendix B: Screening rules

The total tenancy population of the five agencies was 786. The sampling procedures had to address two separate issues.

The first was that the tenancy population was dominated by two agencies (WAYSS and AHS) who managed 80 per cent of the total tenancies (Table B1). I opted to disproportionately sample the tenancy population to ensure that the smaller agencies were well represented in the sample (Table B2).

Table B1 Tenancy profile participating agencies at 1/1/03.

Agency	AHS	WAYSS	BSW	Gipps	SACAC	TOTAL
Number of tenancies	322	309	94	33	28	786
Average exits a month	25	29	17	3	N/A	65
Average tenancy duration (days)	246	196	94	171	-	201

A second issue arose from the study's interest in what happened to people after they exited from transitional accommodation. This meant it was important to avoid recruiting tenancies that might still be residing in transitional accommodation at the time of the second interview. This problem typically arises from a practice known as 'parking'. Parking refers to tenancies waiting for a public housing allocation. When a household's application for segment one⁴⁴ has been approved, while they wait for their housing allocation many tenancies go beyond the maximum tenancy duration⁴⁵. Most agencies will not evict tenants in these circumstances and this meant there was a strong possibility that some tenancies would extend across both interview waves.

One option to overcome this problem was to sample people as they exited transitional accommodation. Based on data provided by the services, approximately 65 households exited transitional accommodation each month (Table B1). However, exits generally occurred in one of two ways – planned and unplanned. A planned exit is one where a client exits to permanent accommodation with the support of the THM and support service. Generally, a forwarding address is provided to the support or tenancy administration staff. These tenancies are easier to sample because their exit from transitional accommodation is generally known in advance.

An unplanned exit is where the tenancy ends unexpectedly. In these cases no forwarding address is provided to support agencies or tenancy administration workers. In general, two thirds of transitional tenancies exit in a planned way with the remaining third exiting in an unplanned manner.

⁴⁴ Public housing allocations are based on a four-tiered level of need. Segment one or recurring homelessness, is the highest priority.

⁴⁵ For people under 24 the maximum tenancy duration was 18 months, for all other tenants it was nine months.

Planned and unplanned exits raised a number of issues. First, I did not want the sample to be dominated by tenancies that had 'successfully' exited. While this approach has been adopted in some longitudinal studies (Horn & Cooke 2001), the effect of systematically excluding unplanned exits would be to create a perception that exits are generally planned and ordered, and that the short-term resolution of homelessness is achieved in a significant majority of cases. A cross section of tenancies is necessary to understand different career trajectories and by definition a cross section of tenancies should include both planned and unplanned exits. The question was how to do it.

To sample tenancies that were likely to end in an unplanned manner was complicated and my approach was to disproportionately stratified the tenancy population using the 65/35 split.

The next question was how to identify tenancies that might end in an unplanned manner. While there are a number of possible ways to identify vulnerable tenancies including the level engagement with support and tenancy administration workers, the number of breaches of the Residential Tenancies Act (1997), and neighbourhood problems, I opted for an arrears ratio⁴⁶ for three reasons. First, each agency had unique methods of collecting data, and, while all agencies collected uniform tenancy duration and arrears data, in many instances data relating to the other indicators was not systematically collected. Second, an arrears ratio is an objective indicator, which is equally likely to pick up short term unplanned exits, as well as those tenancies that might also end in unplanned exits. While longer tenancies generally exit in a planned fashion, it was important those that did not were not excluded by the sampling procedures. Finally, this approach could be adapted to suit variations in each agency arrears collection practices.

The stratification procedure was taken to each of the tenancy administration teams for comment, enhancement and improvement. In taking this preliminary approach directly to tenancy administration workers I aimed to ensure the project methodology was viable and made sense to those people who were too play an active role in the recruitment of the sample. Immediately, it became obvious that the sampling approach would need to be adapted to each of the five recruitment sites.

⁴⁶ Arrears ratio = Number of days in arrears / tenancy duration (days)

Table B2 Population, sample frame and sample population, by agency.

	AHS	WAYSS	BSW	Leong'a	SACAC	TOTAL
Tenancy population (n)	322	309	94	33	28	786
Tenancies after initial sampling (n)	198	126	63	33	28	448
Sample frame (n)	49	53	63	33	28	226

Argyle Housing Service

As of 23 February 2003 AHS managed 322 transitional tenancies. The average tenancy duration was the longest of the five agencies (Table B2). For planned tenancies the selection criteria was six months and this identified 161 tenancies. 38 tenancies were identified using an arrears ratio of 0.5 as the selection criteria for unplanned tenancies. Of these 38 tenancies, two were also selected in the planned sample (ie two tenancies had an arrears ratio greater than 0.5, and had been in transitional accommodation for six months or more). I included these tenancies in the unplanned strata ⁴⁷ and excluded them from the planned strata. This reduced the planned strata from 161 to 159. This meant that 198 tenancies satisfied the initial sampling conditions.

Random numbers were allocated to both sample frames to achieve the correct sampling balance of planned and unplanned tenancies (using the 65/35 rule). By randomly assigning each vulnerable tenancy (N=38) a number between 1 and 2, and then selecting all tenancies that had been allocated a '1', 19 tenancies were identified. The same principle was applied to the mature sample (N=159), but in this case to reduce the sample to approximately 30 tenancies, random numbers between one and five were allocated to each tenancy. Those tenancies allocated the number four were selected resulting in the identification of 30 mature tenancies. This left a final sampling frame of 49 tenancies.

WAYSS Ltd

WAYSS had the second most tenancies (N= 309) and the second longest average tenancy duration of 196 days (Table B2). In this respect WAYSS was more similar to AHS than the two other agencies. WAYSS was also a more complex organisation, with a range of programs under its umbrella. Consequently, the stratification procedures were modified to reflect these differences.

⁴⁷ The rationale for including these tenancies in the vulnerable subgroup is that the chances of these tenancies being evicted was significantly higher given the level of arrears, than the chances of them securing a planned exit outcome, which could take many more months.

Initially the project had a geographic interest, and a decision was made to focus the research in three local government areas (Cardinia, Casey and Greater Dandenong) that formed the bulk of the south-east growth corridor⁴⁸. The exclusion of the remaining areas reduced the tenancy population to 178. After excluding non-transitional tenancies, the number was further reduced to 147. WAYSS had a shorter average length of stay than Argyle Housing Service (Table B2) and the criteria for the planned strata was reduced from 6 months to 4 months. This captured 103 tenancies.

The next step involved identifying tenancies that were vulnerable and might possibly exit in an unplanned manner. Because of different rent and arrears collection policies the arrears ratio at WAYSS was set at 0.3. This produced 24 tenancies, of which one tenancy had also been selected in the planned strata. As with AHS I counted this tenancy as vulnerable tenancy, and this reduced the number of mature tenancies to 102. This meant that 126 tenancies satisfied the initial sampling conditions.

To reduce the planned sample to approximately 30 tenancies, random numbers between one and three were allocated to each tenancy. Those tenancies allocated the number three were selected resulting in the identification of 31 mature tenancies. The final sampling frame at WAYSS was 53.

