

**“Taking a Chance and Striking Out”: An Exploration of Homelessness,
Housing Pathways, and ‘Self-Sabotage’**

by

Shannon Wilson

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THESIS EXAMINATION INFORMATION

Submitted by: **Shannon Wilson**

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An oral defense of this thesis took place on August 15, 2022 in front of the following examining committee:

Examining Committee:

Chair of Examining Committee	Dr. James Walsh
Research Supervisor	Dr. Tyler Frederick
Examining Committee Member	Dr. Steven Hayle
Thesis Examiner	Dr. Alyson King

The above committee determined that the thesis is acceptable in form and content and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate during an oral examination. A signed copy of the Certificate of Approval is available from the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

ABSTRACT

Homelessness remains a prevalent social issue in Canada, though limited research has sought to explore the process of transitioning from homelessness to housing. Exits from homelessness are rarely straightforward and are obstructed by the prevailing discourses that entrap identity within homelessness, making it difficult to establish a new sense of self after obtaining housing. The phenomenon of self-sabotage offers insights into the conscious and unconscious forces that drive individuals to engage in behaviors that may obstruct their chances at achieving desired goals. This thesis provides insights from individuals with lived experience of homelessness regarding the challenges they feel impede housing stability. Findings suggest that discourses of homelessness contribute to identity and result in continued engagement in the expected behaviors of this social category, jeopardizing housing stability.

Keywords: homelessness; housing pathways; housing stability; self-sabotage

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis consists of original work of which I have authored. This is a true copy of the work, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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SHANNON WILSON

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this work and that no part of this work has been published or submitted for publication. I have used standard referencing practices to acknowledge ideas, research techniques, or other materials that belong to others. Furthermore, I hereby certify that I am the sole source of the creative works and/or inventive knowledge described in this document.

DEDICATION

For Mathew, whose story will always remind me of where it all began. Your contribution to this thesis will never be forgotten.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Padgett (2007) persuasively outlines the significance of the transition from homelessness to home, stating “this phenomenological experience of getting a ‘home’ after losing it is rarely reported on in the literature. The tendency in previous research has been to make static comparisons between ‘housed vs. unhoused’ or ‘owners vs. renters’, thereby failing to capture the dynamic experience of housing deprivation among the destitute poor which can range from doubling up with family to sleeping on a park bench” (p. 1926). Exiting homelessness is an ongoing process, with the experience often being regarded in terms of the transitional nature embodied not just in the procurement of housing, but also in establishing housing stability (Van Straaten et al., 2017; Boland et al., 2018). To complicate matters, the concept of housing stability is poorly defined and difficult to assess, with few studies available that explore housing stability as a continuum or garner insight into the subjective experiences and meanings of housing stability for those with lived experience (Frederick et al., 2014). Ultimately, a more nuanced understanding of how individuals sustain tenancy after homelessness is necessary to inform policy and service provision, recognizing that the very concepts most widely addressed in terms of understanding pathways into homelessness like mental illness, trauma, or disaffiliation are equally important when it comes to exiting homelessness (Patterson et al., 2014; Boland et al., 2018).

With exits from homelessness being as multidimensional as the onset of homelessness, scholars generally have had limited success at uncovering the factors contributing to successful exits from homelessness (Zlotnick et al., 1999). Despite this, years of research have helped to identify some successful evidence-based practices to assist in addressing the issue of homelessness, though it is widely contended that without adequate housing, income, and

supports, people will continue to struggle to remain housed (Gaetz et al., 2013a). One significant service implemented to support individuals experiencing homelessness to transition into housing and achieve housing stability is case management. Case management programs emerged as a service category in the 1980's with the intention of preventing individuals from falling through the cracks of social service systems, assisting those experiencing homelessness to develop independent living skills and aiding them in accessing income supports, housing, and other services (Stanhope et al., 2012). Importantly, maintaining ongoing engagement with service users experiencing homelessness can present as a challenge for frontline workers, such as case managers, because, in some instances, service users may suddenly disengage from supports or engage in behaviors that undermine their chances at achieving a desired goal such as housing. With this in mind, Stanhope et al. (2012) introduce the term 'self-sabotage' to explore the perplexing occurrence where individuals experiencing homelessness appear to sabotage their own opportunities for housing stability.

This thesis seeks to explore homeless to housing transitions and the challenges associated with housing stability from the perspective of those with lived experience. Using the theoretical framework of housing pathways and liminality, this analysis explores the relationship between identity and homelessness. The analysis reflects on how identity is shaped within the status of 'homeless' and reproduced through engagement with street peers and homeless subcultures. By investigating the discourses of homelessness shared by participants, this thesis highlights how those who have experienced housing loss describe and define what it means to be homeless, in turn contributing not only to an identity within homelessness but one that may pose barriers to housing transitions. Finally, by combining the elements of discourse and identity, this thesis will explore the phenomenon of self-sabotage with regards to homelessness and housing transitions,

underscoring how people with lived experience talk about the concept of self-sabotage, define it, and operationalize it.

Justification of Research

The difficulties of achieving housing stability are well documented, but this dynamic experience can be difficult to capture “given the transient states of homelessness and being housed” (Allen, 2003; Hopper, 2002, as cited in Padgett, 2007, p. 1926; Patterson, et al., 2014). Aubry et al. (2016) note that individual, interpersonal, and community factors can be considered either resources or risk factors in terms of exiting homelessness and attaining housing stability; however, it remains largely unclear how these factors work interdependently at varying levels or how these relationships may enable or prevent a sustained tenancy.

The overarching idea that frames this thesis and offers justification for exploring housing transitions surrounds the common conclusion that a lack of available affordable housing is one of the most significant contributors to homelessness and housing instability. In fact, Gaetz et al. (2013) contend that the goal of ending homelessness in Canada is to ensure housing stability, a concept they define in part based on affordability of housing. Importantly, however, research indicates that obtaining housing alone is not sufficient for successful exits from homelessness, and further, that even with supports and efforts to minimize the stress of transitioning into a new living environment, some service users will still experience difficulties in achieving housing stability (Stanhope et al., 2012; Patterson et al., 2014). With this in mind, understanding the dynamics that obstruct successful transitions into housing after experiencing homelessness is critical to meaningfully address homelessness in Canada and improve housing stability.

Guiding Questions

This thesis is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the barriers identified by people experiencing homelessness to transitioning into housing?
2. What do people with lived experience see as being the most common reasons for housing loss?
3. Do people experiencing homelessness engage in self-sabotage? If so, how?
4. How do people experiencing homelessness define and talk about self-sabotage?

Thesis Overview

This chapter has outlined the significance of exploring transitions from homelessness to housing, providing a brief discussion on how the topics of identity and homeless discourses will be used to explore exits from homelessness. Further, this chapter included justification for this research and a general outline of the guiding questions that will be explored throughout.

Following this, chapter two will include a literature review summarizing the research on homelessness in Canada and the various programs and strategies used to prevent and address homelessness. The literature review also includes general discussion of factors that can impede or support successful housing transitions, as well as an overview of the concept of self-sabotage.

Chapter three identifies the theoretical frameworks that will be applied throughout this analysis, specifically the Housing Pathways framework from Clapham (2002) and Clapham (2003), as well as the conceptual framework of liminality proposed by Chamberlain and Johnson (2018).

Chapter four will include a positionality statement, summarize how the methodological approaches of semi-structured qualitative interviewing and grounded theory were used to conduct this thesis, as well as an overview of participant characteristics. Chapter five explores

the findings from this research, identifying key themes and exploring quotes and passages from participants. Chapter six of this thesis includes a discussion of the findings of this research and explores their connections between existing literature as well as the theoretical frameworks chosen. Additionally, chapter six includes a brief discussion of potential policy implications. Following the discussion section, contributions to current research and suggestions for future research will be discussed and finished with a conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Homelessness in Canada: Who & How Many

Who is Homeless?

Homelessness in Canada has evolved drastically since the late 20th century and has progressed from an issue that primarily affected a small proportion of single males, to a rampant social problem that impacts a diverse population of both individuals and families (Gaetz, 2010). Entering the 21st century, one of the most consistent findings noted in homelessness research was that people experiencing homelessness do not constitute a homogenous group (Rosenheck et al., 1999). While single adult males are still overwhelmingly overrepresented and account for close to 50% of Canada's homeless population, other sub-populations have been found to be at increased risk for homelessness including women and families, youth, and Indigenous Peoples (Gaetz et al., 2013a). Beyond this, homelessness affects people from varying walks of life, including both rural and urban residents, individuals with and without mental or physical health issues, those with high or low education attainment or occupational status, and more (Zald, 2004; Peressini, 2007). According to Gaetz et al. (2016) "the more data we gather through PiT Counts,

by-name lists, and other data sources, the more we learn that [*sic*] experience of homelessness is not homogenous” (p. 6).

The National Shelter Study provides a partial picture of homelessness in Canada by examining shelter data between 2005 and 2016. Adults between the ages of 25 and 49 account for the greatest percentage of shelter users, making up roughly 52% of the homeless population. The number of women accessing homeless shelters has not seen any significant change over the last 10 years, with women accounting for about 27% of the unsheltered population. While the rates of youth homelessness have declined somewhat, they still make up 18.7% of the homeless population. Importantly, Gaetz et al. (2016) identify three key ‘target’ groups experiencing homelessness in Canada that have been emphasized in new developments within service provision: youth, veterans, and Indigenous Peoples. Homelessness disproportionately affects Indigenous Peoples, and though they make up only about 5% of the general population across Canada, they account for about 30% of the homeless population (Gaetz et al., 2016; Duschesne, 2021). Regarding youth homelessness, findings from the National Shelter Study suggest that young people between the ages of 21 and 24 represent almost 60% of unaccompanied youth using shelters (Duschesne, 2021). Youth homelessness is viewed as a complex social issue given the substantial developmental changes that come during the transition into adulthood as well as the limited resources, education, life skills or social supports that many young people experiencing homelessness face (Gaetz et al., 2016). Finally, while veteran homelessness accounts for a very small percentage of shelter usage in Canada, homeless veterans have been found to have unique needs given that they tend to be much older than the broader homeless population and most commonly undergo a significant time lapse between when they exited the forces and when they became homeless. Forchuk, Richardson and Atyeo (2016) analyzed a pilot

project that explored different programming for homeless veterans and found that they often benefit from implementing peer support and veteran-specific housing (as cited in Gaetz et al., 2016).

In sum, homelessness in Canada is an issue that does not discriminate on gender, age, health status, or any other factors. Individuals experiencing homelessness come from many different walks of life and each individual experience of homelessness is unique. While there are some groups that have been identified as ‘target’ groups including youth, Indigenous Peoples, and veterans, as well as some sociodemographic categories such as single adult males that represent a significant proportion of the homeless population, there is no standard representation of ‘who’ is homeless in Canada.

Measuring Homelessness in Canada

In Canada, there are an estimated 30,000 people homeless on a given night, with at least 200,000 Canadians experiencing homelessness each year (Gaetz et al., 2013a). While these figures reflect people who are living ‘in the rough’, staying in emergency shelters or violence against women (VAW) shelters, or are provisionally accommodated, they fail to show the ‘full picture’ of homelessness in Canada. In specific, one group identified as the ‘hidden homeless’ are difficult to account for given that reliable data at the national level does not exist. Hidden homelessness, more commonly referred to as couch surfing, includes individuals who are temporarily living with friends or relatives with no other options and no immediate prospect of housing (Gaetz et al., 2013a).

Measuring homelessness is a necessary step to gain a deeper understanding of the issue, establish strategies and systems to address the problem, and to evaluate progress over time. In Canada, two of the primary tools utilized to measure and understand homelessness are the Point-

in-Time (PiT) Counts and the National Shelter Survey (Gaetz et al., 2016). PiT Counts are designed to “provide a snapshot of homelessness in a community over a set period of time, generally 24 hours” and typically include those experiencing unsheltered homelessness (sleeping outside or in places unfit for inhabitation) as well as those experiencing sheltered homelessness, including individuals temporarily residing in emergency shelters, violence against women (VAW) shelters, extreme weather shelters, etc. (Gaetz et al., 2016, p. 28; Donaldson et al., 2017). The purpose of a PiT Count is twofold in that it works not only to provide an enumeration of people experiencing absolute homelessness, but also provides insights into service needs via an accompanying survey to measure demographic characteristics and other relevant information (Donaldson et al., 2017). The second method used to measure homelessness in Canada is the National Shelter Survey, which collects data from over 200 shelters across Canada that is subsequently analyzed and recorded into the National Shelter Study (Segaert, 2017). The National Shelter Study is known as the “most comprehensive national-level study of homelessness in Canada” and assesses administrative shelter data to evaluate changing trends in homelessness, with its most recent publication containing data from approximately 2.5 million shelter stays between 2005 and 2016 (Duchesne, 2021, p. 7). Unlike the PiT Count’s inclusion of unsheltered individuals, the National Shelter Study only reflects a partial portrait of homelessness in Canada given that it only includes individuals experiencing homelessness who access the emergency shelter system (Segaert, 2017; Duchesne, 2021).

