HANGING OUT IN THE CONCRETE JUNGLE:

EXPLORING THE CULTURE OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN

MELBOURNE

Submitted By

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No parts of this thesis have been submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the Australian Catholic University Research Ethics Committee. Editorial assistance in the preparation of this thesis was obtained from Ms. R. Almond. Editorial services included proof reading the final draft of the thesis.

Jennifer Hill

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Abstract

Since early nineteenth century much homeless literature has conceptualised groups of homeless people as a homeless 'subculture' with distinct characteristics and norms. Theories of youth homelessness suggest that young people who participate in the subculture are at a high risk of experiencing chronic homelessness into their adulthood yet, until recently very little has been known about the youth homeless culture, particularly in the Australian context. In order to widen our understanding of the homelessness experienced by young people we must first understand the context in which they conduct their lives. This thesis is the result of an ethnographic study that examines the extent to which a youth homeless subculture exists, then, what its key features are.

Findings from this study foremost revealed that in the broadest sense of the term, participants represented a subcultural unit with behaviours, rules and cultural practices counter to dominant values. In addition to this subculture was a number of smaller 'subgroups' that were found existing, but not independently alongside it. Association with particular subgroups was dependable on a number of factors, including: geography, substance use, shared interests and tastes in music, and fashion. This research found that subcultural participation empowered participants and reinforced distinct collective and individual identities. The process that underpinned interactions across subculture groups further shaped social identities, relationships and norms. Consequently, this negotiation process both practically and symbolically benefited the young people involved.

Glossary of Terms

The following terms are described in relation to the content of this thesis.

Bupe	Buprenorphine - A Drug used to Treat Addiction to Heroin
Choof	Marijuana
Dog	A term that describes a person who informs on someone to the authorities.
Lag	To 'dob' on someone.
Kicks	Cross training shoes or sneakers.
Mushie Caps	Magic Mushrooms – A hallucinogenic drug, illegal in Australia.
Seroquel	An antipsychotic approved for the treatment of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder.
Street Family	A term used to describe the relationships that some homeless young people form with other homeless people. Street family associations resemble 'fictive kin' (McCarthy et al., 2002) and may include pseudo parents, siblings, uncles and aunties.
Street life	A term used to describe the environment in which participants live their lives, or that denotes a lifestyle that is characterised by 'both legal and illegal activities such as drinking, drug use, panhandling, scavenging, vagrancy, crime, and delinquency that occur in street locations'. (Stablein, 2011, p. 292)
Subculture	A 'relatively diffuse social network having a shared identity, distinctive meanings around certain ideas, practices, and objects, and a sense of marginalisation from or resistance to a perceived "conventional" society.' (Haenfler, 2014, p. 16)
Subgroup	Smaller groups formed within a subculture or as an extension of the subculture. Subgroups share subcultural elements yet can be distinguished from one another by minor differences (e.g. music – thrash metal and industrial metal).
Transitional Housing	A form of short- to- medium term supported accommodation

provisioned by welfare and community organisations.

Preface

If Cameron could have a movie written about him, he would: he would demand full screen rights, the job of the director and both lead roles. It is for this reason that I am certain he would not object to his story setting the scene for this thesis – no doubt he would prefer I skip 'the boring bits' and get into the thick of the drama.

As a seven year old Cameron* was fascinated by lives of the characters in his favourite television show, *Neighbours*. In contrast to *Neighbours*, Cameron could not recall the last time his mother attended a parent-teacher meeting, nor could he remember the last weekend barbecue he attended, and the ritual of a family dinner was a foreign concept. Of his childhood, Cameron recalled the lengths his mother would go to in order to avoid contact with his teachers. Then, the weekends he spent alone at home, for his mother to return from her Saturday night out followed by the clinking sounds of glasses and then inevitable arguing.

In school, Cameron felt nothing like his classmates or the social world that surrounded him. From an early age, he paid enough attention to know that he did not wear the 'right' clothes, or pack the 'cool' recess lunches. On the rare occasion that Cameron received an invitation to play at a friend's home, it always ended in an awkward car ride back to the residential unit he shared with five other children and he would receive no further invitations. Should Cameron receive a Ronald McDonald note inviting him eat cheese burgers and ice-cream cake for a classmate's birthday he was rarely able to attend, unless one of the many social workers in his life ceded their Saturday to accompany him.

As the years passed and his home environment changed back and forth from foster homes to residential settings, Cameron discovered that he felt most at ease with others in his position. He slowly felt accepted by a peer group who, like him, lived in care and whose lives were in contrast to those Cameron watched on the television. Learning the ropes, Cameron found ways to compensate for a lack of pocket money and to fill in time between the hours when he was meant to be attending school and dinner time. At thirteen years of age, filling in time consisted of scoring drugs for the older kids, for which he was always 'chopped out' (given a portion in return).

The days that Cameron actually attended school were marred by fights and drama that always seemed to be because of his sexual identity. Cameron identified as being gay and knew that the aggression towards him was increased by his flamboyant personality that others either loved or loathed. Cameron did not care too much by this stage, as he had learnt that his personality was an asset. At fifteen he was placed in a residential unit in Melbourne and was quickly shown by his new friends where he could pick up men. Having found a taste for heroin in his last placement, it was necessary for Cameron to supplement his income and he quickly became involved with the group of young men that hung around a St Kilda park known as 'The Beat'.

Initially, in Cameron's eyes, this group of young people represented a family. They found refuge together by sharing of the elements of their lives that others may never experience: their drug use, childhood experiences, homelessness, involvement in sex work, and a distinct resistance to those who existed outside the margins of their world bound them together. Likewise, their shared tastes in music, movies, and fashion formed the basis of friendship. On the nights where business was slow on The Beat and the last of potential clients had been propositioned, the boys would move as a group to a nightclub to seek clientele and to dance and socialise. As with any fraction of society, there were unspoken rules to be followed that governed life on the street. Breaking them saw young people excluded or, depending on the severity of the rule broken, physically punished. These social mores prevented chaos and made for smoother management of dynamics within the group.

After absconding several times from the residential units where Cameron had been placed as a teenager, he was not fazed when he was exited from care. He moved in with a friend with whom he had shared a foster home years before. Within a month, the tenancy failed and Cameron started couch surfing at friends' homes. Should he not secure a couch for the night he would stay with one of a number of men in exchange for sexual favours. These arrangements were rarely suitable and would often end violently or in conflict over Cameron's level of illicit drug use. Reluctant to be tied down to someone for too long or to curb his increasing drug use, Cameron found himself staying at various

youth refuges in Melbourne. Despite the rules that each refuge presented and the temporary nature of homeless refuges, Cameron felt secure in this type of accommodation.

Moving between a number of youth refuges created a social life for Cameron. It was in the refuges where Cameron met young men who were rougher, tougher and gutsier than those at The Beat. Like Cameron, they routinely filled their days with making money, purchasing drugs, and socialising. Cameron's income was predominantly comprised of what he earned from sex work and Government assistance payments. This was in contrast to the young men who made money through various illegal avenues; Cameron's crew did not consider their work on The Beat to be illegal. This put the group in a somewhat superior position than those they considered to be 'Boob Heads' (those who embody prison culture) or 'Junkies'. While not all of Cameron's friends used drugs, the majority did and maintained this by participating in sex work rather than petty crime. This meant two things: drug use amongst Cameron's group was high as sex work was lucrative, and it was rare that members were involved in the Juvenile Justice system. Whilst prison culture was despised by many of Cameron's social group, he was fascinated by the characters he met in the refuges in which he stayed.

Alan was one of these characters. He wore the look of a kid who had seen it all and did not mind seeing beyond. Cameron had met Alan through residents at a refuge and steered clear of him. Alan looked like the guys Cameron had distanced himself from since Grade 6 and was one of the young people who slept near Southern Cross Train Station. The economy of the street, the symbiotic relationships, and the interaction between Cameron and Alan's crew was complex and fundamental to the survival and safety of young homeless people. Those who Cameron perceived as Boob Heads offered him and his friends' protection from predators while they worked on The Beat in exchange for money or drugs; however this 'offer' was less of a favour and more of a stand-over tactic. There was no choice in this offer. If protection was refused, the boys would be robbed by those offering it as soon as they were alone.

One evening, Cameron had serviced his last client on The Beat and had begun to make his way to the refuge. En route to the refuge he was intercepted by Alan and two boys Cameron vaguely knew. 'Oi, working boy,' Alan yelled out, 'help a brother out will ya? Lend us $50 yeah?' Cameron kept walking, knowing full well that one of the refuge workers would still be awake to open the door for him. Ignored, Alan and the boys gave chase and caught up quickly: 'Ya think ya too good for us ya fag?' Cameron had no reply; he knew what was coming and began to empty his pockets. That made no difference. Cameron covered his face while the boys kicked him, breaking his collarbone and some ribs, taking his earnings and the little packet of heroin put aside for the next morning. Rather than return to the refuge where his assailants would be, he started walking towards South Melbourne where sanctuary could be found in a friend's squat. Ignoring the hospital just two blocks from the abandoned house, Cameron curled up for the night after telling his story and receiving amateur medical attention from his friends.

The following evening saw a key shift in Cameron's life. As per the social convention on the Street, three boys who regularly 'spotted' for Cameron accompanied him in a search for Alan. Despite his objections, the boys dragged Cameron up and down Burke St, across Russell and all over Swanston St, grilling those who knew Alan for his whereabouts. Later, Cameron would explain that although the thought of what would be done to Alan made him sick, it had to be done. That was just the way it was in his world. Not retaliating to previous violence would serve to strengthen Alan's reputation, leading to Cameron's rejection from the social group and having negative consequences for the reputation of the boys who spotted for him. The boys in Cameron's group could not work without the protection of the spotters. This cultural practice, outside the norms of mainstream society, was necessary to maintain stability amongst the cultural participants; it was a rule that prevented further chaos in an already-chaotic world.

Cameron was eventually charged and sentenced to 18 months in prison for causing grievous bodily harm to Alan. Although not quite old enough to vote, and despite having a relatively clean record, Cameron was sentenced to adult prison. In accordance with subcultural rule and entrenched values,

Cameron accepted his situation and 'copped it sweet', pleading guilty so that the three boys who accompanied him that night were not implicated. Once incarcerated, Cameron could either adapt to prison life and the 'Boob Head' philosophy he despised, or spend the next 18 months as he spent his childhood: lonely and not fitting in. So began Cameron's criminal education. Amongst learned behaviours and language, Cameron was introduced to a class of drugs easily obtained via the prison doctors, which were quick to dull his thoughts and highly addictive.

When Cameron was released he found he was not able to make as much money as he once did on The Beat. Under the influence of a substantial amount of prescription drugs, Cameron experienced many blackouts. His life was more chaotic than prior to his conviction, and he would often wake up not remembering what had taken place the previous day. This change in circumstance suited Cameron who had been excluded from his former social group, after cheating one of the boys out of money for drugs. Cameron no longer visited night clubs and had no-one whom he could rely on for friendship or protection. In January 2013, six months after his release from prison, Cameron's boyfriend found him in a laneway in St Kilda not far from the park where he worked. Cameron was unconscious, presumably affected by an overdose of heroin and large quantities of benzodiazepines. Three days later hospital staff turned off his life support. Six days later, accompanied by some of Cameron's old friends, I attended Cameron's wake.

<p align="center">***</p>

In the country town of Victoria where Cameron spent his childhood, city friends paid their respects and I reflected on the discussions about his life that Cameron and I had over the years. Attending his wake offered me further insight into Cameron's life: from childhood, Cameron's life was far from the norm. As a young man he was deprived of feelings of worth and he carried a foreboding sense of failure. He lacked the stability of family or social networks, thus his urge to belong was not met until he found inclusion in the street culture of homeless young people.

As a youth worker I had known Cameron for many years, yet prior to his participation in this research, I was unaware of the sheer level of isolation and exclusion he had experienced. Reflecting on the many discussions about the social side of his life, I began to wonder how terms such as the 'socially disengaged' can be applied to those with which society is not willing to engage? Young homeless people with backgrounds similar to Cameron's tend not to disengage; rather, they have existed on the margins of society with little access to the structures that influence a child's well-being. Homelessness was not an 'experience' for Cameron: it was his life. His story is not necessarily of his homelessness, but it is, to a greater extent, a tale of neglect, of an inherent need to belong, and of a culture resting on the margins of mainstream society.

Cameron satisfied his urge for friendship and acceptance; it was ultimately found within a culture governed by its own rituals, values and rules that for the most part are in contrast to those found in mainstream society. Paradoxically it was these subcultural rules and values that were key tools to his survival, yet these rules and values also contributed to the circumstances that surrounded Cameron's passing in January 2013.

Introduction

This thesis is an ethnographic study of a subculture of young people who are homeless in Melbourne's City Business District (*CBD.*) My focus is young people who are literally without shelter—these young people are commonly referred to as 'sleeping rough' or residing in temporary accommodation and couch surfing. Within Australia, rough sleepers are defined as experiencing 'primary' homelessness, and those in temporary accommodation are classified as experiencing 'secondary' homelessness (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1992). Although 'sleeping rough' may correspond with a stereotypical view of homelessness, people literally without shelter are thought to constitute the statistically smallest section of Australia's homeless population (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2008).

Working within the homeless sector, I have given much consideration to the idea of a homeless youth subculture. Whilst the homeless culture or subculture has been a widely-used concept among overseas researchers with an interest in the processes by which people become entrenched in the homeless population (Mayers, 2001; Karabanow, 2008; Ravenhill, 2008), in recent years it has also gained momentum in Australian studies of young people's homelessness (Barker, 2010; 2012, Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008; Johnson & Chamberlain 2008; Johnson, Gronda & Coutts, 2008; Pinkey & Ewing, 2006). This thesis aims to build on this work through a) questioning the existence of a homeless youth subculture in Melbourne and b) emphasising the importance of understanding how young people's biographies influence their experience of homelessness and possible entry into a homeless youth subculture.

Key Research Questions

Following this research aim, the central research questions are:

- Can an existing homeless youth subculture be located in Melbourne?

- What are the key features, characteristics, and cultural practices found in groups to indicate a possible homeless youth subculture?

- To what degree do homeless young people adopt subcultural behaviours and values in order to belong to a social network?

Despite the far-reaching influence of these understandings of people who were homeless, there is a paucity of Australian research critiquing the 'homeless identity' or 'subculture'. With the exception of Fopp's (2009) critical analysis of metaphors such as 'homeless careers', the ways that people experiencing homelessness are identified have rarely been the subject of detailed analysis in Australia.

Significance

Dominant representations of homeless young people are not sufficiently informed by young people who are experiencing homelessness. Parker and Fopp (2004) suggest that until recently, a large amount homeless research is about 'the homeless' as a broad or abstract concept, rather than the people who experience homelessness. Although not referring to subculture, Horsell's (2006) accounts explain this disparity; he suggests that knowledge about homelessness in Australia reflects the power/knowledge axis, where the perspectives and insights of those who are homeless are overlooked or 'reconfigured through an expert gaze' (Horsell, 2006, p. 221). My research aims to create space and add to a small body of Australian literature (e.g. Zufferey & Kerr, 2004) where people experiencing homelessness speak for, and about, themselves. This study is significant because young people experiencing homelessness talk about their homelessness and what this does, and does not, mean for them. Prior to exploring the extent of homelessness experienced by young people, it is necessary to define two terms which are used throughout the thesis.

Defining 'Subculture'

Michael Clark (1974) suggests that the concept of subcultures has been used so indiscriminately and uncritically that it may be useless. Employing a very broad understanding of subcultures, we might think of them as smaller pieces of a larger culture or society, differing in some way from mainstream culture. Haenfler (2014, p. 16) describes them as a:

> Relatively diffuse social network having a shared identity, distinctive meanings around certain ideas, practices, and objects, and a sense of marginalisation from or resistance to a perceived 'conventional' society.

These aspects will be discussed further in later chapters. The important aspect here is that subculture is not a 'thing', not an immediately recognisable 'group', but rather a diverse set of meanings and practices that change over time.

Defining Homelessness

While the denotation is seemingly clear, 'homelessness' is a multifocal term. However, for the purpose of this thesis it has specific meaning attached to it that is located within a historical, cultural, and social context. In the Australian context, the legislated definition of homelessness considers the security of one's accommodation. Section 4(1) of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994) stipulates that for the purposes of the Act 'an individual person is homeless if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing' (p. 3).

While this definition takes into account notions of safety and security, it is not able to separate the literal homeless from those at risk of homelessness. There is a consensus that homelessness is a multidimensional concept, experienced on many levels, and is 'influenced by context, culture, gender, class, age, and sexuality' (Zufferey & Kerr, 2004, p. 36).

An alternative definition of homelessness that exists within the cultural context is described by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2003). Based on a typology approach, this definition is comprised of three categories: primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness:

Primary homelessness: Someone who is without acceptable accommodation, and has taken to 'sleeping rough', a term that denotes living on the street;

Secondary homelessness: Those who couch surf, temporarily staying with relatives or friends, in emergency accommodation or refuges;

Tertiary homelessness: Residents of private boarding houses who do not live within minimal housing standards (often sharing a communal bathroom or kitchen), without a fixed tenure.

Widely accepted in Australia, the cultural definition has assisted academics to guide the translations of the various dimensions of homelessness and contributes to the conceptual framework informing the National Census count of the homeless population (Australian Bureau of Statistics (*ABS*), 2011). This indirectly has an influence on service provision within the community services sector and the practice of welfare, social work and youth work.

The premise 'at risk of homelessness' informs much of the legislative definitions of homelessness throughout Western countries. In the United Kingdom, statutory homeless households are deemed homeless if they are literally without accommodation, or threatened with homelessness (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012). Similarly, in the American context, it is the characteristics of the environment where one sleeps that demarcate an individual's homelessness (van der Ploeg & Scholte, 1997). More recently, the Canadian Homeless Research Network (2012) adopted

a typology approach and conceptualises homelessness in the milieu of Unsheltered, Emergency

Sheltered, Provisionally Accommodated, and At Risk of Homelessness.

As the provided examples demonstrate, defining homelessness within the cultural context considers

the fluidity of homelessness and recognises that it is not linear. Rather, homelessness is a

multidimensional process that begins with an event or trigger and is experienced differently

depending on variables such as gender and age. It is for this reason that further consideration is

required when thinking about specific experiences of homelessness.

Youth Homelessness in Australia

> *'The fact is that there are homeless children and young people dying in Australia,*
> *some from suicide, others simply from neglect. That is not something our nation can*
> *ignore'.*
> (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1989)

In 1985, the push for a youth-specific definition of homelessness gained momentum with varying

conventional, literal, and person-centred proposals (Crane & Brannock, 1996, p. 6). The National

Youth Coalition for Housing (*NYCH*) proposed that homelessness occurs amongst young people in

'the absence of secure, adequate and satisfactory shelter as perceived by the young person' (NYCH, p.

1, cited in Brannock & Crane, 1996, p. 6). Moving away from literal notions of home, the Human

Rights Equal Opportunity Commission (*HEROC*) regarded young people's experiences of

homelessness within the context of detachment, safety and the vulnerability of the young person

(Brannock & Crane, 1996). Then, later that year, the third category of the accepted cultural definition

was replaced with a description that includes young people in 'longer term supported accommodation

for homeless people (e.g. hostels, youth housing programs, transitional accommodation)' (Brannock

& Crane, 1996, p. 6).

While the shift in defining young people's homelessness was a focal point of debate during the 1980s,

in recent years this dialogue has been minimal. To clarify what youth homelessness means to young

people, Fitzpatrick (2000) illustrates how their experience may be defined. In this context, privacy, security, safety and the permanent nature of accommodation are the most important factors that young people speak of when defining home and homelessness. More broadly, young people's thoughts revolve around rejection and detachment, particularly the absence of one's family and having control over one's life. Young people additionally make a clear separation between their own circumstances and those of the stereotypical 'skid row' assumptions of a homeless person. These examples demonstrate that literal homelessness is not the only factor in how young people define their homelessness. Their responses are sophisticated and consistent with literature that separates youth from adult homelessness in the Australian context.

Responding to Youth Homelessness

'By 1990, no Australian child will be living in poverty.'
(Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, June 23rd, 1987)

Prior to the 1980s, youth homelessness in Australia was not a prioritised social issue (National Youth Commission, 2008), and our understandings of homelessness were guided by academic research and welfare practice. With regard to both these social priorities and research focus, adult men were the primary concern and subjects of research (Austerberry & Watson, 1986). Young homeless people, aged between 12 and 25 years, formed a largely hidden population and were not typically featured in literature focussing on Australian homeless. An exception to this is evident in research by performed by Shaw (1969) then later, by Jordan (1994)[1], who both documented the presence of young homeless people at adult services in Perth and Melbourne respectively.

The increasing number of young people accessing homeless services prompted the Federal Government to allocate three million dollars towards a Youth Services Scheme with the aim to provide young people temporary accommodation in refuges across Australia, and financial assistance towards securing their long-term housing (HEROC, 1989). In the four years following this, the Youth

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[1] Based on fieldwork conducted as part of Jordan's 1973 thesis '*Inner-city homeless men in Melbourne'*.

Supported Accommodation Program (*YSAP*) was established under the Government-funded

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (*SAAP*) (Fopp, 1993). While SAAP was designed to

provide supported accommodation to those who experience homelessness, YSAP was intended 'to

assist the young person to stabilise his/her living pattern' (HEROC, 1989, p. 169) specifically for

those aged between 12 and 25 years of age. Despite the establishment of YSAP, Fopp (1993) suggests

that there was a lack of realistic exit points from supported accommodation and on-going support for

homeless young people. It was clear that further programs specific to the needs of young people were

required to cope with what was fast becoming an epidemic of youth homelessness (Fopp, 1993).

In 1987 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, headed by Commissioner Brian

Burdekin, launched an inquiry into the state and extent of Australia's homeless youth population. The

inquiry resulted in the publication of the seminal report, *Our Homeless Children* (1989)[2], which

revealed the multifaceted and complex nature of youth homelessness to the wider public. What

followed was an immediate Governmental response to youth homelessness. However, in the twenty

years following the initial expansion of SAAP availability to young people, there was found to be a

lack of national intervention programs that adequately addressed youth homelessness (National Youth

Commission, 2008). Funding stagnation and a lack of growth in community housing are considered to

have contributed to the inadequacy of the implemented responses for our young people (2008, p. 51),

and with the exception of nationwide initiatives such as the Reconnect Program, providing a response

to youth homelessness had become the responsibility of State Governments.

In 2007, the National Youth Commission launched an independent and community-driven inquiry

into youth homelessness, funded by the Caledonia Foundation. The ensuing findings report of the

inquiry was released on the 3rd of April 2008, the same date that *The Oasis*, a documentary focusing

on the stories of young homeless people in the setting of a Sydney youth refuge, aired on prime time

television. In total, 319 young people contributed to the 21 public hearings held during the National

Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness. A further 91 submissions were received from

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[22] Also referred to as the *Burdekin Report*.

State departments and welfare organisations to identify the extent, needs and issues of youth homelessness, twenty years after the Burdekin-led Inquiry (National Youth Commission, 2008).

Within the following year, Government responses to homelessness included the goal of halving homelessness by 2020. The Rudd Government planned to achieve this goal by creating exit points from homelessness into long-term housing, as well as improving intervention practices, as outlined in the released White Paper-*The Road Home* (Australian Government, 2008). In addition to defining the Australian Government's position on homelessness, the paper reintroduced homelessness to the political agenda and addressed the community's responsibility to young people:

> Homelessness is everyone's responsibility. Ending homelessness requires sustained long-term effort from all levels of government, business, the not-for profit sector and the community. (Australian Government, 2008, p. viii)

Five years on, despite the attention that youth homelessness received in 2008, the last Australian census count revealed that there are 26,238 homeless young people between the ages of 12 and 24, an increase from 21,943 in 2006 (ABS, 2012). Explanations for such increases in homelessness are complex, therefore academic discourse that conceptualises and shapes our understandings of youth homelessness, its causes, and the young people who are affected by it, is invaluable to those who work within the welfare sector.

Negotiating Key Understandings of Youth Homelessness

> *'Homeless youth are neither architects of their own journeys nor objects of external forces; they are in fact both, attempting to make sense of their lives and identities within an environment of choice and constraint.'*
> (Karabanow, 2005, p. 124)

Two primary but contrasting perspectives that are central to academic debate regarding theories of homelessness are the structural and individualist explanations (Neal, 1997, p. 49; Christian, 2003, p. 86). These dominant theories propose that it is either the wider social conditions that shape a person's homelessness, or that the individual is responsible for their own homelessness due to characteristics

and failings that cause and sustain their homelessness. More recently, a balanced approach to conceptualising homelessness has featured in homeless studies (McNaughton, 2008); this approach contends that homelessness is caused by individual factors that occur *within* a particular structural context that are exacerbated by a lack of resources, such as human, social and financial capital. These factors have the potential to intertwine and create the prime conditions under which homelessness can be generated. In addition, Fitzpatrick, Pawson, Bramley and Wilcox (2012) suggest that 'the balance of causes [of homelessness] differs over time, between countries, and varies between demographic groups' (p. 3). A significant body of literature regarding homelessness is informed by this combination of key perspectives, conceptualising the entry into, exit from, and experience of youth homelessness as 'pathways' (Clapham, 2003; Fitzpatrick, 1999; Johnson, Gronda & Coutts, 2008; Mallett et al., 2010; Snow & Anderson, 1993; Quilgars, Johnsen & Pleace, 2008).