Salvation Army – Barwon South West (SASHs-BSW)

SASHs - BSW had 94 tenancies as at 3 May 2003 and also the shortest tenancy duration at just over three months (Table B2 above). The short turnover period reduced the value of the distinction between unplanned and planned exits, nevertheless tenancies that were shorter than two months were excluded from the planned group. This left 52 tenancies. Based on experiences gained at AHS and WAYSS where a response rate of around 60 per cent had been achieved, it was decided to include all 52 tenancies in the sampling frame.

The arrears ratio was set at 0.25, again reflecting different rent and arrears collection practices, and 15 tenancies were identified, four of which had also been identified in the planned strata. For consistency these were excluded from the planned strata reducing it to 48. The final sample frame at the BSW service was 63 tenancies .

Salvation Army Gippscare – Leongatha

⁴⁸ The south-east growth corridor is characterised by medium density suburban developments. It is predominately a mid to lower socio-economic region.

The Leongatha service had 33 tenancies as at 3 May 2003. The small size of the agency neutralised the benefit of stratification. Consequently, it was decided to include every tenancy in the sampling frame.

Salvation Army Crisis Accommodation Centre

Participants were also recruited from The Salvation Army Crisis Accommodation Centre (SACAC) in inner city Melbourne. As a crisis service SACAC has a higher turnover rate, so a convenience sample was used. On two nights (15th and 16th May 2003) all residents were verbally informed of the project by staff, and a written description of the project was posted around the centre. If residents were interested in participating they informed staff who contacted me to arrange an interview. 20 interviews were completed.

Appendix C: Letters to potential respondents

<DATE>

Dear <Tenants name>

<Agency Name> is supporting a research project in an effort to gather information on the long-term housing outcomes of transitional tenants. As a current tenant we are seeking your participation in this project, which aims to gather information on your experiences prior to, during and after transitional housing. For more information about the project see the attached sheet.

Your involvement in the research would require you to participate in two (2) interviews 12 months apart, irrespective of whether you are still in transitional accommodation.

**Participants will be paid \$40.00 for the first interview and
\$60 for the second interview 12 months later.**

Each interview will last for no longer than one-hour and can be conducted at your home, at the service or any other location you may prefer. Interviews can also be conducted over the phone if that is your preference.

If you would like to participate could you fill out and return the enclosed form in the stamped envelope provided. By signing this form you are giving permission for the researcher to contact you directly and arrange an interview time. Or you can contact me directly on <CONTACT NUMBER>

If you do not wish to participate in this research you do not have to and that decision will have no affect on your access to transitional housing.

If you would like more information on the project please contact me on the number above. Thank-you for your time and we hope that you are able to assist with this important piece of research. Please find attached a brief summary of the project

Yours Sincerely

Tenancy Administration – <Agency Name>

CUT Here -----
-

Consent to Contact

I, _____ of _____ _____ Post Code _____ consent for the researcher to contact me with further information. Phone Numbers: _____ or _____ (If you have a phone) Signed: _____ Date _____ / _____ /2003
--

Appendix D: Plain English statement

A longitudinal study of the housing stability of transitional housing tenants in Victoria

What is the project about?

The project is designed to examine what happens to urban and rural tenants of transitional housing after they leave transitional accommodation.

Your housing experiences prior to, during and after your stay in transitional housing are incredibly important. Your contribution to this project will assist in developing appropriate and relevant policies that could help people who experience housing crisis in the future.

Who is doing the study?

The project is being conducted by the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University (RMIT) and the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) in conjunction with Argyle Housing Service, WAYSS Ltd, Salvation Army Social Housing (Geelong and Leongatha) and the St Kilda Crisis Contact Centre. The researcher is Guy Johnson

How long will it run for and who will be involved?

The interview will run for just under one hour. Interviews can be arranged to take place at your home, by phone or any other location that is convenient for you. Just inform the researcher of your preference.

How can you assist with the project?

We would like to interview you twice – the first as soon as is possible for you and the second twelve months later.

What will I be asked?

The survey will focus on your housing history, your employment history and your general household details.

Will you be paid?

Yes. You will be paid \$40 for the first interview and \$60 for the second interview.

What if you do not want to participate?

You do not have to. Access to services and transitional housing will not be affected if you choose not to participate.

Are my answers confidential?

Absolutely. Confidentiality is guaranteed. No information gathered in the report will identify you.

How will the information be reported?

The information will be presented as a PhD thesis. If you would like a copy of the thesis or any preliminary reports, just tell the researcher who will forward copies to you.

Can I contact someone if I am unhappy with the research or researcher?

Yes you can. Any queries or complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chair of the Faculty of the Constructed Environment Research Ethics Sub-Committee, RMIT, GPO Box 2476 V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is 9925 3957. Alternatively, you can contact your support worker or your tenancy manager for assistance.

Who to contact?

If you wish to participate return the attached form in the stamped, self addressed envelope. If you prefer you can contact Guy Johnson directly by phone on either 99253758 or 0419 545 305, or via email (guy.johnson@rmit.edu.au)

Appendix E: Social characteristics of the sample

I argue in the body of the thesis that the benefits of a small sample are derived from their capacity to provide theoretic insights. Nevertheless, it is important to have a sense of who was in the sample and what the sample looked like in comparison to other samples of the homeless population.

In Australia two datasets provide a basis for comparison. These are the SAAP dataset (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2003) and data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics special homeless enumeration strategy (Chamberlain 1999). While both datasets have their limitations they provide the closest thing to a master file of the homeless population in Australia.

1. Age

The age distribution of the homeless population has changed in the last two decades, with increasing numbers of young people. The age distribution in the sample and SAAP clients confirmed this (Table E1). In both groups just over half of the people were between 25 – 44 years of age, with about one third under 25 years of age. The similarities between the two groups were reinforced by the identical mean age of the sample and SAAP clients (Table E2).

ABS estimates, however, suggest the age of the homeless population is more heavily distributed at either end of the age scale with homeless people under 25 and over the age of 55.

Table E1 Age breakdown of respondents at T1 compared to SAAP and ABS data

	Interview One (T1)	SAAP 02/03*	ABS** 2001
Age	%	%	%
18 or under	7	36***	36
19-24	27		10
25-34	29	30	17
35-44	24	22	13
45-54	10	8	10
55+	3	4	14
TOTAL	100	100	100

* AIHW 2004: Table 4.1, p.16

**Chamberlain and Mackenzie 2003:Taable 5.1, p.37

*** Data from four categories combined

Table E2 Mean age of respondents at T1 compared to SAAP (by gender)

	Interview One	SAAP 02/03*
Gender	(T1)	
Mean age – female (yrs)	30	30
Mean age – male (yrs)	33	33
TOTAL	31	31

*AIHW 2004:Table 4.1, p.16

2. Gender

From the late 1970s onwards research in Australia has documented increasing numbers of women in the homeless population. As indicated in Table E3 the gender profile of the sample and SAAP client data indicate a predominantly female homeless population. The ABS data point in a different direction indicating that men form the majority of the homeless population⁴⁹. I point out in the main body of the thesis that the concentration of women is reflective of special institutional access arrangements and is not necessarily representative of the gender profile of the homeless population.