Causes of Homelessness

While homelessness has long occurred in Canada, beginning in the 1980’s significant changes in the national and global economy as well as government policy regarding social services and housing established a growth in poverty and a drastic increase in the number of

people experiencing homelessness (Gaetz, 2010). While a reduction in spending on affordable housing began in the 1980's, the issue of limited affordable housing supply was exacerbated by the elimination of Canada's national housing strategy in 1993 which eradicated spending towards new affordable housing stock. Following this, the federal government shifted financial responsibility for affordable housing to provincial governments, "leaving Canada as virtually the only major developed nation without a fully funded national commitment to housing" (Gaetz, 2010, p. 22). The significant reduction of affordable housing was then intensified by an aggregate loss of rental housing, with many rooming houses and apartments being demolished and neighbourhoods becoming gentrified to focus on encouraging home ownership. Homelessness became a mass problem in the mid-2000's, and while some progress has been made in responding to homelessness, it remains a significant issue (Gaetz et al., 2013a; Gaetz et al., 2016). Comparatively, other countries have demonstrated similar challenges with establishing national plans that can meaningfully address homelessness. For example, while Finland "has a constitutionally enshrined right to housing" the country did not see any significant reduction in homelessness until it adopted a nationwide policy based on a Housing First approach (DesBaillets & Hamill, 2022, p. 275). The significance of this comparison is that national policies that simply emphasize a belief in the importance of housing do not necessarily indicate a real respect for the fundamental right to housing or a person-centred approach to meaningfully reduce homelessness (DesBaillets & Hamill, 2022).

Earlier works from Gaetz (2010) stressed that the most notable weakness in Canada's response to homelessness is that it "continues to stand alone amongst developed countries in lacking a well-funded national housing strategy" (p. 25). Since then, however, Canada has re-established a national housing strategy that focuses on effective responses including early

intervention and prevention measures as well as offering innovative and appropriate supports (Gaetz et al., 2016). Returning to the comparison with Finland, it appears that Canada's efforts may to see challenges at noticeably reducing homelessness in a way that mirrors the challenges in Finland. While Finland prioritized the absolute right to housing, homelessness was not meaningfully addressed until other central facets of the right to housing, such as habitability, location, cultural adequacy, or availability of services, was realized. In this sense, access to housing alone is not a sufficient means of reducing homelessness, and a more person-centred approach such as the Housing First model is key to addressing this (DesBaillets & Hamill, 2022). Contrastingly, Canada's housing strategy emphasizes the importance of innovative solutions like Housing First, though the implementation of such innovative solutions is significantly constrained by the lack of available affordable housing. The scarcity of affordable and social housing significantly undermines the implementation of vital programs and strategies, while also undermining key facets of the right to housing, such as affordability and accessibility (Gaetz et al., 2016; DesBaillets & Hamill, 2022).

While the scope of homelessness in Canada has grown, so too has the complexity and diversity of the homeless population (Gaetz et al., 2016). People experiencing homelessness are not a homogenous group, and the causes of homelessness are most often a combination of structural factors, systems failures, and individual/relational factors. Structural factors include social and economic elements that impact the access to and availability of resources and opportunities, including access to affordable housing, adequate income, health supports, etc. The most notable structural factor affecting homelessness in Canada is the lack of affordable housing across the nation. Canada's affordable housing crisis is largely attributed to shifts in policy that drastically reduced the available funding to create new social housing units. Government support

with housing shifted to prioritize monetary supports like low interest rates or tax incentives to support private home ownership, and the supply of affordable rental housing began to decline due to neighbourhood gentrification and/or extensive renovations making previously affordable apartments unattainable for many Canadians (Gaetz, 2010; Gaetz et al., 2013a). Collectively, the reduction in affordable and market rental housing combined with stagnant or lowering incomes, reductions in social benefits, and general economic changes has meant that many Canadians are spending more money each month on housing than they can actually afford. This has contributed to the creation of the homelessness problem in Canada, especially in terms of the increased visibility of homelessness in communities both urban and rural (Gaetz et al., 2013a).

Next, systems failures transpire when systems of care and support, such as child welfare agencies, hospitals, correctional facilities or mental health facilities fail to provide the necessary support and/or discharge planning resulting in vulnerable people entering homelessness. Lastly, individual and relational factors reflect the personal circumstances of an individual experiencing homelessness. These personal circumstances can include mental health or addictions challenges, personal crisis such as intimate partner violence or family breakdown, as well as traumatic or unexpected events like house fires, floods, or loss of employment (Gaetz et al., 2013a).

Just as diverse as the population of individuals experiencing homelessness in Canada are the myriad of circumstances that lead people to becoming unsheltered. The most common academic consensus regarding the cause(s) of homelessness is that they are largely interactional and reflect a number of different individual-level factors that are exacerbated by structural issues (Batterham, 2019). Essentially, causes of homelessness can be explained by looking at the individual level factors through a structural scope, in that “individuals with particular behaviours, characteristics and experiences are more likely to become homeless during adverse structural

conditions” (Batterham, 2019, p. 6). Peressini (2007) conducted a longitudinal survey with individuals experiencing homelessness and identified that key pathways into homelessness could not be explained by sociodemographic factors alone, stressing the importance of individual level factors. Specifically, Perresini (2007) noted that while some sociodemographic groups are at a greater risk of following a specific pathway into homelessness, the data “point to the fact many of the pathways into homelessness are rooted in individual problems and issues” as well as that most participants experienced homelessness as a result of personal problems that caused them to “fall through the gaps” of systems of support (p. 124). Generally, these findings align with much of the recent research on homelessness that has taken the “new consensus” or “new orthodoxy” (Batterham, 2019, p. 6) view that acknowledges the interactional nature of individual and structural factors contributing to homelessness.

With the understanding that the causes of homelessness are largely intersectional, some scholars such as Parsell (2010) express that it is possible to explore individual level factors such as substance use independently from broader social problems. Parsell (2010) notes that the relationship between individual level issues like alcohol or substance use is often quite influential in how identities are defined and that while many people experiencing homelessness tie substance use inseparably to a range of other social problems, individual ‘pathologies’ can and should be explored independently from macro structures in an effort to understand the lives of those experiencing homelessness as far as how they see themselves, what they view as the problem(s) in their lives, and what they wish to change. The important thing to note, however, is that pathologizing homelessness can further contribute to negative portrayals of this population; therefore, efforts at exploring individual factors or “problematic attributes” should be done in a way that explores past and present life experiences as opposed to attempting to establish cause

and effect (Parsell, 2010, p. 187). As such, the exploration of individual factors or problematic attributes is a central component of this thesis and the analysis of homelessness and housing pathways to come.

The information discussed thus far is intended to provide a general picture of homelessness in Canada, including who is affected by homelessness, how it is measured and whether this is a true reflection of homelessness in Canada, as well as the predominant causes of homelessness as identified through literature and policy/service responses to the issue. Importantly, this thesis does not seek to substantiate causal relationships between preceding or ‘trigger’ factors and homelessness, but instead to centre insights from individual pathways and experiences of homelessness within the broader scope of academic and governmental understandings of the problem. The next section will look at chronic and episodic homelessness, a key subsection of the homeless population that is increasingly important in both research and service response, as well as an exploration of the systems in place support those experiencing homelessness as well as to prevent occurrences or re-occurrences of homelessness.

Chronic & Episodic Homelessness

Most individuals who experience homelessness in Canada are homeless for less than one month and are able to exit homelessness with minimal support (Gaetz et al., 2013a). There is, however, a smaller subset of individuals who experience long-term homelessness and often become “locked into a state of homelessness” (Gaetz et al., 2013a, p. 28). Chronic homelessness refers to those who have been on the streets for a long time, in some cases years, and have long-standing shelter stays and/or periods of absolute homelessness. In Canada, the definition of chronic homelessness outlined within the National Housing Strategy entitled “Reaching Home” defines chronic homelessness as “individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness AND

who meet at least 1 of the following criteria: 1) They have a total of at least 6 months (180 days) of homelessness over the past year. 2) They have recurrent experiences of homelessness over the past three years, with a cumulative duration of at least 18 months (546 days)” (Government of Canada, 2021, para. 8). Within this definition, homelessness encompasses not only those who are living in unsheltered locations, places not intended for human habitation, or in emergency shelters, but also reflects individuals who are temporarily staying with others or ‘couch surfing’ and who do not have a guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospect of permanent housing (Government of Canada, 2021). Some definitions of chronic homelessness explicitly reference the presence of physical or mental disability as inclusion criteria (Culhane, 2018), while others refer to the common presence of disabilities and/or other personal struggles but do not necessitate these as standard elements of chronic homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2013a; Gaetz et al., 2013b). On the other hand, individuals experiencing episodic homelessness spend less time unsheltered, but move in and out of homelessness numerous times. Episodic homelessness is defined as those who have been without housing for less than one year but have experienced multiple transitions in and out of homelessness over a three-year period (Gaetz et al., 2013a; Gaetz et al., 2014).

There are approximately 4,000 to 8,000 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and 6,000 to 22,000 experiencing episodic homelessness in Canada (Gaetz et al., 2013a). The significance of exploring chronic and episodic homelessness is in that while these individuals account for a small segment of the overall homeless population, combined they utilize more services than any other group. Individuals experiencing chronic or episodic homeless are found to have the highest level of need given that longer experiences of homelessness increase the likelihood of developing or worsening physical and mental health issues as well as experiencing

victimization or trauma. In Canada, those experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness account for less than 15% of the homeless population but are responsible for receiving more than half of the available resources and supports (Gaetz et al., 2013a). Since the mid-2000's, the approach to homelessness has shifted from primarily investing in emergency responses such as shelters and drop-ins to actively working to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness across Canada, especially those with high acuity mental health or addiction needs. Ultimately, shifting away from focusing on emergency responses has allowed for more targeted efforts that prioritize chronic homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2016).

Housing Strategies/Programs

Given the unique and often complex needs of individuals experiencing homelessness, in particular those experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness, the implementation of housing services and programs is a key component in understanding housing retention and stability. There are three key responses to homelessness in Canada: homelessness prevention, management of homelessness, and supporting transitions out of homelessness (Gaetz, 2010). First, strategies aimed at preventing homelessness typically involve investments in supports and services that work to reduce the chances for individuals or families to become homeless in the first place. These may include social policies that promote an adequate supply of safe and affordable housing, financial supports to those living in poverty such as rent supplements, as well as the provision of streamlined and seamless services for those with addictions, mental health issues, or who may be transitioning out of foster care, incarceration, hospitals, or other settings (Gaetz, 2010; Piat et al., 2015). Second, traditional resources addressing homelessness, such as shelters, drop-in centres, or soup kitchens, are used as tools to manage individuals while they are homeless and act as emergency responses to provide basic human necessities (Piat et al., 2015).

The final response to homelessness includes approaches which “focus on supporting peoples’ transition out of homelessness” and resources like supportive or transitional housing and case management programs (Gaetz, 2010, p. 23). Given that the focus of this thesis is to uncover the challenges that contribute to housing stability, primary emphasis will be placed on exploring resources that help to prevent homeless episodes from occurring and models of service provision to support the transition from homelessness to home.

Structural Prevention & Early Intervention

In responding to homelessness in Canada, increasing attention is being given to homelessness prevention strategies. Among these prevention approaches, Gaetz et al. (2016) propose that there are three levels of homelessness prevention: primary prevention, secondary prevention, and tertiary prevention. Importantly, Culhane (2010) emphasizes that these classifications of prevention should be seen as a continuum with indeterminate boundaries rather than discreet categories (as cited in Gaetz et al., 2016). Primary prevention seeks to address structural and systemic factors that broadly contribute to homelessness and housing precarity while secondary prevention refers to interventions and services targeted towards those at imminent risk of homelessness. Finally, tertiary prevention looks to provide the housing and necessary supports for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness with the goal of eliminating the risk of future homeless episodes.

Primary prevention aligns with structural and systemic issues that contribute to the risk of homelessness and housing instability. Access to safe and affordable housing as well as income security are both examples of primary and structural prevention which Gaetz et al. (2016) states create a “backbone” for the mechanisms necessary for secondary and tertiary prevention (p. 21). Secondary prevention includes both early intervention strategies as well as eviction prevention

strategies to help individuals or families who are at imminent risk of homelessness to either retain their current housing or access new housing as quickly as possible. Early intervention and eviction prevention can be reflected via landlord/tenant laws and legislation as well as by empowering renters through housing education and providing crisis supports for those at risk. Tertiary prevention is reflected through services to promote housing stability that are necessary to support individuals who have experienced homelessness in housing and prevent future homeless episodes (Gaetz et al., 2016). A brief exploration of examples of secondary and tertiary homelessness prevention will be discussed below, while discussion of primary prevention will follow later in this thesis.

Systems Coordination

A critical component to preventing and ending homelessness and housing instability is implementing coordinated systems to appropriately target all the risk factors for homelessness. Gaetz et al. (2016) note that “because homelessness is a systemic problem involving numerous sectors, institutions, and agencies, it requires more integrated system responses in terms of governance, policy, and programs” (p. 22). Establishing community-wide coordinated systems improves the efficiency and function of programs by eliminating duplication of services and improving information sharing, which in turn provides seamless care and better service outcomes. Gaetz et al. (2016) use the analogy of a “no wrong door” approach, meaning that no matter what sector a person enters the system from, they are able to access the services they want or require in a timely manner through efficient needs assessments and standard referral protocols (p. 22). Shifting to coordinated systems has been found to offer more effective responses to homelessness, an example of which is the establishing of “by-name” lists that identify each individual experiencing homelessness in a given area and what their needs are. By-name lists

allow service providers to successfully target their resources to those with higher level support needs and effectively follow each individual until they achieve housing stability (Gaetz et al., 2016).

Comprehensive Safety Nets

In light of the importance of offering streamlined coordinated services with a “no wrong door” approach, recently, increasing research has suggested that adverse life events can be a significant ‘push’ factor into homelessness (Curtis et al., 2013). O’Flaherty (2004) contends that homelessness is often caused by a “conjunction of bad circumstances” such as health shocks, relationship breakdown, or loss of employment coupled with a resulting loss or reduction of income (as cited in Curtis et al., 2013, p. 2228). Ross-Houle and Porcellato (2021) conducted a study investigating the relationship between significant adverse life events, alcohol consumption, and deterioration of living situation or loss of housing and identified three key themes of adverse life events which demonstrated an intersection with housing instability: social, structural, and health.