Conceptualising the 'Problem People': Pathways into Homelessness

Informed by typologies of homelessness, the various pathways to youth homelessness are categorised as domestic violence, housing crisis, mental health, substance abuse and the youth pathway (Fitzpatrick, 1999; Johnson, Gronda & Coutts, 2008). The distinction between youth and adult homelessness is necessary; it enables the issues and needs that are unique to youth homelessness to be presented in public and policy discourse. There is a consensus amongst Australian researchers that the foremost differences between adult and youth homelessness are its causes (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2002; Couch, 2009; HEROC, 1989; Mallett, Rosenthal, Keys & Averill, 2010; National Youth Commission, 2008; van der Ploeg & Scholte, 1997).

Family conflict is often cited as the main precursor to youth homelessness, followed by a range of further contributing factors in the youth pathway, including; sexual preference, ethnicity, the refugee experience, and exiting of out-of-home care (Fitzpatrick, 2000; Johnson, Gronda & Coutts, 2008, p. 52; Mallett et al., 2010; Martijn & Sharpe, 2006). McNaughton (2008) and Quilgars et al. (2008) suggest that youth homelessness is highly transitional and is 'a result of a complex interaction

between individual characteristics and experiences and wider structural factors' (Quilgars et al., 2008, p. 43). Clapham (2003) writes that recognising the pathways has potential to influence intervention methods designed and tailored to youth homelessness:

> Homelessness can be seen as an episode or episodes in a person's housing pathway. The pathways framework can shed light on the factors that lead to homelessness, influence the nature of the experience and enable some people to move out of it. (p. 123)

Those with adverse childhood experiences or those who have been subjected to exclusion in the past are more likely to experience a longer 'career' of homelessness (Johnson, Gronda & Coutts, 2010); as a conceptual framework, the career analogy can map the process of a young person transitioning through homelessness by situating the various stages found within many experiences of homelessness (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1998; Hughes & Wright, 2010; Karabanow, 2004; Wallace, 1965).

Youth Homelessness as a Process: Career Trajectories

Research by Chamberlain, MacKenzie and Johnson (Chamberlain and Johnson 2002; Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1994; Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998; Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2006; MacKenzie and Chamberlain 1995; MacKenzie and Chamberlain 2003) conducted during the 1990s and early 2000s has made an influential contribution to the ways that the homeless are identified and understood. Underpinning this research is the proposition of a 'homeless identity' and 'homeless subculture'. These constructions of who 'homeless people' are, and the distinct 'subculture' that organises their daily lives, were derived from Chamberlain and MacKenzie' (1998) model of a 'homeless career'. They developed this concept first for youth homelessness and later applied it to adult homelessness. As their understandings of the 'homeless career' evolved, representations of the people assumed to be travelling this career path also became more nuanced.

MacKenzie and Chamberlain (1998; 2003) hypothesise that youth homelessness is best understood as a process or a 'career' with many complex layers. This concept is illustrated in figure 1[3] as an 'ideal-typical model' (Mackenzie, 2003, p. 13) representing the biographical stages they have found within young people's experiences of homelessness.

Fig 1: Homeless Youth Career

Starts to leave home	Permanent Break		Drops out of school		Transition to chronicity
At-risk	In and out	Homeless student		Homeless and unemployed	Chronic homelessness
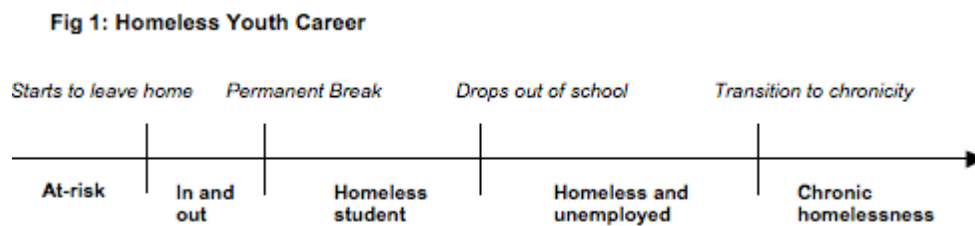
Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2004) emphasise that the 'youth homeless career' is not representative of all young homeless people, rather, it is a heuristic device;

> …used to order reality, so that the core characteristics of the temporal process can be seen more clearly. Individual cases do not necessarily reproduce the model in every detail and people can move along the career trajectory at different speeds. (p. 14)

It is during the last transitional stage of the youth homeless career that Chamberlain and MacKenzie posit that a young person may come to 'accept' and 'adapt' to their homelessness by assuming a homeless identity, and participating in a 'homeless subculture' (2003b, p. 12). The subculture that Chamberlain and MacKenzie reference here is the focus of the research that informs this thesis.

Thesis Structure

Chapter One explores the main body of literature relevant to this study. The intention is to locate the reader in the current discourse of subculture and young people. It begins with a comprehensive analysis of past and present subcultural research indicating the possibility of existing subgroups with unique characteristics that separate them from a wider homeless culture. Chapter Two describes the

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[3] Figure 1 (Adapted from MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2003, p. 16)

research methodology and the processes involved in collecting data. The chapter aims to situate the studies of homelessness within an ethnographic methodology and thus discusses the fieldwork component of this thesis, and the challenges faced during the process. The participants' stories that are subjected to analysis in Chapter Three were gathered from the interviews in fieldwork. This chapter introduces the young people, tells their stories and begins to question the idea of the existence of a homeless youth subculture in Melbourne. Putting together the data analysis and the literature explored for this study, this thesis concludes by elaborating the salient findings of the study which relate to homeless young people and subcultures. This includes a reflection on the ways in which the research questions have been addressed. Finally, the conclusion addresses issues indicated by the research that are recommended as subjects for future research.

Chapter One

Locating the 'Sub' Within the Culture

'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.'

(Johnson, 2006, p. 42)

As I have established, youth homelessness in Australia is a pervasive social issue that requires greater understanding. The existing body of knowledge is largely drawn from evidence-based research that questions the role that social, structural, systematic and individual factors play in young people's homelessness (Fopp, 1993; Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2006; Mallett et al., 2008; Mallett, et al., 2010; Mayock, Corr & O'Sullivan Oliveira, 2008; National Youth Commission, 2008). While this has resulted in a large body of Australian literature focussing on the causes of youth homelessness, there is little written about the cultural and social worlds of young homeless people, and in particular, a homeless youth subculture. Therefore, this chapter also draws from international studies that concentrate on the social worlds of young homeless people and their cultural practices and behaviours. Within this literature, characteristics, norms and practices have been identified, which point to a subculture amongst homeless young people. In this chapter I will explore these practices and behaviours under the following themes: friendship, identity, routines, risk-taking behaviours, gender and the use of space.

One major paradigm has informed conceptualisations of the youth experience more than any other: that of youth subcultural theory, together with the related concept of post-subcultural theory. Youth attitude and behaviour is most obviously represented in youth subculture. Subculture refers to the system of attitudes, behaviours and lifestyles possessed by groups in opposition to the dominant cultural system (Cohen, 1972). Usually applied to 'deviant' or subversive youth cultures, subculture has become a way to explain the alienation of young people from mainstream culture (Kehily, 2007).

Not surprisingly, youth subcultures have been of intense interest to sociologists and welfare policy makers since the last part of the century, due to their perceived threat on the dominant social system.

There are three distinct periods of research into subcultures. Work at the University of Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s opened up the first debates on young people. There was a shift in the 1970s when the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham (*CCCS*) dominated the field of youth research, followed in the late 20th century by the emergence of post-subcultural theories. According to Blackman (2005), while the work of the Chicago school and the CCCS gave priority to the collective, the attention of postmodern subcultural theories has been towards the individual. This is problematic insofar as it has attenuated the theoretical concentrations of subcultural theory, as it does not account for economic, gendered or cultural difference, or for the political potential of the collective.

Some Theoretical Starting Points: Academic Debates surrounding Subcultures

The Chicago School

The Chicago school came to prominence under the direction of Robert Park in 1913 (Blackman 2005) but it was not until the 1920s that youth theory began to appear, when Ernest Burgess constructed ethnographic maps of the social and cultural territories of the Chicago population. By the 1920s and 1930s the Chicago school refuted the dominant psychological theories of deviance which claimed that 'delinquency' was a psychological factor. Instead, delinquency was understood within its social-cultural context rather than away from it, with deviant behaviour being explained as a functional response by young people to their marginalised positions (Bennet & Kahn-Harris, 2004). Figuring prominently in the Chicago School's development of subcultural theory was Robert K. Merton, who introduced his social theory of deviance in 1938, later revised in *Social Theory and Structure* (1957). Merton devised a typology of 'structural strain' in which he identified five modes of social adaption which young people adopt: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion. In his

typology, Merton offers explanations of deviance based on the means of attaining mainstream cultural goals and the rejection of them: Merton posits that at one extreme, conformists will accept and adhere to cultural goals and pursue them through legitimate means (such as education), and at the other, rebels will reject both mainstream and cultural goals and their means of attainment, for example, rejecting school and engaging in subculture.

The value of Merton's theory of deviance derives from his argument that it results from the interplay of culture and structure in society (Blackman 2005). In reacting to negative responses from the dominant society to infractions of its moral code, many subcultures become locked in a process of what Merton (cited in Bennet & Kahn-Harris, 2004, p. 4) called 'deviance amplification,' in which the negative response of the adult society compels members of the subculture to commit further acts of deviance, which only serve to stigmatise their behaviour further creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

An additional notable contribution to the Chicago School's study of subculture was made by Frederic Thrasher (1927), who is credited with providing the foundation for the development of the School's subcultural theory through his influential conceptualisation of 'delinquent' gang subcultures (Blackman 2005). According to Thrasher, gang members were situated in what he called the 'situational complex' by which the workings of gangs should be understood in terms of their social relation to other influential social institutions, such as the family, religion and education.

One major flaw in the Chicago School's argument was that while it accounted for ethnic differences, young people were seen as a homogenous and unified group which struggled and rebelled against the stigma of the dominant culture. This perception of 'unified' or common youth culture did not allow for the complexity of youth social life to be fully appreciated, nor did it allow for the examination of more complex processes such as class division, the individual struggle with dominant culture and differences between groups.

The British Response: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies:

By 1970, the work of the Chicago School was superseded by research being conducted in Birmingham, England, by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. This school, while agreeing with the premise that subcultures allow for the understanding of deviance as a process, rejected the assumption held by those such as Parsons and Coleman that youth was a homogenous and unified group with its own distinctive culture (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). The CCCS argued that even though a newly-emerging consumer culture made youth superficially appear to be a homogenous identity, it was in fact driven by class divisions and under-privilege (Clark et al., 1976, p. 4).

Notable contributions toward subcultural theory by the CCCS include Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour* (1977), in which he examined working-class young people's rejection of formal education in favour of working-class jobs, thus forming a subcultural grouping, and Dick Hebdige's (1979) *Subculture the Meaning of Style* in which Hebdige equates young people's subcultural style and forms of expression to 'noise', subversive to mainstream culture.

The main goal of the CCCS was to explore how working-class youth actively expressed their dissatisfaction with life in post-war Britain through acts of deviance. They explained deviant behaviour as a way to 'establish a unique identity and subcultural style, by setting itself apart from the present culture' (Epstein, 1998), through the appropriation and 'misuse' of everyday objects in 'subcultural style' and bricolage. According to the CCCS, style and bricolage could be seen as ways of gaining empowerment through resistance to the hegemonic culture.

The CCCS has been criticised for romanticising working-class youth subculture (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003) and failing to explore the influence of race and colour (Kahn-Harris, 2005). In addition, McRobbie (McRobbie & Garber, 1977) criticised the CCCS's disregard for young women's involvement in subculture, while Thornton (in Blackman, 2005) describes the CCCS's theory of subculture as 'empirically unworkable' and elitist, as well as lacking ethnographical information.

The Subcultural Turn

'The era seems long gone of working-class youth subcultures 'heroically' resisting subordination through 'semiotic guerrilla warfare'.
(Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2003, p. 4)

Whilst the work of the CCCS may well be the 'crown jewels of British youth research' (Roberts, 2000, p. 10)**,** several writers would agree that subculture theory has now 'run its course' (Jenks, 2005, p. 145), become 'superfluous' and 'no longer relevant' (Chaney, 2004, p. 36) and failed to provide 'a useful description of young people's social world or their experiences'(Karvonen et al., 2001, p. 393). The increased fragmentation of youth style since the 1980s led to new ways of conceptualising young people. These emerging paradigms, classified as subcultural theory, are primarily based on the arguments of Max Weber, Jean Baudrillard and Michel Maffesoli. First seen in the work of Chamber (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003), the post-subcultural approach has contributed to youth theory by showing how the advent of post-industrialisation and unstructured free time have resulted in a 'clubbing' culture, capable of dissolving structural divisions such as class, race and gender. The creation of 'youth scenes', 'neo-tribes' and 'lifestyles' has contributed to an understanding of youth as a creative and fluid force.

According to Blackman (2005), there are two main stances identified with the post-structural paradigm: the first is a challenge to CCCS's theoretical conventions by subcultural theorists who propose that subcultures should be seen in terms of club cultures, and the second is a complete rejection of the term subculture. It is argued that subcultures should not be seen in political terms but instead as a form of escapism, often afforded by drug use.

David Muggleton (2000) conceptualises DIY techno-cultural youth formations, in which techno-cultures are concerned with 'surface' and self-authentication, and exist outside the constraints of class, gender and ethnicity, allowing for subcultures to become multiple and fluid. Sarah Thornton's (1995) seminal work *Club Cultures: music, media and subcultural capital,* looks at club cultures as 'taste

cultures' and questions the value of authenticity and 'hipness'. Finally, Andy Bennett (1999) deems the CCCS's conceptualisation of subculture as unworkable and instead advocates for an understanding of modern lifestyles in which notions of identity are 'constructed' rather than 'given', and 'fluid' rather than fixed. However, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter, post-subcultural theory can itself be critiqued for its neglect of class experience and its reluctance to consider the effects of marginality, alienation and subordination.

Subcultural Theory and Research on Homelessness

The term subculture has been used significantly in homelessness literature as a way of describing characteristics and elements found amongst homeless populations (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1994, 1998, 2001; Davis & Costello, cited in Parsell, 2010, p. 56; Hagan &McCarthy, 1997; Johnson, Gronda & Coutts, 2008; Karabanow, 2004; MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2003; Mayers, 2001; O'Sullivan Oliveira & Burke, 2009; Shaw, 1969; Snow & Anderson, 1993; Wilson & Arnold, 1986). This section will explore the major writings that have explored homelessness and subculture.

Early studies on homelessness, such as Anderson's (1923) *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man*, Sutherland and Locke's (1936) *Twenty Thousand Homeless Men* and Wallace's (1965) *Skid Row is a Way of Life*, provide us with definitive explorations of homeless subculture. This research locates distinct patterns of behaviours, routines, status order, rules and language amongst groups of homeless people that are aberrant to the social norms of mainstream society. Anderson (1923) and Sutherland and Locke (1936) suggest that particular traits such as these are formed in response to the social conditions surrounding their homelessness.

Written in 1969, Shaw's *Subculture of the Homeless: A Study of Conflict and Integration Among a Group of Homeless Men in Western Australia* presents a sophisticated framework to describe the

characteristics found to be emblematic of the homeless subculture that was the centre of his research. These included:

Learned behaviours -   The changes one makes to fit in and 'sets him apart from the larger society'

                        (1969, p. 201) such as an increase in drinking patterns.

Social adaption -   The process by which an individual acclimatises to homelessness.

Continual in nature -   The subculture has the means to reproduce itself.

Social networks -   The subculture replaces lost social or family networks.

In all, Shaw addressed nine[4] subcultural characteristics that are thereon referred to in homelessness literature, indicating that the subcultures mentioned in homeless studies are not uncommon (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1998; Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008; Johnson & Ping Tseng, 2010; Mayers, 2001; Neil & Fopp, 1992; Pears & Noller, 1995; Ravenhill, 2008).

Snow and Anderson's (1993) research *Down on their Luck* is celebrated for its empirical findings and 'filling the void in literature' (Parker, 2012, p. 21). Snow and Anderson developed a grounded typology to reflect common responses to homelessness found during their research. In justifying this approach, they note that the social world of the homeless operates to form distinct subcultures:

> What these similarly situated individuals have in common is not a strong and recognizable set of values, but a shared fate and determination to make do as best as they can. This common predicament and associated survival problems, may give rise to an identifiably unique set of behaviours, daily routines, and cognitive orientations, and may this be constructed as a subculture, albeit a limited or incomplete one. (Snow & Anderson, 1993, p. 39)

These subcultures are identified as the recently dislocated, the straddlers, and the outsiders, and reflect not only the temporal dimension of homelessness, but the clusters of adaptive behaviours particular to each as well.

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[4] Shaw identified the following nine characteristics he found to be emblematic of the homeless subculture he located in his study: the subculture is learned, inculcated, social, ideational, gratifying, adaptive, integrative, continuous and selective (Shaw, 1969, pp. 200-202).

Ravenhill (2008) in *The Culture of Homelessness*, provides a contemporary and one of the most comprehensive accounts to date of theoretical perspectives on subculture and homelessness. Ravenhill considers homeless people primarily in terms of their relationships with others; she emphasises the social networks in which they participate and the 'cultures' they create together. She talks about a 'culture of homelessness' or 'homeless culture' or 'homeless community', which involves the emotional and social support that homeless people find on the streets. Ravenhill's homeless culture is a subculture, defined as 'the system of beliefs, values and norms adopted by a significant minority in any given society or culture' (2008, p. 145-146).

Narrowing the focus to young people, Wilson and Arnold (1986) proposed in *Street Kids: Australia's Alienated Young* that young homeless people form a subculture based on the collective identification of common norms and values, codes of behaviour, shared styles and a rejection of societal rules. Mayers (2001) in *Street Kids and Streetscapes: Panhandling, Politics and Prophecies* applies the terms 'street kids', 'street youth' and 'subculture' in reference to young research participants, and Karabanow (2004; 2007) interchangeably uses the terms 'culture' and 'subculture' to characterise homeless young people. All authors imply that there is a 'homeless youth subculture' comprising of young people who are drawn together by common values, backgrounds, and interests, and who have specific codes of behaviour and norms running in parallel to mainstream society. Each of the subcultures discussed form an integral part of the homeless culture. However, the culture is far more complex than groups of people that associate together. To understand the subculture and its impact on its members and those who are excluded, we need to understand how people enter the culture, how they become a part of it, what the culture's norms and values are and how these are transmitted. It is to these aspects of subcultural participation that we now turn.

Subcultural Participation

'First, the social adaptation model contends that involvement in the homeless sub-culture is important for young people who often lack a sense of 'belonging' following the breakdown of their family relationships. The sub-culture provides them with friends and a sense of camaraderie, as well as information on how to survive in a hostile environment. Our findings corroborate these claims'.

(Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008, p. 576)

As I have pointed out in the above section, it is a widely accepted theory that changes in behaviour, appearance, drinking or drug use, social networks and such take place in a process whereby people adapt to homelessness. (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1998; Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008; Johnson & Ping Tseng, 2010; Mayers, 2001; Neil & Fopp, 1992; Pears & Noller, 1995; Ravenhill, 2008; Shaw, 1969). Sutherland and Locke refer to this process as 'shelterisation':

> A man's life becomes narrowed to a limited sphere of action and after a few months his independence is broken down, his individuality disappears, his identity is lost, his personality becomes reorganised and he becomes shelterized. (Sutherland & Locke, 1936, p. 15)

It could be argued that in many ways shelterisation mirrors Goffman's (1961) description of the process of institutionalisation. There is the initial inertia: the stripping of self-identity as clothes wear out, hygiene and personal care becomes impossible to maintain and the communal identity is absorbed. This depersonalisation includes the loss of their name (street people are often known by nicknames and aliases), personal demonstrable history (photographs, keepsakes, forms of ID) and the loss of "me" (the stories, memories attached to photographs and keepsakes). There is a language and demeanour that needs to be adopted for survival. Homelessness then becomes one of Goffman's (1970) games, the rules of which need to be learned and accepted before the actors within that game can play. The idea of learning to play the game is a form of institutionalisation that is reinforced by mainstream society through labelling (Goffman 1961; 1968). With regards to young people, 'learning to play the game' is essential: 'Their strategy for survival was the formation of a subculture that lived on the margins of mainstream culture' (O'Sullivan Oliveira and Bourke, 2009, p. 157).

Literature points to multiple avenues where young people are introduced to the homeless subculture (Karabanow, 2004; Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008; Johnson, Gronda & Coutts, 2008; Mallett et al., 2010); however one avenue stands out more than others. The homeless service system is described in literature as an accelerated initiation into subcultural practices where street norms and survival strategies are instilled by more experienced members to young apprentices (Karabanow, 2004;

Johnson, Gronda & Coutts, 2008). Narrowing this down, Johnson Gronda and Coutts (2008) write

specifically of the role that refuge life has in fast-tracking a young person's entry into the homeless

subculture:

> Youth refuges and night shelters are important sites for reproducing subcultural practices and
> knowledge. By facilitating interactions between homeless people, they are an essential part of
> transmitting the homeless subculture. (pp. 147-148)

It is not only the material needs that draw young people to the subculture. In order to prevent social

disenfranchisement, young people look to others for comfort and camaraderie. According to

O'Sullivan Oliveira and Burke (2009), the homeless subculture has the potential to provide

relationships for young people who may no longer feel they fit within the wider community or have

lost social networks on their pathway through homelessness. Karabanow (2007) suggests that, for

some young people, community is found in street life. For those suffering from exclusion, the street

acts as a 'symbolic space where one can feel accepted, cared for and even protected' (p. 2).

Social Exclusion

*'Involvement with the homeless subculture is a 'double edged sword'. On the one
hand associating with other homeless people can provide a 'refuge from the
exclusion they suffer' (Rice et al., 2005) and can suppress the insecurity typically
associated with being homeless. On the other hand, participation in the homeless
subculture can entrenchment in the homeless population.'*

(Johnson & Chamberlain, 2007, p. 9)

Subcultural participation can alleviate the social exclusion that accompanies youth homelessness.

According to Ravenhill (2008), young people's pathways into homelessness begin well before the

actual experience. For many young people 'rooflessness appears to be the solution to their problems

rather than the problem' (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 114). Explaining this, Mayock and Carr (2008) situate

social exclusion as a process that is typically in motion prior to young people becoming homeless.

This process intensifies through their experiences of homelessness 'across several domains: in terms

of access to shelter and housing, employment and health' (Mayock & Carr, 2008, p. 21). Similarly, according to Madanipour et al. (cited in Bryne, 2005, p. 2):

> Social exclusion is defined as a multi-dimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes. When combined, they create acute forms of exclusion that find a spatial manifestation in particular neighbourhoods. (1998, p. 2)

Homelessness as it pertains to social exclusion is complex. Social exclusion may be a precursor to homelessness, and homelessness can be a by-product of social exclusion (Clapham, 2008). Raffo and Reeves (2010) argue that the level of exclusion is dependent on individual resilience to external restraints, and that young people create individualised strategies in relation to social exclusion. When the young person is homeless, a range of structural and personal factors limits their capacity to overcome social exclusion. Kolar, Erickson and Stewart (2012) note that the transitory nature of homelessness often results in a lack of steady social networks. Barker (2012) suggests that without a family that can provide social capital, young homeless people do not have access to resources that are typically provisioned by such social capital. These factors combined leave young people isolated and without the necessary tools to overcome the structural and personal barriers that contribute to their homelessness.

Aligning his work with that of Pierre Bourdieu's, Barker (2012 b) writes:

> Bourdieu uses the concept of capital to refer to the cultural, social and symbolic resources used by individuals and groups to maintain or enhance their position in their social universe (p. 3).

Young homeless people invest in the form of cultural capital available to them (street or counter-cultural capital). Barker (2012 b) refers to this as negative cultural capital, 'a brand of cultural capital that is recognised as negative, is potent because of its anti-social, stigmatised or even illegal status' (p. 361). Acts of anti-social behaviour or crime are examples of how homeless people invest in such social capital. Amongst their peers these actions are perceived to be legitimate and; 'positions

homeless youth in a place of power, respect, fear or recognition' (Barker, 2012 b, p. 361). Participating in a subculture that 'rewards' anti-social behaviour is likely to contribute to the further marginalisation of homeless young people. Conversely, subcultural participation can play an important role in the well-being of some homeless young people.

In general the homeless culture is characterised by dense social networks and reciprocity, with people experiencing anxiety and depression when they leave or are denied access. The latter most likely occurs because 'The intense friendship and reciprocal care received within the homeless culture seems not to be prevalent in mainstream society' (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 155). It is these friendships made within the subculture that will now be discussed.