Table E3 Gender of respondents at T1 compared to SAAP and ABS data (per cent)

	Interview	SAAP	ABS**
Gender	One (T1)	02/03*	2001
Female	59	58	42
Male	41	42	58
TOTAL	100	100	100

* AIHW 2004: Table 4.1, p.16

**Chamberlain and Mackenzie 2003:Taable 5.2, p.38

3. Household type

There was more variation in household type of people in the sample than is reported in SAAP data (Table E4). While single households dominated both groups, proportionately my sample contained fewer single people. The reason for this variation can partly be explained by the stock profile of the participating agencies. Most agencies reported insufficient single

⁴⁹ The distinction between households and individuals is central to the census enumeration strategy. The census enumerates homelessness in two ways. The first way counts households. The second method counts the number of individuals in each household type. The second approach produces a higher figure based on the number of individuals who are homeless. It also produces different compositional profiles vis a vis household type. For a full discussion see Chamberlain (1999)

bedroom stock to meet demand. The majority of their stock was two and three bedroom and while some agencies used two bedroom properties for single households, this was not a common approach.

Table E4 indicates a stronger similarity between SAAP and the ABS household profiles. This suggests that the sample, and to a lesser extent SAAP arrangements, are biased towards families at the expense of singles. This needs to be taken into account when considering the research findings.

Table E4 Household type at T1 compared to SAAP and ABS data (per cent)

Household type	Interview One (T1)	SAAP 02/03*	ABS** 2001
Single	55	71	78
Couple	8	3	13
Single parent family	32	23	9
Couple with children	5	3	
TOTAL	100	100	100

* AIHW 2004: Table 5.1, p.24

**Chamberlain and Mackenzie 2003:Table 4.2, p.34

SAAP data refer to support periods not clients

4. Education

In terms of education attainment the sample confirms a well-established sociological portrait of the homeless. Table E5 shows that the majority of the sample (63 per cent) did not go beyond year 10 with just under one quarter (23 per cent) completing year 12. In Australia, Parkinson and Horn (2002: 18) reported that more than half of their sample had completed year 10 or less, and between 15 and 20 per cent had completed secondary school.

It would be incorrect to conclude that people who experience homelessness are 'less intelligent'. In fact a lack of educational attainment increases the risk of homelessness in an indirect way. That is, employment prospects are mediated by, amongst other things, educational attainment. Furthermore, educational attainment is strongly and persistently mediated by, amongst other things, social origin (Broom, Duncan-Jones, Jones & McDonnell 1977; Broom, Jones, Williams & McDonnell 1980).

Table E5 Highest completed year level (secondary)

Year level	%
Year seven	4
Year eight	10
Year nine	18
Year ten	30
Year eleven	15
Year twelve	23
TOTAL	100

} → 63 per cent

5. Social background

An indicator of the participants' social background was the occupation of the household's primary breadwinner when the respondents were children (under 16). 83 respondents recalled their parents' main occupations. Using a six tiered classification scheme⁵⁰ the occupational distribution of the respondent's parents was overwhelmingly blue collar (Table E6). While there was considerable diversity among blue-collar occupations, a consistent theme that emerged was that most people moved from one form of employment to another with some regularity.

Table E6 Primary breadwinners occupation

Classification	N	%
White Collar I	1	1
White Collar II	3	4
White Collar III	4	5
Blue Collar I	30	36
Blue Collar II	33	40
Blue Collar III	12	14
TOTAL	83	100

} → 90 per cent

6. Labour market

⁵⁰ The occupation of the main breadwinner was recorded to establish the socio-economic background. Apart from recall issues, the data was difficult to collect due to periods of unemployment, interspersed with periods of stable long-term employment. Numerous occupations and changes to family composition also made determining the primary breadwinner difficult. Nevertheless the data was coded using a six point scale that provided an indication of socio-economic status (Broom, Duncan-Jones, Jones and MacDonnell 1977). Like other similar measures, this approach has its 'advantages and disadvantages' (Broom et al. 1977:15) and there were two reasons why it was the preferred measure. First it provides comparability with other studies, in particular O'Connor's (1988) study of young homeless people, which used the same scale to determine socio-economic background. Second on a more technical level, the measure was selected as 'researchers had found the . . . scale more discriminating in predicting various kinds of behavioural outcomes eg school performance' (Broom et al. 1977:14). The six point ANU scale is a condensed version of a sixteen point hierarchical scale.

Research in Australia and overseas has consistently documented high rates of unemployment in the homeless population (Elliott & Krivo 1991; Neil & Fopp 1993:25; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 1997:44, Table 4.12; Bartholomew 1999:46-47; Chamberlain 1999:34; Victorian Homelessness Strategy Ministerial Advisory Committee 2001:9; Chamberlain & Johnson 2002a:33) and my findings are consistent with this.

The employment status of people in the sample and SAAP clients were similar with the significant majority of both groups outside the labour force – 61 per cent in the sample and 58 per cent in SAAP (Table E7). This is likely to reflect, in part, the gender and household composition of both groups and that single parents, primarily women, are unlikely to be in the work force. Both groups reported similar levels of unemployment (34 per cent and 33 per cent respectively). However, slightly more SAAP clients were working (9 per cent and 5 per cent). There is no comparable ABS census data across this domain.

Table E7 Employment status of respondents compared to SAAP clients before support

	Interview One (T1)	SAAP02/03*
	%	%
Working full time	3	3
Part time /casual	2	6
Unemployed	34	33
Not in Labor force	61	58
TOTAL	100	100

* AIHW 2004:Table 8.5, p.51

7. Housing

Most participants were on the margins of the housing market with few people reporting they had ever owned⁵¹ their own home (12 per cent). Prior to their current episode of homelessness just over half had been in the private rental accommodation (52 per cent), with 13 per cent were in public housing, and four percent were in their own home. A significant minority of the sample (31 per cent) reported that they had never lived in stable and independent accommodation, and while this group tended to be younger (median age 20), there were some people in their mid to late twenties who had never lived independently.

Another indicator of the precarious position these people had in the housing market was the prevalence of eviction. Over half the sample had been formally evicted at least once

⁵¹ Purchasing or outright ownership

(57 per cent), and just over a quarter had been evicted from their last stable place of residence. Of those that had been evicted, half (56 per cent) had been evicted once, one quarter (27 per cent) twice and 17 per cent had been evicted three or more times. As many people reported leaving accommodation prior to the commencement of formal eviction proceedings these figures under report the housing instability of the sample. Nevertheless, the dominant pattern that emerged was one of on-going housing instability over many years.

Appendix F: First interview schedule

First interview (T1) – Current Tenants

This interview is to be given to all the current Transitional Housing tenants at the first interview. This interview schedule should not be repeated.

BACKGROUND to the Research project

I am carrying out a study about people living in transitional housing. I'll be asking two kinds of questions. In some cases you will be asked to answer in your own words. For those questions, I will have to write down your answers. In other cases, I will give you a list of answers and ask you to choose the one that fits best. If at any time during the interview you are not clear about what is wanted, be sure to ask me.

1. Family background

I would like to start by asking some questions about your family background.