The social theme of adverse life events reflects the many circumstances associated with relationships that may contribute to homelessness. A major catalyst for homelessness is the loss of relationships with friends, family, or partners that individuals may depend on for housing. Ross-Houle and Porcellato (2021) found that the death of a parent had the most significant impact on the deterioration of living situations, with many participants expressing that they had previously experienced adversities that could have led to homelessness but were able to rely on support from a parent to avoid this. The loss of a parent highlights the importance of human capital and relationships in contributing to homelessness. The second theme, structural adversities, demonstrates how unexpected adversities pertaining to income and employment

impact homelessness. Ross-Houle and Porcellato (2021) found that “loss of employment, predominantly due to poor health or unintentional injury, resulted in homelessness” (p. 7). Additionally, participants stated that challenges with obtaining employment after housing loss created a vicious circle that increased the difficulty of exiting homelessness. Finally, health related adversities were also found to impact the deterioration of housing circumstances. Ross-Houle and Porcellato (2021) focus on the impact of heavy drinking as both a cause and effect of physical and/or mental health issues among participants, with some individuals experiencing deteriorating health because of alcohol consumption and others using alcohol as a means to cope with pain. It is plausible that not only alcohol, but any substance use disorder, may have similar effects wherein consuming substances as a means to cope with physical pain or mental health can be a cause of homelessness as well as a result of homelessness (Ross-Houle and Porcellato, 2021).

The significance of exploring unexpected adverse events (or “life shocks”) that contribute to homelessness is that they expose holes in service systems that allow individuals and families to slip through the cracks. Lee et al. (2021) add to the analysis of unexpected life events and contend that while micro-macro perspectives can generate a critical understanding of the causes of homelessness, “micro-level circumstances define a selection process through which the most precarious at-risk households have higher odds of winding up homeless” (p. 4). Ultimately, certain “trigger effects” and unexpected life events can contribute to experiencing homeless spells, especially when there are limited community resources available to support individuals and families facing sudden adversity (Curtis et al., 2013). This prompts the importance of having systems that are designed to support housing related emergencies ranging from eviction, disaster loss (fire or flood), interpersonal or relationship challenges like domestic violence, or other

circumstances. Lee et al. (2021) assert that preventing homelessness for individuals who find themselves in these circumstances is largely dependent on researchers and policy-makers to better predict who has higher chances of ending up homeless.

Housing First

The Housing First model is “perhaps the only homelessness intervention that can truly be considered a Best Practice” given its demonstrable success as a homelessness intervention (Gaetz et al., 2016, p. 15). Housing First is best described as a recovery-oriented approach to homelessness that encompasses moving people from homelessness into permanent housing as quickly as possible without any housing readiness requirements (Gaetz et al., 2013b). The primary philosophy of Housing First is that housing is a basic human right and, as such, individuals who are experiencing homelessness should be provided with immediate access to housing without any conditions or prerequisites, such as participating in substance use programming or maintaining abstinence (MacKinnon & Socias, 2021). In addition to rapid rehousing, the Housing First model includes offering ongoing supports to those who want or need them. Supports and services offered within the Housing First model can include case management, rent supplements, and assistance with navigating or accessing other community resources to engage people with their community. Housing First contrasts the more traditional or standard approach to homelessness intervention known as the ‘treatment first’ or ‘treatment as usual’ approach, wherein individuals or families are expected to address concerns that could impede housing stability, such as addictions or mental health issues, before they move out of homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2013b). The five core principles of Housing First are: providing immediate access to housing without any readiness conditions, allowing for consumer choice and self-determination in selecting the location and type of housing they receive, a recovery

orientation to focus on individual well-being in all facets of life, individualized and client driven supports that address the unique needs of every individual, and social/community integration (Gaetz et al., 2013b; Gaetz et al., 2016).

There is substantial research on Housing First which demonstrates that the model has positive effects on housing stability (Tsemberis et al., 1999; Tsemberis et al., 2004; Pearson et al., 2009; Palepu et al., 2013; Urbanoski et al., 2018). The first ever Housing First model was developed and implemented by ‘Pathways to Housing Inc.’ in New York City in the 1990’s (Tsemberis et al., 1999), and provided one of the most thorough comparative assessments of housing stability among homeless individuals assigned to receive immediate housing without prerequisites as opposed to those assigned to a Continuum of Care program where housing was contingent on sobriety and/or other conditions (Pearson et al., 2009). Tsemberis et al. (2004) found that study participants who engaged in the Housing First program had “substantially faster decreases in homeless status and increases in stably-housed status” as compared to those in the control sample who received programming following the Continuum of Care/treatment as usual model (p. 654). Those who participated in a Housing First program sustained an almost 80% rate of housing retention, challenging long standing assumptions held by service providers that those who are chronically homeless and experience mental illness should be supported through a Continuum of Care to achieve housing readiness (Tsemberis et al., 2004). Similarly, Pearson et al. (2009) analyzed a comparison of the Pathways to Housing program alongside two other programs sharing common features to the Housing First model and found that Pathways to Housing participants had the greatest level of housing stability with 92% remaining housed after 12 months.

While Housing First delivers notable improvements in housing stability, research demonstrates that stable housing in turn contributes to further positive impacts within other areas, such as health and wellness. Given that physical environment is a critical social determinant of health, improvements in housing stability have been shown to also improve health outcomes through reductions in behaviours that increase the risk for communicable diseases like HIV or hepatitis C, reduced exposure to violence, reduced rates of overdose, and so on (MacKinnon & Socias, 2021).

Housing Stability & Retention After Homelessness

Housing retention is generally a poorly defined idea within the homelessness literature despite an understanding that tenancy sustainment is critical to preventing returns to homelessness. The term housing retention is often used interchangeably within academic literature with other terms such as housing stability, housing maintenance, and other similar phrases (Boland et al., 2018). Moreover, since housing stability does not have a standard conceptualization, it is assessed differently based on the type(s) of measures used, such as duration of time in housing, and the type of housing (e.g., independent, shared, transitional, etc.). As a result, it is difficult to compare between studies (Frederick et al., 2014; Van Straaten et al., 2017; Boland et al., 2018).

There are numerous longitudinal studies on homelessness that have drawn on individual, interpersonal, and community factors that can both support and obstruct not only the duration of homelessness, but also the outcome of exits from homelessness, namely housing stability as well as returns to homelessness (Aubry et al., 2016). The following section will outline some of the key predictors of housing stability as well as factors that have been associated with unsuccessful housing transitions and poor housing retention.

Housing Stability: Positive & Negative Predictors

While this thesis explores unsuccessful housing transitions and poor housing retention, it is necessary to establish an outline of both positive and negative predictors of housing stability as noted in academic literature. Ribar (2017) states that “homelessness is seldom an isolated event; it co-occurs with many other problems and circumstances” (p. 218). Many of the risk factors that have been found to precede homelessness (i.e., individual, interpersonal, and structural issues) are also deeply related to the course of homelessness, including exits from homelessness and achieving housing stability (Aubry et al., 2016). While there are a number of broad factors that have been found to contribute to differences in housing stability, such as gender or age (Aubry et al., 2016; Boland et al., 2018), for the purposes of this thesis I focus on the most salient factors participants identified from their own experience or the experience of others. With this in mind, the predictors of housing instability to be discussed include structural factors, such as affordable housing and income supports, individual level factors, like substance use and mental health, and interpersonal factors, such as street entrenchment, adaptation to homelessness, and social support.

Structural Factors

Affordable Housing & Income Support

Providing adequate access to affordable housing is viewed as one of the most critical solutions to prevent and end homelessness in Canada (Gaetz et al., 2013a; Gaetz et al., 2016). Thus, access to affordable housing may be a substantial component of housing stability, in that affordability helps to reduce the chances of experiencing homelessness to begin with, but also improves housing retention through mitigating the risk of housing loss from financial constraints. O’Donnell (2021) used a multistate approach to assess the possible risks individuals may face as

they transition between homelessness and housing. The multistate approach takes into consideration a variety of housing or accommodation ‘states’ to assess not only the different pathways between homelessness and housing, but also the qualitative experiences of various housing types. Using the multistate model, O’Donnell (2021) found that social and affordable housing is associated with greater housing stability for individuals within disadvantaged populations such as those who have experienced chronic homelessness. In particular, O’Donnell (2021) found that “people who enter social housing are more likely to maintain their tenancy and less likely to experience homelessness or other forms of disadvantage than people living in privately rented housing” (p. 1722).

A variety of structural level factors play a role in housing stability after homelessness, but specific emphasis can be placed on affordability of housing available as well as the economic resources individuals experiencing homelessness have access to. Aubry et al. (2016) corroborated consistent findings from previous studies outlining the critical role housing affordability plays in housing stability. Zlotnick et al. (1999) utilized multivariate analysis to explore exits from homelessness and found that structural supports, namely access to subsidized housing and receipt of entitlement-benefit income, were “the most important variables associate with exits from homelessness into stable housing” (p. 209). Aubry et al. (2016) echo similar findings, noting that having access to subsidized housing and receiving income support benefits not only facilitates the opportunity to exit homelessness, but also reduces the risk of losing housing based on financial hardship. Additionally, Piat et al. (2015) emphasized how the interaction between structural factors including lack of affordable housing may amplify individual factors that contribute to homelessness, ultimately restricting opportunity for upward mobility.

Individual Characteristics and Circumstance: Addictions & Mental Health

Substance Use

Illicit drug use has repeatedly been identified as being a major barrier to exiting homelessness as well as being linked to lower housing stability among previously homeless individuals (Zlotnick et al., 1999; Aubry et al., 2016; Van Straaten et al., 2017). Specifically, illicit drug use that meets the criteria for a substance use disorder or results in impaired function has been found to predict unstable housing (Zlotnick et al., 1999). Urbanoski et al. (2017) conducted a secondary analysis of individuals meeting the criteria for substance use disorder engaged in either Housing First or Treatment as Usual programming over a 24-month period, and determined that for both programs, people with a substance use disorder spent less time in stable housing than those without substance use disorder. Padgett (2007) conducted a longitudinal analysis with individuals who were precariously housed or experiencing homelessness, following up on initial interviews with participants after an 18-month time frame and noted that reducing and controlling substance use was a significant challenge for the majority of participants. Further, Padgett (2007) noted that “among participants who lost their housing during the study, heavy substance use was cited as the primary reason” (p. 85). In contrast with the above findings, Palepu et al. (2013) assessed the relationship between substance dependence and residential stability among homeless adults with mental health disorders and found that “whether participants met the criteria for substance dependence or daily substance use did not influence housing stability” (para. 18). Similarly, Edens et al. (2011) found that individuals actively using substances during their housing transition were able to retain their housing equal to other clients without substance use disorders when provided with appropriate supports (as cited in O’Connell et al., 2013).

The exploration of interactions between active substance use and housing stability thus yields mixed results. A variety of factors may result in different housing retention outcomes, including the severity/frequency of use, type of drug used, the type(s) and level of supports provided, presence or absence of mental illness, or timing of access to residential treatment (North et al., 2010; O’Connell et al., 2013). While some study results have noted the absence of substance use disorder as predictive of housing stability, others did not yield any significant differences in housing stability between individuals with and without substance use disorders. This again highlights the complexity of experiences of homelessness, but also suggests that housing retention is achievable for individuals with substance use disorders or concurrent disorders who are exiting homelessness (Palepu et al., 2013; Ribar, 2017). These findings, however, raise questions about how and why dynamics of substance abuse contribute to housing instability.

Mental Health

The individual pathologies of serious mental health issues have been well documented as contributing factors to homelessness (Peressini, 2007; Gaetz, 2010; Piat et al., 2015). Mental illness is not only a risk factor for homelessness, but experiencing homelessness also presents as a risk for developing mental illness. An estimated one-third of individuals experiencing homelessness suffer with mental illness, and Goering et al. (2011) assert that “individuals with severe and persistent mental illness are likely to experience repeated and long periods of homelessness than other groups” (as cited in Piat et al., 2015, p. 2368). Achieving tenancy sustainment following homelessness can be challenging for individuals experiencing mental illness, especially for those who have experienced chronic homelessness, as they may struggle to display housing readiness or sustain independent living due to challenges with basic life skills,

hygiene, substance use, or the ability to actively engage in support programs (Pearson et al., 2009). Zlotnick et al. (1999) conducted a 15-month prospective study on residential exits from homelessness and found that individuals with severe mental or concurrent disorders obtained stable housing at a proportionately lower rate than those without mental health issues. Similarly, Van Straaten et al. (2017) found that anxiety, depression, and psychological distress was negatively associated with housing stability.

Like substance use, the impact of mental illness on housing retention varies across studies and achieving housing stability for individuals with mental illness is best viewed as an iterative process (Pearson et al., 2009). There are a number of individual characteristics and circumstances that may contribute to housing stability for those with psychiatric disorders. For example, Pearson et al. (2009)'s exploratory study on the success of Housing First for individuals with mental illness found that participants who entered the program directly from the streets were less likely to achieve housing stability, whereas those who entered the program from emergency shelters, correctional institutions, or mental health facilities achieved the highest level of housing stability. Conversely, Palepu et al. (2013) assessed the role of Housing First on housing retention and found that individuals experiencing homelessness and mental illness can achieve residential stability. Boland et al. (2018) also found via systematic review that "adults with mental illness were no less likely than those without such illnesses to maintain stable housing" and that some mental health disorders, such as schizophrenia, were actually correlated with increased housing retention (para. 20).