Friendships

'Social Validation helped make up for their rejection from the mainstream institutions such as family, school and the housing and labour markets'
(Johnson, Gronda & Coutts, 2008, p. 147)

Following Ravenhill (2008), Hirst (1989) and McNaughton (2008) warn of the potential for further social disconnection and isolation that young people may experience after disengaging with the subculture. Ravenhill (2008, p. 161) stresses that the close-knit character of the homeless culture makes it very difficult to leave: once an individual has acclimatized to rooflessness and survived the first few days and weeks, it becomes increasingly difficult to move back into mainstream society. This is, in part, because of the intensity and strength of the networks and friendships formed early on. Separation from such intense friendships can be painful and may become increasingly difficult the longer a person remains within the homeless culture. These cohesive friendships and informal support networks are at the heart of the culture's continued existence. According to Mayers (2001), young people flag these street support systems as significant in mitigating street life.

Hirst (1989) suggests that the largest proportion of personal support often received by homeless young people is from their peers within the subculture. However, these social systems have the

potential for further exploitation, particularly by older homeless people. While friendships within the subculture have been described as 'opportunistic in nature' (Johnson & Wylie, 2010, p. 13), 'strategic' and 'structured' (Parsell, 2010, p. 175) and lacking in-depth (Snow & Anderson, 1993), young people perceive them to be highly functional:

> I was kind of lost. I got by and I met some really cool people on the street and sort of formed a brotherhood type thing and we all looked out for each other. That's how I survived. (Karabanow, 2004, p. 63)

Literature places an emphasis on the provision of care and nurture (Karabanow, 2004; Mallett et al., 2010; Slesnick, 2004). A distinction exists between friendships that are intimate (based on an interpersonal bond), and those 'premised on practical functions' (Parsell, 2010, p. 174) such as meeting basic needs. The relationships have the capacity to combat loneliness and enable access to resources, information, protection, and a cultural group with which to identify (Wilson & Arnold, 1986). These relationships and the social exclusion that often accompanies homelessness are significant ideas within the discussion on subcultural participation, and are explored further in chapters three. For now, I turn to the literature that examines the distinguishing elements found within subcultural groups of homeless people.

Subgroups within the Homeless Subculture

'Then there are subcultures within subcultures.'
(Cohen, 1956, p. 12)

Within the homeless culture, Ravenhill (2008) identifies a number of subcultures, such as street drinkers, drug addicts, daycentre/hostel groupies, specialist day centre groupies (with mental health problems), precariously housed street users (squatters, flophouse dwellers, etc.), intermittent participants (loners and drifters), homeless advocates and activists (who used to be homeless), and the 'homeless at heart' (Ravenhill, 2008, pp. 54-55). The last of these seems to be a particularly interesting group in terms of thinking of homelessness as an ideological construct. The process involved is an inverse of normalisation, in which those who feel uncomfortable in mainstream society

choose to create a society in which they are the norm. They become part of the homeless culture by participating in it and identifying themselves as homeless. Several authors refer to subgroups—including those consisting only of young people—existing as an extension of the larger homeless subculture (Ravenhill, 2008; Snow & Anderson, 1993; Sutherland & Locke, 1936; Wallace, 1965). These subgroups are distinguished from the broader homeless subculture by commonalities of fashion, music, geography, family backgrounds, drug use, ethnicity, shared interests and age (Finkelstein, 2005; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Mallett, 2004; Mayers, 2001). According to O'Sullivan Oliveria and Burke (2009), young homeless people themselves often use labels when describing the various homeless subgroups within their worlds.

Ravenhill (2008) points out that subcultures (including the homeless culture) have discernible identifiers, such as language, demeanour, style, tattoos, symbolic hairstyles and behaviour; these give an identity to both the group and individuals within it. Subcultures enable members to become 'mainstream' within their group and to distinguish themselves from other subgroups (Karabanow, 2004). Hagan and McCarthy (1997) write that like subcultures, subgroups are formed by shared experiences, concerns and beliefs. Exemplifying this, Hagan and McCarthy describe a group of young homeless women in their research who had formed a 'sister hood' based on the premises of teenage motherhood. Membership assured that a degree of support would be provided between group participants. Comparing the shared beliefs of the groups to that of a religious nature, in O'Sullivan Oliveira and Burke's 2009 study, '*Lost in the Shuffle: Culture of Homeless Adolescents*' they observe a shared belief of Wicca (modern witchcraft) to bind a subgroup of the homeless youth subculture together:

> Our family is Wicca, we have our parents, we have kids, and we have aunts and uncles. Being Pagan, our family is definitely different from other families. (p. 157)

A variation of a subgroup, which literature shows young homeless people may form or participate in, is the street family (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Whilst this concept is rarely addressed in Australian

homeless literature, it is a prominent feature within overseas studies (Fitzpatrick, 2000; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; O'Sullivan Oliveria & Burke, 2009; Ravenhill, 2008).

Street Families

'In addition to self-care practices, homeless youth described numerous examples of connecting with others. They developed a community of peers, a street family, from whom they realized unconditional acceptance and acquired information to ensure their survival. This phenomenon of caring and connectedness was described in contrast to the estrangement they felt from their families of origin and other adults.'
(Rew, 2008, p. 545)

Despite their displacement from the family home, young homeless people retain the cultural ideology of the family unit. Street families often consist of a street 'Mum' or 'Dad' (a more experienced homeless person) and pseudo siblings or cousins. Noted in Hagan and McCarthy (1997), the casting of roles within a street family is not contingent on age. This is corroborated by a description provided by a young homeless woman:

Well there's this these two people down there there's a, 13 year old girl and I'm, 15 but she's like a mother to me and her boyfriend's like, 23. And he's like a father. Because if I'm ever in trouble I just gotta go to them and they'll protect me help me and what not. (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997, p. 161)

The role of a street family is similar to that of the subgroups I discussed in earlier sections. 'Family members' seek out sleeping places, are sources of protection, teach survival skills, and pool resources. In *Mean Streets: Youth crime and homelessness*, Hagan and McCarthy (1997) conclude that over half of the young people they spoke to had aligned themselves with a street family since becoming homeless. Young people are often hesitant to leave their street family or subgroup, as inclusion provides them with a space to develop relationships which are thought to be necessary to their survival (Ravenhill, 2008).

Fitzpatrick (2000) and Miller et al. (2005) suggest that participation is more dependent on participants' shared pathways into homelessness than on the desire for a family unit. Young people who couch surf or reside in their local area are more likely to attempt to retain old friendship groups.

Those on the street pathway and living in refuges typically sever ties with old friendship groups and rely on the homeless subculture for social interaction. Young people on the street pathway join subgroups whose participants sleep rough; similarly, those in and out of refuges join others on the 'refuge roundabout' (Johnson, Gronda & Coutts, 2008, p. 150) within the subculture, and young people whose pathway involves drug and alcohol use keeps the company of other substance users.

Young people who had been entrenched in the homeless culture were accustomed to years of intense social support and company, 24 hours a day. As with those leaving the armed forces, prisons and other institutions, withdrawal of this level of intense human contact appeared to cause distress, the onset of mental health problems (depression) and feelings of isolation and loneliness (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 194). Adding to the barriers that may impact the withdrawal from the homeless youth subculture are theories regarding the young person's identification with the subculture. If we agree with Chamberlain and Mackenzie's (2003) homeless youth career model that I described in the previous chapter, then subcultural participation occurs during a young person's transition to 'chronic homelessness' where they identify with homelessness. The next section explores how a young person's identity relates to their involvement in the subculture, and the overall subculture itself, by drawing from various writings on the homeless youth subculture.

Me, Myself and I: Changing Identities

'My beliefs are changing the longer I'm out here. More and more things are becoming okay to do... I don't know why that's changed and I don't want to change it anymore because it's getting worse and worse. It's like my values they're slipping'.
(Mayers, 2001, p. 67)

Mayers (2001) proposes that the loss of identity is one of the principal costs of homelessness to the individual. Social isolation, loss of school contacts (both social and supportive), and the breakdown of the family often leave young people feeling powerless and unable to relate to their previously recognised sense of identity. Erikson's (1968) theory of identity formation suggests that adolescence is a critical period in which identity formation takes place. Identity formation is a product of cognitive

growth, relationships with parents, and experiences outside the home. O'Sullivan Oliviera and Burke (2009) suggest that homelessness interferes with this development as young people are forced to negotiate new identities to fit into a social network and the homeless subculture. Neil and Fopp (1992) write that that self-identification with homelessness manifests over time. Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998) (as cited in Parsell, 2010, p. 63) suggest subcultural immersion occurs after a young person has experienced homelessness for a period of twelve months, signifying the young person's self-identification with homelessness.

Parsell (2010) argues that assumptions made about identity constructs homeless people in a problematic light, positioning them as 'abnormal', and implying that their social and personal identities are one (p. 68). Further, Parsell (2010) points out that people do not passively accept identities; aligning himself with Cohen (1955), Parsell argues that homeless individuals are 'engaged social actors, doing identities' (2010, p. 85). According to Cohen (1955), identity is not fixed: it is a social, rather than a personal identity, one that adheres to and is acted out within subcultural norms and rules. The idea of 'actors doing identities' is explored further by Barker (2012):

> The performances and actions that are central to gaining the cultural capital of youth homelessness are not only for the audiences of these events and those who hear the stories. These practices were done to improve one's standing in the social universe and also to provide a sense of value and identity. (Barker, 2012 b, p. 13)

Performing a 'homeless' identity enhances young homeless people's sense of place in the world. In the homeless subculture, this includes the young person's status in the subcultures hierarchy.

Hierarchies within the Subculture

Within the homeless youth subculture culture, Ravenhill (2008) argues that a hierarchy exists that appears to be the inverse of the hierarchy in mainstream society, in that those who have survived the worst child abuse, addiction, the most roofless episodes or the longest duration of rooflessness are the most respected. In this culture:

> Leaving was seen by some as a sign of weakness and failure to cope with rooflessness… Failure in the resettlement process appeared to be another badge of honour, proving they had deep-seated complex multiple problems unlike other roofless people. (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 165)

Ravenhill (2008) goes to show how, to some extent, such inverse hierarchies are developed and reinforced by the homeless industry, medical profession, social services and housing departments. For example, when applying for social housing, the more problems you have the more points you gain. If you have complex multiple needs, you are a "special case", one meriting more time and more elaborate support. In court, if you can claim to have a dysfunctional family, this is a useful status that excuses or mitigates the crime committed. There is evidence to suggest that language and jargon of professionals is incorporated into the homeless culture's vocabulary (Ravenhill, 2008).

Routines and Rules

Routines and rules within the subculture provide structure to the daily life of a young person (Johnson, Gronda & Coutts, 2008; Karabanow, 2004; Mayers, 2001; Ravenhill, 2008). Johnson, Gronda and Coutts (2008) note as Wallace did (1969) that over time subcultural rules are reproduced, allowing the subculture to regenerate. Young people learn street codes and rules by taking on 'a quasi-apprenticeship role whereby the novice begins to gain knowledge and experience' (Karabanow, 2004, p. 53). While Ravenhill (2008) observes that, on the surface, the homeless subculture is impressionably unstructured, Johnson, Gronda and Coutts (2008) offer a contrasting view in that the subculture relies on governing rules to regulate behaviour. In the milieu of street begging, Mayers (2001) learns that street rules are necessary to a young person's survival. Standards are practical and essential to the homeless subculture, and coupled with simple routines, the structures or rules result in a general truce on the streets (Snow & Anderson, 1993).

Johnson and Wylie (2010) propose that established routines assist in combating boredom. For some, routines are structured around drugs and alcohol, providing an escape from and giving purpose to

daily life. This is problematic due to the likelihood of addiction. Substance-affected young people are very visible in public spaces, especially considering that homeless young people tend to socialise in large groups (Gibson, 2011).

Claiming Space

Discussion on the use of space has dominated youth studies and a large body of homeless literature has been produced (Fitzpatrick, 2000; Gibson, 2011; Karabanow, 2004; Mayers, 2004; White, 1999). Subjects of young people *and* homelessness have very publicly existed in social discourse: homeless young people rely on public spaces, yet the use of this space is complicated. With limited private space available to them, young people are seen candidly partaking in risk-taking behaviours by the public. This exacerbates negative discourse already surrounding youth homelessness in the community (Fitzpatrick, 2000).

Parsell (2010) observes that 'hanging out' occupies much of the day for homeless people. Public spaces are viable areas that offer homeless young people 'a cultural centre and a place to belong' (O'Sullivan Oliviera & Burke, 2009, p. 157). Providing the means to socialise and access an information network (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997), these spaces are contested and valued by members of the subculture (Mayers, 2001). Cloke et al. (2010) talk about the possession and use of space: e.g. creating an obstacle on the street, creating a safe place to sleep, defining a visible identity such as Cardboard City, and creating a meaningful living space that can be called 'home' (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 177). This can be explained as a response to the lack of privacy that is commonly associated with rooflessness (what Somerville [1992] called the territorial dimension of homelessness), with the response taking the form of marking and controlling new boundaries of one's own.

Discussing ideas surrounding space in the homeless context provokes the subject of marginal space. Snow and Anderson (1993) advise that this is space that is rarely used and is of little value to the

wider society: abandoned buildings, alleys and underneath bridges are of high importance to people experiencing homelessness. Mayers (2001) writes that young people perceive an ownership over the spaces they frequent. These spaces are used to sleep, socialise and generate income. She observes that many young people take care not to provoke local traders so as not to jeopardise the space in which they 'panhandle' (beg). As urban development endangers marginal space, Gibson's (2011) concern is that as young homeless people are pushed out of public spaces they become less visible and accessible for social services; young homeless people pushed out into the suburbs are not noticed by youth workers or services that often exist in the inner city, thus 'far from becoming someone else's concern, they become no one's concern' (Gibson, 2011, p. 4).

Le Roux and Smith (1998) believe that although homeless young people are likely to exhibit deviant behaviour, there is a common misconception that equates this behaviour to street gang affiliation. Le Roux and Smith maintain that gang affiliation is not the motivation for such behaviour; rather, it is the young person's positioning on the streets that promotes risk-taking behaviour (Rice, Stein & Milburn, 2008).The literature on this topic is not in agreement: Australian literature often considers risk-taking behaviour or deviancy as a defining characteristic of the homeless subculture (Davis & Costello, 1992, as cited in Parsell, 2010, p. 55; Wilson & Arnold, 1986),but this finding is not consistent in all research, with some suggesting that such behaviour is episodic rather than a consistent theme within the subculture (O'Sullivan Olivier & Burke, 2009).

Literature with a focus on risk-taking behaviour typically makes reference to illicit substance use, alcohol abuse, unsafe sexual practices, prostitution and various criminal activities (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; le Roux and Smith, 1998; Mallett et al., 2010; O'Sullivan Oliviera & Burke, 2009; Rice, Stein & Milburn, 2008). Behaviour such as illicit substance use is considered to be a product of young people's homelessness rather than its cause (Dachner & Tarasul, 2002; Mallett et al., 2010; Snow & Anderson, 1993). To exemplify, O'Sullivan Oliviera and Burke (2009) suggest that over time marijuana use can become normalised behaviour consistent with the subculture. Hagan and McCarthy

(1997) subscribe to this notion that risk-taking behaviour is a product of adaption, and suggest that entry into sex work is also typically a response to homelessness (p. 104).

The criminal activity of homeless young people—such as drug dealing, begging, prostitution, stealing and shop-lifting—may be intentional and unintentional (Mallett et al., 2010). Drawing upon concepts of space and privacy in the homeless context, young homeless people are likely to come into police contact. Hagan and McCarthy (1997) suggest that the majority of contact homeless young people have with police is due to alcohol and drug use, offensive behaviour, begging, loitering or trespassing when found sleeping in marginal or private spaces. In Mayers' research (2001) *Street Kids and Streetscapes*: *Panhandling, Politics and Prophecies* young people do not perceive panhandling (begging) as a crime, nor do they see themselves as criminals.[5] Miller (1991) writes that historically there was an acceptance of panhandling. Begging did not become a social issue until the Hippie movement 'turned the whole affair upside down' (p. 101) by increasing the numbers of panhandlers on the streets when travelling through cities.

Engaging in violent activities is a risk-taking behaviour that features in research literature: accounts of victimisation or witnessing violence are prominent among homeless young people (Adler, 1991; Finkelstein, 2005; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Miller et al., 2004):

> Every day I see something wild happen. Every day I see a fight. Every single day…
> Somebody messes with somebody's girl. Somebody stole something. Somebody disrespected
> somebody. You know the usual stuff that happens. People get stabbed people get shot. I seen
> [sic] one guy last night get stabbed in the side of a face with a razor blade right here in this
> park. (Finkelstein, 2005, p. 107)

Violence between homeless young people has been attributed to drug and alcohol use (Finkelstein, 2005). Alder (1991) reminds us that many homeless young people are victims of violence from outside of the homeless subculture, fear for their safety, and experience anxieties about their day-to-

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[5] Young panhandlers are not oblivious to the illegality of their actions. They are careful to stop begging when police are present. 'Look outs' provide the young people with timely notice to avoid been caught by police (Mayers, 2001).

day survival. Spending the majority of their time in public spaces increases the probability of

victimisation from outsiders (Adler, 1991; Finkelstein, 2005).

Adler (1991) and Mallett et al. (2010) write that for many young homeless people, violence becomes

the norm before they enter street life. Those on a homeless street pathway share backgrounds that are

'typified by poverty violence and neglect' (Mallett et al. 2010, p. 39). Over half of the young people

Adler encountered experienced sexual or physical violence before becoming homeless (Adler, 1991,

p. 12). Ravenhill describes how the homeless culture is shaped to a significant degree by violence and

people's reaction to that violence. Violent incidents are frequent, mainly because:

> Angry, violent (especially) men are common within the culture. A number have been
> diagnosed with behavioural problems and have trouble controlling their tempers and violent
> outbursts. Many are angry at "life" and at the way things have turned out for them. There
> were also feelings of intense frustration and anger at a system that excluded them from
> accommodation or the help they needed. This led to intolerance and provoked anger at the
> apparent injustice of much smaller matters. When mixed with drink or drugs, little incidents
> easily sparked off rage and violent outbursts' (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 166).

These incidents affected other homeless people in different ways. Some perceived them as part of

everyday life, being ways of 'airing a grievance' or 'clearing the air', or even 'a good laugh', others

spoke of a 'buzz' and associated this with being 'like a drug', while others again experienced the

violence as intimidating or terrifying and withdrew from the culture or linked with a 'protector' within

the culture (Ravenhill, 2008, p. 167). Although group protection is a method of staying safe for most

young people, 'protectors' often become a source of violence, particularly for females: 'Their

violators were the men they looked to for support and/or protection' (Adler, 1991, p. 12).

Prostitution and Sexual Violence

Woven through literature on homeless subcultures are themes of invisibility, pathways to

homelessness, prostitution and violence, all of which pertain to the gender-related experiences of

homeless people. Adult women are more likely to engage in prostitution and experience sexual abuse

than men. Regardless of gender, young homeless people are vulnerable to the dangers of sexual

assault, harassment and violence (Ensign & Bell, 2004; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; HEROC, 1989; Mayers, 2001; Ravenhill, 2008; Reeve, Goudie & Casey, 2007; Syngajewski, O'Leary, Koch, Flynn & Owens, 2007).

While gender-related themes are not as prominent in literature on homeless young people, it is agreed that young homeless women experience an increased invisibility to services, social workers and researchers (HEROC, 1989; Hill, 2009; Ravenhill, 2008). Young males tend to sleep rough in public spaces, whereas females are more inclined to sleep alone, often in outer suburban schools, squats, cars and garages (Austerberry & Watson, 1986). Young women are often victims of sexual harassment and violence when staying in refuges and hostels, prompting them to sleep rough, hidden out of sight (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). An alternative to sleeping rough is participating in a subgroup for squatting. Ravenhill (2008) and Ensign and Bell (2004) find that although a young woman may be invited into a squat, she is then susceptible to sexual assault and rape if she refuses to have sex with fellow squatters in exchange for the accommodation or protection.

A further method of accommodation involves 'shacking up'. This concept is presented in terms of both young females and males who exchange sex (often reflective of a de-facto relationship) for long and short term shelter (Adler, 1991; Hill, 2009; Ravenhill, 2008; Robinson & Searby, 2006; Sharman, 2008). Although the discussion about survival sex is typically located in adult homeless literature (Snow & Anderson, 1993), it is known that young males, perhaps more so than young women, consciously enter relationships (heterosexual or homosexual) in order to secure accommodation, not unlike prostitution (Hill, 2009; Snow and Anderson, 1993).

Prostitution is a risk-taking behaviour that is not easily avoided by young people experiencing homelessness (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; le Roux & Smith, 1998; Mallett et al., 2010; O'Sullivan Oliviera & Burke, 2009; Rice, Stein & Milburn, 2008). Snow and Anderson (2003) report young heterosexual and homosexual males rarely initiate prostitution: men often solicit them for sex. Young

participants of the subculture are prey to pimps and paedophiles. Homeless young people may be introduced to sex work by their peers, as Ravenhill (2008) demonstrates:

> I had to sleep rough with a couple of people I know. She was working (a prostitute) and offered to take me to meet the same man that got her working but I said 'no'. (p. 59)

For young homeless people, sex is an ever-present factor in their homelessness. Adler (1991) writes that much of the violence towards young women is associated with sexual demands rather than physical violence; this typically takes place from within their social world. Similarly, young males are placed in the same positions of vulnerability. Young people in the homeless subculture have dangers and risks imposed on them; this is the nature of their homelessness.

To Summarise

> *'The subcultural approaches originating from Chicago and Birmingham offer invaluable and sophisticated insights, many of which retain significance'.*
> (Hodkinson, 2007, p. 6)

This chapter has reviewed the literature that informs understandings of homelessness and subculture. When examined closely, all three theories presented have pitfalls which limit their usefulness as lenses for investigation for the purpose of this research. The Chicago School's construction of a single homogenous group belies the complexity of youth cultural formation, whilst subcultural theories' rejection of class precludes the inclusion of their theory as a lens in this study. Despite flaws, such as their dismissal of gender as a category (McRobbie & Garner, 1977) and their preoccupation with stylistic 'authenticity', much can still be gained by considering youth subcultures within the context of the work of the CCCS. Hodkinson (2002) suggests that it is necessary to revisit the subcultural theory of the Chicago School and the CCCS in order to understand the formation of groups of young people based on shared interests and identity. In his book *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture*, Hodkinson (2002) adopts a combination of Chicago's and Birmingham's subcultural theory to his research, providing a flexible approach his study of youth culture. Through this framework Hodkinson explores concepts of identity, commitment, resistance, collective-mindedness and distinctiveness within and

between groups of young people to indicate cultural substance. This enables an examination of the functions, meanings and symbols that construct a subculture and the distinctions that the groups make between themselves and outsiders.

In further advocating the use of subcultural theory, Woo (2009) asserts that the concept occupies an important place in sociology due to its 'connecting cultural expressions of personal and group identity to broader, social-structural determinants and to power relations' (p. 29). Woo suggests that post-subcultural theories have 'fallen prey to a fetishism of style' (p. 23) and are too focused on the consumption of a lifestyle rather than the 'cultural expressions of youth' (p. 24). Finally, in a similar contention to Woo (2009), Blackman (2005) concludes that post- subcultural theories are lacking in focus on social class and marginalisation. Therefore, in this regard he writes that:

> On this basis postmodern theories of subculture do not address or critique the relations of dominance and subordination exercised through social and cultural structures of society. (p. 12)

If we are to observe Blackman's (2005) contribution, then post-subcultural theories are unable to provide a thorough understanding of young people's experiences of marginalisation in relation to the social conditions surrounding them. Therefore it is useful to examine how subcultures have been studied in relation to homelessness.

Whilst in need of theoretical refinement and empirical renewal, some of the broader goals of the CCCS's sub-cultural approach remain valid within the context of this study. Most notably, the emphasis upon the relationship between social structure and culture and, particularly, the ways in which individual biographies intertwine with the two, seem appropriate.

This chapter has also considered a variety of theoretical approaches to the idea of homelessness subculture and has concluded that ethnographic approaches, focusing on homeless subcultures and the relationships between those cultures and mainstream culture/society, hold out the greatest promise for increasing our understanding of youth homelessness. According to these approaches, homeless young

people are seen as primarily social beings, with specific histories, living in specific environments, and relating to those environments, to other homeless people and also to themselves, in different ways.

What the research explored indicates is that we must pay more attention to young people's life stories and the meaning of these life stories in the construction and maintenance of sub cultures. Narratives in themselves are a form of knowledge 'that allows people to know how to increase their awareness of their social environment. To study stories and their telling, one should explore the way stories elicit experiences of the listener and order them, to be returned as knowledge' (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2008, p. 17). This means that we should not only pay more attention to people's life stories but also to the relationship between the story-teller and the listener. The researcher as listener is inevitably part of the story itself. The next chapter will explore how this review influenced the methodology used to frame, collect and analyse the data. In doing so I will address the ethical concerns and challenges faced during the research journey.