1. **First, were you born in Australia?**

1. Yes – **Go to Q4**
2. No

2. **If no, what country were you born in?**

3. **How many years have you lived in Australia?**

_____ (years)

4. **When you were growing up who did you live with?**

Family Structure

1. Single parent - female
2. Single parent - male
3. Dual Parent
4. Blended Family
5. Other – Variation
6. Adopted / Foster Care / Ward of the State

5. **When you were growing up did your mother have a paid job?**

1. Yes
2. No – **Go to Q7**
3. Unsure – **Go to Q7**
4. Not raised by mother – **Go to Q7**

6. **If yes, what sort of work she did she do?**

_____ (mother)

7. **When you were growing up did you father have a paid job?**

1. Yes
2. No – **Go to Q9**
3. Unsure – **Go to Q9**
4. Not raised by father – **Go to Q9**

8. **If yes, what sort of work he did he do?**

_____ (father)

9. **Did you move house very often when you were growing up?**

1. Yes
2. No – **Go to Question 12**

10. **How many times?**

_____ (No. of times)

11. **Was there any particular reason why you moved?**

12. **How many primary schools did you attend? _____ (Number)**

13. **How many secondary schools did you attend? _____ (Number)**

14. **How old you were when you FIRST left home? _____ (Years)**

15. **Can you tell me why you left?**

16. **What sort of housing did you move into?**

1. Public Housing or Community Housing
2. Community Rooming House
3. Squatting
4. Sleeping Rough – Car/Tent/Park/Street
5. Private Rental
6. Private Hotel/Boarding House
7. Friends
8. Other THM
9. Caravan Park
10. Refuge - Domestic Violence
11. Refuge - Youth
12. Crisis Accommodation
13. Family
14. Rehabilitation Centre – Drug and Alcohol
15. Hospital
16. Prison
17. Other _____
18. Partners family home
19. THM

17. **How long did you stay there? _____ (Years)**

25. How many children (under 16) are not currently living with you? _____ (#.)
26. Where are they currently staying? _____
27. Have you ever been in foster care?
1. Yes
 2. No - Go to SECTION TWO (2)
28. Have your children ever been in foster care?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Not applicable
29. Have you ever been married? 1. Yes 2. No
30. Have you ever been in a de-facto relationship? 1. Yes 2. No

ANSWER next questions only if respondent is part of a BLENDED FAMILY

31. Are all of your partners children living with you?
1. Yes – Go to Q33
 2. No
 3. Unsure
 4. Not applicable
32. How many children are not currently living with you? _____ (Number.)
33. Where are they currently staying? _____
34. Have any of your partner's children been in foster care?
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Unsure
 4. Not applicable

NOTES:

2 Accommodation history

I am now going to ask you some questions about your housing. This is a very important part of the research, so take as much time as you need with each question. If there are any questions that you do not understand, just let me know and I will explain them to you more clearly.

35. **Prior to moving into transitional accommodation, when did you last live in a flat, unit or a house for six months or more?**

1. Never have lived in a flat, unit or house – **Go to Q40**
2. Cannot remember – **Go to Q41**
_____ (mths ago)

36. **What sort of accommodation was it?**

1. Public Housing or Community Housing
2. Community Rooming House
3. Squatting
4. Sleeping rough
5. Private Rental
6. Private Hotel/Boarding House
7. Friends
8. Other THM
9. Caravan Park
10. Refuge - Domestic Violence
11. Refuge - Youth
12. Crisis Accommodation
13. Family
14. Rehabilitation Centre – Drug and Alcohol
15. Hospital - Psych
16. Prison
17. Other ___
18. Own home

37. **What town / state was it in?** _____ (enter postcode)

38. **How long did you live there for?** _____ (months)

39. **Why did you leave?**

1. Didn't answer
2. Sold for redevelopment (GENTRICATION)
3. Accommodation inappropriate
4. Evicted – Rent arrears
5. Evicted – Anti- Social behaviour
6. Evicted – Other Reason
7. Relocating- new region
8. Offered Transitional Housing
9. Relationship Breakdown
10. Domestic Violence
11. Family breakdown
12. Safety Issues – Physical or emotional abuse
13. Family Reunification
14. Health Issues
15. Financial difficulties due to gambling
16. Financial difficulties due to substance use

- 17. Reduced income due to loss of employment
- 18. Reduced income due to **Centrelink** breaching
- 19. Other _____

40. **What are the things you like about transitional accommodation?**

41. **What are the things you DIS-LIKE about transitional accommodation?**

42. **I would like to ask you to compare your current situation with the situation you were in before moving into transitional housing? Do you think your current situation is better or worse?**

- 1. Much better
- 2. Better
- 3. Same
- 4. Worse
- 5. Much worse

43. **Why?**

44. **How much rent are you currently paying per month? \$_____**

45. I am now going to read you a list of housing types. Could you tell me if you have lived in any of them, and the reason why you left them. To help me I have a small chart that I would like to use work backwards starting with your current accommodation.

Accommodation type		Duration (weeks)	No of times	Reason for leaving
1.	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Housing	1. _____	1. _____	1. _____
2.	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Housing	2. _____	2. _____	2. _____
3.	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Rooming House	3. _____	3. _____	3. _____
4.	<input type="checkbox"/> Squatting	4. _____	4. _____	4. _____
5.	<input type="checkbox"/> Sleeping Rough – Car/Tent/Park/Street	5. _____	5. _____	5. _____
6.	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Rental	6. _____	6. _____	6. _____
7.	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Hotel/Boarding House	7. _____	7. _____	7. _____
8.	<input type="checkbox"/> Friends	8. _____	8. _____	8. _____
9.	<input type="checkbox"/> Other THM	9. _____	9. _____	9. _____
10.	<input type="checkbox"/> Caravan Park	10. _____	10. _____	10. _____
11.	<input type="checkbox"/> Refuge - Domestic Violence	11. _____	11. _____	11. _____
12.	<input type="checkbox"/> Refuge - Youth	12. _____	12. _____	12. _____
13.	<input type="checkbox"/> Crisis Accommodation	13. _____	13. _____	13. _____
14.	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	14. _____	14. _____	14. _____
15.	<input type="checkbox"/> Rehabilitation Centre – Drug and Alcohol	15. _____	15. _____	15. _____
16.	<input type="checkbox"/> Hospital - Psych	16. _____	16. _____	16. _____
17.	<input type="checkbox"/> Prison	17. _____	17. _____	17. _____
18.	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	18. _____	18. _____	18. _____

Primary

Secondary

Tertiary

Date / Duration											
Type of tenure	Transitional Accomm										
Location											
Reason for Leaving											
Other Info											

Comments

Date / Duration											
Type of tenure											
Location											
Reason for Leaving											
Other Info											

CODING: Temporal order

Been in prison? Yes No. If yes, pre homeless or post homelessness
 Been in drug rehabilitation? Yes No. If yes, pre homeless or post homelessness
 Been in alcohol rehabilitation? Yes No. If yes, pre homeless or post homelessness

46. **Have you ever been formally evicted?**

1. Yes
2. No – **Go to Q 48**

47. **If yes, how many times?** _____ (**# of times**)

48. **Have you ever left accommodation because the landlord had threatened or started eviction proceedings?**

1. Yes
2. No – **Go to Q 50**

49. **If yes, how many times?** _____ (**# of times**)

50. **Have you ever been told to leave accommodation?**

1. Yes
2. No – **Go to Q 52**

51. **If yes, how many times?** _____ (**# of times**)

52. **Have you ever owned a house?**

1. Yes
2. No – **Go to Question 54**

53. **What happened?**

54. **Have you thought about your housing after transitional accommodation?**

1. Yes
2. No - – **Go to Question 57**
3. Not really

55. **What sort of housing are you planning to move into after transitional housing?**

1. Public Housing
2. Private Rental - Flat
3. Private Rental - House
4. Other THM
5. Crisis Accommodation
6. Community Rooming House Tenant
7. Private Hotel
8. Caravan Park
9. Family
10. Friends
11. Squatting/Sleeping rough
12. Unsure / Don't Know
13. Other _____

56. Is this the same as the sort of housing would you LIKE to move into? Yes – Go to Q58

- 2. No
- 3. Not really

57. What sort of housing would you LIKE to move into? Public Housing

- 2. Private Rental - Flat
- 3. Private Rental - House
- 4. Other THM
- 5. Crisis Accommodation
- 6. Community Rooming House Tenant
- 7. Private Hotel
- 8. Caravan Park
- 9. Family
- 10. Friends
- 11. Unsure / Don't Know
- 12. Other _____

58. I would like you to tell me about the factors that have influenced your decision about where you would like to live, and the type of housing you plan to move into.