Interestingly, the specific elements of mental illnesses for which Boland et al. (2018) associate with increased tenure are not identified in this systematic review, leaving questions about how the presence of psychiatric disorders may improve or impede tenancy. The actual

dynamics of mental health issues that may impact tenancy sustainment are difficult to isolate and may point to limitations within quantitative analysis on the subject. While many analyses may substantiate a relationship between mental health and housing stability/instability, they do not qualitatively explore the unique dynamics of how mental health may impact housing stability. For example, while Pearson et al. (2009) assert that untreated psychiatric issues often jeopardize housing stability, the authors do not offer an exploration of how the presence of psychiatric illnesses will affect tenancy. Furthermore, it is difficult to substantiate any conclusions on the role that mental health plays in housing instability given the differences between research designs, type(s) of housing, type of support/programming (e.g., Housing First, Treatment as Usual) as well as how stability is defined and operationalized.

Interpersonal Characteristics: Social Support, Street Adaptation & New Identities

Peers, Family & Social Supports

Longitudinal research has largely identified having strong social support as being a key predictor of housing stability (Patterson et al., 2014; Aubry et al., 2016; Boland et al., 2018). Interestingly, research from Aubry et al. (2016) corroborates this finding but indicates the size of one's social network to be more predictive of successfully exiting homelessness rather than the quality of the social support. Boland et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review of 43 articles to synthesize research on tenancy sustainment among formerly homeless individuals and found that having social contact with other housed individuals and "having regular contact with relatives or housed friends was significantly associated with tenancy sustainment" (para. 24). Social networks have the potential for significant impact on the onset of homelessness as well as the duration based on the social ties that make up the network and the level of support they can provide (Lee et al., 2021).

Though strong social supports can be critical to successful exits from homelessness and achieving housing stability, the type of social networks that individuals associate with has also been found to play a role in some studies. While Boland et al. (2018)'s systematic review found that social support generally offered positive impacts to those exiting homelessness, the quality of these social relationships may present some level of impact of tenancy sustainment. One study assessed in the systematic review found negative associations in housing stability for individuals who actively engaged in socializing with homeless peers after moving into housing (Boland et al., 2018). For individuals experiencing homelessness, associating with street peers and engaging in the homeless subculture deteriorates housing stability but also reduces the likelihood of securing housing to begin with. Johnson and Chamberlain (2008) articulate that while homeless subcultures are important in providing a sense of camaraderie and the necessary survival skills for street life, this involvement also increases the likelihood of engaging in activities that ultimately further perpetuate homelessness. Further exploration of the relationship between homeless subcultures and long-term homelessness is discussed in the following section.

Chronic Homelessness & Street Entrenchment

While the aforementioned research signals mixed ideas about the role of social support and housing stability, the ideas presented in works such as Johnson and Chamberlain (2008) highlight the necessity of exploring peer influences and relationships among individuals experiencing homelessness that extend beyond basic social engagement. Building on the exploration of social bonds, Johnson and Chamberlain (2008) extend the analysis of the role of social support by evaluating how social connections may work to categorize and embed one into a specific lifestyle, pathway, or social standing. In particular, one idea that combines the topics of social bonds and supports, peer influence, and survival of the chaos and dangers of life on the

streets is the concept of street entrenchment. Street entrenchment refers to an adaptation to homelessness that is explained by Farrell (2010) as the “experience of homelessness as a constant state of being” (p. 248). Street entrenchment occurs when individuals form an attachment to the familiar experience of homelessness and encounter difficulties within structured environments. The concept of street entrenchment is often linked to the duration of the homeless experience, most commonly affecting individuals who are chronically homeless, though it is important to note that not all who experience chronic homelessness will become entrenched (Farrell, 2010).

Research on street entrenchment has identified that individuals who experience longer durations of homelessness are less likely to retain and maintain stable housing in comparison to those with relatively short episodes of homelessness (Zlotnick et al., 1999). The notion of street entrenchment is often comparable with a number of different concepts explored in academic literature on homelessness, including disaffiliation, social adaptation, identity work, etc., and generally refers to instances where individuals experiencing homelessness become estranged from domiciled society, adapt to their homeless lifestyle, and formulate a new and positive identity or narrative about their homelessness. For example, Zlotnick et al. (1999) conducted a longitudinal analysis of 397 adults experiencing homelessness and determined that in comparison to respondents with shorter homeless episodes (< 1 year), those who had experienced long-term or chronic homelessness obtained stable housing at a lower rate. Specifically, individuals who identified having been homeless for longer than one year were only 10% as likely as other participants to exit into stable housing (Zlotnick et al., 1999).

Various frameworks have been explored to understand how individuals experiencing chronic homelessness become disaffiliated from society, thus contributing to their difficulty in exiting homelessness or achieving housing stability (Piliavin et al., 1993; Snow & Anderson,

1993; Farrell, 2010; Bell & Walsh, 2015). For example, Zlotnick et al. (1999) suggest in their analysis that study participants with homeless histories less than one year are less likely to identify with the “culture” of homelessness, thus improving their chances at obtaining stable housing. Sosin et al. (as cited in Zlotnick et al., 1999, p. 221) labels this process as cultural identification, noting that it takes time to acquire but that “once the new identity is assumed, it is hard to shed.” Individual progression of cultural identification to homelessness may be impacted by things such as the number of homeless episodes, total time spent unsheltered, where a person spends their time while homeless (e.g., on the street versus in emergency shelters.), or who they associate with while homeless (Zlotnick et al., 1999).

Similarly, Farrell (2010) argues that many individuals experiencing chronic homelessness accept housing opportunities only to stay for a short amount of time before they “return to the familiarity of their life on the street” (p. 241). In his analysis, Farrell (2010) suggests that there are three central dynamics that contribute to those who are experiencing chronic homelessness to maintain their homeless status: a conflict between the familiar experience of homelessness and the desire to leave it, difficulty within structured environments, and an adaptation to the lifestyle of homelessness. To begin, conflict with the familiar presents itself for those experiencing homelessness by the way in which they organize and seek normalcy in the chaos of street life. When the routine of survival becomes a familiar state, other factors contributing to their homelessness, such as substance use or mental illness, may become secondary to the difficulty of physically and emotionally breaking the ties to their established normality (Farrell, 2010). The second component proposed by Farrell (2010) is a difficulty with structured environments, wherein those who have been homeless for years may experience discomfort, anxiousness, or powerlessness if confined to a new setting such as a shelter or room/apartment rental. For many

who have lived on the streets for years, homelessness provides a feeling of freedom that offers a sense of control, despite the fact that the majority of their existence is in fact dictated and controlled by people and systems. Moreover, Blankertz et al. (1990) note that the “state of homelessness may be an important source of self-esteem and personal identity as they have successfully created a lifestyle that most people could not survive” (as cited in Farrell, 2010, pp. 246-247).

The final dynamic outlined by Farrell (2010) is a total adaptation to the lifestyle of homelessness, which he contends for many may be “a result of the combination of the two dynamics previously described” (p. 248). The adaptation to homelessness may manifest through brief feelings of grandiosity or excitement that are powerfully held but ultimately followed by long-term negative feelings or experiences. Farrell (2010) provides the example of receiving a welfare or disability cheque at the beginning of the month, but using this money to binge on drugs, alcohol, or gambling as a result of the adaptation to homelessness. While this desire can result in long-term negative outcomes like having no money for the remainder of the month, the anticipation and excitement of feeling something positive can be seen as an addictive spiral where the impulse eventually becomes out of the persons control (Farrell, 2010). Ultimately, the adaptation to homelessness presents a critical concern in that it works to maintain one’s homeless status and their overall ability to secure housing or leave life on the street.

In line with Farrell’s (2010) exploration of adaptations to homelessness, Osborne (2002) explores the nature of self-identity in the lives of individuals experiencing homelessness. All human beings are motivated to maintain a positive self-view, but for those experiencing homelessness, this is of particular difficulty given the disorder and bleakness of street life. Upon entering homelessness, individuals are faced with an identity choice; they can attempt to

maintain their domiciled identity, or they can accept a new identity as ‘homeless’. For individuals experiencing their first episode of homelessness or who are only recently displaced, efforts to maintain their desired identity require engaging in behaviours that align with their preferred role or identity. In most cases, behaviours aligning with the desire to maintain a domiciled identity can include staying with friends/family or at a homeless shelter in attempt to exit homelessness and the homeless role (Osborne, 2002). Over time, however, it becomes more and more difficult for individuals to negotiate their desired identity with their homeless status, creating internal tensions that are difficult to relieve. Osborne (2002) posits that accepting a homeless identity may be one of the only ways to alleviate such tension, necessitating that the homeless person begins acquiring the values of their new social group. Incorporating homelessness into one’s identity, disaffiliating with domiciled society, and adapting to their new living conditions are all methods of alleviating the inner conflict that comes with homeless status (Osborne, 2002).

The significance of Osborne’s (2002) work on homeless identities is much like that of Farrell’s (2010) finding that adaptation to homelessness impedes upward mobility, where accepting a homeless identity creates barriers to getting off the street. Osborne (2002) notes that part of integrating homelessness into identity involves establishing self-reliance and self-respect, which often is done by utilizing little to no services as well as making fewer attempts to transition out of homelessness. Osborne (2002) refers to identifying with being homeless as a “double-edged sword” in that “accepting one’s lot in life has positive benefits (e.g., sharing with others in the clique, self-esteem enhancement), yet it also brings with it the reality that getting off the street will become harder and harder the more one becomes entrenched in the homeless identity” (p. 49). The aforementioned research suggesting longer homeless durations are

correlated with poorer housing retention and stability may be further supported by Osborne's (2002) evaluation that thorough street entrenchment (defined by length of time unsheltered and number of homeless peers) is predictive of declining service use that would assist with obtaining housing and establishing stability in housing.

Self-Sabotage and Service Disengagement

The concept of self-sabotage has been suggested in the research as another way of understanding the dynamic of entrenchment but is one that has received limited attention to date. Sabotage is a behaviour identified in service delivery that is obstructive to the provision of care (Koekkoek et al., 2006, as cited in Stanhope et al., 2012). In the academic literature, self-sabotaging behaviour in the context of homelessness can be seen as a dichotomy between conscious and willful actions that hinder desired outcomes as opposed to negative actions stemming from an unconscious resistance to change (Mitchell et al., 1992; Farrell, 2010; Stanhope et al., 2012). Regardless of whether an action is viewed as intentional (conscious) or unintentional (unconscious), the general outcome of self-sabotaging behaviour is the undermining of one's chances at achieving desired goals (Stanhope et al., 2012). Due to the limited research on self-sabotage and homelessness, many questions remain about the existence of this phenomenon including how it can be defined, what factors contribute to it, and what behaviours constitute self-sabotage.

While the use of the term self-sabotage in homelessness literature is relatively sparse, there are two general perspectives that help to explore the basis of self-sabotaging behaviours: self-sabotage is either conscious and intentional or unconscious and involuntary. Stanhope et al. (2012) offer one of few perspectives into the concept of self-sabotaging behaviours among individuals experiencing homelessness, defining this phenomenon from the perspective of case

managers. Stanhope et al. (2012) suggest that service providers invoke the term sabotage as a response to “clinically difficult situations” wherein service users “undermine the progress they have made towards housing and stability” (p. 261). Stanhope et al. (2012)’s analysis on self-sabotage revealed that, from the perspective of case managers, self-sabotage is generally viewed as conscious and intentional behaviour(s) that damage a service users’ chances at achieving their goals. In contrast, while not explicitly invoking the term ‘self-sabotage’, works from Farrell (2010) offer a different perspective on self-sabotage that views this behaviour as inherently unconscious. Farrell (2010) explores the paradox of having a conscious desire for housing but an unconscious sense of comfort and familiarity with street life, wherein competing feelings of hopelessness and excitement work to foster behaviours that impede one’s chances of exiting homelessness. Such unconscious processes work to trap individuals into street life and maintain their unsheltered status, a notion that is similar to the idea of self-sabotage.

Stanhope et al. (2012) offer one of the most detailed explorations into the concept of self-sabotaging behaviours among individuals experiencing homelessness, defining this phenomenon from the perspective of case managers. In this context, actions that were deemed as self-sabotaging included behaviours that demonstrated resistance towards services, or in some cases, complete rejection of services altogether. Generally, the framing of self-sabotage through service disengagement is simplified by Stanhope et al. (2012) as a demonstrated resistance to or outright rejection of services. From a case management perspective, service disengagement is a particularly confusing phenomenon as, on the surface, it appears that “service users are walking away from the very things they want” (Stanhope et al., 2012, p. 262). There are a handful of similar definitions used in academic literature to explain self-sabotage, including Mitchel et al.’s (1992) description of “a conscious act where service users sabotage efforts by providers in a

willful manner,” however, there are few academic studies that have sought to identify what behaviours may constitute self-sabotage when it comes to homelessness, as well as why someone might choose to engage in these behaviours (as cited in Stanhope et al., 2012, p. 262).

In addressing the questions regarding how self-sabotage should be defined, as well as why someone may engage in this behaviour, Stanhope et al. (2012) define self-sabotage through operationalization, referencing the behaviours and actions that service providers constitute as self-sabotaging in nature. As previously noted, Stanhope et al. (2012) largely view self-sabotage as the demonstrated resistance or rejection of services, but the authors also suggest that self-sabotage can include patterns of rule breaking that would ultimately lead to removal from housing/case management programming that is done in a deliberate effort to fail. In both instances, self-sabotage is seen as deliberate and intentional. It is important to note, however, that Stanhope et al. (2012) also suggest that there are more benign views associated with self-sabotage, such as when clients display an inability to follow through. The inability to follow through with scheduled appointments or other program expectations may not always be viewed as self-sabotage but is more likely to be deemed as such when it occurs at critical junctures (Stanhope et al., 2012).