Chapter Two

An 'Anthropology' of Homelessness

Any study which looks to address issues faced by a particular section in society should ideally be guided by those who it will ultimately affect. In youth research this is often not the case. There has been a tendency to marginalise the voices of young people, and young people often are rendered invisible and voiceless. One of the aims of this thesis is to ensure that young people's voices, experiences and opinions are adequately represented.

Martin (2002) writes that young people bear knowledge and expertise about conditions of their everyday lives shaped in contexts of oppression, neglect and resistance. The premise that young people are the experts on their own, and other young people's lives, has guided this research. Building upon youth homelessness research outlined in Chapter One, it is evident that researching marginalised young people requires a research process that is empowering to its participants, yet malleable enough to adjust to challenges and issues that may arise. Therefore, this study requires the adoption of a research paradigm that is grounded in a commitment to learning from the perspectives of young people.

This chapter discusses the research methodology adopted in the study. In this qualitative study, I used the ethnographic methods of participant observation and qualitative interviewing to obtain empirical materials. This qualitative approach was adopted to explore, understand and theorise the day-to-day lives of young people who were homeless. In light of these aims, the first section of this chapter considers some important tenets underpinning qualitative and ethnographic enquiry to illustrate the suitability of the approach. The latter part of this chapter provides detailed accounts of how I conducted the fieldwork and analytical processes. By providing these detailed descriptions of how the research was conducted, the reader is better able to understand and evaluate the credibility of the themes explored in subsequent chapters.

Guiding Methodology – A reflexive approach

At the core of qualitative inquiry lies the guiding principal that in order to 'capture lived experiences of the social world', the perspectives of those researched must be documented (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 2). Rather than presenting data from the researcher's sole perspective, qualitative data emphasises the significance of meaning and interpretation. In order to widen our understanding of the experiences of homeless young people, we must first attempt to understand the context in which they conduct their daily lives and construct their identity from their own perspectives. With the understanding that this knowledge is best gained through in-depth research in young people's environments, this study was accordingly conducted within an ethnographic framework. Various factors informed my choice of methodology: one pertained to the flexibility in research methods: I was aware that a one-size-fits-all approach to collecting data would not be suitable, due to the various environments where fieldwork was to be situated. A further deciding factor rested in the knowledge that people respond differently to research methods, and this impacts on how they give accounts of their lives. This research necessitated reaching a variety of young people in an inclusive manner without the constraints of a strict methodology.

The first step in this process was to acknowledge the inherent power difference between myself and the researched, as the imbalance of power is apparent at all stages of the research process (Bourdieu 1996, cited in Block et al., 2012, p. 71). Thus, my position as a researcher, my world views, and the disparate 'life world' between the participants and ourselves was analysed, using a reflexive approach:

> The knowledge's produced and the valuing of those knowledge's become entwined with and influenced by the identities, social positions and social locations linked to the attributes of the knowledge's producers. (Walter, 2010, p. 14).

There is nothing new or ground-breaking about analysing the risks associated with the power relationship between researchers and the researched (Block et al., 2012, p. 71), nor is a mere

recognition of the power imbalance an adequate way of guiding reflexive power relations (Chapman 2011, p. 734). As Block et al. argue, it is imperative that when the researcher comes from a different 'life world', ethical reflexivity needs to be employed (2012, p. 71). However, such ethical reflexivity was a difficult and complex process that required me to critically analyse the social context within which my research was conducted. For instance, this research is situated within 'the academy', contributing to my career by undertaking research, and I also have greater social and economic capital than the participants. This did not mean that I absolved myself of that responsibility by simply situating my own biography in a mechanical fashion (Moore, 2012, p. 614). Adopting ethical reflexivity meant focussing on the formation of social knowledge about social structures and the research participants. A thorough examination and engagement with data and theory was essential in achieving reflexivity (Moore, 2012). It was absolutely necessary to understand and, importantly, critique the 'broader relationship between the researcher and the socio-political context in which the researcher [was] working and how this [impacted] on the research context' (Schweitzer & Steel. 2008, p. 94). This broader social context in which the research took place was a critical aspect that needed to be considered within the methodology and research design. This was not simply to alleviate my accountability, nor is it to place me on a pedestal of a higher moral stance; rather, this critique and analysis serves to highlight the value-laden research that was conducted.

Ethnography

Ethnographic research is a broad school, lacking a single or uncontested definition. It is an approach to research with a long history, and over time, 'ethnographic researchers', have employed a range of research designs and methods. Originating in anthropology, ethnographic research traditionally focused on people in their lived environment, and always 'different', non-Western people (Gobo, 2008, p. 2). The evolution of ethnographic research throughout the twentieth century, however, has seen ethnographic studies also focus on people in Western culture, although often the deviant 'other' (Hobbs, 2001). More recently, however, this progression has moved further away from the study of 'others' to include auto-ethnographies where elements of the self are revealed (Jones, 2005).

Despite the changing philosophical perspectives that inform ethnographic research, and the various range of disciplines that now draw upon this approach, a fundamental tenet has endured: ethnographic research is about exploring and understanding people in their day-to-day environment. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest that this type of research is about understanding how people view their situation, and the people with which they live and interact. But perhaps more importantly for this study, central to ethnographic research is a desire to understand how peoples 'see themselves' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3).

Research Methods & Setting

One of the key aspects of ethnographic research is its close engagement between the researcher and the field. Erving Goffman suggests that in order to gain an understanding of people, an ethnographer must artificially force himself or herself to witness how people respond to what life does to them (Goffman, 2001, p. 154). Or as Coffey (1999, p. 23) proposes, it involves the enactment of social roles and relationships, which places the self at the heart of the enterprise. Wolcott (2005, p. 58) captures these sentiments by arguing that ethnographic research is characterised more by intent and personal involvement than research practices.

Key ethnographic theorists agree on a number of methods required to achieve this end. First among these is participant observation (Davies, 2008, p. 77): this method involves the detached observation of people's behaviours, mannerisms, interactions and relationships. In fact, ethnographic researchers use participant observation to observe all facets of people's day-to-day lives. Observing the diversity of people's lives and the close engagement this requires means that participant observation is a method that also involves more than detached observations. Ethnographers engaged in this method do considerable listening. Gobo (2008, p. 167) notes that the listening in on research participants' conversations, informal conversations among the researcher and person researched, as well as the

researcher's interactions and participation in groups of people studied, are all important components of participant observation. The aspects of people's lives that ethnographers aspire to understand involves close and careful observation on one hand, and engagement and active participation in their lives on the other (Brewer, 2000). This close engagement blurs distinctions between participant observation and qualitative interviewing; despite this, qualitative interviewing is recognised as an ethnographic method separate to participant observation. While qualitative interviewing is frequently used outside of this context, when used to understand the meanings and perspectives of those observed further, it is considered to be an important ethnographic method (Gobo, 2008, p. 191). As such, qualitative interviewing is often conducted during phases of participant observation, with interviewing predominately taking an unstructured form. This type of qualitative interviewing can also be defined as ethnographic because it normally takes place between individuals who share more than the one-off interview encounter (Davies, 2008, p. 105). In his ethnography, *Everywhere but Home,* Barker (2010) includes genealogies and life histories to construct social diagrams with young people. This provides insight into the dynamics of the young people's social networks and occasionally results in a chronology of the events preceding their homelessness. Barker describes this in more detail:

> The practice of drawing up genealogies and timelines mapped out the lives of these young people before their eyes, presenting a synoptic vision that many of them had not constructed previously. (2010, p. 23)

Having provided a brief review of ethnographic research pertinent to this study, I will now outline my fieldwork, analysis and interpretation. First I will explain the setting for my research, then I shall discuss the methods used to collect data, how I used them, and why they were deemed most appropriate. I then detail the analytical process before discussing three ethical tensions raised during fieldwork and exiting the field. The chapter concludes by introducing the young people whose thoughts and comments feature throughout the remaining chapters of the thesis.

Research Setting: The Concrete Jungle

'We're all survivors in this concrete jungle, some play hard, some play it humble

Either way we all wish our own hustle, because everybody's got to eat
Up north, down south, you can hear it in the east, all the way to the west'
(Diafrix, 'The Concrete Jungle' Lyrics, 2013)

Fieldwork for this research was conducted over the period between September 2011 to December 2011 and October 2012 to January 2013, with 23 key participants; the research applied participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews and auto-photography. Research was conducted over five key areas within Melbourne's central business district (*CBD*) and an inner city refuge. The combined area of Flinders Street train station and Federation Square, Southern Cross train station, Southbank and the corner of Burke and Swanston Streets form a 37.7 kilometre radius. Located approximately four kilometres from the Swanston and Burke Streets site is the youth refuge that serves as an unofficial drop-in centre for many homeless young people, including those who are not regular clients. These research locations are well known to young homeless people and youth workers. The sites are situated along the route of numerous soup vans that operate of an evening. Young people who contributed their time to the research utilise the following public spaces for the convenience they offer and the relative safety that numbers can provide.[6]

Site 1: Flinders Street Station is the gateway for all suburban train lines in Melbourne and the central hub for many homeless young people. The steps leading into the station are symbolic; they are a space in which to socialise and share information. The surrounding area is an access point to outreach services. Over time, homeless young people have claimed 'The Steps' as theirs. The Steps, as dubbed by participants, is one of three spaces surrounding Flinders Street that are used by young people. Adjoining sites include the Memorial Park (referred to by young people 'The Grove'), and Federation Square – a civic centre located opposite Flinders Street Station. At night, Federation Square is convenient for those who are waiting for the soup vans and offers a vantage point for young people who want to know who is at the Salvation Army's Youth Bus that parks opposite the square.

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[6] For an illustrated description of the research site see appendix A.

Located five blocks from Flinders Street Station is the corner of Burke and Swanston Streets. This outside mall is a place to obtain illicit drugs. This site also offers an advantage; it is a prime area in which to beg for money and cigarettes and it does not overstep the boundaries of the area regularly used by a group of adults of Indigenous Australian descent.

Southern Cross Train Station (formally 'Spencer Street Station') was an important site of fieldwork. Young people frequent Southern Cross Station to use the Travellers' Aid showers and to sleep at intervals; it is located near backpacker hostels that some homeless young people board at a few nights of the week.

The area outside of the Crown Casino in Southbank is a popular location for panhandling. Somewhat tolerated by security, the young people make use of visitors to the Casino and reports of big earns were common when discussing this space with participants. Some young people split their time between Crown Casino and Southern Cross Train Station.

In addition to these sites, observation was conducted in a youth homeless refuge. The refuge is often at capacity with six young people residing there, and young visitors socialising. Young people who do not reside at the refuge come off the streets to rest, help themselves to food in the kitchen and seek assistance if required. Although semi-structured interviews and the analysis of participant's photographs were largely conducted in private settings such as cafés, the bulk of research was conducted via participant observation in the aforementioned research environments. The following pages provide a description of the research methods used to collect data for this study, beginning with participant observation.

Participant Observation

'While I knew gaining entry into this particular group of young people [would be challenging], I think that tonight really showed me how difficult it's actually going to be. There is absolutely a collective rage if you wish, there is a collective reaction or resistance to authority or power and I actually felt that this evening. I didn't know anyone I saw tonight and being mistaken for a DHS worker was not

something I was expecting. The aggressive interrogations really threw me- 'Who are you? Where are you from? What do you want? It really showed that gaining entry is going to take a long time... I've got to think of a better approach because going through that aggression every night will kill me'.

(Recorded field notes, 15/09/2011)

As established in the previous section, participant observation is a defining method of ethnographic research (Davies, 2008; Gobo, 2008). Dewalt and Dewalt (2010) have described participant observation as

> a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tactic aspects of their life routines and their culture. (p.1)

One of the richest aspects of data collection came from observing young people as they conducted their lives. Time was spent 'hanging out', engaging in conversations at soup vans, homeless services and in public settings such as Flinders St Station, Federation Square and Swanston Street, Melbourne. Field notes or audio recordings were then produced. These notes were used later while analysing the research data to interpret my observations. This enabled the documentation of a comprehensive account of the research setting, and provided the opportunity to remain engaged in the reflexivity process each time I referred to my notes. While 'hanging out' may sound like a straight forward process, it was not.

Following a review of homeless literature based on in-depth research with young people, I understood that entering the field to observe young people would take time, patience and creativity. The first hurdle I encountered was housing services, or 'gatekeepers'. Seeking assistance from services that young people are known to visit in order to gain entry to the field resulted in mixed responses; some refused and others offered to select young people with whom to discuss the research. Eventually, I associated myself with a youth outreach team. This enabled me to observe participants from a distance and to normalise my presence to them.

Constantly interacting with young people had a snowball effect with participants. Snowballing is a technique which has been used extensively for researchers to engage with marginalised young people where participants introduce the researcher to their friends who do likewise, creating a snowball of contacts or participants (Barker, 2012; Joniak, 2010; Mayers, 2001; Power, 1989). Snowballing is a practical and non-threatening method to meet potential participants (Power, 1989). It enables the researcher to meet people who may not be accessed via service providers through gatekeepers (Reid et al., 1998) or the extended social networks of the young people (Barker, 2012). Snowballing provides reassurance to young people who are introduced to the researcher by others who vouch for them (Joniak, 2010). Being 'vouched for' by participants signified that my presence had become normalised, enabling insights into a lifestyle and subculture gained through participant observation. This process was time consuming as young people got used to my presence.

> I'm beginning to notice that some young people are really hesitant and wary of my presence. Now I'm becoming uncomfortably aware of my presence too and coming from the position of being in the same situation and the same culture as a teenager, this feeling of uncomfortably is not something I had expected would happen. It's making me doubt that I should be here. (Field notes, November, 2011)

Naïvely, I had believed that I would feel entirely at ease, perhaps even at home, in the environment of the streets and the company of the young people. However, as my above field notes suggest, this was not the case in the early months of fieldwork. It took patience and the help of the young people who assisted me with my confidence as a researcher. The reassurance of their interest in the research and an occasional 'na man-she's cool' from a young person to another was what it ultimately took to forget that I was an 'outsider' so that my observations could continue.

Young people were eager to be involved in the research and helped me negotiate my place by giving me advice about my appearance during fieldwork. On the steps of Flinders Street Station Jess* stated that my clothes were similar to those of the Department of Human Services (*DHS*) outreach staff. Young people avoided DHS staff whose roles often included locating young people absconding from DHS units or placements. I was thus styled in the form of jeans and a hoodie combined with sneakers for the winter and singlet tops for the warmer months. Additional advice I collected during my 'make

over' included to refrain from holding a set of keys in my hand, wearing sunglasses on the top of my head and planting my hands in my pockets. If I avoided these practices, it was likely that I would avoid young people's accusations or assumptions of being a DHS worker or undercover police officer. I took this advice seriously.

This incident reminded me of the work of Power (1998) who suggests that while a research 'uniform' of sorts is not practical, clothes should be comfortable and appropriate for the environment where the researcher is operating. Consistently wearing attire that differentiated myself from those whom the research cohort resisted not only assisted in the acceptance of my presence, but also allowed me to feel comfortable during observations. I have placed emphasis on my acceptance, comfort and appearance in the field because it was a site (or sites) that where a large part of the research data was collected through my observations and informal conversations held with young people. Further to these conversations were those conducted in a slightly more formal setting using the method of semi-structured interviewing and auto-photography. I shall now explain this process in more detail.

Semi-Structured Interviews

'Semi structured interviewing and observations offer researchers the most systematic opportunity for the collection of purely qualitative data'.
(Schensul & Le.Compte, 2012, p. 194)

I felt it necessary for the research to operate as a 'vehicle' for participants to use in defining what was important to them and what they wanted others to know about their experiences. Concerns regarding 'youth issues' are often those of adults; however, what is not often known is if young people share the same concerns. Recognising the value of the participants' knowledge resulted in many casual discussions that were formulated around what they perceived as important subject matter. Operating within this framework encouraged what Oakley (1981) describes as 'a free association of ideas' (Oakley, 1981, p. 37).

Interviews with young people were typically conducted in public settings such as cafés or libraries using a digital recording device from which transcripts of the interviews were later made. Interviewing participants over coffee or a meal provided a relaxed atmosphere. Interviews were also conducted at the refuge where I work where I would cook before commencing the interview. Food played a large role in how knowledge, or 'data', was collected. An example of this can be drawn from the situation in which one of the young people I had met during one interview expressed that he had never had a birthday cake before. Because it was close to his birthday, with the assistance of his friends I made a racing car themed cake. This built strong rapport with the young person and his friends who then later participated in interviews. Rapport with participants grew as each young person was interviewed. In one case prior to an interview I conducted at Federation Square, the participant arrived early, with friends, and the expectation of cupcakes. It was common that young people would tell their peers what we were talking about (and the cupcakes), increasing the amount of interviews with young people.

In addition to obtaining specific knowledge, conducting interviews created space to receive feedback on the research process. Renee* gave valuable advice on how I approached discussions about sensitive issues. According to Renee, those who have been homeless and used to using housing services have normalised responses to sensitive questioning and do not see these as invasive. While I was wary of my questioning I was advised to be direct, as the sensitivity of the subject matter (such as prostitution) would not bother most young people. Young people who had difficulty sitting through interviews or who wanted to contribute more to the research were encouraged to participate via auto-photography.

Auto-Photography

'The photograph perhaps more so than the sound recording is a powerful tool in the representation of identity'.

(Bloustien & Baker 2003, p. 68)

The research methods used in this study were not initially fixed. Rather, they were applied over time, based on reflexivity of the research context. Young people assisted in shaping these methods, particularly in the use of photography. Kane* was one of these young people. Approximately three months into fieldwork I met with Kane who agreed to be interviewed, and then withdrew at the last minute. In explaining his withdrawal, he expressed that he was more comfortable telling me his story though creative measures. I brought a disposable camera for Kane to use and later asked other young people to document their story visually by using their mobile phones. I found that the use of auto-photography complemented the knowledge I was obtaining during participation, which, despite some difficulties, was a highly valued method in the research process.

Whilst auto-photography is conventionally located in anthropological studies, depicting exotic environments and cultures, it is becoming increasingly adopted in youth studies (Johnsen, May & Cloke, 2008; Wright, Darko, Standen & Patel, 2010). Bloustien and Baker (2003) suggest that photographs provide a powerful vehicle with which to tell a narrative. It is a medium through which a story of 'self' can be explored, negotiated and confirmed. Adopting photography as a method in qualitative research provides further access to the aspects of everyday life that the ethnographer may not uncover during fieldwork through observations or formal interviewing.

Wright et al. (2010) recommends that participant photography can assist in balancing power relations between researcher and participant. Photographs are the authoritative voice that provides insight into the layering of ethnography. I found that photography provided a powerful basis for producing dynamic discussions with participants. Wright et al. (2010) explains that photographs can stimulate discussion or narratives between the researcher and photographer when focusing on its meanings and interpretations. This was utilised when young people preferred to not be formally interviewed. I found the use of photography initiated an active response from creative participants who otherwise shied away from formal conversations.

I asked young people to document their daily lives and friendship groups through photography. Participants were given copies of the photos they took and were aided by their friends to take photos. The young people took much pride in the results of their work. Narratives that followed ensured a collaborative approach; the narratives were communicated face-to-face or by writing descriptions on the back of the photographs. In one case photos were sent to an email account that I had created so that participants could contact me throughout fieldwork. Analysing photographs with participants enabled me to understand the significance of the images to the participants.

Auto-photography was a time consuming yet valuable tool in the research process, requiring extra resources. Initially I considered the use of digital cameras, yet the cost of replacing these when participants failed to return them was simply not feasible. Had time permitted, I would have paid more attention to the use of this method, and engaged more young people to participate in a narrative though photography.

The use of photography presented ethical considerations. Becker (1974) explains that identifying characteristics found in photographs must be disguised in a similar fashion as seen in conventional method. The strength of the photographic work may depend on the identification of de-identified participants and their environment. The sociologist may block out identifying material ensuring that ethical requirements are met. As such, identifiable characteristics found within the photographs have been altered in order to preserve the participants' anonymity. The consideration to research ethics is an important matter that is discussed further in this chapter. For now, I wish to note that while Appendix B of this thesis contains some of the photographs taken by participants, those that could potentially identify the photographers or their friends have not been included. The photographs containing identifiable characteristics were, however, analysed during the data analysis stage of the research, which I describe in the following section.

Data Analysis

Thematic Content Analysis is used to identify, examine and analyse the patterns or themes within the research data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Berg (2001) these patterns, or themes as they are also referred to, are 'grounded in the data from which they emerge' (p. 87). Clarifying this notion, Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that these patterns or themes, 'Capture something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (p. 87).

Returning briefly to the methods of data collection that I have described in this chapter, semi-structured interviews conducted with participants were digitally recorded, and later transcribed verbatim. This process lent me the privilege of revisiting and continually reflecting on the content of each interview. Listening to recordings prompted me to recall tones in voices and the body language or facial expressions of participants. This, combined with regularly studying my observation notes and fieldwork diaries in the early stages of the research, triggered the development of an initial coding scheme.

The coding scheme is used to identify and organise the research data. In this case, the coding scheme produced was both inductive and, to an extent deductive in nature. In other words, the data was not coded to fit into a pre-determined scheme or to suit only my interests. This form of analysis is driven by the research data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Berg (2001) insists that the development of themes in any content analysis must first 'derive from inductive reference' (p. 238). Although my coding scheme was primarily data-dependent and driven by recurring themes that were meaningful to research participants, the influence of theoretical perspectives that underpin this study cannot be discounted. Patterns or themes identified within the data sets were considered in light of theory, such as that highlighted in the introductory chapter, and previous research studies featured within my

review of the literature surrounding the topic of this thesis. Analysing data through an approach such as Thematic Content Analysis resulted in the emergence of the following themes:

- Characteristics of participants (age, gender, ethnicity, family background)

- The relationships that participants have with other

- Sexual identity

- Participants interests and tastes in music

- Style and fashion

- Alcohol and drug use

- Participants use of space

- Rules, rituals and routines and,

- Stigma and stereotypes

These themes shape the remaining chapters of this thesis, and will be described in detail in the following chapter. A discussion of the findings that emerged from the research conducted for this study cannot possibly be performed without first explaining the ethical considerations made throughout this research. The remaining sections explore my engagement with research ethics, personal reflexivity and leaving the field of research.

Ethical Considerations

Ethnographic research raises concerns relating to the ethics of the study and the researcher. Questions will arise pertaining to standards, morals, beliefs and compromise. Researchers have ethical obligations to those involved in their studies, and while they may seek not to harm the safety, dignity and privacy of subjects, this is a complex issue (Ensign & Bell, 2004). This complexity grows when researching with groups of marginalised young people.

Research with homeless young people prompts further consideration of the ethics associated with age and informed consent: obtaining consent is not always feasible, nor is it always practical to enquire

about young people's age. These considerations required reflection throughout the research process due to the age of those with whom I came into contact during observation work in the field. Ethics clearance was obtained through the Australian Catholic University in 2011 to undertake research with young people over the age of 18 years; however, there were environments where the participants were noticeably younger than I had predicted (such as Flinders Street, where a large amount of outreach work with young people is conducted). Many had absconded from child protection services, therefore they were reluctant to reveal their true age.[7] The only solution to this was 'screening' those whom I interviewed. This was done over time with the assistance of key participants whom I could trust to let me know the ages of those I asked to interview. Following this, I requested that participants advise me of their age prior to the interviews commencing.

Further ethical considerations raised included the issue of illicit substance use amongst participants. The use of substances is common amongst some homeless young people (Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008), making it difficult to conduct interviews at times. Sometimes substance-affected young people were keen to complete an interview, and several interviews had to be rescheduled and some cancelled. This was due to the concern that participants may disclose sensitive information that would not otherwise have been discussed.

Due to the sensitive nature of the research, a referral protocol was developed early on with the Young People's Health Service at Frontyard Youth Services, who agreed to provide free counselling to participants if required. Transcribed interviews, recordings and documentation have been stored in a locked filing cabinet at the University in Melbourne and the true names of participants and other possible identifying data was removed in the transcribing process. Research did not commence until the University Ethics Committee had approved the study, and detailed consent forms for each participant were developed in adherence to Australian Catholic University's ethics guidelines.

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[7]Joniak (2010) describes this in her study *"On the street" and "Of the Street:" The Daily Lives of Unhoused Youth in Hollywood.* Joniak's response was to simply explain that the young person's age was irrelevant to her; she was simply not interested in their age. However, for my research to adhere to ethical guidelines, the age of participants was limited to 18 - 25 years. I had to follow my first instincts and not proceed with fieldwork with those I deemed to be too young.

Participants received copies of consent forms and letters that provided the details of the study. Participants were asked to create pseudonyms that have been used to replace participants' real names throughout this thesis.