CODING - Multiple Responses

57 a	57 b	57 c	57 d
1. <input type="checkbox"/> Affordability 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Safety/ Security 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Near family/friends 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Availability 5. <input type="checkbox"/> Employment 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Close to education 7. <input type="checkbox"/> Close to PT	1. <input type="checkbox"/> Affordability 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Safety/ Security 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Near family/friends 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Availability 5. <input type="checkbox"/> Employment 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Close to education 7. <input type="checkbox"/> Close to PT	1. <input type="checkbox"/> Affordability 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Safety/ Security 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Near family/friends 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Availability 5. <input type="checkbox"/> Employment 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Close to education 7. <input type="checkbox"/> Close to PT	1. <input type="checkbox"/> Affordability 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Safety/ Security 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Near family/friends 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Availability 5. <input type="checkbox"/> Employment 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Close to education 7. <input type="checkbox"/> Close to PT

59. Do you feel positive or worried about your future housing options?

- 1. Very positive
- 2. Positive
- 3. Mixed
- 4. Worried
- 5. Very worried
- 6. Neither

60. Why?

3 Social connectedness

This set of questions refers to your social networks. If you are unsure about the questions, just tell me and I will explain them more clearly.

62. **Do you have any contact with your family, other than those who are currently living with you?**

1. Yes
2. No – **Go to Question 67**

63. **How often would you have contact with any family members?**

1. Daily
2. Weekly
3. Monthly
4. Every couple of months
5. Once a year
6. Rarely / Never

64. **What is the main form of contact that you have?**

1. Phone
2. Visit
3. A mix of phone-calls and visits
4. Other

65. **Has being in transitional accommodation changed the amount of contact you have with your family?**

1. No
2. See them more
3. See them less

66. **Have you received any financial support from your family in**

1. The last week
2. The last month
3. The last three months
4. The last six months
5. Greater than six months
6. Never

67. **Do you know many people in the local area?**

1. Yes
2. No

68. **In what year did you move into this area?**

_____ (Year)

69. **Do you consider this to be your community?**

1. Yes
2. No
3. Unsure

70. **Have you used any of the following services/agencies in the last 12 months**

1. Community Health Service
2. Local Doctor
3. Housing Services
4. Support Service
5. Recreational facilities (including library)

- 6. Child care
- 7. Church / religious centre
- 8. Employment services
- 9. Training services
- 10. Other(s): specify _____

71. I am interested in finding out whether your friends have permanent housing⁵². Would you say that

- 1. None of your friends are
- 2. Some of your friends are
- 3. Most of your friends are
- 4. All of your friends are
- 5. Lost contact
- 6. No friends – **Go to Q74**

72. Has moving changed the amount of contact you have with your friends who have permanent, stable housing?

- 1. No
- 2. See them more
- 3. See them less

73. How often would you be in contact with them?

- 1. Daily
- 2. Weekly
- 3. Monthly
- 4. Every couple of months
- 5. Once a year
- 6. Rarely / Never

74. Do you know any people who are homeless?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No – **Go to Q77**

75. Are any of your friends currently homeless?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No – **Go to Q77**

76. Have you had any contact with your friends who are homeless in

- 1. The last week
- 2. In the last month
- 3. In the last three months
- 4. More than three months ago
- 5. Lost contact completely

77. Do you identify with other homeless people?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

If yes, PROBE in what way respondent identifies with other homeless people

⁵² That is they must have been there more than six months, be on a lease (unless they own a place), and it must be in a flat, unit or house to be consistent with the cultural definition.

4 Education and employment

I am now going to ask you some questions about your employment history and its relationship to where you live. I stress that this information is confidential.

RESPONDENT

82. What is your current source of income? (Respondent)

- | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|----------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Work Full time | | Working |
| 2. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Work Part time | | |
| 3. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Casual Work | | |
| 4. | <input type="checkbox"/> | New Start Allowance | | Unemployed |
| 5. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Youth Allowance | | |
| 6. | <input type="checkbox"/> | No Income | | |
| 7. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Traineeship | | |
| 8. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Special Benefit | | Not in Labour Force |
| 9. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Old Age/Veterans Pension | | |
| 10. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Supporting Parents Benefit | | |
| 11. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sickness Benefit | | |
| 12. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Disability Support Benefit | | |
| 13. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other _____ | | |
| 14. | <input type="checkbox"/> | No Information | | |

83. If employed, what kind of job is it? _____

84. What kind of business or organisation do you work for? _____

85. Do you work for yourself or someone else? _____

86. How long have you been in your current job (months)? _____

87. How much did you earn in the last fortnight? \$ _____

88. When did you last have a paid job?

1. Less than one month ago
2. 1 – 2 months
3. 3 – 5 months
4. 6 – 8 months
5. 9 – 11 months
6. 12 - 23 months
7. 24 months or over
8. Never had a paid job

89. How would you describe your main occupation?

PARTNER

90. What is your partner's current source of income? (Partner)

- | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|----------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Work Full time | | Working |
| 2. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Work Part time | | |
| 3. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Casual Work | | |
| 4. | <input type="checkbox"/> | New Start Allowance | | Unemployed |
| 5. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Youth Allowance | | |
| 6. | <input type="checkbox"/> | No Income | | |
| 7. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Traineeship | | |
| 8. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Special Benefit | | Not in Labour Force |
| 9. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Old Age/Veterans Pension | | |
| 10. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Supporting Parents Benefit | | |
| 11. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sickness Benefit | | |
| 12. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Disability Support Benefit | | |
| 13. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other _____ | | |
| 14. | <input type="checkbox"/> | No Information | | |

91. If employed, what kind of job is it? _____

92. What kind of business or organisation do THEY work for? _____

93. Do THEY work for THEMSELVES or someone else? _____

94. How long have THEY been in your current job (months) _____

95. How much did THEY earn in the last fortnight? \$ _____

96. When did THEY last have a paid job?

1. Less than one month ago
2. 1 – 2 months
3. 3 – 5 months
4. 6 – 8 months
5. 9 – 11 months
6. 12 -23 months
7. 24 months or over
8. Never had a paid job