The second factor to consider in exploring self-sabotage is the question of why individuals harm their chances at success, which Stanhope et al. (2012) suggest comes down to two key factors: fear and wanting too much too fast. Oftentimes, individuals struggle with the responsibility of getting and maintaining the very things they have wanted for so long, with some fearing success and others fearing failure. Stanhope et al. (2012) viewed fear of failure and new responsibility as a critical factor in service disengagement, quoting a case manager that participated in their study who stated that “just when they [service users] got to the time to do

what they needed to do they sabotaged it” (p. 264). Further, for many individuals who have experienced long-term homelessness and adversity, achieving success in obtaining housing was seen as intimidating. This creates a complex phenomenon where some individuals may sabotage successes they don’t feel they are worthy of. Despite the inherent intentionality in the use of the term self-sabotage by Stanhope et al. (2012), the exploration of why some individuals engage in this behaviour does allude to the possibility of more unconscious processes at play. Beyond fear, Stanhope et al. (2012) advise that some individuals simply aren’t ready for housing but experience a disconnect between what they want versus what is realistic as far as housing readiness. In this case, self-sabotage is reflected in setting oneself up for failure by transitioning into housing before being truly ‘ready’, an idea which is difficult to conceptualize given the diversity of challenges that each individual experiencing homelessness may face (Stanhope et al., 2012).

The concept of self-sabotage is difficult to define given the limited academic research available on the subject. Self-sabotage is a phenomenon that thus far has primarily been limited to use by service providers and case managers as a means of describing behaviours, actions and choices that are difficult to understand or otherwise “mystifying” (Stanhope et al., 2012, p. 262). In this thesis, I will explore the dynamics of self-sabotage which represent a different way of thinking not only about service disengagement, but also about disengagement from broader domiciled society as a whole for individuals who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness. Exploring self-sabotage through a lens of service disengagement is necessary in order to examine the pathways through which individuals accessing services undermine their chances at success, but it does not capture a full picture of self-sabotage and homelessness, especially for those who are so deeply entrenched that they do not access services at all.

Consideration of disengagement not just from services, but from wider society as a whole, raises important questions about the processes of street entrenchment which effectively enable and facilitate engagement in sabotaging behaviours. From this viewpoint, establishing deep ties to the unsheltered community advances the question of whether the dynamics of street entrenchment may in itself be viewed as a form of self-sabotage.

In terms of the dichotomy behind the motivations of self-sabotage, important questions can be raised about whether the basis of behaviours being conscious or unconscious is significant or meaningful. Particularly for service provision or policy implications, the outcomes of sabotaging acts may largely be the same regardless of intention. The explicit use of the term ‘sabotage’ by Stanhope et al. (2009) and Stanhope et al. (2012) indicates some level of intentionality, whereas other works that explore behaviours or decisions that impede the achievement of a desired goal do not include such distinct terms and generally imply this issue as the result of unconscious forces (Wong & Piliavin, 1997; Farrell, 2010; Bell & Walsh, 2015). Nevertheless, this thesis asserts the importance of recognizing the duality of self-sabotage as opposed to viewing it in absolute terms. Seeing self-sabotage as either conscious or unconscious overlooks the intricacies and nuances of each individual experience of homelessness that also contribute to the success or failure of housing transitions, and eliminates the possibility that some individuals may experience both conscious and unconscious desires to self-sabotage.

Gaps in Literature

The research examined thus far regarding homelessness and housing transitions highlights a number of gaps within the literature. One of the most significant questions to consider is how a lack of housing shapes the identity of those experiencing homelessness, and in turn, if and how identity contributes to housing transitions and housing stability. Housing has

been found to be an important source of identity (Clapham, 2003), and while there is ample research that explores identity and identity work among individuals experiencing homelessness, (Osborne, 2002; Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008; Farrell, 2010; Bell & Walsh, 2015) there are few studies that explore how discourses of homeless identity may persist after transitioning into housing and what impact this may have on housing stability. Further, while the notion that peer influences and social connections may contribute to housing stability/instability is discussed in some literature (Aubry et al., 2016; Boland et al., 2018), questions remain about what dynamics contribute to continued engagement with homeless peers for individuals who have exited homelessness, and what role this continued engagement may play in housing loss.

In light of the varying findings regarding how individual level factors such as mental illness or substance use disorder may impact housing transitions, additional questions remain about the unique dynamics of these micro-level factors which work to contribute to instability. While there is ample research that substantiates the connections between individual level factors and housing stability, the limited literature drawing out the nuances regarding why and how these factors impede housing stability indicates some methodological limitations. Put simply, while many academic works may determine that drug use lowers rates of housing retention, there is little to no discussion of what specific elements of drug use actually contribute to this (e.g., financial issues, behavioural issues, safety issues, and so on). This gap in literature highlights the need to explore what particular dynamics of substance use or mental health issues pose as a barrier to successful housing transitions.

The final overarching idea that frames this thesis is the general consensus among homelessness research that having access to affordable or subsidized housing is one of the most critical predictors of housing stability, especially for individuals who are transitioning out of

homelessness (Zlotnick et al., 1999; Gaetz et al., 2013; Piat et al., 2015; Aubry et al., 2016).

Considering the unanswered questions discussed above regarding the role of identity, expectations tied to homeless discourses, as well as the dynamics between these factors, there are a number of unexplored elements that may contribute to poor housing retention. In sum, despite the availability of research that substantiates the importance of affordable housing, there remain unanswered questions about why some people may be unsuccessful in achieving housing stability even with access to affordable housing.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The Housing Pathways Framework

Clapham (2002) notes that a commonly voiced criticism of homelessness and housing studies within the 20th century was that the research was often atheoretical and focused primarily on practical matters such as policy issues. The ability for this type of research to meaningfully contribute to greater understandings of homelessness and housing issues was subsequently questioned, leading to a significant increase in “theoretically aware” housing research (Clapham, 2002, p. 57). Since this time, several different approaches to studying housing have been undertaken and include political ideologies that focus on governmental policies, neo-classical approaches that emphasize the economic framework of housing markets, geographical methodologies that examine the spatial allocation of housing, as well as focused approaches from varying sociological schools of thought such as exploring structural inequalities that affect the housing system. Despite these theoretical developments, the majority of research on housing fails to explore the intricate relationships between the actions of individual(s) and the structural/systemic constraints that limit actions, and instead focuses on only one component or

the other. Clapham (2002) also notes that “the dominant approaches to the study of housing were derived from paradigms formulated in a societal context very different from that of today” and as such suggests that the framework of a ‘housing pathway’ may help to integrate human agency with structural mechanisms to better address the complexities of homelessness and housing (p. 59).

The housing pathways approach is deemed a framework as opposed to a theory or methodology, though Clapham (2002) notes that theories may be developed from its use. Clapham’s (2002) works offers the most developed exploration of the pathways approach and is based on the theory of social constructionism which assumes that all social life is constructed through human interaction, and that this process is the basis for how individuals define themselves and the world around them (Clapham, 2003). Clapham (2002) adds to this general perspective Giddens’s (1984) concept of structuration, wherein structures are seen as being produced and reproduced at the individual and institutional level and these structures serve to enable or constrain action (Clapham, 2002).

Using this integrated perspective, Clapham (2002) defines housing pathways as “patterns of interaction (practices) concerning house and home, over time and space” (p. 63). In particular, he explores the ‘consumption’ of housing including characteristics of housing, the meaning(s) of the home that relate to its inhabitants and how the space is used, as well as the way housing contributes to individual identity and lifestyle choice. Further, the way individuals interact with neighbours and community members is an additional factor pivotal to the consumption of housing, conveying critical information such as the presence or sense of community as well as feelings about a particular neighbourhood as expressed by outsiders (Clapham, 2002). The significance of the pathways framework with regards to this thesis is that it explores the

connection between housing and all other aspects of life. Clapham (2002) states that “housing is not consumed in isolation from other aspects of life” and posits that housing pathways co-exist and are closely related to other pathways in life, such as employment (p. 65). With this in mind, housing pathways are closely attached to personal identities and lifestyle choices, and as such the pathways framework is useful not only at exploring causes of homelessness, but also the factors that enable people to exit homelessness as well (Clapham, 2002; Clapham, 2003).

The housing pathways framework will be incorporated in this analysis by drawing connections between identity and homeless discourses. Clapham (2003) notes that “housing can be an important source of identity” and explores how this relates to the categorical identities ascribed to us and contribute to the discourses that assign our relation to broader society (p. 122). As such, the pathways framework will be used to explore the connection between housing (or lack thereof) and identity. The second interconnected way that the pathways framework will be used is to explore how discourses of homelessness contribute to identity, and what role this may play in housing transitions. In qualitative analysis, this framework allows for greater understandings of the perceptive world of an individual that contribute to their identity and behaviour, and further, how individuals experiencing homelessness may act to challenge or reinforce pre-existing discourses about their lives. Existing practices and discourses surrounding homelessness, especially chronic homelessness and street entrenchment, “contain normative guidelines, which reflect expectations of behaviour and attitudes both by those in the category and of others towards them” (Clapham, 2002, p. 65). This analysis will focus on how subscribing to an identity of homelessness contributes to behaviours that in turn impede one’s ability to exit homelessness or achieve housing stability. In essence, discourses on homelessness suggest that

people are expected to act within the normative guidelines that are attached to the homeless subculture, even after attaining housing.

This thesis will focus on the discourses and meanings people ascribe to their individual housing pathways and how these can work to shape their present and future pathways. The housing pathways model allows for exploration of participant identities tied to their homeless or housed status and can be used to examine the categorical identities that contribute to the ability to obtain and/or maintain housing. Further, using the pathways framework this thesis will explore how participants view their world, and how this perception influences their constructed identity and resulting behaviours as they transition from homelessness to home. More specifically, the connection between identity and housing can be viewed by exploring how the homeless identity shapes behaviours, and in turn how these behaviours shape housing opportunities.

Liminality

To compliment the housing pathways framework, this thesis will also incorporate a conceptual framework of liminality to further explore the transition from homelessness to home. The term 'liminality' was first coined by Van Gennep (1960) in his analysis of tribal societies and has since been used by other social theorists to explore a variety of situations where individuals are between social identities (as cited in Chamberlain & Johnson, 2018). Liminality "refers to situations where individuals are between social identities during ritual transitions" wherein those experiencing liminality can be described as being in "no-mans land" (Johnson & Chamberlain, 2018, p. 1249). Much of the existing research analysing liminality and homelessness has sought to understand peoples' experiences on their way to becoming chronically homeless, as the experience of liminality fades away and they become entwined

within the homeless subculture (Hopper & Bauhmol, 1996; Hopper, 2003, as cited in Chamberlain & Johnson, 2018). This transition can be seen when individuals move from one ‘status slot’ and into another, or what Snow and Anderson (1993) identify as becoming ‘outsiders’ who have a clear break from mainstream society and focus solely on surviving street life (as cited in Chamberlain & Johnson, 2018).

In line with the work of Chamberlain and Johnson (2018), the conceptual framework of liminality helps to explore how individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness transition into housing. Chamberlain and Johnson (2018) note that many people experience liminality after becoming rehoused, often expressing that they feel as though they do not fit in, do not belong in their home or community, or that they cannot cope. I will be referencing three key dimensions of liminality: material, relational, and psychological. The material dimension of liminality refers to how people may feel about their housing as well as whether their transition from homelessness to housing is difficult. Material liminality is about the process of transitioning into housing and the changes that come along with it. Next, relational liminality explores how people sustain or rebuild relationships with friends or family after exiting homelessness. The desire to understand the relational dimension of liminality is driven by research that began emerging in the late 20th century that suggested people experiencing chronic homelessness often become progressively disaffiliated from mainstream society and social bonds (Bahr, 1973; Bahr & Caplow, 1973, as cited in Chamberlain & Johnson, 2018). Finally, the psychological dimension of liminality explores the stigma surrounding homelessness and how individuals deal with this after becoming housed. The significance of stigma and homelessness is twofold in that individuals not only experience stigmatization during homelessness but may carry this feeling

even after being housed for fear of being looked down upon if anyone were to find out or know about it (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2018).

Chamberlain and Johnson's (2018) dimensions of liminality will be used to draw out key themes identified by participants as impeding the success of housing transitions. Primary focus will be placed on investigating the relational and psychological dimensions of liminality based on the most salient challenges that participants disclosed having experienced themselves or by those within their social network. Primarily, the framework of liminality can explore the challenges of housing transitions for individuals experiencing homelessness who have become disaffiliated from society, addressing questions about how disaffiliation, entrenchment and identity may outweigh the desire for housing or overpower the supports in place to aid in tenancy sustainment. While Chamberlain and Johnson (2018) stress that feelings of stigmatization from homelessness may persist even once housed, this thesis also explores the contrary wherein some individuals face stigma, shame, or the loss of friendships from street connections when they move from a homeless status to a housed one. Furthermore, the concept of liminality can be used to address gaps in policy and programming within the social service field, namely in that becoming re-housed does not reflect or entirely address issues of social exclusion and community re-integration, both of which are critical to successful housing retention. Tsemberis (2010) emphasizes that exiting the trauma of homelessness does not remove the stigma of extreme poverty and unemployment that many people continue to face even after obtaining housing, therefore exiting homelessness should be seen as a steppingstone towards social inclusion rather than a guarantee for it (Busch-Geertsema, 2013, as cited in Chamberlain & Johnson, 2018).