Remuneration

Participants were compensated for their time during formal interviews and taking part in photography with a $30 Coles/Myer voucher. Liamputtong (2007) suggests that the remuneration of participants' time is respectful and appropriate during the research process. Paradis (2000) and Bentley and Thatcher (2004) write that payment for the contribution of participants' knowledge puts interviewees in a position of equal partners in the research. It does not signify coercion as 'monetary inducement can validate informed consent without being coercive' (Bentley and Thatcher, 2004, p. 293). Financial reward is rarely the motivation for participation in research (Sears, 2001). Offering a gift card to participants was my way of acknowledging that the young person's time and knowledge is valued and respected.

On Multiple Personalities

Early in the chapter, I gave consideration to reflexivity in researching meanings within a social or cultural context. Reflecting on the research became a natural process that I engaged in constantly: the nature of the research and relationships formed with some participants affected me on a deep and personal level. In contrast to positivism, qualitative methodologies operate with the knowledge that pure objectivity within research with people in the social context cannot be achieved (Harding, 1986). Unlike a detached arrangement, frameworks that situate the researcher in the context of the research (such ethnographic or feminist frameworks) celebrate subjectivity. Human emotion, indeed my own, is rightly so positioned in the research; my research is no less valid than a detached scientific study.

Unequivocally situated in the context of the research, my beliefs, experiences and social location influenced the direction of inquiry. At times, my experiences and beliefs led me to disagree with parts of the research process. I struggled when personal values were tested and, at times, with the many 'faces' that I 'wore' during the research process. As a researcher, my role was to carry out the study. As a student, I was continuing the growth in my learning, and as a youth worker, I carried with me a social conscious and preconceived ideas relating to the characteristics within groups of homeless young people.

My researcher face was trained and primarily focused on a commitment to understand more about marginalised groups of people and the social context in which they live. I predicted that an ethnographic methodology would promote researcher immersion into the culture and would additionally allow for flexibility in method use, an important factor in research with young people. Fieldwork in qualitative research results in the visibility of the researcher within studies, particularly as the researcher spends time reflecting on his or her own experiences throughout the research process. As a student, receiving regular feedback from participants prompted the growth of the research as well as a continual reflection of research practice. Finally, the third face I wore was that of the youth worker. My experience working with homeless young people was invaluable and influenced my interactions with the young people in this research. My professional background contributed to the conception of the research topic. However, being unable to shed the face of the youth worker in fieldwork did carry with it new considerations, at times hindering the research.

Barker (2010) found that he took on a multitude of roles during the research process and notes how this influenced findings:

> the existing rapport and networks that I had were invaluable in facilitating immersion amongst homeless young people. However, I was struck by how the differing roles of youth worker, consultant, and anthropologist affected the data that I collected. (Barker, 2010, p. 18)

As I described earlier in the chapter, one of the research sites used to conduct research was my workplace, a homeless refuge for young people. This was initially avoided due to ethical questions

that I had surrounding its use. Three months into fieldwork, I decided that this decision was restricting

the research, as I felt I was excluding a large section of the population of young homeless people.

Working at a refuge meant that I had direct access to young people who were eager to contribute to

the research. I used my position to contact clients who had exited the refuge in order to conduct in-

depth interviews. The decision to interview former residents of the refuge rather than young people

currently staying at the refuge was made out of ethical considerations, as I was concerned that some

current residents may have felt compelled to take part in interviews due to my position as a youth

worker. This was discussed with my manager and supervisor, and interviews conducted at this stage

of the research process were with young homeless people who were not current clients.

Leaving the Field

Perhaps all researchers experience the same hesitation when faced with the realisation that one must

leave the field. In my case, this was met with mixed emotions and questions regarding whether or not

I had enough data, or if had done my participants justice in presenting their perceptions adequately. I

experienced guilt, as the majority of the young people I had interacted with had no choice but to

remain homeless.

Struggling with the idea of leaving the field saw my exit date changing as more young people asked to

be involved in the research. The decision was made for me when in January 2013, I was informed of

Cameron's death. Cameron was not only a research participant, he was a young person whom I had

known in a professional capacity for five years. In the following weeks, I witnessed the grief and

anger of Cameron's peers while dealing with my own on a personal and professional level. After

driving his friends out to the country to attend Cameron's funeral and participating in a small service,

I felt that it was simply too sad to continue the research. It was time to thank the young people who

were involved in the research and begin the task of analysing the data that I had collected throughout

fieldwork.

Introducing the Young People

Whilst a more detailed account of the characteristics and perceptions of participants are presented in the following chapters, it is appropriate that I introduce the key participants of the research in the order they appear:

Cameron

The first young person to feature in this chapter is also the subject of the Preface. At the age of 23, Cameron had spent the majority of his life in transience. He spent his childhood and early teenage years in foster homes and residential units until exiting State Care into homelessness. When faced with sleeping rough, Cameron often exchanged sex for shelter; he attributed his heroin addiction to his sex work. Cameron sought out those in need of help or a friend and committed his time proudly: he volunteered at a service for street sex workers. Sadly Cameron died in January 2013. His insights contributed greatly to this research and are reflected in the following chapter and elsewhere.

Stevie

Armed with an artillery of tattoos, Stevie is one of the wisest 'old' women I have ever encountered. At 21 years of age, Stevie was noticeably sure of herself and articulated every thought with great consideration. At the time of interviewing Stevie, she had obtained a placement in a specialist housing program for young people experiencing mental illness. Stevie had very recently severed ties with her peers and was experiencing difficulty separating herself from the homeless culture that has been her world for many years.

Genete

Twenty-three-year-old Genete has experienced homelessness according to cultural definitions for ten consecutive years. At the age of thirteen Genete left home and, upon returning a year after, was not welcomed back by her family. Genete has been a poly-drug user since she was twelve, and has fought

a heroin addiction, and later an addiction to buprenorphine. Many of the years that Genete has been homeless have been spent rough sleeping, in refuges, couch surfing, or in transitional properties. Although because of her drug use Genete is still positioned within the homeless culture, at the time of our last interview, Genete had secured an Office of Housing property where she was living with her daughter. At the time of writing, Genete had moved interstate where she remains with her daughter.

Cookie

Cookie, 21, was homeless, as the fragile and violent relationship he had with his step-father prevented him from safely living at home. At the time of research, Cookie was residing in a youth refuge with his girlfriend Renee. Cookie was a big personality amongst his group of friends, and his word was generally accepted by all. Although he was against the use of hard drugs, and did not drink excessive amounts of alcohol, he still had an addiction that was problematic; Cookie's gambling, fuelled by the Casino, had a negative impact on his ability to remain in housing, as he could not hold onto money long enough to pay rent due. The space that Cookie and his peers had marked out for themselves is the territory surrounding the Casino and Southbank.

Renee

Renee, the youngest interviewee at 18 years, had been sleeping in garages and squats before finding a room at a youth refuge with her boyfriend (Cookie). She and Cookie then vacated the refuge to couch surf at a transitional property occupied by friends. This was Renee's first homeless experience and she was not able to go home while in a relationship with Cookie. Although Renee presents a tough front, she is frightened of her situation and the uncertain future. My last contact with Renee was approximately six months prior to writing this, according to other accounts she is couch surfing and is still obsessed with her mobile phone.

Lauren

I met 20-year-old Lauren old at Federation Square one evening after the early soup van run. Lauren socially positions herself as 'one of the boys'. She had been homeless twice and had recently served

two months in prison. Lauren attributes her cycles of homelessness to heroin and ice addictions that she maintains by engaging in sex work. Lauren's family background was unusual: her parents earn high incomes and she was educated at a private school. Lauren left home because she refused to abide by her parents' rules. She now believes that it is her addiction that prevents her from returning home.

Glenn

Glenn, aged 22, is likable and highly regard by his peers. Glenn has been out of home since he was a young teenager and, at the time of research, was either couch surfing with his girlfriend or sleeping rough. Glenn has served three sentences in juvenile and adult prisons and believes that the time spent in adult prison prompted him to 'take stock' of his situation. Glenn is nearing the completion of a pre-apprenticeship in plumbing. Throughout the research period, Glenn remained nonchalant about his homelessness as if it had become normalised.

Kane

Initially reluctant to participate in this research, Kane was happy to share his insights through photography and the narratives that followed. Kane is originally from Sydney and has been homeless since he was 15. Kane has spent five years couch surfing, in prison and in psychiatric units. He attributes his five-year-cycle of homelessness to his addiction to drugs and alcohol. However he struggles to imagine how life would be without substance use and the social life that accompanies it. Kane went on to complete a court-ordered rehabilitation program and is living outside of the homeless culture, maintaining social ties with the people he trains or those with whom attends Narcotics Anonymous. Since becoming homeless, this is the longest period in which Kane has remained housed and in control of his drug and alcohol addiction.

While many more young people contributed to this research, the word restrictions of this research do not allow them to all be individually introduced. However, many of their insights, comments and experiences are represented in the chapters that follow and are a result of the previously discussed methods that were employed to this study. In order to understand the lives of the young people

involved in this study beyond their current experiences of homelessness, the following pages describe the socio-demographic characteristics of participants.

Beyond their Homelessness: Socio-demographic characteristics of participants

In order to outline the backgrounds of the young people with whom I spent time during this research I have organised descriptive characteristics under the headings of: age and gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and identity, family background, contact with family, education and employment and income. Presenting these details offers insight into the backgrounds and lives of the research participants, and provides a context in which to introduce the key themes and subthemes that are explored in Chapter Three.

Age and Gender

Young men were over-represented throughout the research. Twenty-three participants (seventeen males and six females) were recruited to take part in formal interviews, conducted through semi-structured interviews and the use of auto-photography. The ages of the young people involved in this study ranged from 18 to 25 years[8]. The mean age of females interviewed was 20 years, and males 22.5 years.

Ethnicity

For the most part, participants were Australian born and Caucasian. Three young people identified as Indigenous Australian. The young people born overseas included two sisters from Fiji, a young male from Texas, USA and a small number of Maori young people born in New Zealand.

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[8] This is part in accordance with the ABS (2013) and with life span and developmental theories (Sigelman & Rider, 2006) that consider those up to the age of 25 years as youth and/or young adults.

The absence of non-Australian born young people who are culturally and linguistically diverse in homeless studies is common; many of these young people avoid sleeping rough or in places where visibility is high (Couch, 2011). There is also increased evidence that many people who are young and culturally or linguistically diverse do not access homeless agencies (Beer, Delfabbro, Oakley, Verity, Natalier, Packer & Bass, 2005; Couch, 2012).

Sexual Orientation and Identity

Participants were generally forthcoming in disclosing their sexual orientation. While most young people asserted that their sexual identity or orientation made no difference to their experiences of homelessness, two participants including Johnny suggested that it did:

> *They [society] sort of put me, stereotype me as a young person being homeless but then on top of being gay… I was fired from a job because I was gay, I was kicked out of a hostel because I was gay.* (Johnny)

During interviews and periods of observation with participants, a large number of young people identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and gender-queer. Participants often drew my attention to the topic of their gender preference. Two young people frequently used gender expressions such as 'androgynous' and 'transgender' during discussions about their sexual identity. Renee spoke of her best friend who identified as a lesbian, and often referred to herself as a 'dyke' as a way to exhibit her gendered identification:

> *like someone called her a lesbian once and she turned around and said no I'm a dyke and they were like, err well it's the same thing. And she said no, a lesbian is a lesbian and a dyke is like a lesbian but more like a man.* (Renee)

Four formally interviewed participants identified as being attracted to the opposite sex, two stated they were bisexual and one was unsure. An additional two participants identified as trans-women. Early into the research Cameron stressed to me that that his transgendered identity was strictly professional. Over time, however, Cameron's appearance changed, as he began to dress in feminine clothing during his personal time in addition to when engaging in sex work.

Family Background and Contact with Family

The majority of formally interviewed participants came from blended or single-parent households, while two young people were raised in dual parent homes. Those with a history of foster care, residential care and/or child protection involvement were over-represented throughout the research.

Approximately half drew income from Centrelink payments. Parental home ownership was rare; the majority of childhood homes were rented privately and through community or public housing. Family wealth or home ownership was spoken about with hesitancy; Lauren explained that she often felt she was judged as undeserving by her peers and social workers when she had mentioned to them that her parents own their home or have some wealth. More than half of the interviewees had some form of contact with family members:

> *I still talk to my Mum.* (Cookie)

However, for some participants, contact with family members was limited or non-existent:

> *I find it difficult to go back to visit my Dad's side of the family, I just kind of struggle with it because I've got so many bad memories from growing up there like high school, um just moving around a lot that I just don't like going there. But I'm a, I'm an adopted city boy.* (Kane)

Education and Employment

At the time of their interviews, two young people were working—Jimmy was casually employed as a seasonal labourer and Cameron was volunteering for an organisation that assisted sex workers. Kate was undertaking a Certificate IV in Youth Work, Glenn was completing a pre-apprenticeship in plumbing and Jimmy was studying for a Certificate in Mental Health Work. Genete had recently enrolled at a senior high school and was set to commence her VCE.

Nearly all participants had disengaged with education at an early age for several reasons, including a lack of interest in their education, the transient nature of their households or factors extending from their experience of homelessness. Cookie left high school after experiencing five changes of schools over seven homes in varying suburbs. Genete stopped going to school because of family issues:

> *I fucking hated school since I was seven cause, like, I started school when I was seven, my parents had a bad divorce and there was a lot of sexual and physical abuse in my family to the point where there's five girls in the family and three of those girls in my family got abused it was hard-core and when Mum and Dad finally broke up it kind of fucked my whole thing of school because all happened in the one year. When I was twelve my dad got my sister a caravan and she didn't want it so I lived in it and I left school and for six months straight just smoked bongs.* (Genete)

Alternative programs that the overall research group had participated in included vocational courses, such as obtaining a forklift license, or short courses taken during periods of incarceration in youth detention centres or adult prisons.

Income

Most young people reported on weekly or fortnightly Centrelink payments as their primary source of income, specifically the Living Away From Home Allowance or the Disability Support Pension. Additional income was obtained by a variety of methods including:

> *Sell drugs, steal and rort and scam and coal bite.* (Jimmy)

> *Yeah that's where I get...well I can guarantee you that all the clothing I own Crown has paid for it. It's not my main thing, like, I do rorts but I do them myself by myself, I do it and I know I won't get caught.* (Cookie)

> *Me and my girlfriend have made shitloads off scabbing.* (Glenn)

> *My mate goes picks them (psychedelic mushrooms) and sells them, he lives in a backpackers and doesn't get Centrelink so that's how he makes his money.* (Kane)

> *I was taking drugs in and out of jail for a friend.* (Genete)

Engaging in sex work also generated a supplementary income for several young homeless people involved in this research. There was no gender variation in regards to participating in prostitution. Young male and female respondents either reported that they had engaged in sex work or knew other young homeless people who did:

> *Like there is actually a place called subway sauna and it's for gay guys and I know people who go down near there and sell their arse. Yeah it's just a sauna and spa but there are gay guys who go down there and sort themselves out. It's easier for the guys to go down there and say 'listen mate a 100 bucks and you can do what you want'. And they get it. They can do it to ten different guys and get a 1000 bucks and that's a 1000 bucks in their hand*! (Cookie)

> *If guys are just straight and just doing it for the money they won't talk about it. But that's not as common.* (Glenn)

> *I know a few girls that do it. It's actually more common for the guys to do it than girls.* (Genete)

> *Yeah I've known a few. Pretty evenly split form my experience I think it's sad that they have to resort to that.* (Stevie)

> *Well the girls are everywhere, in St Kilda it's on this street and that street right in your face. Where the boys work it's hidden in the park and if you don't know about it you would never know it's there.* (Cameron)

Of the participants interviewed, three males and one female reported engaging in sex work. While males cited parks and the street as sites of prostitution, Lauren specified that she had also been employed by an escort agency.

To Summarise

This chapter has outlined the ethnographic approach adopted in the study. I have also explained how I engaged with the research participants. The research methods used to collect data were described, followed by an outline of how this data was analysed. The chapter ended with an introduction to the young people who contributed to this study and providing an overview of their socio-demographic

characteristics. In the following chapter I will explore participant's lives and their involvement in subcultural formations.

Chapter Three

'So whatchya writing about again?'

'As with other subcultures, the culture of street life is diverse and complex. As such, those who make up street or homeless youth are equally diverse in terms of background, present experiences, and future aspirations.'
(Karabanow, 2008, p. 10)

So far, I have discussed the experiences of young people's homelessness. In this section, I address the experiences of how participants identify with each other through subcultural affiliations. As this chapter will demonstrate, there is great diversity amongst this group of young people which manifests itself in different ways. Collective participation raises questions regarding whether these young people together represent a subcultural movement. While collectively, participants can be viewed as having subcultural qualities, their diversity problematises some of the classical theories of subculture and uses of the term. Uncovering the layers and meanings of these subcultures required that I first understand the significance of the subculture groups and how participants formed an identity through participating and interacting with peers of similar and different subcultures. However, before we discuss this, it is important to explore the background experiences of research participants.

Becoming Homeless

The living situations of participants were indeed complex. Young people experienced various levels of homelessness within all the categories of homelessness:

> ***Q:*** *Thinking about these different categories of homelessness, how many of those describe your experiences of homelessness?*
>
> ***Cameron:*** *All three of them.*

> *Q:*   *So thinking about those homeless definitions how would you*
> *define your situation now and past situations?*
>
> *Stevie:*   *All of them.*

Interviews revealed that the length of homelessness experienced by participants varied; however, essentially, the homelessness experienced was cyclic in nature. As was expected, participants shared similar pathways into homelessness with those reported in recent youth homeless research (Barker, 2012; Mallett et al., 2010; Mayock, 2012; McLoughlin, 2013).

Pathways into Homelessness

Reasons why young people experienced homelessness were varied and often overlapped. Mental health issues, abuse (emotional and physical) and conflict with parents over the young person's drug use were common factors cited by participants in leaving or being forced out of home:

> *My story all started when the family home started to fall apart when I was about 15 and I was thrown out for the first time. I went to stay with my sister for periods while trying to finish high school. This soon fell apart like most things as I was beginning to get involved in the drug scene.* (Kane)

> *I think in a way it [poor mental health] caused it....well the first time I was ever admitted while I was on the way to the psych ward, the police were taking me there and my mother rang up the psych ward and said 'keep her there, I don't want her back'. And then from there I went to into foster care, and then from there my mother sent me to live with my father who beat the shit out of me every day. And then from there my mother finally took me back and I stayed there for a few more years....finally I just left because she was going to send me back to him again cause I was depressed and she couldn't handle it...oh and she thought he would straighten me out.* (Stevie)

> *I left home at like 15 so I was young and my own drug use had a lot to do with it. Once something went wrong and I had no money and I still went and got drugs and before you know it that's it you've got nothing.* (Jimmy)

> *My step father is a dick I don't like him, he used to beat me up when I was a kid and Mum never saw it, Mum believed him over me and then finally I told her and finally she realised what he had done and then she... she wants to leave him but she hates to love him because of what he has done. The moment he leaves I'll go back home, like I'll try to. He has lived there my whole life.* (Cookie)

Additional precursors to homelessness included the separation or remarriage of a parent, overcrowding and parental drug or alcohol abuse. Renee, for example, blames a large part of her homelessness and events leading up to it on her father's drug use and her mother's participation in sex work. When asked if she had adults in her life that she could turn to, Renee explained that her only other family members was her auntie, who also was involved in sex work, and her grandfather whose whereabouts were not known to Renee.

I am Homeless

Several young people were confused or unsure about when they had become homeless. Confusion over the length of homelessness was more common amongst participants with a history of institutional or residential care than those without:

> *Well kind of up until… like do I count before 18 when I was in foster care? I kind of had a few stable places up until 15 so since about 15 to 24?* (Cameron)

Young women were found to have first experienced homelessness at a younger age than males; the youngest age reported was 13 years. Both Stevie and Genete experienced homelessness at this age:

> *The first time I was 13 and it was after I had a psychotic episode and burned a house down for several reasons.* (Stevie)

> *I left home when I was 13, I had a boyfriend and I left and got on the train with his friends… I went back home but I had nowhere to stay cause none of my family would take me in so I thought fuck I have to go on a journey to find my place called home.* (Genete)

Compared to female participants, young males were more likely to report longer periods of homelessness, which also tended to be more cyclic in nature. The following excerpt taken from Kane's written narrative demonstrates just what it means to have experienced reoccurring homelessness:

For most of the years from 15-19 I was hanging around people that had similar interests to me; smoking bongs and drinking, I was staying at their houses when I could and in my car when I had one. I was directed to a youth refuge called Oasis located in Surrey Hills in Sydney. As things go I was exited to a supported accommodation program which I couldn't maintain and I was to be on the street again for a while.

Around this time is when I started going to rehabs and detoxes until I was accepted back into the refuge but then I was soon kicked out of the refuge around Christmas time for robbing the Xbox to support my drug habit. I was then sleeping in stairwells of housing commission flats or under stairwells in apartment buildings. Things took a turn for the worse when I was about 20. I was admitted to a psychiatric facility by the police under the mental health and was released after about a week but was soon to be re-sectioned for a lengthy period of time.

When I was discharged this time they gave me a house but my drug habits got out of control so I made a move to Canberra, living in backpacker hostel but I was to be banned from every backpacker hostel in the Canberra region. I moved to Victoria and this is where things went completely out of control.

I started out staying in backpacker hostels and even managed to rent a variety of share houses for periods though I was never in one place for more than a few months. I was sleeping out or at friends places in the in between going from service to service. I was put in refuges shitty boarding houses or refuges and when a moment of clarity would hit me I would go to a detox or rehab but these services are hard to access or have long waiting lists. (Kane)

Where I Sleep

In the early stages of homelessness, participants reported relying largely on couch surfing as a means of shelter:

Well I've been couch surfing at people's houses with people I used to play football with. Now it's people I don't really know, but I still couch surf with them, but yeah. (Glenn)

Usually I'm lucky so I'm couching or anything like that. (Genete)

More often than not, the relationships with those with whom they stayed turned sour or failed. It was thus only a matter of time before young people ran out of places to stay, and the breakdown of relationships marked the beginning of the cycle of squatting, sleeping rough, or residing in refuges

and rooming houses. Although these results differ from some studies (such as Barker, 2010), they are consistent with those of McLoughlin's (2011). Discussing the findings of her thesis, *Tenuous Guests: couch surfing through homelessness in the lives of Australian youth*, McLoughlin explains how the practice of couch surfing often takes place in the early stages of homelessness, before other experiences such as rough sleeping or the use of shelter systems:

> Often, becoming aware of and gaining entry into formal services like youth homeless shelters, or supported temporary accommodation happened at a much later point [following couch surfing]. In many cases, for example, access to shelter systems only came about after meeting other young people who had experienced homelessness and who possessed knowledge of where to go. (Mcloughlin, 2011, p. 528)

Findings from Barker's (2010) Canberra-based ethnography suggest couch surfing is a method often turned to *after* staying in service. One possible explanation for the observed difference in these findings may be the accessibility of youth services in Canberra and Melbourne. In Melbourne, participants reported long periods of time before links were made with youth and housing services. Both Jimmy and Darren, for example, were homeless for over one year before accessing support services, or, such as in Jimmy's case-outreach services:

> *It wasn't until about 12 months later that I even knew you could get help. I ended up going to the Salvos soup van and asked for a housing worker.* (Jimmy)

> *After about a year and a half I just started slowly finding out about, like, support places.* (Darren)

Other forms of accommodation used by participants included youth and adult refuges, private rooming/ boarding houses, backpackers, train stations and squats:

> *Boarding house when I was 17 for adults in Dandenong behind the train station. I was there for a month.* (Cookie)

> *I've had to break into a house and like and used the curtains as a blanket and that.* (Genete)

> *At Southern Cross waiting room, it was warm and safe, they had security checks every 20 minutes so I was fine there, and yeah then…yeah just stayed there.* (Dave)

We stayed in an abandoned hotel, that was pretty cool because actually it already had mattresses and everything and all the mattresses were clean and everything but um we got blankets and pillows off the salvo's van and what not so... we actually set it up like an actual bedroom, we bought, we sold magazines and stuck posters up, we had, they already had fake plants so we like the plastic bug plants so we put them in there and everything. (Renee)

Schools were considered safe places to sleep during the holiday periods:

We stayed at a school on the school holidays, that was actually quite fun there because we had friends come over and what not and like it was pretty fun, we would all drink and….that was one of the good ones. (Lauren)

Other measures participants took in accommodating themselves were creative, and included accessing a drug and alcohol detox centre, as Glenn did, or hospitals, as in Stevie's case:

I'm not really needing it, I'm not using but I smoke (marijuana) but they have really good food, it's a bed and the workers are cool. (Glenn)

Friend's bedroom floors and psych wards. (Stevie)

Ian explained how he had recently wandered into a Church of Scientology. Ian spent the afternoon talking to people from the church and, after expressing interest in joining the religion, was offered the couch of one of the church's members to sleep on for a few nights. Ian had joked with me that they must have realised he had nothing to offer, and after a couple of days he was told not to return. Similarly, a couple I met during field work attended a church on Saturdays. They viewed this as an exchange for the permission they obtained to regularly sleep in the church camping grounds located in the inner suburbs.