97. How would you describe THEIR main occupation? _____

BACK TO Respondent

98. In the last two years, have you ever moved house in order to gain or maintain employment?

1. Yes
2. No

99. Would you consider moving house in order to gain or maintain employment in the future?

1. No
2. Possibly
3. Unsure
4. Probably
5. Yes

105. **Can you recall what the highest level of secondary education your MOTHER completed?**

1. Year Eight or less
2. Year Nine
3. Year Ten
4. Year Eleven
5. Year Twelve
6. Unsure
7. Not raised by mother

106. **Can you recall if you mother completed**

1. An apprenticeship
2. A university diploma or degree
3. Other qualification
4. Unsure
5. No other qualification

107. **Can you recall what the highest level of secondary education your FATHER completed?**

1. Year Eight or less
2. Year Nine
3. Year Ten
4. Year Eleven
5. Year Twelve
6. Unsure
7. Not raised by father

108. **Can you recall if you father completed**

1. An apprenticeship
2. A university Degree
3. Other qualification
4. Unsure

109. **(Ask only those with children). Are your children currently at school?**

1. Yes
2. No - *Finish of formal interview – Go to next page*

110. **If yes, have your children had to change schools IN THE LAST TWO YEARS as a result of your housing problems?**

1. Yes
2. No - *Finish of formal interview – Go to next page*

111. **If yes, how many times**

1. Once
2. Twice
3. Three times
4. Four times or more

CODING – Still at school

1. Yes
2. No

In twelve months time I would like to interview you again, mainly to talk about your housing. You will be paid \$60 for your time. What is the best way to find you?

112. Follow Up Details

1. Mobile number _____
2. Landline _____
3. Post Office Box _____
4. Other (1) _____
5. Other (2) _____
6. Email address: _____
7. Social Security Details: _____ (Office)
_____ (Number)

Do you have any family members or friends who I could get in touch with, if necessary, to find out where you are living?

113. Family & Friends

8. **Relative/friend Details 1**
 - a. Name _____
 - b. Address _____
 - c. Contact Number _____
 - d. Other _____

9. **Relative/friend Details 2**
 - a. Name _____
 - b. Address _____
 - c. Contact Number _____
 - d. Other _____

10. **Relative/friend Details 3**
 - a. Name _____
 - b. Address _____
 - c. Contact Number _____
 - d. Other _____

11. **Relative/friend Details 4**
 - a. Name _____
 - b. Address _____
 - c. Contact Number _____
 - d. Other _____

12. Next Interview Date ____/____/04

Thankyou for agreeing to participate in the interview, and for being so generous with you time. I hope that everything works out for you. If your contact details change in the next twelve months, please call the number on the card I have given you and I will update my records. I will be in contact by phone or letter every three months to try and maintain contact prior to the next interview. The next interview will take place in approximately twelve months. If you have any problems, queries or concerns please call me on the number on the card and I will endeavour to assist you. For this research to have any impact on policy makers it is crucial that I interview you once again.

Finally, here is the \$40 for you. Could I ask that you sign this form to confirm that I have made the payment to you.

Respondent Signature: _____

Interview Finish Time:

Administration		
<input type="checkbox"/> Payment Made	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 month contact	<input type="checkbox"/> Notified support
<input type="checkbox"/> Researcher reimbursed	<input type="checkbox"/> 6 month contact	<input type="checkbox"/> Notified THM
<input type="checkbox"/> Data Entered	<input type="checkbox"/> 9 month contact	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

5 Pre interview information

114. Interview Date: ___/___/___

115. Interview Time: ___ am/pm

116. Interview Round:

1. Baseline
2. Follow up

117. Respondents

1. Name: _____
2. Address: _____
3. Suburb _____
4. Postcode _____
5. Contact Number _____

118. Client ID Number (first two letters first name, last two letters last name) ___ _ _ _

119. Interview Type:

1. Phone
2. In person
3. Other

120. Transitional Tenancy Start Date ___/___/___

121. Transitional Tenancy End Date ___/___/___ (* TA teams to inform researcher)

ADDRESS _____

122. EXIT TENURE: _____

123. THM

1. HomeGround
2. WAYSS
3. SASHs Geelong
4. SASHs Leongatha
5. St Kilda Crisis

124. Signed Consent (attach)

1. Yes
2. No

125. Interpreter required

1. Yes
2. No

126. Support Agency Name: _____

CONTACT NUMBER: _____

WORKERS NAME: _____

127. Support Type:

1. Domestic Violence
2. Family
3. Aged
4. Women Only
5. Substance
6. Men Only
7. Youth
8. Migrant
9. Medical
10. Other _____

128. Gender

1. Male
2. Female
3. Transgender

129. Age (DoB) ___/___/___

1. Under 20
2. 20 - 29
3. 30 - 39
4. 40 - 49
5. 50 - 59
6. 60 and over

Appendix G: Second interview schedule

Second interview schedule

Pre interview information – collect prior to interview

1. **Interview Date:** ____/____/____

2. **Interview Time:** _____am/pm

3. **Interview Round:**

1. Baseline
2. Follow up

4. **Respondents**

1. Name: _____
2. Address: _____
3. Suburb _____
4. Postcode _____
5. Contact Number _____

5. **Interview Type:**

1. Phone
2. In person
3. Other

6. **Transitional Tenancy Start Date** ____/____/____

7. **Transitional Tenancy End Date** ____/____/____ (* T1q155)

I am interested in finding out about your housing situation since you left transitional accommodation. Like the first interview I'll be asking two kinds of questions. In some cases you will be asked to answer in your own words. For those questions, I will have to write down your answers. In other cases, I will give you a list of answers and ask you to choose the one that fits best. If at any time during the interview you are not clear about what is wanted, be sure to ask me.

1. Household composition

I would like to ask you a couple of questions about your current household. When we first spoke, there were _____ adults and _____ children living with you.

8. Has the number of adults changed?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No → Go to Q10 if have children. → If single or no children go to Q16

9. If yes, how many adults are living with you? _____

10. Has the number of children living with you changed since the last interview?

- 1. Yes →
- 2. No

Number of children		Age
1. <input type="checkbox"/>	One	6. _____
2. <input type="checkbox"/>	Two	7. _____
3. <input type="checkbox"/>	Three	8. _____
4. <input type="checkbox"/>	Four	9. _____
5. <input type="checkbox"/>	More than four	10. _____

11. If yes, how many children are currently living with you? _____

12. Are all of your children under 16 living with you?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Not applicable

13. How many children (under 16) are not currently living with you? _____ (#.)

14. Where are they currently staying? _____

15. In the last 12 months have any of your children been in the care of someone else? (eg - foster care; relatives; DHS; JJ)

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Not applicable

T1 Household type	T2 Household type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Single 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Couple - no children 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Single parent family 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Couple with children 5. <input type="checkbox"/> Extended family 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Blended family 7. <input type="checkbox"/> Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <input type="checkbox"/> No change 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Single 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Couple - no children 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Single parent family 5. <input type="checkbox"/> Couple with children 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Extended family 7. <input type="checkbox"/> Blended family 8. <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Number adults:	Number adults:
Number of children:	Number of children:

2. Accommodation history

I am now going to ask you some questions about your housing over the last 12 months. This is a very important part of the research, so take as much time as you need with each question. If there are any questions that you do not understand, just let me know and I will explain them to you more clearly.