Chapter 4: Methodology

Author Positionality

It is important to consider positionality within this research, given that my own position to the topic may have influence in not only why but how I chose to engage with this subject. With this in mind, I have not personally experienced homelessness or housing instability. Instead, I have three years of direct experience working within the homelessness sector, in particular with individuals experiencing chronic and absolute homelessness. This experience has allowed me to see first-hand the various challenges that come with exiting homelessness, and also helped me to establish critical skills that aided in the data collection process including rapport building and reflective listening. While not identifying as someone who has experienced homelessness, I was able to demonstrate to participants a sound understanding of the difficulties of homelessness as well as a genuine desire to make a difference.

This positionality has shaped my interest and perspective on the topic of difficult housing transitions given that it was something I witnessed on many occasions during my time as a case manager. I first heard the term self-sabotage being used by a colleague to describe a situation with a specific client who, after months of work, was deliberately jeopardizing his new housing by having too many guests and a lot of traffic in and out of his unit during the day and night. After this, I began to recognize other situations where clients experienced similar issues after transitioning into housing and noted that in many cases these issues appeared to be somewhat intentional, especially for those who had experienced chronic homelessness. This idea of self-sabotage began to impact the way I prepared clients for a housing transition, in that I started to have conversations about what actions and behaviours they needed to be conscious of to avoid potential tenancy issues. Despite these efforts, some clients still ended up engaging in the very

behaviours that they had been cautioned of and ended up losing their housing. Given this, my positionality does bring forward some assumptions or biases, namely that I had my own understanding of self-sabotage prior to conducting this research, but also that it was something I had regarded as deliberate or at the very least something that clients had been cautioned about. Importantly, I did not reflect these assumptions in my interviews with participants and focused instead on uncovering their individual beliefs and perspectives about self-sabotage.

Data Collection Procedures

The data for this thesis was collected by conducting interviews with individuals currently experiencing homelessness as well as individuals who are housed but have a history of homelessness. All participants interviewed were recruited with assistance from a community agency in Southern Ontario offering wrap-around support services for individuals dealing with poverty, homelessness, housing insecurity, food insecurity, as well as mental health and/or addiction concerns. A recruitment flyer containing information for those interested in participating was posted at the main entry point for clients looking to access services from the community agency. The flyer identified recurring dates and times that the researcher would be present on site to conduct interviews, and agency staff were provided with a sign-up sheet to keep track of interested participants. Interviews were conducted on a first come, first serve basis, with the researcher on site twice a week for a period of two weeks. As noted previously, the primary eligibility requirement to participate in an interview were that individuals must be currently experiencing homelessness or be housed with at least one past experience of homelessness. In addition to this, participation was limited to those 18 years of age or older to mitigate the ethical concerns associated with conducting research on minors.

This thesis utilizes in-depth semi-structured interviews, a common qualitative research method chosen to garner understanding of the subjective lived experiences of specific social groups (Pessoa et al., 2019). The use of semi-structured interviews was selected as it allowed for discussions to be flexible and versatile, promoting open exchanges between the interviewer and interview participants (Kallio et al., 2016). Further, these open exchanges enabled the interviewer to follow the participants lead in the discussion, improvising follow-up questions based on what areas of conversation the participants felt important. The interview guide was used to cover the main topics of this analysis and focus the structure of the discussion, providing participants with guidance of what subjects to discuss but not limiting them to any specific line of inquiry (Gill et al., 2008, as cited in Kallio et al., 2016). Generally, participants were asked questions about their current housing status, the factors that they felt contributed to their most recent loss of housing, as well as what aspects of transitioning into housing they perceived would be challenging.

Interviews were conducted in-person at a private station inside the community agency to respect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim using Descript, then subsequently edited by listening to the recordings to correct any errors. The analytic approach was inspired by grounded theory, in particular the focus on determining codes and themes inductively. Line-by-line coding was completed to establish a basic understanding of each participants individual thoughts and experiences. This stage helped to begin uncovering patterns and identify the direction for more focused coding. The use of this approach based on grounded theory allowed opportunity to study the perceptive world of individuals experiencing homelessness, in particular the meanings and discourses tied to their homelessness and how these may impact actions and behaviours (Charmaz & Thornberg,

2021). The exploration of participant transcripts inductively was of particular importance with regard to the phenomenon of self-sabotage, given there is limited literature on the topic. It was important to ensure that my own assumptions about self-sabotage as well as those available in the literature did not influence participant understandings of the idea. After completing line-by-line coding, focused codes were established to generate broad categories which were later compared to existing literature on homelessness and housing transitions. Subsequently, the final thematic frameworks were established, and key participant passages were assigned to their respective theme(s).

Participant Characteristics

In total, 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants who have current or past experiences of homelessness. Of the 28 interviews, three were subsequently excluded during analysis due to insufficient material, generally as a result of interviews that were cut short at the discretion of the interviewer. While no participants formally withdrew during the interview, there were extenuating circumstances that made it difficult for some participants to actively participate, such as extreme fatigue or behaviour suggesting they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol. In these instances, interviews were cut short as some participants struggled to actively engage in conversation, as well as due to ethical considerations. As such, 25 interviews were coded and analyzed for key themes. All interviews were conducted individually with the exception of one couple who requested to be interviewed together. With regards to demographics, information such as age, race, gender, or sexual orientation were not collected to protect participant anonymity, and further, as this information was not seen as vital to the analysis. With regard to geographical location, all participants were currently residing in Southern Ontario.

The only demographic information elicited from participants centred on their current living situation as well as their homelessness history. Of the 25 interviews analyzed, 17 participants identified as being homeless or ‘on the street’, four identified as being ‘in-between places’ or in the process of transitioning into housing, and four identified as being currently housed. Each participant was asked to provide a general timeline of their homelessness history. The duration of time spent homeless, either chronically or episodically, ranged amongst participants from just a few months to as long as 30+ years. Specifically, seven participants disclosed being homeless for less than one year, nine participants disclosed being homeless between one and five years, five identified being homeless for longer than five years, and four participants did not disclose the exact length of their homelessness history.

Chapter 5: Findings

Causes of Housing Loss & Instability

The Unexpected

Throughout the interviews, many of the participants who reflected on their perceived reasons for losing housing made references to significant events or life changes that were unexpected and had deleterious consequences. Importantly, those who referenced the unexpected typically referred to these events as the primary cause for their initial or most recent experience of homelessness as opposed to a reason for ongoing housing instability or difficulty with transitioning into housing. In total, 12 participants disclosed losing housing as a result of life changes or unexpected events that can be roughly categorized into three main groups: unexpected events/changes that directly impact the housing itself (e.g.- fire, flood), unexpected events/changes that impact their financial means of maintaining housing (e.g.- job loss, injury),

or unexpected events/changes that impact a person's critical supports or overall mental capacity to sustain their housing (e.g.- loss of a loved one).

To begin, four participants experiences of housing loss can be attributed to events which directly impacted the housing in a concrete way (physically/tangibly). Participant one disclosed losing his housing because his landlord "had financial difficulties, so he sold his house" and stated that "he gave me my 60 days and uh, I was out just after Christmas." This participant became homeless because he "didn't find anything [housing]" after his 60 days ran out, and the home was subsequently sold leaving him with nowhere to go. Similarly, participant eight shared that he lost his housing because of an unexpected and unfortunate disaster:

I had an apartment fire. Didn't get much support after that, they just put me at a motel for three days then I was stuck on the streets. I've been on the streets since I lost my housing program because of the fire.

Though this participant in part attributes his current homelessness to the lack of assistance he received in obtaining new housing, the principal cause of his homelessness was the house fire. Participant 15 reflected that his "last place had a sewage flood" which forced him to leave because of the physical state of the property along with the health and safety risks caused by the flood. Like participant eight, this participant voiced a secondary factor that made it more likely for him to end up on the streets as opposed to finding new housing, in this case being that the landlord would not give him his rent money back despite him no longer being able to live there. Finally, participant 21 and his partner experienced two housing losses in two years, both of which were the result of unforeseen damages to their accommodations. Participant 21 stated "we had to get out of the place that we were living in because the basement flooded" and that after the damages were repaired the owner "moved family in" and "didn't no longer wanna rent

anymore.” This resulted in participant 21 and his partner living unsheltered for a period of 18 months before they were able to secure housing, though it was unfortunately short lived.

Participant 21 described his most recent loss of housing as follows:

... we found a place and we got all our stuff moved in. And on the seventh day, it caught fire and burned and everything in the apartment was destroyed. I didn't have no shoes, no shirt. I just had a pair of jeans on. And my wife, she had, she managed to get her shoes and stuff on. But, uhm, I didn't because I was trying to put the fire out until the fire department had come. And then they told me to leave.

Ultimately, each of the situations described above reflect unforeseen and generally unavoidable misfortunes that resulted in the loss of housing. While some participants attributed their homelessness to not only these unforeseen circumstances but also events that followed after, such as not being repaid rent money or receiving inadequate housing supports, others did not attribute blame to any additional factors.

Unexpected financial issues resulted in housing loss for four participants. These participants experienced life changes that ultimately impacted their financial ability to maintain housing, resulting in the eventual loss of housing. Participant 12 explained his financial difficulties stating “I lost my job. I got injured and lost my job. I didn't, I didn't lose my job, I just couldn't work.” This participant was unable to maintain his monthly rent and ultimately lost his housing due to the financial implications of the unexpected injury. Similarly, participant 16 revealed that he experienced a sudden life change when his wife filed for divorce, noting the reason he lost housing was because “me and my wife split up.” Elaborating on how this impacted him financially, he stated “Well, as soon as they started the divorce process, they froze everything, all the assets and everything. And, she has the kids, so she has the house.” Participant

20 stated she lost her housing after her partner was arrested and incarcerated, and she was kicked out of her housing because “the landlord didn’t think I could take care of it [financially].”

Finally, participant 24 shared that he had relocated to the city for a job and was awaiting the final stage of the interview process when he fell victim to a rental fraud and ended up homeless, stating “Well, uh, I gave somebody \$600 to get a place for me down here in [city]. And I was up in [city]. And that never happened, so I’ve been homeless since then.” This participant did not anticipate losing the money he had saved to relocate for employment, and as such did not have the financial means to secure alternate housing. Each of these scenarios reflect unexpected financial losses with adverse outcomes on housing.

The final category of ‘the unexpected’ resulting in housing loss is participants who experienced life changes that dramatically impacted their mental and emotional wellbeing and/or their ties to systems of support like family or friends. Four participants shared experiencing life changing circumstances that hindered their ability to manage almost every facet of their life, including housing. To begin, participant 11 shared that the last time she had housing was in 2014 and lost it “when my mother passed away.” More specifically, she shared that “it was just, I was living with a girlfriend, but when my mom passed away uh, I kind of had a, a little bit of a break down and, ended up into a bad habit.” While participant 22 shared almost an identical situation, it wasn’t the passing of a loved one that caused a rift in her emotional stability. Participant 22 disclosed first becoming homeless at age 13 and having several other periods of homelessness “off and on” until around age 20, at which time she became stably housed for close to 20 years. Participant 22 explained the reason she has since lost her long-term housing and lives unsheltered:

Cause, I have, I have a son, and I raised him properly until he was 17. And then he moved back to his dad's house and I got all depressed and started doing drugs. And here we are back in the same boat again.

Both participants 11 and 22 expressed that the emotional toll resulting from significant life changes compromised their wellbeing and ability to sustain their housing. Next, participant 18 disclosed losing housing after his mother passed away, in part because the circumstances surrounding her death were distressing, and also because his access to housing was tied to his mother and her social connections. He stated "My mom passed away. Well, she, she got hot shot, right. Somebody killed her" and "it was one of my friends" who had done it. Reflecting on how her unexpected passing impacted his housing, he stated:

She was in the ghetto. Like she was homeless too, right. For, for a year. But what it was is we were staying at her friend's houses, right. Yeah. And I don't have a phone. I don't talk to nobody after my mom died. I don't even talk to my dad, my sister. I want nothing to do with them.

Since participant 18 was living with friends of his mother's, his decision to cut ties with all his social connections resulted in the loss of housing. Finally, participant 27 shared how the loss of a loved one resulted in his homelessness. Participant 27 noted that he had plans to turn his life around with the help of his mother after being incarcerated for five years, but she passed away. Participant 27 shared how the shock of his mother's death impacted his life, stating:

... and I was really close to my mom. She wasn't much older than me. Uhm, she was like my buddy and my mom. Anyways, that's all I had left. Uhm, so that's what, so she, I found out she was dead, and everything changed. I had nowhere to turn if I needed, you know.

Since this participant was incarcerated at the time of his mother's death, her passing didn't truly cause him to lose housing. Instead, however, the loss of his mother left him without the necessary connections and emotional support needed to secure housing and take additional steps to turn his life around. Overall, the circumstances described by the above four participants demonstrate how significant life changes, such as losing a loved one, can damage emotional welfare and vital social supports and result in housing loss.

Additionally, while these participant reflections all emphasize unexpected events, they also highlight individual underlying vulnerabilities and/or a lack of resources that contribute to the inability to avoid or overcome unexpected circumstances. In particular, turning to alcohol or drugs to cope with unexpected events was a common outcome shared by participants, one which mirrors ideas presented by Parsell (2010) about individual pathologies of homelessness. Participants 11 and 22 both turned to substance use after experiencing unexpected life changes, attributing their homelessness primarily to the unexpected event and secondarily to the way in which they responded to it. This highlights a specific pathology independent from broader social problems, pointing to the unique way that individuals understand their life experiences.