In addition to the above scenarios identified by participants was accommodation secured via 'survival sex'. Exchanging sex for shelter was found to be common, regardless of gender:

For a girl to be homeless, a straight girl, I've noticed if they have homeless male friends, they want sexual favours in return for letting them stay with them but with guys it doesn't really happen unless it's part of the gay community. (Stevie)

Q: *Do you know of people who exchange sexual favours for shelter?*
Lauren: *Yeah*

I would go to the Peel or something and just pick up someone just so I can have somewhere to stay for the night but yeah. (Cameron)

Overall, participants presented an extensive list of the various ways they found somewhere to sleep. Some of these spaces were more preferable than others, however, in reality there was little choice and the young people had ended up sleeping rough at least one stage during their experience of homelessness.

Sleeping Rough

When participants exhausted all options to sleep under cover, they slept rough in alleyways, underground car parks, stairwells, train stations, parks, and as Glenn described, behind buildings:

I've slept, I've actually been behind, well, there's a library in [suburb disclosed] *called the* [name disclosed]. I*'ve slept behind that because it's all covered in plants so no one knows I'm there.* (Glenn)

Last weekend I slept, I hided under a bush kinda under, near a DHS building in the North that I know really well... I avoid public so I don't get attacked, over the weekends I will sleep and hide under a bush so I don't get attacked. I use Monday to Friday the train stations and weekends I use DHS which I know is closed on weekends or like I said things like the bush so I don't get attacked. (Glenn)

Stairwells were often utilised and, as Kane described, they provide privacy when locked from the inside and are accessible to a medium sized group. It was in the context of rough sleeping where the participant's gender influenced the environment in which they slept, and with whom they shared the location. Many female participants I spoke to preferred to attach themselves to others when it came to sleeping rough. However, Stevie preferred to sleep separately from other young homeless people she knew, finding parks to be a safer environment:

Yeah, I used parks because I knew that they were safer than alleyways and that… people didn't go there as much surprisingly, during the night anyway. (Stevie)

When sleeping rough, the participant's safety was important. Glenn relied on sleeping in spaces that were under surveillance:

> **Glenn:** *So yeah, slept behind libraries, and the train station, at the end of the platforms because I know that I am on camera.*
>
> **Q:** *Are the cameras important to you?*
>
> **Glenn:** *Yeah well the only reason I did that under cameras is because I knew if I didn't go somewhere under cameras I knew I would get jumped by someone that night so I'd lie under a steel chair. So Monday to Friday at midnight and after when the trains stop are the only time I go there because I would avoid public so I don't get attacked.*

The risk of being attacked or harassed while sleeping rough was high. On occasion this meant sleeping in locations where a large number of young homeless people slept:

> *Like at first it was just me and my girlfriend by ourselves and then 10 or so casually got bigger until there was like 20 of us staying in the one spot.* (Cookie)

It was during this period of sleeping collectively that many of the young people in this study started to form relationships with other homeless young people.

Social Worlds

When asked to recall their experiences of becoming homeless, many reported this early period as confusing, scary and lonely.

> *It's lonely, you are so fucking alone and you will carry that forever. It doesn't matter how many people are around, at the end of the day you are with yourself, and I think it's what's the most scariest… just been alone.* (Genete)

However, with time, these feelings lessened and young people found ways to cope with their situations. One way was to form friendships with other young homeless people; these usually took the form of having a boy/girlfriend or other platonic relationships, and finally, identifying with a peer group consisting of other homeless young people. The following discussion will focus on different

kinds of relationships, including intimate relationships, platonic friendships, the loss of old friendships, street families and peer groups.

Intimate Relationships

The intimate relationships of participants varied. Of those interviewed, Kate was married, and Jimmy, Cookie and Renee were in monogamous relationships; Cookie and Renee were a couple. Genete was in an on-and-off-again relationship with the father of her daughter. Reasons for forming or maintaining relationships were occasionally strategic; females particularly reported their safety as a factor in their decision to form or continue a relationship. Some believed being in an intimate relationship was necessary to their survival:

> *Yeah, a lot of my friends have done that. They need someone to look after them.* (Genete)

> *Cause I'm a girl, if I didn't have a boyfriend when I'm on the street I could be dead right now. Like, everyone goes for the females. So like, without him yeah… someone to keep you company and keep you safe.* (Renee)

Overall, of young people involved in this research, the largest proportion was single. This was a preferable and conscious choice made for a small number of respondents:

> *Q: Have you had relationships with people who are homeless?*
> *Stevie: No, I knew better than that*
> *Q: Was that a conscious decision you made?*
> *Stevie: Yes*
> *Q: Why?*
> *Stevie: Because I knew how small choice my life had been and I didn't want to be with*
> *   someone who was as unstable as I was.*

> *Q: Have you been in a relationship while homeless?*
> *Jimmy: No*

> ***Q:*** *Is it something you have avoided or…*
>
> ***Jimmy:*** *Yeah, that's not a relationship. Like I've had girls you know but not relationships.*

Additional reasons for avoiding an intimate relationship included not wanting to share drugs with anyone and having experiences of domestic violence in previous relationships:

> *She convinced me that I would be nothing and nowhere without her. Actually I, she, kind of breaks that rule about not being with other homeless people. She was in transitional housing while I met her.* (Stevie)

Stevie found it difficult to leave the relationship because she had nowhere else to live. This was also the experience of Johnny. Johnny had recently entered a youth refuge upon leaving a violent relationship with an older man with whom he had lived. According to Stevie and Johnny, domestic violence between same-sex couples experiencing homelessness is very common:

> *I've noticed a lot of domestic violence going on in between couples who are on the streets or who are in transitional housing and stuff like that a lot.* (Stevie)

In this study, there were no reports of domestic violence from participants in same-sex relationships.

Platonic Friendships

The friendships of most participants were those forged with other homeless young people. Many participants had stopped socialising with school friends prior to, or in the early stages of, their homelessness. Jimmy explained how he had managed to maintain some friends when first becoming homeless:

> *One or two but lost contact after a while.* (Jimmy)

Various reasons were cited regarding the loss of contact with old friends. Many reasons related to how young people felt about themselves and their current situation. When asked about why he had stopped contacting old friends he responded:

I don't know…shame? (Jimmy)

For Renee, it was the loss of her mobile phone that led her to disconnect from her school friends:

> *Yeah at times there was like half way through me being homeless I was like from the start to about half way three quarters through the time I knew friends that had homes and stuff, like I used to always talk to them and stay at their house but at the end I just lost contact because I lost my phone and what not so I, then I started hanging out with all the other homeless people, so like it's good sometimes knowing homeless people because they know what it's like and they are like you know we all take care of each other and what not.* (Renee)

Genete, Stevie and Kane blamed their behaviour for attributing to the loss of school friends:

> *Well I ended up stealing off my friends just to get places like where I needed to go and these people that I stole from they actually had a lot of money and I thought well they won't care, they have a lot to support themselves like why not help me so I helped myself.* (Genete)

> *Yeah I've got a couple of friends that I have had since I was 16 but yeah but mostly I change friends every few months. I burnt a lot of bridges when I was younger too cause I was a lot crazier then and did a lot of stupid things and that really didn't help.* (Stevie)

> *I have at times had friend that did not use drugs but that did not last long and I'd use them up and either fuck them off or rob them.* (Kane).

While many participants valued the friendships made during homelessness, three young people's responses differed from most. Cameron made a distinction between true friendship and the friends he had made over the many years spent homeless:

> *When I say friends it's mainly people I know, not someone who I've really bonded with that I'm really, really close with its just people I know.* (Cameron)

Ian had difficulty forming close friendships and while he associated with other young homeless people; he considered himself somewhat of a loner. Ian reasoned that this was due to a difference in personalities and a reluctance to rely on others:

Yeah I never really thought the same as them, never really listened to the same music, never had the same aspirations. (Ian)

It's just easier. Then I don't have to worry about them not been there one day… I would rather just look to myself for support all the time and things like that. (Ian)

Jimmy had recently started to question the friendships he had made on the streets and when asked if he trusted his friends, Jimmy's answer was clear:

Not at all, not as far as I could throw them. (Jimmy)

Genete also reported that trust was always an issue amongst friends:

You can never trust them to a point you like never know when they're going to turn or when they're going to do you over and it's always like that on the street. It doesn't matter if you have grown up when youse are good then it's gone all fucking haywire and shit you can never trust each other, you can't, it's impossible to. You've gotta be street smart and think what do they want out of me and am I going to allow them to get it? Or its vice-versa – do they think the same? You've got to be open minded but alert of what's going on. (Genete)

For the majority of participants, friendships formed with other homeless young people were considered to be very important to them and to their survival. This was particularly so in early stages of homelessness:

I would just sit there doing nothing, waiting just you know because I had nothing to do and then they would walk up and ask are you ok, come chill with us. (Renee)

He showed us everywhere to go and his like he came up and said youse have been coming here every night are youse homeless? And we were like yeah, and he goes me too come with me in the morning and I will show you everywhere you need to go like somewhere to have showers, somewhere to get something to eat and he showed us the Salvos and everything and yeah, without him we wouldn't know anything. (Cookie)

Street Families

The closeness that street peers have with one another has been the focus of multiple studies on homeless young people (Fitzpatrick, 2000; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Karabanow, 2007; Ravenhill, 2008); as previously mentioned, researchers find that young homeless people in peer groups take on the characteristics of a traditional family unit. According to McCarthy, Hagan and Martin (2002), street kids 'establish relationships in which they adopt familial names and identities' (p. 832). This may be a logical adaption to situations of deprivation, whereby young people recreate those informal institutions that have failed them. The organisational patterns are symbolic. The practical functions of street families have far-reaching consequences for the young people involved.

For the homeless, Plympton (1997) suggests that there are five task-performing functions found in traditional and street families. These functions illustrate not only the reason why young people adopt a form similar to the conventional family, but also why it is so productive. The functions s are seeking responsibility, developing egalitarian relationships, having a recreational unit, finding the opportunity to contribute and creating a sense of agency. Street families appear to fulfil needs for young people who are otherwise deprived of conventional institutional participation. Although the notion of a street family is largely an international concept and rarely discussed in Australian literature, for some young people in this study, the street family (as referred to by research participants) was found to be highly valued. In Renee's case, a street family provided her with an element of protection. Her 'street dad' played a large role in building her social networks and was viewed as a 'protector' and held in high regard because of the kindness he had shown her:

> *He just gave me $100 out of his pocket because I was hungry*. (Renee)

Renee saw her 'street dad' as essential in terms of finding places to sleep and providing her with physical protection:

> *It was Peter, my street dad that told the others at the squat that we were cool.*

Renee's comment reflects the suggestion made by Hagan and McCarthy (1997) that females frequently join street families because the families can provide them with some level of protection.

However the street family also has the potential to exploit young people further within the street culture. Karabanow (2004) notes that while some young homeless people discuss street families with optimism, many also acknowledge their distrust of the homeless community overall. This distrust was also shared by some of the research participants I spoke with, including Jimmy:

> *It's just really just to build a relationship and then, like rip the bloke. 'Yeah I'll look after you I'm your street dad, what day to you get paid?' The girls are just lost.* (Jimmy)

While the relationships between homeless young people have been viewed as problematic (Hughes & Wright, 2004), or existing only to serve immediate needs such as socialisation, it is equally important to acknowledge their positive attributes. Young people make meaning through social and cultural resources, and relationships with others provide a sense of belonging and enhance wellbeing. These social relationships are essential to the development of a young person's identity (Machielse, 2006) and without them, they can become withdrawn, as with my example of the young rough sleeper I encountered. For the most part, research participants had formed relationships with other young people experiencing homelessness.

The closeness peers shared with one another certainly had some of the characteristics of familial relations:

> *Yeah, like I have my own street Dad, I call him Dad and I have a street Mum and I call her Mum..... Yeah it's common cause there are some people that are full drug addicts and we don't go near them. We talk to them you know, how are you going, but there another group and our group are just trying to help each other out and look after each other like if I was in trouble all I needed to do is go and find my street Dad and he would deal with it all.* (Renee)

Street families consisted not only of a street Mum or Dad. Participants spoke of having street siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins:

> *I would class one person as my family but that's the only person I would. You need to have that type of person... maybe, maybe not, it's just about how you get along with people, like this guy that I look at as a brother, I mean we have only known each*

other for 2-3 months but we get along well we've never had a fight or nothing so…. And we are always out together at night. Without him I would be like I wouldn't know what to do. Kind of thing like he would help, like if some guy was giving me shit he would walk up and deal with him, and if I wasn't talking to him and I walked up and told him he would be like, look it's your own problem, it's kind of like a fight with your brother. (Cookie)

When I came to Melbourne the two people I first met well I didn't think of him as a substitute father, more like a brother. But I don't think it [the relationship] is as significant as I just needed someone to hang around with because I was lonely. (Cameron)

Several participants viewed the idea of a street family with suspicion. Stevie and Jimmy had not encountered the concept until recently, and Kane was against the idea of it all together:

I'm very self-reliant so I think the idea is a bit hmmm, I …hmmm… a bit stupid. (Kane)

Prior to a friend introducing Jimmy to her 'street dad, Jimmy' had only thought about the idea of a street family in a particular cultural context:

I know one or two, I think it comes from the Aboriginals...I don't understand it myself. (Jimmy)

Stevie had learnt about street families from other homeless young people at a youth refuge where she had stayed:

I have heard of it like hmmm… I didn't get involved in that but I know some others that did and it kind of surprised me at first to hear some people talking about their street Mums or street Dads. I had never experienced that until I got to my last refuge. (Stevie)

Although importance has been given to the role of street families, in this research it appeared that most young people existed in what McCarthy, Hagan and Martin (2002) refer to as 'street group relations', which differ from street families; they note that street group relations are 'friendships based on a particular style of dress, music, or other cultural markers, as well as those that occur as a result of personality and history' (832). From what we have examined so far young people in this research

seems to correspond more with this definition, and it is to an exploration of these peer groups that we now turn.

Peer Groups and Subcultures

During the research, it became clear that the majority of those involved in this study knew each other. Young people met and interacted with one another by 'hanging out', accessing services, using alcohol and other substances, sleeping nearby one another or or making money together. In this way, participants identified first with a larger group of homeless young people in the CBD:

> *A lot of them [friends] have like been in and out of refuges and what not so… yeah.* (Renee)

> *Rooming houses n' that is where you meet other people who are on drugs and other people who you would fit in with because you have the same issues. (*Genete)

> *I met them [other homeless young people] when I was in a refuge.* (Cookie)

Beyond these interactions, it was found that young people spent most of their time hanging out in smaller, separate groups consisting of young people who were also homeless. These groups were defined by several elements found to be common amongst group members that made each clique distinct from one another in several noticeable and subtle ways:

> *Yeah like we all listen to the same music. We all, you know like to do the same stuff like drink or what not and we all have the same taste in clothes and what not so it's good.* (Renee)

> *Well it's just people that hang out together the most kind of thing. Like we are all friends and talk to each other but there's one group that just sits there and they all hang out together and there's always three groups, like just sitting there but we all swap around and come join the other groups of people and what not but….does that make sense? There's a couple of loners all in the group and they all sit together and like the 'cool' people as other people call it….like I go hang out with the main people and then there's just other people that sit there and chill. (Renee)*

However, this was not the only way in which young people identified with one another. Within this larger group, participants subsequently separated themselves into smaller, distinct, stylistically oriented groups (which I call subculture groups). Participants tended to spend time primarily with one another or smaller subculture groups, though there were a number of participants who did not associate with any one group. These groups were identifiable by the spaces that are utilised, aesthetic style, music, preferences in substance use, and occasionally the sexual orientation and identities of young people.

Each of these characteristics and their importance is discussed in this section. Firstly, I will describe each of these smaller subcultural groups. Then, I will outline how and why participants are differentially affiliated with each group.

Subculture Groups: Defining and Differentiating

There were subcultural distinctions amongst participants which divided them into smaller sub-segmented peer groups. When I first began field work I noticed there were a number of prevailing visual characteristics that distinguished participants from one another. This was most evident in the way that participants were differently dressed. A decision to affiliate with one peer group over another was also determined by the stylistic preferences of peers and interests in activities:

> *People I click with on different levels my group of friends are actually good poem writers and write lyrical type of stuff. They are heavily into music.* (Johnny)

> *We all go to the EB games shops and spend our time playing games.* (Glenn)

To get a better understanding of the subculture groups, I asked participants to help explain peer relations and the importance of subcultural affiliation. I also asked participants to give me an understanding of how they classified themselves, and one another, in relation to these conceptualised

subculture groupings. Participants identified a number of distinctive, subculturally-oriented peer groups that were present.

The following section describes each of these groups and the traits found to be common amongst group members. The groups are presented and labelled here as how they were referred to by the young people. While some traits overlap into other groups, there was at least one common element found to set groups apart from one another. These groups are labelled as: Scene Kids, Punks, City Rats, Rhymers and The Lads.

Scene Kids

The label 'Scene Kid' is one both assigned and self-ascribed by research participants. Often when the label was used by participants outside of this group it carried with it negative undertones. Three participants labelled themselves as 'Scene Kids'. In an interview with Renee, it was revealed that Scene Kids feel a sense of ownership over several locations in the city. This group spent nights hanging around the Crown Casino where they made additional income begging for change in the evenings between the Casino and the bridge connecting Southbank to Flinders Street station. When ejected from the Casino and its surrounding areas by security, they found seclusion in the Grotto:

> *Well we like to find secluded areas with trees and what not, like the Grotto and the only way you can see is if you are taller than the bushes and if we are having two drinks each, when we see kids we cover the drinks up.* (Renee)

When it came to the use of the Casino and its surrounds, the group was territorial and quick to move on other homeless people whom they deemed unsuitable to share their space with, adults included.

Overall, looks were important to the Scene Kids:

> *Image is everything, if you dress like a gangster of course they will look at you differently, but it happens.* (Cookie)

Common colours worn by this group included black, deep reds and blues and purple. Hair styles were varied yet for the most part reflected the hair styles of the punk era, yet neater, more polished. Hair was often dyed various colours or bleached until peroxide white in some cases. The use of dramatic makeup, coloured contact lenses, facial and neck piercing were additional elements of style found within this group:

> *The people at the steps, they all dress like freaks they were called the 'scene'. 'Scene Kids' like with big hair and wearing all black, kind of like Gothic or Emo.* (Lauren)

> *Yeah most of us have the same taste in clothes, like we all have like the 'scene' look kind of thing, and like we, a lot of us like to wear black but real funky stuff. We like to stand out like we don't like to just be normal and blend in.* (Renee)

Males took as much care with their appearance as the girls did. It was not uncommon to observe young males having their nails polished or hair done by other members of the group and when asked where clothes were obtained, some would enthusiastically answer the question in great detail. A notable example of this was in the early stages of participant observation at the youth bus one evening. I had complimented a young man on the knee length, black woollen coat he was wearing. He was pleased I had noticed and proceeded to show me the detailed silver buttons and dark red lining of his coat and proudly explained that it was a 'NYC Tripp' coat.

The majority of young people from this group reported to be attracted to the opposite sex:

> *Most of my friends, the only friends that I have that are straight are probably about 6-8 friends, all the rest are gay, bi or transgender.* (Renee)

Young people were quick to identify their sexual orientation and to correct others if identified incorrectly by their peers. An example of this was witnessing an argument between Ben and another young person who had referred to Ben as being gay. Ben asserted that he was bi-sexual rather than gay and told his peer to 'get it right!'

Participants within this group preferred to listen to two different styles of music: Screamo and R&B:

Yeah like we all listen to the same music. Mostly Screamo music and like full like none of that electric techno stuff, just good plain Head Bang music. (Renee)

It was rare that R&B was listened to by the young male participants, the girls listened to it on their portable speakers when the majority of their male peers were not around.

Of the young people I met during observation, the highest concentrations of young people in relationships were found within this group of young homeless people. Couples included young homeless people in same-sex and opposite-sex intimate relationships.

All of the participants who stated that they did not use drugs were associated with this group. Although they stated that they did not use drugs, some made a clear distinction between marijuana and 'harder' drugs, and the use of marijuana was acceptable behaviour according to participants such as Renee and Cookie:

A lot of my friends drink and do smoke pot but they don't do other stuff. I drink more since I've been on the streets and hang out. (Renee)

Like I know people who do harder shit than that but they don't do it when they are around us. Well we don't really care: it's their choice we aren't going to say 'don't do that' because they will because they want to. (Cookie)

Punks

Born some decades later than they should have is the group of boys I refer to as the Punks. This reference is based on the self-ascribed label that is worn with pride. There were no female punks involved in this study. Josh explained that punks preferred to hang out with males and that girls 'come and go'. There is only one young woman who Josh considers to be a 'real' Punk. This was explained by Josh as he showed me his photographs of the group.

Geographically speaking, this group was the most unpredictable of all young people involved in the study, particularly in the evenings. This was due to the number of squats taken up by members on a regular basis. Squats could remain theirs for days or months at a time. They would be abandoned due to police shutting the place down or another group of homeless people (usually adults) taking over. Public areas frequented by participants identified to be part of this group include The Steps, Federation Square, the King's Domain where the Shrine of Remembrance is located and, for a short time, the areas where the Occupy Melbourne movement protesters were stationed.

As with many young people involved in this study, this group of young people placed much emphasis on appearance. Many of the study's participants who described themselves as a Punk took time to rough up their woollen jumpers and rip another tear in their worn out jeans which were most likely to be held together by safety pins. Worn leather jackets were favoured as were t-shirts with the names of Punk Bands from the 1970s and 1980s on them. Punks whom I met preferred to look like they had not washed in days, although they had that morning. It was the look of 'I don't give a fuck' or, as Josh explained to me, 'Like a gutter rat, that's real Punk'. Dyed hair was very common amongst this group and hair styles ranged from Mohawks to having a very pointy fringe hanging over an eye or in the middle of one's face.

When asked about the music that the young people within this group listened to, the names of old 1970s and 1980s Punk bands such as Misfits, Minor Threat, Dead Kennedy's and The Ramones were recited. Participants of the group also expressed a loyalty to the Melbourne 'hard-core' Punk scene. The young people within this group regularly drank alcohol and smoked marijuana. Some participants spoke of using mushroom caps and speed yet did not condone the use of the drug 'ice'. Josh spoke of a time where his peers had beaten him for 'getting on the crack' (ice) and of how a recent squat was taken over by older homeless people who had turned it into a 'crack house'.

City Rats

Although this label 'City Rat' was not one self-ascribed or commonly assigned to this group, it is used in this thesis to describe the following collective of participants. This is due to the few times that the term 'City Rat' was mentioned as a reference to this group, particularly by Cookie. While this group is made up of younger people than the majority of those involved in the research, a small number of them were over 18 years. Those to whom I spoke claim to be over 18 years old and stay in youth refuges or couch surfed most notably with other young people living in Transitional Housing. None of the young people from this group who were asked questions about their accommodation were currently sleeping rough.

Young men in this group were observed to wear hoodies and skinny jeans regardless of the season. Females tended to wear skinny jeans, short skirts and hoodies, also for most of the year. Most noticeable amongst this group was that for the period between September and November 2011, the girls were observed to accessorize with pointy ears and makeup drawn on their faces to resemble cats. This was a temporary phase that was unique to this particular group.

The members of this group spread themselves out more than the other groups, yet noticeably utilised the steps of Flinders Street Station during the day. It is common for this group to share space with the Scene Kids and Punks.

I observed a common love of Techno music amongst this group of young people. This was no more apparent than during a period of observation spent at the youth bus which has a DJ booth built in at the rear. Participants whom I identified to be members of the group spent the majority of their time playing Techno tracks and performing the 'Melbourne Shuffle' to hard-style Techno music. (The Melbourne Shuffle is a dance move originating from the Melbourne rave scene in the early 1990s. Using talcum powder on the dance floor to prevent slipping, arm and feet movements are rapid and move in time with beats breaking out at between 140-160 beats per minute). Cameron discusses the group's preferred type of music:

> *Like we love Techno or some Screamo, depending on the type of Screamo. I don't like that type when you can't understand what they are saying.* (Cameron)

Many females within the group also listened to R&B and Pop songs that they played from their mobile phones.

A large number of the young people within this group reported poly-drug use. Those with whom I discussed drug use claimed to have chromed and smoked marijuana since their early teenage years, and while a few had experimented with 'harder' drugs at times throughout their homelessness, no one reported using these regularly:

> *A lot of weed, pretty much every person I know smokes weed, some would be into ecstasy and speed and some would be into heroin but I think weed is the most common thing.* (Stevie)

While drugs and alcohol were consumed by the young people, the analysis of field notes and interviews indicated that participant's drug use was dependent on what was available to them rather than a preference for specific drugs:

> *Umm the last refuge I was in I would take a lot of cough syrup.* (Lauren)

> *When I'm in refuges I would be smoking a lot. I wouldn't really drink as much, I used to be a heavy drinker but not as much anymore.* (Stevie)

A number of participants from this group identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and, as one young participant advised me, androgynous. Participants felt accepted by peers and this played a large role in the formation of friendships within the group:

> *Yeah a lot of people say… well two girls are walking down the street everyone is like oh my god lesbians, but with us it's cool, it's just boyfriends-boyfriend, girlfriend-girlfriend. That's what I like about us they accept you for who you are not just the clothes.* (Lauren)

Several young people implied during discussions with me that for some of their peers seemed to centre their identity on their sexuality:

Hmm yeah, some people are really obsessed with their sexuality and how no one understands them because they are gay and they sort of stick together …Yes they flaunt it, they are out there… I don't question my sexuality. (Stevie)

The Rhymers

The label of 'Rhymers' is neither self-ascribed nor assigned to them by their peers. I have assigned this name to the group of young people in order to differentiate it from the others for the purpose of this study. Although groups were racially homogenous, this group was comprised of members who, for approximately half of them, had a distinguishable Islander or Maori background. The other half of the group's members were observed to be Anglo-Australians.