16. Are you still residing in transitional accommodation

1. Yes → Go to Q25
2. No

17. When did you move out of transitional accommodation? ____/____/____

18. Did you feel ready to leave transitional accommodation?

1. Yes → probe
2. No → probe

19. What sort of accommodation did you move into immediately after leaving transitional accommodation?

1. Public Housing or Community Housing
2. Community Rooming House
3. Squatting
4. Sleeping rough
5. Private Rental
6. Private Hotel/Boarding House
7. Friends
8. Other THM
9. Caravan Park
10. Refuge - Domestic Violence
11. Refuge - Youth
12. Crisis Accommodation
13. Family
14. Rehabilitation Centre – Drug and Alcohol
15. Hospital - Psych
16. Prison
17. Other ____
18. Own home

20. What town / state was it in? _____ (enter postcode)

21. Are you still in the same accommodation?

1. Yes. → Go to Q25
2. No

22. How long did you live there for? _____ (months)

23. Why did you leave?

1. Didn't answer
2. Sold for redevelopment (GENTRICATION)
3. Accommodation inappropriate
4. Evicted – Rent arrears
5. Evicted – Anti- Social behaviour
6. Evicted – Other Reason
7. Relocating- new region
8. Offered Transitional Housing

- 9. Relationship Breakdown
- 10. Domestic Violence
- 11. Family breakdown
- 12. Safety Issues – Physical or emotional abuse
- 13. Family Reunification
- 14. Health Issues
- 15. Financial difficulties due to gambling
- 16. Financial difficulties due to substance use
- 17. Reduced income due to loss of employment
- 18. Reduced income due to **Centrelink** breaching
- 19. Other _____

24. What sort of accommodation are currently staying in?

- 1. Public Housing or Community Housing
- 2. Community Rooming House
- 3. Squatting
- 4. Sleeping rough
- 5. Private Rental
- 6. Private Hotel/Boarding House
- 7. Friends
- 8. Other THM
- 9. Caravan Park
- 10. Refuge - Domestic Violence
- 11. Refuge - Youth
- 12. Crisis Accommodation
- 13. Family
- 14. Rehabilitation Centre – Drug and Alcohol
- 15. Hospital - Psych
- 16. Prison
- 17. Other ___
- 18. Own home

25. How much rent are you currently paying per month?

\$ _____

26. Using the attached sheet, can you list the places you have stayed in since you left transitional accommodation.

Description current accommodation

Accommodation type	Duration (weeks)	No of times	Reason for leaving
1. <input type="checkbox"/> Public Housing	1. _____	1. ____	1. _____
2. <input type="checkbox"/> Community Housing	2. _____	2. ____	2. _____
3. <input type="checkbox"/> Community Rooming House	3. _____	3. ____	3. _____
4. <input type="checkbox"/> Squatting	4. _____	4. ____	4. _____
5. <input type="checkbox"/> Sleeping Rough – Car/Tent/Park/Street	5. _____	5. ____	5. _____
6. <input type="checkbox"/> Private Rental	6. _____	6. ____	6. _____
7. <input type="checkbox"/> Private Hotel/Boarding House	7. _____	7. ____	7. _____
8. <input type="checkbox"/> Friends	8. _____	8. ____	8. _____
9. <input type="checkbox"/> Other THM	9. _____	9. ____	9. _____
10. <input type="checkbox"/> Caravan Park	10. _____	10. ____	10. _____
11. <input type="checkbox"/> Refuge - Domestic Violence	11. _____	11. ____	11. _____
12. <input type="checkbox"/> Refuge - Youth	12. _____	12. ____	12. _____
13. <input type="checkbox"/> Crisis Accommodation	13. _____	13. ____	13. _____
14. <input type="checkbox"/> Family	14. _____	14. ____	14. _____
15. <input type="checkbox"/> Rehabilitation Centre – Drug and Alcohol	15. _____	15. ____	15. _____
16. <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital - Psych	16. _____	16. ____	16. _____
17. <input type="checkbox"/> Prison	17. _____	17. ____	17. _____
18. <input type="checkbox"/> Other ____	18. _____	18. ____	18. _____

CODING: Primary Secondary Tertiary
 Homeless: Continuous Yes/No
 Housed: Continuous Yes/No

Date / Duration											
Type of tenure											
Location											
Reason for Leaving											
Other Info											

Been in prison between interviews? Yes No.
 Been in drug rehabilitation between interviews? Yes No.
 Been in alcohol rehabilitation between interviews? Yes No.

27. What do you think of your current accommodation?

28. When you moved out of transitional accommodation did you feel like you had control over the decision about

- a. The area where you wanted to live in? Yes No
b. The type of accommodation you would live in? Yes No

29. Do you feel safe and secure in your current accommodation? Yes No

30. Can you tell me what you thought of transitional accommodation?

31. During your stay in transitional accommodation did you have a support worker?

1. Yes
2. No → Go to Q36

32. During your stay in transitional accommodation how often were you in contact with your support worker?

1. Daily
2. Weekly
3. Fortnightly
4. Monthly
5. Rarely saw them
6. Never saw them

33. Did you find that you received adequate assistance from your support agency/worker during your stay in transitional accommodation?

1. To explain the purpose of transitional accommodation? Yes No
2. To explain the role of support workers? Yes No
3. To assist you to find alternative accommodation? Yes No
4. To assist you to move into alternative accommodation? Yes No

34. Are you still in contact with your support agency? Yes No

35. If you had problems with your housing in the future would you seek assistance from the same agency? Yes No

36. I would like to ask you to compare your current situation with the situation you were in before moving into transitional housing? Do you think your current situation is better or worse?

1. Much better
2. Better
3. Same
4. Worse
5. Much worse

6. **Why?**

37. **Do you feel positive or worried about your future housing options?**

- 1. Very positive
- 2. Positive
- 3. Mixed
- 4. Worried
- 5. Very worried
- 6. Neither

Why?

38. **What is the thing you most disliked about being homeless?**

39. **Is there anything you liked about being homeless?**

40. **Do you worry about becoming homeless again?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

41. **Have you spent any time in prison or remand in the last 12 months?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

42. **Have you spent any time in drug rehab in the last 12 months?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

43. **Have you spent any time in a psych hospital in the last 12 months?**

1. Yes
2. No

44. **Have you spent any time in alcohol rehab in the last 12 months?**

1. Yes
2. No

3. Social connectedness

This set of questions refers to your social networks. If you are unsure about the questions, just tell me and I will explain them more clearly. All of these questions relate to the last 12 months

45. Do you have any contact with your family, other than those who are currently living with you?

1. Yes
2. No → Go to Q49

46. How often would you have contact with any family members?

1. Daily
2. Weekly
3. Monthly
4. Every couple of months
5. Once a year
6. Rarely / Never

47. Have you received any financial support from your family in

1. The last week
2. The last month
3. The last three months
4. The last six months
5. Greater than six months
6. Never

48. Do you know any people who are homeless?

1. Yes
2. No → Go to Q51

49. Are any of your friends currently homeless?

1. Yes
2. No → Go to Q51
3. No friends

50. Have you had any contact with your friends who are homeless in

1. The last week
2. In the last month
3. In the last three months
4. More than three months ago
5. Lost contact completely

51. Do you identify with other homeless people?

1. Yes
2. No

If yes, PROBE in what way respondent identifies with other homeless people →

52. Have you ever described yourself as homeless to

1. Your Friends Yes No
2. Your family Yes No
3. People you have meet Yes No
4. Other people Yes No

4. Education and employment

I am now going to ask you some questions about your employment history and its relationship to where you live. I stress that this information is confidential.