Breaking the Rules

While the previous section addresses narratives that emphasize unforeseen or sudden circumstances, another significant theme that emerged as to why people struggle to keep housing can be broadly summed up as a general disregard for rules. This grouping encompasses a range of 'rule breaking' activities with varying degrees of severity. Furthermore, the general labelling of rule breaking can include personal/familial rules or standards, rules and expectations of tenancy, as well as wide-ranging societal rules like laws, or any combination of these. In total,

eight participants shared personal accounts of housing loss as a result of some form of rule breaking behaviour.

One of the primary rule breaking behaviours participants disclosed as contributing to their homelessness was substance use. Four participants expressed that drug use was the primary cause of their housing loss, though some attributed other factors connected to drug use as playing a role as well. To begin, participant 25 explained his loss of housing four years prior was the result of his decisions with regards to drug use that went against his personal morals as well as his family expectations. He stated “I was living at my brother’s house and uh, I was using needles and there was kids there, so. You know what I mean? I couldn’t really do that.” Despite the fact that substance use itself is illegal, the implicit expectation that he would not put his family or their children in harm’s way was the ‘rule’ that he broke before losing his housing. Participant one presumed that rule breaking was one the most common reasons that people would lose housing after transitioning out of homelessness. He cited that while he felt failing to pay rent was the primary reason for loss of housing, there were other factors:

... yeah like uh, breaking the rules of the, breaking the rules of the landlord. You know, the landlord don’t want, if the landlord don’t want you to smoke in the house, you can’t smoke, and they smoke so, you know, you give them a warning and then they give another warning, and then like your third time you’re caught smoking in the house, you’re basically evicted. Yeah, so breaking rules, making trouble, getting drunk, disorderly, partying, loud music, you know, stuff like that.

Participant two expressed strong beliefs about rising rent costs being the reason why people lose housing, but also articulated the belief that sometimes people engage in behaviours or make poor choices that will cause them to lose their housing. Participant two also stressed the importance of

taking accountability for choices that result in housing loss, specifically when it comes to breaking rules:

Well, if you, if you don't comply, if you don't comply with the rules or with the, with what you're supposed to be doing in the housing, then, then you don't excuse it and you don't justify yourself over that. If you do something wrong in that housing, or you do something wrong in the place, or you're not doing something right, then you take responsibility for that.

While these participants expressed rule breaking as common grounds for housing loss, they generally looked at rule breaking from the standpoint of poor decision making as opposed to a deliberate choice in the face of clear consequences.

In contrast, some other participants saw rule breaking as a more intentional practise, especially for those who have previous experiences of homelessness and know how to survive on the streets. Participant 11 shared her own perspective on how a history of poor choices can turn into a more deliberate disregard for rules:

... once you've been on the streets you kind of get the mindset of "oh well it doesn't matter, I know I can survive out there." Uhm, so like, when the landlord is threatening to kick you out or you know they say you can't have a girlfriend over or something like that, uhm, you automatically start to think "oh, but I want to have that girlfriend, other people can have a girlfriend in their apartment. So, I will leave my apartment to go.. to my girlfriends or, to my family back on the street because they need me."

This participant's explanation centres on choosing to break the rules simply on the basis that the consequences are survivable. While the initial action or decision may not be deliberate or made with animosity, such as participant 11's example of having a girlfriend over, the anticipated

consequence of housing loss does not appear to outweigh individual comforts or desires. In line with this idea, participant 21 believed that some peoples disregard for rules was so strong that staying on the street became a deliberate choice rather than abiding by the expectations of housing. Put simply, participant 21 stated “a percentage of them don’t want to be housed because they don’t want to live by certain rules. And they don’t have to answer anybody.”

Chronic Homelessness and Street Entrenchment

While many participants noted significant barriers to securing housing, the focus of this thesis is on housing retention and unsuccessful housing transitions, a topic which many interview participants expressed as a significant issue for themselves or their peers. Speaking candidly, some participants described the difficulty of transitioning from homelessness to home as a challenge beyond paying rent on time or managing guests. For participants who had experienced chronic homelessness, moving into housing brought about significant changes to every aspect of their life and significantly disrupted the routines of surviving the street which they had grown accustomed to. Participant 17 experienced chronic homelessness for five years, and at the time of his interview had been successfully housed for three months, but stated:

... when you sleep outside, something’s going on all the time. It’s like being in jail having a place. And that’s not, that’s not good. I feel like I’d rather be in jail sometimes. Just cause I, I know the routine, I know when lunch is, supper, breakfast is always served in the morning.

Participants who had experienced chronic homelessness expressed facing unique challenges to transitioning into housing as opposed to those with shorter homelessness histories, and while the long-term impacts of an adaptation to living unsheltered seem inherently negative, not all

participants reflected on them this way. Several participants spoke of the freedom that comes along with being homeless despite the hardships that go hand in hand. Participant four shared:

Being homeless, homelessness is a, uh, is a uh, a trend. Because, what's it like to be free? Does anybody truly know? Only a homeless person knows, what it's truly like to be free to go anywhere which way, everywhere, any way. You wanna sleep anywhere—up in a tree, down underneath a bridge covered by some rocks, maybe in a cave, who knows.

This reflection highlights how this participant was able to form a more positive outlook on their own experience of chronic homelessness over a period of approximately 30 years despite the damaging effects that came along with it. Namely, the participant “jumped around from housing to housing, went back to [shelter], got kicked out a lot of times” and “it took about 20 years” before he was able to succeed long-term in housing. Similarly, participant 25 experienced chronic homelessness for a total of four years but disclosed having housing at some points during this time, “not for very long though.” This participant had multiple unsuccessful transitions from homelessness into housing, and when reflecting back on why his efforts at staying housed were ineffective, stated “I just, I just can't be, it's hard to fucking house train me again, you know what I mean?” Despite the overwhelming negativities of life unsheltered, participant 25 continued to cycle in and out of homelessness and stated resolutely “yeah, like I'm hooked on the streets.” The notion that life on the streets can be more attractive to some than being housed was further echoed by participant 11, who when asked if she had any final thoughts she wanted to share prior to the end of her interview, stated “I think I just want to touch on again that uhm, homelessness itself is an addiction.”

It is noteworthy to mention that the idea that homelessness can be enjoyable or even addicting for some was a sentiment brought up not just by those with experiences of chronic

homelessness, but by those with comparatively short homeless histories as well. When asked to identify what makes it difficult for people to move into housing and remain housed, participant 18 advised:

Because what it is, is we like to sleep outside. You, once you, with humans, we're used to adaption, right? So, when you go from being, being in a house, right, and then homeless, it's different. It's better. Like, we don't like to even sleep inside a house. It's just, different. Different. Freedom! Fresh air, you know, I eat all the time. You just feel free. You don't feel confined in a space, right. Because they're used to an open [space]. It's like having agoraphobia and going claustrophobic. And vice versa, right. That's what it's like.

Participant 18 was unsheltered at the time of his interview and disclosed being without housing for approximately one year, and while this still constitutes a substantial amount of time to go without housing, his homeless history could be considered brief in comparison to other participants that shared similar sentiments about street life. The idea that homelessness could be pleasant for some was largely attributed to the freedom associated with the outdoors and the lack of rules that goes along with it. Participant 20 was housed at the time of her interview but was episodically homeless for two years prior and expressed that some members of her street network “like being on the streets” and attributed this to them being “nature lovers.”

Some participants with shorter homeless histories or who disclosed not getting involved in the homeless subculture drew similar conclusions from observations they had made while on the street. Participant three demonstrated psychological distancing and downward comparisons to other individuals on the street throughout his interview, emphasizing their ‘otherness’ and only offering speculations about their challenges. This participant did not get involved in street

life but was able to offer insights into what challenges others who experience chronic homelessness and engage in homeless subculture may face when moving into housing through statements such as “Some folks get claustrophobic I guess, so that keeps them outta housing” and “... they sorta get, you know, feeling closed in at the place they’re in ... you go from space to a confined area.” Participant 15 shared that he felt some people may choose to leave housing after long-term homelessness, putting himself in their shoes and empathizing that “I bet you would feel ... trapped. Betcha that’s what it would feel like. Cause they’re always outside.”

Street Drugs and Housing Retention

The topic of illicit drug use was a recurring theme throughout participant interviews as a significant barrier to housing retention. It is important to note that while participants were not asked directly about their experience(s) with substance use, 23 participants brought up drug use as a consistent means of losing housing. While a few of the participants did speak openly about their own struggles with substance use and how it has impacted their housing journey, most reflected on the experiences of members of their street networks. The first way in which substance use was identified as impacting successful housing transitions was the financial implications of being an addict. Some participants noted that having an addiction to illegal substances leaves individuals with no control over their finances, inhibiting their ability to even make efforts to obtain housing. When asked about the most prominent challenges in transitioning into housing that he had observed while on the street, participant one stated:

Well, they’re users of uh, street drugs. So, they spend their money on... uh, street drugs and uh, they don’t, they don’t even bother looking for housing, they just choose to, choose to live a lifestyle on the streets. They aren’t even making any, any attempts.

In line with this finding, participant 13 disclosed having a substance use disorder and acknowledged this as the reason she has lost housing in the past. When asked if she felt this would impact her success in future housing, she stated: “I would like to be uh, sober first... before I’d even try [looking for housing].” Participant 14 echoed a similar sentiment when discussing what she felt was a key reason for unsuccessful housing transitions, stating:

... what’s the point, what’s the point in dealing with homelessness when, when these people are going to continue to spend their money on drugs. You got to nip it in the bud. Look after the drug problem first and then let them move on to the other important things, you know?

Numerous participants echoed the response that substance use played a pivotal role in one’s ability to take the necessary steps towards securing housing, such as showing up to case management appointments, conducting housing searches, or other crucial tasks. Further, this observation held true between interview participants with varying homelessness histories. For example, at the time of his interview participant 24 disclosed being homeless for just a few weeks and noted that this was his first-time experiencing homelessness. When asked what might make it difficult for people to get housing, he stated: “Well, I just find that there’s a lot of people around me that to drugs and everything.” In contrast, participant 26 has experienced chronic homelessness for approximately 30 years, but had similar reflections, stating: “Drugs are the most dominant force out here. And most people revolve their lives around their drugs when they’re outside.” These sentiments suggest the importance of understanding the role substance use plays in an individual’s ability to make efforts to transition out of homelessness before assessing the role of drugs post-transition.

Moving beyond how drugs impact a person's chances of exiting homelessness, substance use was overwhelmingly posited as a cause for poor housing retention. As noted earlier, the financial impacts that come along with addiction can be severe. For individuals with active addiction(s) who have exited homelessness into housing, money management appears to be of critical concern when it comes to successfully remaining housed. When it comes to financial difficulties and loss of housing, participant 17 advised that "drugs is number one." Some participants voiced that active substance use equated to poor housing readiness, as noted by participant 14, who stated "until they get some kind of control over their addiction, then it's going to be a losing battle, you know?" This participant elaborated when asked if individuals in active addiction could be considered ready to move into housing, asserting:

Absolutely not. No, no, no. It would be a disaster. I mean, uh, no, it would be a complete disaster because the rent money, even, let me say that they have first and last [months rent]. No, it's going to go towards drugs, drugs, drugs.

Of the 25 interviews analyzed for this thesis, the topic of substance use was overwhelmingly cited as the primary reason for unsuccessful housing transitions by 23 participants. Specifically, 21 participants referenced the terms "drugs" or "drug use," one participant referenced the term "addiction," and one participant utilized terms related to drug use, including "heroin," "down," and "needles" when discussing the challenge of maintaining housing. The financial implications of having a substance use disorder were the number one reason participants felt that it would be difficult for themselves or their peers to keep their housing, as "they would have to basically just quit using drugs to manage their money so that they would be able to maintain a dwelling." Statements such as "they buy their drugs instead of paying their rent" and "that's all they do with their money... when they get money they buy drugs, drugs, drugs, drugs, drugs" were reiterated

in almost every interview by participants both sheltered and unsheltered, as well as with varying homelessness histories.

Negative Peer Influences

One critical theme that emerged during this analysis was the role of social bonds on the street and how peers influence housing retention. Specifically, many participants noted feeling strongly connected to the people they know on the street, suggesting that exiting homelessness creates a significant rift in their social connections. For example, participant 11 stated “people on the street became my parents and my family... after I’ve been homeless for so long, when I get inside I start to think that I’m missing something.” While transitioning into housing is seen by service providers or case managers as a positive change, for individuals experiencing homelessness, it establishes a divide between themselves and the people who they are closest to. This divide was of great significance to many participants when it came to discussing why some people are unsuccessful when they transition into housing. Many participants noted the difficulty of navigating social relationships after moving into housing, specifically when it came to staying connected with people living unsheltered who have deep ties to the streets.

Of the 25 participant interviews analyzed, 15 participants referenced the importance of social connections made on the street as well as the potential implications that these connections can have on housing retention. To begin, two participants disclosed that their most recent loss of housing was a result of allowing others who are not on their lease to live with them. Participant six originally stated that the cost of rent is what contributed to her loss of housing two years prior, but when asked about any other contributing factors, elaborated that “people were living with us” and that this caused tenancy problems. Similarly, participant nine shared the following explanation for his most recent loss of housing:

... and it was in the middle of COVID and wintertime, they threw me, they locked my door and threw me out on the streets because I brang [*sic*] [girlfriend] home, I didn't know I wasn't allowed to have people in my home. I wasn't allowed to have a girlfriend.