The Rhymers were often observed and spoken to on Burke and Spencer Streets where some of them skateboarded, at the refuge in Fitzroy North and the Salvation Army 614 centre. This group also utilised the youth bus on most nights where they would hang out and rhyme. In addition to these spaces, I engaged with members of this group in parks where they made use of the skate bowls.

Many of the Rhymers whom I met during fieldwork dressed in the style of the hip-hop youth culture: baggy jeans, baseball caps and oversized hoodies were common amongst this group. For the young people I met, it was common to own at least two pairs of sneakers or 'kicks'; Nike and skater shoes such as DC's are the shoes most favoured by male and females. Baseball caps were also worn by males and females.

Hip-hop music appeared to be exclusively listened to by those participants whom I met in this group. When they could afford to they went to gigs to watch Australian hip-hop artists. Two males to whom I spoke were observed to be very talented rappers and rhymers, often rhyming while waiting for the arrival of the soup vans. One of these young males showed me YouTube videos of himself taking part in a small number of battles.

The majority of young people I observed to belong to this group smoked marijuana regularly. While marijuana was their drug of choice, amphetamines and mushroom caps were the other drugs that participants advised me they used when they could afford it, or when another young person was paying for it.

The Lads

The group containing mostly young males in their early to mid-twenties, and whose experiences of homelessness were found to be more cyclic in nature than average, was known to most young people I met as The Lads.

Style was well-maintained and clothing brands were frequently discussed by Lads, particularly the males. The young men who called themselves and were known to others as 'Lads' tended to wear expensive designer clothes such as Polo, Lacoste, Tommy Hilfiger, Nike and Nautica in a very preppy fashion. Clothing such as polo shirts, running shorts, tracksuit pants and jeans were often worn with the various designer's logos splashed across the front and back. This was teamed with a baseball cap worn purposively with the cap bent upwards into shape. In addition to these items, the Lads wore quality sneakers.

The largest amount of young homeless people involved in this study displayed pride in the maintenance of their kicks (sneakers): perhaps none, however, more than the Lads. Regardless of their housing situations, their kicks were the latest fashion, and were cleaned with toothbrushes or alcohol swabs from community health centres or needle exchanges. Nike Air sneakers were the preferred brand of trainers amongst the Lads, regardless of gender. The few females (occasionally called 'Lass') I spoke with or observed also favoured Nikes, which accompanied tight-fitting singlet tops with expensive jeans or shorts, similar to the males.

The corner of Burke and Swanston Streets is a well-known area to score drugs, and for a few Lads involved in this research, this meant additional income could be made there. It was also in this area that participants found privacy and a space to sleep during the day on the rooftops above. At night, stairwells within the surrounding buildings were slept in until patrolling security found them out and moved them on. Kane explained that when this occurred, his friends would stay away for a period of time and then return to these spaces again and again. In the meantime, they utilised the area around Southern Cross Train Station, yet unlike the younger group of City Rats, the station workers were less keen for the Lads to use the Station's washroom facilities and undercover areas. There was a high level of transience amongst these participants. Sleeping rough one night, then spending the next at a girlfriend's mother's place, or a refuge, or the police cells was a pattern that Brent had followed for approximately seven years. Jimmy reported that it had been four years since having stable accommodation:

> *So I've had a good run…Like, I had 4 years of like, living!* (Jimmy)

Genete counted five years of been 'on the go' in community housing, on the refuge roundabout and in various squats:

> *I stayed with a sister for a while then two weeks before year 10 I ended up in rehab the went into a Transitional left the Transitional then got into really heavy duty drugs, and like I was up shooting up Bupe taking oh my god Seroquel, anything and everything, whatever it took to block shit out, do you know what I mean? Then I got kicked out of another Transitional and was here, there, and everywhere. I had no money, no clothes, no bag to carry, you don t have the time or energy left. I was just a station rat. Then I got kicked out of the first refuge I went to so just started catching trams.* (Genete)

Many Lads also reported that they had spent time and in and out of youth, and adult, prisons.

A further common trait that I found amongst the Lads was a shared love of hip-hop, particularly local hip-hop and rap. Unlike the rhymers (with only one exception), the music was enjoyed by listening to the lyrics rather than writing them or rhyming. This shared taste in music also extended to female participants who identified with this group. When asked what participants had in common with

friends, those associated with the Lad or Lass group often quoted music as the first shared interest amongst their peers:

> *We listen to mostly rap music and more specifically Aussie hip hop because they rap about things we relate to using or robbing people or graffing or fighting or drinking living the lifestyle.* (Kane)

> *Definitely music n stuff, like rap and hip-hop, the stuff for the hard times* [laughs]. (Genete)

Group members found that rap and hip-hop spoke their language. Hip-hop music provided comfort to Genete at times when she needed it the most.

The levels of illegal substances and alcohol use was found to be high amongst those young homeless people who identified with this group as Genete explains when asked about any common traits amongst her peers:

> *It's all related to drugs.* (Genete)

Marijuana use was found to be normalised behaviour exhibited by group members. Many young people who considered themselves to be Lads or Lasses spoke of their drug use and drug addictions, and overall this group also reported the highest use of 'harder' drugs such as, mushroom caps, ecstasy and ice and to a lesser degree, heroin:

> *Q:* *What's been your drug of choice?*
> *Jimmy:* *Ice, choof and alcohol, once on the streets not so much choof.*
> *Q:* *Whys that?*
> *Jimmy:* *Too hard to use. You've got to carry around a bong, scissors…*
> *Q:* *Ahh yeah okay, that kinda makes sense to me.*

> *Everyone is obsessed with mushie caps. Like all the kids are, cause mushie season is in winter. So for the winter that's just gone, everyone's like "mushie caps mushie caps!"* (Kane)

I didn't know I had an addiction to heroin or Bupe or anything. I was sick and thought I just had the flu. (Genete)

Overall, compared to the four aforementioned subgroups, participants within this group reported the highest use of 'harder' drugs, such as mushroom caps, ecstasy, ice and, to a lesser degree, heroin.

Summary

In this section so far I have presented five subcultural groups of young homeless people with distinctive characteristics that separate one from another, yet they all share the experience of homelessness. Making sense of these subcultures and their significance requires more than simply identifying their characteristics. This, however, is a difficult task, as participation is often characterised on a micro-level, in terms of subcultural participation, and at other times a macro-level, in terms of the larger collective organisation of homeless young people who congregate in the CBD. At times these distinctions were exclusive to one another. At other times, they seemed to overlap, become blurred or disappeared. For example, while there were some important distinctions between the groups, there were also some similarities that the groups had in terms of background experiences, activities and views. The next section will explore stigma, motivations and authenticity in these subcultures.

Stereotypes and Stigma

> *'When you're homeless you put up with a lot of shit, but that's no different from someone who is a CEO of a company, like they have a mad job but they put up with a lot of shit sure'.*
> (Interview with Jimmy)

Johnson (2006) writes of the stigmatised identity that is often equated with homelessness. Informed by Goffman's (1963) theory of social stigma, Johnson explains-

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. (2006, p. 42)

This was emulated in participant's relationships with the wider society; a large proportion of their resistance to mainstream youth culture, authority and the wider community—or 'the public', as Genete called society—is a product of the stigma associated with their homelessness. Farrugia (2011) describes stigma in relation to experiences of homelessness and identity:

> The experience of homelessness has important and specific consequences for the kinds of identities which young people can construct. Homelessness is a particularly acute form of material disadvantage. As well as material deprivation, homelessness is often understood as a stigmatised difference and a personal failing. In an analysis of public attitudes, Phelan et al. (1997) found that the label of homelessness has a stigmatising effect over and above simple poverty. Popular representations often construct 'the homeless' as morally suspect, irresponsible, dangerous or passive (Beresford 1979, Rossiter 2001, Hodgetts et al. 2005) and young people experiencing homelessness are aware of these representations. (Farrugia, 2011, p. 763)

Corresponding with Farrugia's (2011) theories of identity, many participants were aware of the stigma surrounding homelessness and felt the consequences of stereotypes ascribed to them. According to Cookie, the mistreatment that he felt walking into clothing stores made him feel excluded. The difference between how shopkeepers spoke and looked at him compared to other customers was a reminder of where he stood in their eyes:

> *I walk into them and they are like what the hell? Why are you in here like can you afford it?* (Cookie)

Stevie had suffered a blow to her self-esteem when she first began to sleep rough at the age of 16. She felt the stigma of being homeless most on public transport:

> *When I'm on public transport and I've been karting everything I own with me and I get those looks and people make comments and stuff like that, it's pushed friends away from me because they haven't been homeless and cause I've been homeless so many times they think that well I'm a fuck up and they don't want anything to do with me.* (Stevie)

Genete felt that people judged her by her appearance:

> *They don't trust…..I guess it's all about what you look like. They judge you on what you wear, like especially when you are in that state and you haven't had a shower for a few days you know. Cause we do look different. They do, they do they all judge.* (Genete)

Kate and Lauren felt the result of stigma during exchanges with young people outside of the subculture:

> *I've always felt I'm looked at differently, that people can see, well you know…* (Kate)

> *A lot of people assume that if you are homeless you use drugs and you rip people off and that it's your own fault that you are homeless.* (Lauren)

Brent, however, played with these stereotypes rather than letting them upset him:

> *People assume that because I look like this that I can get drugs...so I take their money and do a runner, you know tourists and shit.* (Brent)

Farrugia (2011), Fitzpatrick (2000), Johnson (2006) and McLoughlin (2011) suggest that the burden of stigma leaves young people questioning their identity, yet it can also prompt young people consciously to distance themselves from stereotypical depictions of a 'homeless person' or from a 'homeless identity', and to make efforts towards self-positive reinforcement. However, reactions to 'feeling homeless' can also present negatively. Some participants blamed other young homeless people for the prevailing images of 'homeless youth':

> *Well I don't really know. Some people are bums like they've got places to go and what not, but a lot of the people don't and go the steps and drink just to be cool, just to be like everyone else kind of thing. Which I hate it when people do that, like I like to be my own person like all the time.* (Renee)

Motivation

What motivated young people to enter into one subcultural group or another was difficult to understand. The choice to enter into a subculture group may have simply been determined by characteristics of groups with which new members consequently corresponded. When new to the

street, young people may have gravitated towards others who simply had the recognisable interests or characteristics:

> *I hung around with them more because I found that the people in those groups were more often abused and stuff and that's what I went through growing up. And my normal school friends, well, it never happened to them. And they couldn't related… and I guess that's where it all started.* (Stevie)

> *People in the similar or same situations they're in a way more friendly, are more outgoing. They talk to you, treat you normal. Some people from what 'society' calls 'normal' are like that, but generally, it… that, doesn't happen.* (Johnny)

Researchers suggest that young people on the street may correspond with one subculture or another for multiple reasons (Karabanow 2006; Lundy 1995). In this research, an individual chose a subculture group for reasons related to identity, subcultural 'style' or the ideological framework of the group. Still, identification with these groups as a source of identity took some time. Prolonged time spent in the CBD worked to socialise young people into more distinct subcultural roles. When young people came into the city they did not immediately identify themselves as 'Punks' or 'Lads'. In this respect, identification with one group or another may have been partially determined by one's age, ethnicity and gender, but also the duration that the young person had been homeless. Young people newer to the city unknowingly gravitated towards others with whom they felt commonalities. These commonalities could be based on any number of superficial characteristics, such as music, the style of clothes, or from where they came.

As mentioned, identification with a subculture could also be influenced by the amount of time someone has been homeless. The longer a young person remains without shelter, their correspondence to one group over another became based on interests in activities in which others in the group were engaged. The process of acculturation may have been such that after a prolonged period of time, participants came to associate with one group over another. This may explain why participants who had been homeless for a longer duration identified more closely with specific subcultural groups,

while newer participants had not established a subcultural identity: it may take time for young people to feel comfortable identifying themselves with a particular label.

As young people spent more time living in the CBD, the decision to participate in a subculture was solidified through common interests and activities in which their peers engaged. While all participants shared certain similarities with one another—both in background experiences and in street life—there was something about these subcultural groupings that centralised activities into distinctive identity-based cohorts. These differences manifested in ways that positioned participants with and within particular groups, the interests and activities that the individuals shared with that subculture.

Rules

> *'An important way of understanding subcultures is thus offered here, that even as they appear disorderly to outsiders they are from their own perspective 'tightly organized', their social worlds structured by rules and protocols.'*
> (Ken Gelder, 2007, p. 7)

Consistent with the work of Johnson, Gronda and Coutts (2008), Karabanow (2004), O'Sullivan Oliveira (2009), Ravenhill (2008) and Shaw (1969), an unofficial set of rules or 'norms' governs the social worlds of the participants. Writing in 1969, Shaw proposes that when someone begins to participate in the homeless subculture they must accommodate themselves to a 'special set of norms and behaviour patterns which set them apart from the larger society' (p. 200); this was also the experience of participants in this research, where a set of codes and rules were considered common knowledge and thus expected to be learnt quickly on the streets. The rules and their origins were rarely questioned, and as Stevie explained:

> *That was just the way it was when I hit the streets. It's like a rolling system.* (Stevie)

Rules that participants adhered to revolved around loyalty to one another, earning money and respect for peers:

> *Yeah umm a lot of …sticking together is one important thing, not dobbing each other in to workers about god knows what, umm if someone is in need of help you help them*

no matter what. I guess that was one good thing I learnt, that you know who your true friends are. (Cookie*)*

Street rules… street peoples rules - you don't scab in the same spot as someone else. (Glenn)

 No conflict between one another. (Lauren)

It's like theft: no one else would go there. You get shitloads of money at Crown out the front and there is one or two groups doing that but we each have our own section. So we all like don't take each other's money kind of thing, it's like basically just like working like if you work at Macca's and you are at the back, the people at the registers don't go work out the back. (Renee)

Ravenhill (2008) suggests that cultural rules and norms are essential to the subculture in that they offer participants structure and stability. Regardless of the subgroup that participants identified with, there was consensus amongst the young people that culturally specific rules were necessary as Renee explained:

Renee: *Say if I was with my group and I screwed over one member of that group everyone would hate me and you wouldn't be part of that group anymore like you treat everyone the same no matter what. If someone was ripped off, it would be the same thing we would all deal with it. Like if they screw over one of us we screw over one of them, pay back is a bitch kind of thing.*

Q: *Having those rules on the street, does it help?*
Renee: *Yeah, because it makes it less screwed up for us.*

As Johnson, Gronda and Coutts (2008) illustrate, young people often have to learn the hard way what these unwritten rules and moral codes are, and what they mean. Regardless of the subgroup participants identified with, some these rules and codes included proving yourself through the act of violence, maintaining a code of silence when it comes to police, never calling someone a 'dog' without it been warranted, and standing up for one another.

Resistance

'There is a need for homeless youth to be relatively independent—they need to take some initiative to get food, and find a place to sleep. But there is a fine line between

> *acts of independence required to survive, and the empowering symbolic acts of resistance of homeless youth, most often, the autonomy of homeless youth is characterised by the conflation of these two functions'.*
>
> (Barker, 2012, p. 361)

A key concept of CCCS's youth subcultural theory is that of resistance. Returning briefly to the origins of British youth subcultural theory as outlined in Chapter One, it was during the 1960s and 1970s that the emerging youth subcultures began to be understood as the 'collective response to the material and situated experience of their class' (Hall & Jefferson, 1975, p. 47). In this light, youth subcultures were positioned as spaces in which young people engaged in acts of resistance to their experiences of hegemony.

During fieldwork, politics were rarely discussed with participants; however, this does not signify that the young people involved in this research were apolitical. For Kate, homelessness was a highly politicised issue: she emphasised the need for politicians to 'get real' and see what homelessness is really like from a first-hand account. Kate challenged politicians to come to the street:

> *without a brush, without make-up and with only a crappy blanket, then explain why more money isn't spent on people who need it.*

Proudly, Kate recounted a highlight of her past year where she was able to voice her resistance directly to those she wished to challenge. During a political campaign Kate got the chance to ask the then-Prime Minister, Julia Gillard what the Government was going to do about the fact that Kate had nowhere to go at night:

> *She wouldn't answer that, I don't think she knew how to.* (Kate)

Beyond political resistance, subtle and indiscriminate acts of collective and individual resistance can be located within a number of youth homeless studies (Barker, 2010; McLoughlin, 2011; Johnson, 2006; Ruddick, 1998). Similarly, the results of this research indicated that as a collective, participants engaged in varying forms of resistance through subcultural norms and practices. In Barker's (2012) research on the social capital of homeless young people, he found that resistance transpires in public

settings via social and cultural practices, such as 'yelling, swearing or just talking loudly about things that many people would find offensive or confronting (such as drug taking, and sexual practices)' (p. 367). For the young people in this study, these counter-cultural behaviours enhanced participants' reputation and displayed their resistance to authority.

The research findings Barker (2012) reported accord with those of my research, whereby resistance, and in some cases a disdain for authority, was displayed through the social practices of participants such as heckling others on the street or taking part in illegal acts such as graffitiing. For example, there is an unmistakable tone of resistance interwoven through the narrative that Kane submitted with his photographs:

> *We all had a street name that we tagged up most every were we went.*

> *Mainly the police are the number one enemy. I'm just trying to go about my business and survive and they just wanted to lock me up.*

It is not only through illegal acts or direct statements that this resistance takes place; resistance also took place in expressive forms. For instance, the Lads' taste in music, as discussed by Kane previously, highlights the differences in life styles and values to that of mainstream society. Additional forms of resistance observed during the course of this research relate to the stigma often associated with homelessness, as well as spatial constraints as participants negotiated physical spaces for themselves.

Findings from Johnson's (2006) research revealed that some young people responded to their homelessness through their resistance towards 'a homeless identity and other homeless people'; this resistance was 'framed by stereotypical notions of the homeless as failures' (p. 196). In the case of this study, it was, to a greater extent, that stereotypes played a role in the reasons behind the young people's resistance.

We're (Subculturally) Different but the Same: Differences, Similarities and Style

Across the subcultures discussed, there were differences as well as similarities between groups. In addition to ethnicity, age and gender, there were also a number of interests and activities that participants in each group had that also separated them from one another. Participants engaged in a variety of activities. The similarities and dissimilarities of these activities between groups were difficult to assess, as there were sometimes activities which were both collective as well as group-specific. This depended on the circumstance in which the activity occurred. When considering activities, there were some activities in which the scene kids engaged, that punks, for instance, did not, such as attending the public swimming pools over summer or going to the Crown Casino, but there was also a lot of crossover; drinking and drugs provide a good example of this. While not all research participants drank and/or used drugs, these were activities in which participants in all groups engaged to some degree. Drugs were used by participants to combat boredom, as reported in these excerpts taken from interviews conducted with participants from separate subgroups:

> *Q: So what do you do to alleviate boredom?*
> **Genete:** *Drugs…Drugs.*

> *Q: Do you get bored?*
> **Jimmy:** *Yeah of course*
> *Q: Well what do you do so you aren't bored?*
> **Jimmy:** *Drugs.*

> *Q: So what else is there to do?*
> **Stevie:** *I'd get high*
> *Q: Ok well what do you do when you get up in the morning?*
> **Stevie:** *Well if there were drugs I'd do them*

Other studies of subcultures suggest that activities and subsistence patterns are different from group to group. According to Kipke, Simon, Montgomery, Unger and Iverson (1997) subculture groups amongst 'street kids' 'demonstrate unique patterns with respect to places stayed/slept, means of financial support and economic subsistence, and use of available services' (p. 655); for example, in their study, Kipke et al. (1997) note that different subcultural groups cited different living situations. Punks tended to live on the street, in cars and abandoned buildings, whereas those identified as druggies tended to live with friends, and gang members with family or in shelters.

Some of the subculture groups that Kipke et al. (1997) observed in their research were similar to those I observed. For example, in this study, punks often squatted, while Lads tended to find places off the street to sleep. This was not to say that punks did not use existing networks to get off the street; however, there was not an equivalent squatting culture within the other subcultures as was evident for the punks. Amongst the punks, squatting was not necessarily a preferable way to sleep. Sleeping indoors was always preferred, but squatting, with a little bit of ingenuity, was something that could be productively done. The practice of squatting was, in fact, associated with 'being a punk'; the punk tradition had become steeped in squatting. On the other hand, for rhymers and the city rats, squatting was the last thing they wanted to do. For them, squatting represented a kind of objectified poverty, and was something with which they did not want to be associated. If the image of the punk was to embrace the concept of roughing it on the streets, it was the opposite for those who identified as rhymers or city rats; they concealed outward representations of deprivation. They did this by making themselves look unlike the stereotype of homeless people, even if, in fact, they were indeed homeless:

> *There's no reason to look like shit: the Richmond starlight foundation, you can have showers there, then you've got one* [day centre] *in North Melbourne and you can have showers there and 614. And you are always welcome as long as you don't cause shit so…and then you have here, which gives you a place to have a shower.* (Cookie)

As a subcultural characteristic, I found that style—in terms of dress and adornment—shaped the subcultural identity of participants. In terms of physical differences and as a first impression, style was the most distinctive characteristic found to distinguish each subgroup. In the case of the Lads, I

explained earlier how I observed participants to dress in expensive clothing such as Polo and Nike and worn in a collegiate or bourgeois fashion. This was a characteristic of the group emphasised by Kane through his narrative:

> *We have a sort of dress code. Nike sneakers popped hat polo t-shirts sportswear.*

Hebdige's semiotic analysis of subcultural style as a framework through which to examine the Lads' 'dress code' results in an additional form of subcultural style. Further to providing a means to differentiate one subgroup from another, the Lads' distinct style mirrors the way in which the Skinhead or Teddy Boy subcultures were perceived to express subcultural resistance. In this manner, I could argue that the Lads' resistance towards hegemony has been 'expressed obliquely in style' (Hebdige, 1979, p. 16). The 'humble objects' of everyday life that are said to be appropriated by subordinate groups and 'made to carry secret meanings'—codes for resistance—are, in this case the expensive clothes worn by the Lads. Where the Teddy Boys expropriated the Edwardian fashion worn by the middle and upper classes in the 1950s, the Lads contradiction of or sneer at mainstream society is hinted by Kane; he concludes his description of Lad 'dress code' with the following sentence:

> *Mostly the sneakers and sportswear because wearing attire that's easy to run in, makes it easy to run.*

When Kane writes about running, it is within a tongue-in-cheek manner and in relation to the action of running from the police. Wearing attire that is marketed to consumers through professional athletes, whom Western society regards as celebrities, role models and heroes, could be seen as a strange choice to an outsider. However, according to Dick Hebdige, this is:

> Symbolic violation of the social order, such a movement attracts and will continue to attract attention, to provoke censure and to act ... as the fundamental bearer of significance in subculture. (1979, p. 9)

Moving the discussion away from semiotics, the shared aesthetic style of each subgroup had an additional function. Adopting a specific style, such as that of a Lad or a Scene Kid, assisted some participants in the process of adapting to homelessness, by 'fitting in' with subgroups:

> *So I'm Emo yeah? But some people don't get me because I can also be Indie…take a look at my shirt….but I'm Emo right!* (Field notes, September, 2011)

There was a level of urgency in the way that this young man stressed his affliction with the Scene Kids through style. It seemed imperative to him that I took his appearance seriously. My observations of this group led me to suspect that he had customised his appearance in order to fit in with one of the homeless subgroups, and that this assisted in securing subcultural membership. This example was not an isolated observation. I surmise that many young people observed throughout this research adopted certain styles to make their transition into the subculture, and their adaption to homelessness (Johnson, 2006), a much smoother process:

> **Johnny:** *There's always similar stuff, it's loud and out there. Sometimes I can dress and I'll look like a complete Bogan from Broadmeadows.*
>
> **Q:** *Does that depend on who you are hanging out with or does that depend on you and your mood?*
>
> **Johnny:** *Both, sometimes it's the people but generally I don't really give a fuck what they think.*
>
> **Q:** *Do you sort of conform a little bit depending on who you're hanging with?*
>
> **Johnny:** *A little sometimes…yep.*

Further analysis revealed the adoption of certain behaviours or 'norms' in addition to physical subcultural characteristics to be a relatively common practice amongst the research group.