RESPONDENT

56. What is your current source of income? (Respondent)

- | | | |
|---|--|---------------------|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Work Full time | | Working |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Work Part time | | |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Casual Work | | |
| 4. <input type="checkbox"/> New Start Allowance | | Unemployed |
| 5. <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Allowance | | |
| 6. <input type="checkbox"/> No Income | | |
| 7. <input type="checkbox"/> Traineeship | | |
| 8. <input type="checkbox"/> Special Benefit | | Not in Labour Force |
| 9. <input type="checkbox"/> Old Age/Veterans Pension | | |
| 10. <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Parents Benefit | | |
| 11. <input type="checkbox"/> Sickness Benefit | | |
| 12. <input type="checkbox"/> Disability Support Benefit | | |
| 13. <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | |
| 14. <input type="checkbox"/> No Information | | |

57. If employed, what kind of job is it? _____

58. How long have you been in your current job? _____ (months)

59. How much did you earn in the last fortnight? \$\$ _____

60. Have you worked at all in the last 12 months?

- Yes
- No → Go to Q69

61. What sort of work was it? _____

62. Have you ever been breached (cut off) by CentreLink?

- Yes
- No

PARTNER

63. What is your partner's current source of income? (Partner)

- | | | |
|---|--|---------------------|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Work Full time | | Working |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Work Part time | | |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Casual Work | | |
| 4. <input type="checkbox"/> New Start Allowance | | Unemployed |
| 5. <input type="checkbox"/> Youth Allowance | | |
| 6. <input type="checkbox"/> No Income | | |
| 7. <input type="checkbox"/> Traineeship | | |
| 8. <input type="checkbox"/> Special Benefit | | Not in Labour Force |
| 9. <input type="checkbox"/> Old Age/Veterans Pension | | |
| 10. <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting Parents Benefit | | |
| 11. <input type="checkbox"/> Sickness Benefit | | |
| 12. <input type="checkbox"/> Disability Support Benefit | | |
| 13. <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | |
| 14. <input type="checkbox"/> No Information | | |

64. If employed, what kind of job is it? _____
65. How long have THEY been in your current job (months) _____
66. How much did THEY earn in the last fortnight? \$\$ _____
67. How would you describe THEIR main occupation? _____

BACK TO Respondent

68. **Would you consider moving house in order to gain or maintain employment in the future?**

1. No
2. Possibly
3. Unsure
4. Probably
5. Yes

69. **Could you tell me if you think being homeless has had any impact on your employment or chances of employment?**

I am now going to ask you some questions about your education. If there are any questions that you do not understand or are unsure of, just let me know and I will try to explain them to you more clearly.

70. **Have you undertaken any education in the last 12 months?**

1. Yes → _____
2. No

71. **Have you undertaken any training in the last 12 months?**

1. Yes → _____
2. No

72. **(Ask only those with children). Are your children currently at school?**

1. Yes
2. No - *Finish of formal interview – Go to next page*

73. **If yes, have your children had to change schools IN THE LAST YEAR as a result of your housing problems?**

1. Yes
2. No - *Finish of formal interview – Go to next page*

Thankyou for agreeing to participate in both of these interview, and for being so generous with you time. I hope that everything works out for you. If you have any problems, queries or concerns please call me on the number on the card and I will endeavour to assist you.

Finally, here is the \$60 for you. Could I ask that you sign this form to confirm that I have made the payment to you.

Respondent Signature: _____

Interview Finish Time:

Administration

- Payment Made Researcher reimbursed Data Entered
 Interested in on-going involvement with the project

Appendix H: Informed consent form



Faculty of the Constructed Environment

School of Social Science and Planning

Consent form for persons being interviewed and completing questionnaires

Name of participant:

Project Title: Longitudinal Analysis of Homeless Households in Victoria

Name of investigator(s)

Tel: (bus)

Tel: (home)

Guy Johnson

1. I consent to participate in the above research project. This research project has been explained to me and I have read and kept a plain language description of the research.
2. I have agreed to participate in an interview or answer a questionnaire.
3. I acknowledge that:
 - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data.
 - The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching and may not directly benefit me.
 - My anonymity and the confidentiality of information provided is assured.
 - The security of the data obtained is assured following completion of the study.
 - The research outcomes may be published and a report will be provided to me.
4. In order to conduct a second interview, I give permission to the researcher to contact family members and friends that I have identified in the first interview. Further, I consent to providing access to government and non-Government records for the SOLE purpose of establishing contact with me to arrange a second interview.

Signature: _____ Date: _____
(Participant)

Signature: _____ Date: _____
(Investigator)

Any queries or complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chair of the Faculty of the Constructed Environment Research Ethics Sub-Committee, RMIT, GPO Box 2476 V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is 9925 3957.

Appendix I: Career summary sheet

Appendix J: Comparison of baseline, follow-up and attrition groups in terms of selected variables

Table K1 Comparison of baseline, follow up and attrition groups in terms of selected variables

Distribution of the sample:	T1 Baseline	T2 Follow up	T2 Attrition
Number of each type	103	79	21
Per cent of the total	100	79	21
1. Housing / Homeless Characteristics			
Age at T1 (mean years)	31	31	27
Age first homeless (mean years)	24	24	22
Cumulative duration homeless – mean months	33	35	27
<i>Temporal profile (per cent)</i>			
Short term (0-3 months)	18	14	24
Medium tem (4-11 months)	17	20	14
Long term (12+ months)	65	66	62
TOTAL	100	100	100
<i>Household type (per cent)</i>			
Single	55	51	67
Couple	8	6	9
Single parent family	32	38	14
Couple with children	5	5	10
TOTAL	100	100	100
<i>Onset pathway (per cent)</i>			
Domestic violence	14	13	19
Housing crisis	23	24	19
Mental illness	5	5	9
Substance use	18	30	5
Youth	40	38	48
TOTAL	100	100	100
Completed Year 12	23	25	14
Training last six months	11	9	14
Family financial assistance last six months	25	25	19
Out-of-home care	27	29	24
Victim of abuse (sexual, physical etc)	18	19	16
Adverse childhood experiences – global indicator	31	29	33
Incarcerated – <i>Lifetime prevalence</i>	23	23	24
Eviction – <i>Lifetime prevalence</i>	57	60	43
Two or more episodes of homelessness	67	67	67
Has been accommodated in the HSS previously	75	85	48
Service utilisation (mean number of times accommodated in HSS)	3.8	3.7	4.3
Ever been in psychiatric hospital - <i>Lifetime prevalence</i>	23	18	33
Drug abuse – <i>Lifetime prevalence</i>	50	53	48
Alcohol abuse – <i>Lifetime prevalence</i>	19	18	24
Substance abuse – global indicator	55	58	52
Reports domestic violence prior to first homeless episode	14	13	19
Identity index	0.59	0.41	0.64
Spent time in primary population	55	57	52
Spent time in tertiary population	19	22	14