It has to be Authentic:

Participants acknowledged the presence of a variety of subculture groups and were able to differentiate these groups in terms of activities and interests. While each group engaged in a variety of specific activities, these differences were often overlooked or considered inconsequential. While many minimised these differences, other participants used them as a justification to hang out with only one group. As a result, there was a degree of subcultural crossover as well as a degree of

exclusivity. Participants in different groups would often accept one another and interact, while others would mostly remain with their primary group.

Regardless of what subculture with which they most closely identified, participants also valued authenticity in one's subcultural affiliation. Being authentic did not mean that it was necessary to correspond to one subcultural group or another. Participants privileged other participants who represented the subculture group with which they most closely corresponded: for example, new participants might be ostracised if they tried too hard to correspond immediately to a subculture group. These participants were often criticised for being phony or posers:

> *Wannabe's. Like they always, like if you are hanging out with them by yourself, like it's just me and the other people, they will be completely different as soon as other people come around.* (Renee)

Affiliations to subculture groups were scrutinised by more tenured members; these members made distinctions between the authentic and phony affiliations of newer participants. While there was the attitude that 'everybody got along' and that 'everyone was accepted', participants made distinctions between 'posers' and 'real' participants. These distinctions were often used to ostracise people who did not corresponded completely with the subculture they were trying to identify. These distinctions were, however, subjective. The acceptance of a participant into a subculture group was not wholly determined by clothing, or style or music, but also determined by the way participants were able, over time, to find genuine commonalities with street peers, remain true to their character, to be themselves and not put on airs for the purposes of acceptance.

Subcultural Status

According to Cohen (1955), status is a valued social commodity and one that is acquired through legitimate opportunity structures, such as social, educational or career success. Recent literature also refers to status in studies on social capital, or in terms of the culture of homelessness, 'negative social

capital' (Barker, 2012). Cohen theorises that all individuals desire status, yet it is typically denied to marginalised people. The reactionary solution for those with 'status deprivation' is to seek status outside of mainstream society, bypassing traditionally approved avenues by forming cultural groups with opposing norms and values to that of the wider society. In Cohen's work, these groups translate as gangs or 'delinquent subcultures', or as in this case, the homeless youth subculture.

Rather than achieving status through getting a first job or buying a first home, within these subcultures status is often the result of partaking in risk-taking activities such as violence, substance use or resisting police. An example of this was explained during an interview with Cookie, who recalled an incident that had taken place two weeks earlier while visiting the youth outreach bus. According to Cookie, two older homeless males came to 'get a feed on the bus' and a volunteer had explained to the men that the space was for young people. This provoked an aggressive response from the men and Cookie intervened, telling the older two to 'pull up'. This act of bravado resulted in Cookie being assaulted by one of the older males. The event increased Cookie's status within the subculture while simultaneously securing the space for his group:

> *This is a place for young people and it needs to be protected: the worker was just trying to do this but those cunts never listen.* (Cookie)

Status was particularly important to the girls who participated in this study. Lauren explained to me that she had participated in a violent crime with an older male for which she spent some time in prison. In Lauren's eyes, this made it easier to 'fit in' with other homeless young people while buying her status. For some of the young women, achieving subcultural status was particularly necessary if they were not in a relationship:

> *Yeah if you don't put up a front they'll just take advantage of. Men have that muscle they're big and they're strong. Women can be taken advantage of.* (Genete)

Genete explained how an additional way of fitting in was through participating in substance use:

> *Drug use, drug use is a big thing. You kinda don't fit in as much if you don't, but most people don't use my drug of choice, they use marijuana or something. I guess*

> *that cause there is so much activity around getting money, then watching other people put in, then going to score and stuff like that and there is so much time put in it that. If someone doesn't use then they might feel left out.* (Genete)

Kate also spoke of 'fitting in', and attributed her substance use and shop-stealing to her homelessness. Before she was homeless, using drugs and stealing were not social practices in which Kate had participated. These practices were learnt as a way to adapt to homelessness, or as Bengtsson (2012) explains, Kate's scenario was a 'short term process', where young people 'learn' a subculture as a way 'of creating a meaningful life on the margins of society' (p. 689). So what of those young people who already took part in particular practices, or held values similar to those found to be common within the subculture?

While some participants adapted to homelessness and achieved subcultural status by partaking in risky practices, the behaviours and values of other young people may have been the result of a 'long term learning process':

> The long-term learning is closely connected to experiences of growing up in areas of 'advanced marginality' and life on the streets celebrating values of respect, loyalty and crime, all subcultural values formed by the intersections of class, ethnicity and gender. (Bengtsson, 2012, p. 690)

Through discussions with participants about their family backgrounds, certain practices such as drug use and resistance towards police were established during childhood and modelled as normalised behaviour. Bengtsson (2012) suggests that while subcultural values, behaviour and norms are typically learned, in certain subcultures (considered delinquent), they are often predetermined and normalised during childhood development. These values and behaviours of an individual are later used in response to the social conditions surrounding their lives. Although generally the childhoods of participants varied, a number of themes were found common in the family backgrounds of the Lads: these included household and family structure, neighbourhood, intergenerational poverty and homelessness, parental substance or alcohol misuse, high levels of mobility, parents' education and employment, DHS interventions, as well as family members with a history of involvement in risky, antisocial or criminal behaviours:

Stories are pretty much similar, they're the same. Drugs, being poor living without nothing pretty much, being kicked out of home, similar stuff. (Jimmy)

When I was seven I went to live with my Dad. He didn't have a house it was a half butchers shop but he owned it. It was like a squat there was no toilet, no bath. I used to have to wash in a bucket and you know, pour the hot water… You know we didn't even have a kettle, we heated it over the fire. You know I used to cry myself to sleep because I had dust between my toes. I never went to school with food… it's been an on-going thing, with poorness in my family. (Genete)

These findings were unique to this group, and while the scope of this thesis does not allow for a more thorough analysis, the concentration of the above themes within the backgrounds of this group's participants was unexpected, and warrants further research into the link between family backgrounds of young people and the subcultural values and practices of a particular group.

To Summarise

The significance of subcultural affiliations amongst homeless young people should not be underestimated. Identifying with subcultures can have both symbolic and practical functions for young people who feel detached from conventional social institutions, such as family and school lives. Subcultures provide multiple functions for young people:

> They are problem solving groups, even if those problems are existential in nature; they provide a cultural experience on a manageable level; they create an alternative reality of unique symbols; they give meaning of leisure time; and they give young people a place to work out personal issues. (Wooden & Blazak, 2001, p. 5).

Affiliations with subculture groups cumulatively have the ability to empower young people who otherwise feel alienated from society (Brake 1985).

It was not a coincidence that subcultural affiliations were represented amongst the homeless young people in this study. Participants who corresponded to a particular subculture group were collectively responding to situations of deprivation. By participating, they were able to establish a collective social identity. Participants found ways to achieve both symbolic and practical things through their

involvement. In these groups, they found other similarly situated peers who together managed a stigmatised identity, and through this could collectively become empowered.

The young people in the CBD represented a multifaceted and complex picture of subcultural participation. Multiple subculture groups were present and participants subsequently identified with one or another of them. This collective participation, however, raises questions about whether or not they collectively represented a genuine subcultural movement. While collectively, participants could be viewed as having subcultural qualities, their diversity with regard to homelessness calls into question some of the classical theories of subculture, and uses of the term. The diversity discovered between participants in this street community requires us to seek out a broader definition of subculture in order to understand representation. It is to this that we now turn.

To Conclude

'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... 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'.
(Johnson, 2008, p. 59)

Now that we have examined the lives of the young people involved in the research, and the respective subcultures, it is time to revisit the theoretical discussion of this study. This final chapter will examine the findings in light of subcultural theory to answer the research question of whether a homeless youth subculture exists in Melbourne's CBD.

Early subculture theories would not be able to explain the diversity of backgrounds of young people in this study. In the broadest sense of the term, participants represented a subcultural unit because participation provided 'a collective solution to, or resolution of, problems arising from the blocked aspirations of members or their ambiguous position in wider society' (Ogunbameru, 2004, p. 95). Moreover, collective participation was a meaningful attempt to solve problems faced by concerned individuals (Young, 1971). Early theories of subculture participation, however, sought to understand subculture groups in context to similar class-based contradictions that participants collectively experienced. Subcultures were thus a reflection of economic and class-based forms of alienation. The alienation these groups experienced motivated young people to resist conventional institutional participation. This led them to seek agency through subcultural participation with other young people whose life experiences were similar.

Though perceived similar backgrounds provided a basis for the formation of friendships, participation in the CBD could not exactly be viewed as a subcultural rejection of class values and economic circumstances. Participants came from varied economic and class backgrounds, as well as from different homeless life situations. Nonetheless, they did find they had experiences or interests in

common with one another and, as a result, conformed to similar lifestyles and practices which became centralised through participation. So, were the young people in this study part of a homeless subculture? The answer is yes, but not exactly in the way that classical theories of subculture view participation. This final section of the thesis will explore youth subculture within a proposed new definition.

Revisiting Subcultural Theory

The postmodern view of subculture accounts for diversity and helps us to understand how this diversity presents amongst contemporary youth subcultures. Muggleton (2006) suggests that the relationship between subculture and class is:

> One that is contingent, and in so far as subcultures establish a form of cultural 'sensibility' through attitudes and values, consumption practices and various leisure activities, they can be more accurately be conceptualised as 'lifestyle' groupings. (p. 30)

Muggleston (2006) further proposes:

> There is the possibility of a value convergence across social classes and that young people from different class backgrounds can hold similar values that find their expression in shared membership of a particular subculture. (p. 31)

Although participants may have come from different class and economic backgrounds, and may have had different reasons for initially coming to the CBD, collectively, participants viewed their participation as a result of similar experiences – they were all homeless and had been subjected to social exclusion and deprivation. This allowed for a distinct diversity within the subcultures to emerge and sustain itself. Not all participants were abused by parents and not everyone's journey into homelessness was the same, but their collective perceived experiences superseded individual variations of what was considered 'negative'. As a result, their negative experiences gave way to a diverse community of participants who had some, but not all, things in common:

It's like…We're all on the street and we either don't have, by choice, or reason, or situation. And we grow close to a group of people or a couple of people who are also on the street and we just, it's like we've got a new family. (Johnny)

The non-uniform nature of peer group participation amongst young people in this study fits well into the framework of the post-subculturalists' view of contemporary youth subcultures as comprised of similarly situated, but often class-differentiated, young people. While participation may have been an 'attempt to resolve collectively experienced problems resulting from contradictions in social structure' (Brake, 1985), these were not solely rooted in class-based experiences. Rather, subcultural participation in this context was heterogeneous, fragmented, fluid and often apolitical (Muggleton, 2006). Subculture participation amongst homeless young people in the CBD should not only be viewed in terms of these extra-class orientations. Rather, participation should also be considered in terms of the often different, as well as tangible, outcomes they provided for the young people who took part in them – subsistence, identity, peer groups, and socialisation to street life:

Because I had no family my mates, my crew became my family and we look after each other, we sleep out together, back each other up no matter what. (Kane)

They [friendships] can be long life and meaningful relationships and everyone needs that friend. You can't always find that in normal society. You sort of need to find someone like the same amount of crazy as you. (Johnny)

Embodied cultural capital

Participation in peer subcultures provided more than just agency for participants. Despite where they originated, or their exact motivations or experiences that led them to the city, participation became a marker of identity, status and power for the young people in this research. This power stemmed from both the practical as well as the symbolic functions that subcultures provided for young people. This empowerment was also fostered through identification with the subculture and place, and what 'hanging out' there represented to participants. In this regard, participation worked as a form of 'embodied cultural capital,' which is 'the ensemble of cultivated dispositions that are internalised by

the individual through socialisation and that constitute schemes of appreciation and understanding' (Swartz, 1997, p. 76). For participants, identification with the subculture provided a specialised degree of privileged knowledge about the norms and practices of a selective group. Their participation distinguished members from others who were not members, making membership itself empowering. Thornton (1996) calls this 'subcultural capital', whereby participants in subcultures identify with the rejection of mainstream culture by creating a cultural space of their own, which works as a means of empowerment.

Cultural Space

The cultural 'space' that subcultures occupy can take a number of forms. For Willis (1993), 'dress is one means for marking identity territories' (p. 369). Dressing in a particular way has the ability to signal to other members of a subculture that you are like them, while simultaneously setting the group apart from the mainstream society they reject.

In their analysis of young homeless squatters in the mid-western United States whom identified with punk subculture, Ranaghan and Breese (p. 38, 2004) apply Wills' (1993) finding that having a certain dress code is a signal to others in a society who might also share in the ideology of the squatter culture. The squatters dress this way to set themselves apart but also to make themselves recognisable. This symbolic acquisition of space is done through the image that subcultures convey on the street and in public that express an oppositional attitude toward authority and conventional and commercial culture.

Physical space

Discussions surrounding the use of space have dominated youth studies, largely for the reason that youth subcultures have very publicly existed in social discourse. In addition to 'winning subcultural space', Clarke et al. (1975) explains that youth subcultures strive to win physical space; for example,

the street corner: 'They serve to mark out and appropriate 'territory' in the localities… they cluster around particular locations' (p. 135). Reiterating Clark et al. (1986), Thornton (1996) notes:

> Subcultures win space for the young: cultural space in the neighbourhood and institutions [and]…actual room on the street. They serve to mark out appropriate territory to the localities (Clarke et al., 1976, p. 46 cited in Thornton, 1996, p. 25).

Certainly spaces were highly contested by the young people within this study. Territories had been identified and each location served a purpose; for example, those who spent their time along Southbank also used the area as a site for begging. Through subcultural participation, the participants were able to carve out a cultural space both symbolically and physically.

The majority of young homeless people I met have few resources and possessions, and they can feel as though certain geographical locations belong to them. All the subcultures presented here have certain areas of the CBD over which they claim ownership and status, in an environment dominated by commercial property:

> *Like it's <u>our</u> chill spot. Like the steps are a meeting place, riverside parks like Three Palms is a hangout spot, um the Grotto is our drinking spot: Macca's is where we go eat like you know it's all ours.* (Renee)

> *We would tell people to fuck off if they weren't allowed to be there. It's like a bull in the paddock they don't let another one near it it's their space no one else's.* (Genete)

The physical spaces that the young people occupy have the ability to convey meaning about participation itself; it is this 'ownership' and control over space that helps to sustain and perpetuate the life of a subculture.

For young people, the street is a stage for performance (White, 1993). However, society considers youth who are visible in public space to be an issue (Jackson, 2012). This is problematic for young homeless people with limited access to private space and are forced to occupy and move through public space more than their housed peers. Aspects of their personal and social lives are constantly on display to society, resulting in a significant presence on the streets. This very visible presence is

usually accompanied by an increased level of surveillance and consequent images of 'misbehaving youth':

> *Often, they would like, they come tell us to leave and soon as we go we come back kind of thing.* (Renee)

> *We get moved off the steps by the police, they are like 'you can't sit here people are trying to get through.* (Kane)

> *We can't sit at the steps anymore, they are bringing out a new law if you get caught sitting at the steps you get a straight up 200 fine, they don't want us there. It's not their problem. They have been handing out fines - about 600 people have had fines and they said since we are there all the time, like even if we are standing near there they will say 'fuck off, move on'.* (Cookie)

This monitoring and judgment i**s** concerning for two reasons: first, in the case of the steps of Flinders Street Station, this was a significant place for the young people throughout the study. 'Hanging out' constituted much of their day, and public areas such as The Steps offered the participants a 'cultural centre'. It is where they were initiated into street life, and where they played. Second to this, 'The Steps' was a site where young people exchanged information. Throughout fieldwork, the question, 'What time are ya going to the steps?' was frequently asked by young people after the last soup van run. For young people such as Renee, The Steps was where her most important tool for survival was found – her peers:

> *Half of my friends I have now I met while I was on the streets because they were like at the steps I would just sit there doing nothing, waiting just you know because I had nothing to do and then um they would walk up and ask are you ok, come chill with us and what not so.*

Adding to this was the emotional attachment to public spaces such as The Steps, and the comfort it brought them:

> *Are open places important? Pretty much because there is an amount of civilisation there around you at that time and its more comforting than been somewhere that you font know whose around and what's happening so it's a somewhat safe environment.* (Chris)

The Steps of Flinders Street Station, as with many marginal spaces, is becoming endangered as a space for this study's participants. For some young people, this had resulted in hanging out in spaces where they are less likely to be moved on by police, or harassed by members of the public:

> **Johnny:** *We tend to go down side streets and alleys in the city*
>
> **Q:** *Why? To be hidden? Why's that?*
>
> **Johnny**: *Sort of like society is staring us* [laughs] *and like…glaring down, and going 'grrr'.*
>
> **Q**: *Does that piss you off?*
>
> **Johnny:** *Yes it does*

While resorting to side streets and alley ways may mean avoiding the 'glares of society', or hefty fines from the police, it means that participants are less visible to outreach workers with whom they may otherwise engage.

The decrease in space for homeless people was also creating territorial disputes over the ownership of certain areas. Space was as important to participants as it is to other groups of homeless people of various ages. With limited and limiting spaces, young people voiced their concerns about older homeless groups 'invading' spaces traditionally utilised by young people. Lauren explained this 'invasion' and the reaction of her peers:

> *Yeah with the people that are too old to come into our spaces like the youth bus we get a bit pissed off because there's places where they can go, they have their own food van kind of thing and young kids really don't like using that kind of place because of the older people. Its imitating, you feel like something dodgy is going to happen or they're full perverts, and we freak out.* (Lauren)

There was also a level of resistance that existed between the subgroups of young people. According to Haenfler (2014), such resistance often takes place because 'subcultural youth are resisting/challenging *other youth* as much as they are thinking of the larger 'adult' society' (p. 48). Haenfler points out that political resistance occurs on many levels, including the personal:

> Adherents hold both individual and collective meanings of resistance and express their resistance via personal and political methods. Furthermore, they consciously enact resistance at the micro, meso, and macro levels, emerging at least partly in reaction to other subcultures instead of solely against an ambiguous "adult" culture. Resistance can no longer be conceptualized in neo-Marxist terms of changing the political or economic structure, as a rejection only of mainstream culture, or as symbolic stylistic expression. A conceptualization of resistance must account for individual opposition to domination, "the politicization of the self and daily life" (Taylor and Whittier 1992, 117) in which social actors practice the future they envision (Scott 1985; Melucci 1989, 1996). Resistance is contextual and many layered rather than static and uniform. (2014, pp. 401-408)

As I pointed out in the previous sections, the participants' access to physical space within the CBD was limited. This contributed to subgroups resisting one another. Territorial disputes were apparent between subgroups, particularly with regard to contrasting alcohol- and substance-use patterns. Renee discussed her subgroups' concerns about sharing the space outside the Casino with the Lads; as she told it, this group was known to use 'heavy' drugs, while the Scene Kids rarely did more than drink. Although at times the Scene Kids would permit young people who are identified as Lads hang out with them, they were cautious and worried about being 'stood over' by Lads;

> *Umm it depends on what type of people they are but like a lot of, they, I know nearly every homeless person on the streets in Melbourne so if I say ah na these people are alright, we say ok just stay and chill just don't, as long as they don't steal from us or what not. But if they look dodgy and act dodgy then we ask them to leave.* (Renee)

This caution was also seen in the young people's use of youth services in the winter months. Stevie explained that the behaviours of other young people prevented some from attending services:

> *We have YSAS, but a lot of the kids who take drugs go there and I just didn't feel comfortable. It's a different scene.* (Stevie)

The Holders of Knowledge

It is clear that the participants identified with the smaller subcultures discussed in this study. But is there a broader homeless youth subculture? Through the experience of living in the CBD, young people came to recognise themselves collectively as a unified group, identifying at once with their subjectively marginalised position, while establishing their subcultural relationship to the city. This gesture symbolically suggested that young people were not just street kids, they were part of '*The*

Scene' (Johnny & Renee) or '*The City Crew*' (Kane). Along with this came a reputation, specialised knowledge about life in this setting, and subsequently status and power.

Certainly for the young people in this study, life in the CBD became a reference point which was used to reinforce a collective identity. While life within the CBD served this purpose, there was also another layer of subcultural participation present that demonstrated the differences between the young people. These were reflected in the ways that young people broke off into smaller, stylistically-oriented peer subcultural groups. While they collectively gathered in the CBD, they were further differentiated by the smaller subcultures in which they participated.

Subcultural Groupings

Participants organised themselves into peer groups in two independent but interrelated ways. First, participants identified with all those who gathered and lived in the city; they were all homeless and there was some degree of shared experience. Secondly, young people chose, and primarily identified and associated with, one of a number of subcultural groups. It was not necessarily that one happened before another; rather, affiliations to peers, micro-orientations to subculture groups, and to the larger group collection of participants happened gradually as participants adapted to their environment. As Glenn relates:

> *Slowly I began forming a few friendships.* (Glenn)

While they all acknowledged that life in the CBD was made up of subcultures of participants, and that each of these groups had their own subcultural style, they also acknowledged that they collectively comprised a larger street population of similarly situated peers. There were titles and labels which differentiated subculture groups from one another which identified a larger street population made up from these groups. For example, a young person might identify as being a 'punk', meaning that they identified with the punk subculture group and primarily hung out with them. However, they may also identify as a young person without a home, residing within the CBD.

Subculture group affiliations for participants in this study both mattered and did not matter. Affiliations to subculture groups allowed participants to carve out a unique identity and cultural space to distinguish themselves from others passing through the CBD. The affiliations allowed participants not only to find others with similar experiences, but also others who had similar interests, such as musical preferences. They all, more or less, saw their participation in context to the CBD, and through the larger contexts of homelessness and exclusion, subcultural groups worked to factionalise young people into groups of peers with similar and specific interests.

The Bigger Picture

Although subculture groups played a significant role in the CBD, demarcating friends and participants with different interests, these distinctions were, to an extent, irrelevant under the larger and more centralising classification of being a homeless young person. While subcultural affiliation was important, there was also the understanding that these alliances should not get in the way of the larger groups' concerns, priorities and needs, given that participants had much in common beyond that of subcultural preferences. The larger context in which subculture groups participated had the effect of bonding participants to one another, despite their primary subculture group affiliation, and it worked to establish peer relations across the variously defined subculture groups to which each participant responded.

This correlates with Ravenhill's (2008) observation of the homeless culture in her research:

> No subculture is homogeneous; there are bound to be different subgroups within the main culture. These are usually based on people grouping together with something in common. (p. 146)

In this way, life in the CBD for the participants was layered. Young people were organised as groups within groups. Participants understood that in the broader group, there existed a community of

homeless and marginalised young people who came together as a result of mutually understood negative past experiences:

> *I guess when you're all… when you are in that situation you all come together and because you are in that situation you all help each other in different ways. Even if it's like scoring, getting drugs or someone that you know that can get you things and you return the favour by getting them something or ya know even if it's just a shoulder to cry on. Do ya know what I mean? Like youse are all there, you couldn't go to someone that is clean and had a job and whatever because you would just fell degraded cause you wouldn't be able to be yourself.* (Genete)

Despite this, they still corresponded with particular subcultural groups based on styles, tastes and interests. The resulting dynamic was like no other. The CBD is a place where variously defined subculture groups come together and interact. At first glance, it seemed unusual for a punk to be interacting and befriending a rhymer or a Lad. These were superficial identity markers, however, and while they may have played a role in differentiating peer groups, together the participants had much in common which motivated them to look beyond their occasional differences and coexist through a mediated process of interaction. Simply put, they existed as smaller subgroups within one larger subculture. This influenced the quality and characteristics of interactions between them. At the same time, participants felt a closeness to one another which allowed for a relative degree of stable and productive co-mingling.

This, however, did not happen independently of subcultural references and, as a result, I began to understand how participants managed and mediated a multiple set of identities through their interactions.

Conclusion

Subculture participation empowered participants of this study and reinforced distinct collective and individual identities. The process that underpinned interactions across subculture groups further shaped social identities, relationships and norms. Consequently, this negotiation process both practically and symbolically benefited the young people involved. These interactions had the effect of

normalising superficial differences that appeared across subculture groups and functioned to resolve internal conflicts that routinely arose between them.

Most importantly, young people identified with this larger community of homeless young people through these interactions, which worked to reduce smaller subcultural group boundaries to superficial differences. While subculture groups shaped the way participants thought about one another, interactions across these small groups also fostered a sense of solidarity and collective cultural norms that governed activities and ways of thinking about homeless young people.

The result was that living in the CBD as a homeless young person became a source of multi-layered identity for participants who valued what the totality of participation symbolised and provided.

> *'It's like...We're all on the street and we either don't have, by choice, or reason, or situation. And we grow close to a group of people or a couple of people who are also on the street and we just, it's like we've got a new family. They can be life long, meaningful relationships and everyone needs that. And, you can't always find that in normality. You sort of need to find someone that's, like, the same amount of crazy as you'.*
> (Interview with Johnny, 2011)

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Appendices

Appendix A: Geography of Field Work

Melbourne CBD

Appendix B: A Selection of Participants Photographs Collected During Field Work