Importantly, while most lease agreements would inhibit landlords from enforcing unfair or exploitative tenancy rules such as not allowing any guests, many of the housing options available to participants experiencing homelessness fail to meet the basic legal requirements for rental housing and slip under the radar of tenancy laws. For participant nine, his housing was provided through a social service agency and was considered transitional, substantiating the additional rules and requirements regarding guests. Beyond this, the problem with having numerous guests over and/or allowing others to live with them extends beyond the issue of who is and isn't on the lease, but also how these guests behave within housing and what image this may portray for the landlord and other tenants. Participant 21 described the challenge of transitioning from homelessness to housing in terms of replicating how social connections are maintained on the street, stating:

... because homeless people can congregate and have as many people as they want at their tent or their safe place where they're staying. As to where, if they were housed somewhere, you know, the landlord would say, you know a couple of peoples' okay, but six or seven's just a little bit much. That's turning into a party.

The belief that the number of guests a person has coming and going plays a role in housing retention also went hand in hand with the perceived "type" of crowd a person hangs around. Participant 18 stated that drugs were the most common reason that people who get housing end up losing it but noted that it wasn't just drug use that caused problems. Namely, this participant believed that tenants who use drugs were more likely to bring around guests who live a similar

lifestyle, stating it's "the company they have around. That's about it. Birds of the same feather flock together." Participant nine expressed the same ideas about the kind of people an individual hangs around with, stating "Well, of course, it's part of who you hang out with right, who you are. If the people that you hang out with are shit, you're gonna get shit." Further, participant 25 advised that he believed everyone he knows on the street would be unsuccessful in transitioning into housing and end up losing it:

Just because they're doing what, what they're into. You know what I mean? Most of these people are into heroin. And down. And it's a hard one. And it's not that they wouldn't be able to keep it, but the people that would be coming around, you know what I mean? They would essentially ruin it for them.

The general consensus among the 15 participants who referenced the implications of maintaining connections with individuals living unsheltered was that it would almost always cause tenancy problems. Some participants suggested that the only way to avoid this was to cut ties from the street as much as possible, with participant eight stating "Like, if I get a place, I'm probably just gonna keep it to myself." Participant 22 outlined some of the key issues that arise when allowing street friends into your housing, and repeated the idea that the best way to protect yourself from losing your housing was to keep to yourself, stating:

... because all of them want to come to your house. They all want to come stay there. They show up all hours of the night, they wanna keep their stuff there. They cause damage. It bothers the neighbours, and they don't care. Because they're so used to this lifestyle, people that don't realize, you know what I mean? Like a lot of people don't even want to tell anybody where they live. If they get a place, they don't bring anyone over, nobody can know where they live. That's what people have to do.

Though some participants suggested that cutting off social connections from street peers was necessary, four participants expressed the difficulty of losing social ties after securing housing despite being acutely aware of the problems that could arise by maintaining their friendships. While many viewed the loss of street connections as necessary to successful housing transitions, participant nine felt that having social networks was an important part of maintaining housing.

Participant nine stated:

... we're human beings, right. We're meant to be social, right, we're not meant to be cut off from people. We're social people, we need, we're meant to, to be around other people. We don't want to be alone. Nobody wants to be alone, I'm sure.

Similar sentiments were shared by participant 17 who reflected on the difficulty of transitioning into housing because of social isolation. When asked if he felt he had lost connections with peers since moving into his apartment, he stated "Yep, I have. I know I have. Uhm, a lot of people they just, you know, they just walk by you now. And, if they want something, then they talk to you." Likewise, participant 20 believed that maintaining friendships was important to be successful in housing and stated "I'd socialize with all the people I've met on the street" even after moving out of homelessness. Participant 26 advised that "most" people he knows have unsuccessful housing transitions as a result of struggling to balance the need for social connection with the rules and expectations of housing. This participant expressed the following about why many people are unsuccessful in housing, stating:

For the same reason as me. They have friends that they think are friends, and it's hard to turn your back on them now that you have something, you'll lose your friends if you do. And then you have nobody and you're talked down about, like frowned upon, like "Well, what now? We're shit cause you got this [housing]." So you don't want that.

There is a difficult balance among individuals with lived experience of homelessness when it comes to maintaining social ties and being successful in housing. Participant 25 addressed the challenge of cutting ties with the street as being far more complex than just not hanging around certain crowds anymore, stating "... cause you can't just stop. You can, if you do— you can in a way. Like, I mean, but the way you got to go about it is harsh, you know what I mean?" The isolation of housing coupled with the "harsh" way individuals would have to go about cutting ties with their street peers suggests that staying away from potentially negative influence(s) is not a simple task for those transitioning into housing. Participant 26 advised that cutting ties with street friends was dually difficult not only because of the loss of relationship but also because of the potential for repercussions, sharing that he lost his housing after it turned into a "shit show." Elaborating, participant 26 stated that his housing was lost "Because I don't know who I can trust. And to say no to the wrong person? They're very vindictive and God knows what they're capable of." Indeed, 11 participants made references to peer pressure or statements that alluded to peer influence, like "choosing the wrong friends" and "pretty much everyone I know is a criminal." The issue of peer influence manifests in a variety of ways, though many of the participants who reflected on it largely attributed peer pressure with drug culture. Participant 11 explored how drug culture can foster social connections, stating:

... addictions and stuff take over, and you know that's actually part of feeling like you have a family or friend, a belonging. Because a fellow addict will, you feel like you're bonding with that person ... the main reason why a lot of people actually get into drugs is to socialize and to bond.

For individuals moving into housing who have deep ties to the streets, the juxtaposition of needing social connection but struggling with peer pressure and negative influences can be

problematic to their success. Further, the combined challenge of having an active addiction as well as the social connectedness between drug users makes it all the more difficult to resist outside influences in decision making. Participant five described the difficulty of losing social connections when he transitioned into housing while also highlighting the pressures that come from staying in touch with street networks, stating:

Yeah, it was hard, it was hard... and then some of the roommates were, who were living at our house, they, they started to get bad, right. Going back to it [drugs] and back to it. And it made me want to go back to the stuff that I was doing. Cause I was like, doing drugs was cool, hanging out with bad people, getting into trouble, that's cool.

When asked about others who had lost housing because of peer influence, participant five again elaborated on the social connectedness of drug culture. In reference to substance use, participant five shared that he felt people made poor decisions that would impact their housing stability for the following reason:

I think it's because maybe, they uh have bad influence. Cause a lot of people, even though they stop doing it [drugs], the people that they were hanging out with in the past, they still hang out with them, and they maybe brought them into doing it again. They're like, "try this, try that." Even though they've tried to say no, a lot of times they probably just couldn't take it and they just did it again.

Self-Sabotage & Housing Instability

One of the final questions participants were asked in their interviews was whether they had ever heard of the concept of self-sabotage. The timing of this question towards the end of the interview was intentional in that participants would have already had opportunity to reflect on what factors they believe to impede housing stability in their own words before hearing a term

primarily used by service providers to describe many of the same behaviours. When asked directly if they had ever heard of something called self-sabotage, 19 participants stated they had heard of self-sabotage, while six participants stated they had not heard of self-sabotage. Regardless of whether the participant identified having an understanding of self-sabotage, all participants were provided with an example of a situation that might constitute self-sabotaging behaviour to ensure their understanding of the concept matched that of the working definition used throughout this thesis. The example participants were provided with centred on the following scenario: “Imagine you have a friend who is really wanting to live in a specific apartment/housing unit and has waited a long time to get this apartment. However, shortly after moving in, this friend, whether intentional or unintentional, does something that causes them to get evicted.” As a follow-up to this example, participants were asked if they had ever known or heard of someone who had engaged in self-sabotaging behaviour, and if so, asked to describe the situation.

Self-Sabotage as Rule Breaking

One of the key behaviours identified by participants as being self-sabotaging was a general disregard for rules. Participants noted that amongst their peers in the unsheltered community, failure to comply with the rules or expectations of their housing was one of the most common reasons for loss of housing. Specifically, six participants referenced the term rules or rule breaking when discussing self-sabotage. While some of the expectations that come with being housed, like paying rent on time each month were noted by participants, more commonly participants referenced the unspoken but understood rules that come with being housed, like limiting traffic to/from one’s unit and practising guest management. Participant one connected rule breaking and self-sabotage, stating “They’re aware of the rules but they still break them.

There's a list of rules and if they want to do that [break rules] then it's up to them. But yeah, they self-sabotage themselves." Participant 11 expressed similar sentiments that rule breaking was a common form of self-sabotage, equating self-sabotage via rule breaking as "taking a chance and striking out."

Self-Sabotage as Problematic Drug Use

Drug use was one of the most common behaviours that interview participants attributed with self-sabotage. When asked if he had ever heard of self-sabotage, participant nine eloquently summed up the basis of almost every participants understanding of the concept, stating "Sure. I'm sure you can observe [it] when you're an addict." There were nine participants who, directly and indirectly, tied the terms "drugs" and "self-sabotage" together in their own conceptualization of the idea. For example, participant 14 described acts that she had observed from peers on the street as follows:

So, I think that a lot of them self-sabotage by spending all their money, money on drugs. And uh, it's crazy the amount, I mean— I don't see people spend money on drugs, but I hear people say that they spend their whole cheque, whatever amount that would be. Let say, let's say even \$500. They spent their whole cheque in one day on drugs, like that, that is self-sabotage! When they had plans of leaving, I would say [that's self-sabotage], isn't it?

Participant 22 communicated the same belief that self-sabotaging behaviours make it difficult for people to remain housed, further articulating how self-sabotage and drug use go hand in hand.

She stated:

They self-sabotage by spending all their rent money, too much on drugs. You know what I mean? They have their rent and they're like, "Oh, well, I can spend like a hundred

dollars of my rent. I'll make it back.” And then it's \$200, and then it's \$300, and then it's something insane.

Self-Sabotage: A Deliberate Choice or Unconscious Act

The conflicting dichotomy where self-sabotage can be viewed as willful actions that obstruct one's chances at achieving their goals as opposed to an unconscious resistance to the prospect of change was challenged by some interview participants. Namely, some participants felt that self-sabotaging behaviours were inherently intentional, or at the very least avoidable, suggesting there is some element of choice involved. Participant 26 reflected on his own experiences of self-sabotage, sharing:

I get frustrated. Frustration is my killer. And it's one thing after another. So, instead of one thing after another, fuck it. Crash it all at once. Now I can just deal with it. And then I'm done. And move on and start again.

This participant's reflection conveyed an awareness that certain actions would have negative outcomes, but rather than trying to change behaviours or remedy negative situations, he felt it was easier to intentionally sabotage the situation or “crash it all at once” and move forward. The participant expressed feeling better about moving on from situations such as tenancy issues and beginning again rather “than [taking] steps X, Y, Z.” This mindset is particularly interesting in that the participant had a sound understanding of the consequences of self-sabotage but didn't necessarily view the behaviour as innately negative. Beyond this, it suggests that for some, it is possible for self-sabotage to be intentional, though they may not even recognize the behaviour to be self-sabotage in the moment. Participant 18 shared a similar perspective on self-sabotage, voicing that he felt that “a majority” of people make intentional choices that impede their

chances at achieving a goal. Further, participant 18 suggested self-sabotage was more of an attitude than a behaviour, relaying that some people just think “fuck it.”

On the opposite side of the spectrum were participants who felt that the act of self-sabotage was inherently unconscious, unintended/unmanageable, or at minimum was an unprompted outcome of underlying issues. While participant 18 made statements interpreting self-sabotage as an intentional behaviour, in the context of individuals experiencing homelessness he expressed it differently. When asked if some behaviours of self-sabotage were intentional or unconscious, he stated “No. Unconscious. I don't think they think of it at the time that they self-sabotage themselves backwards. Not too many people think like us, right.” Similarly, whether unintended decisions resulting from unmanageable circumstances such as active addiction can truly be considered as unconscious, participant nine felt that there were some grounds to substantiate this. Participant nine stated “Well, I mean, nobody plans on spending all their money on drugs on the first day of getting your cheque, but it can happen.” Finally, self-sabotage as an outcome of underlying issues was viewed by participant 10 as being indirectly unconscious. Participant ten acknowledged the existence of self-sabotage among individuals experiencing homelessness but asserted the belief that this behaviour reflected a bigger issue than bad choices, stating “I'm sure there are people who've done that [sabotaged], but I'm sure there's a deeper seed in there.”

While there was an inherent divide amongst participants who viewed self-sabotage as conscious decision making as opposed to those who viewed self-sabotage as the outcome of underlying issues or unconscious decisions, there were some participants who were unable to identify whether they felt that self-sabotage was intentional or unintentional, and instead took a stance somewhere in the middle. For example, participant 27 stated he had never heard of self-

sabotage but felt “it sort of sounds like what I’m doing to myself.” Elaborating on this, participant 27 shared “... just all these things, all these things that I’m doing is causing me to be homeless and it’s interfering with me, you know, getting on and doing it and uh, not procrastinating.” He went on to explain how he felt others experiencing homelessness may engage in self sabotage, declaring:

They don’t even take the time to think that they should do this first and then... they just do that, the same way. It’s sort of, they do it without thinking, right. And they always learn that way. That’s what they do, you know. And they’re happy with it, they seem to adjust easily. You can tell who’s going to stay on the street and who’s not.

This participants perspective on self-sabotage straddles the middle ground of both conscious and unconscious action. Specifically, the fact that some people on the street “don’t even take the time to think” about their actions does not necessarily imply intention to sabotage themselves, but it does not eliminate intention either.

Self-Sabotage as a Psychological Phenomenon and Fear of Success

The final element of self-sabotage that was widely addressed by participants was the view that self-sabotage is an outcome of maladaptive psychological processes and fear of success. Participants described the idea that after being on the streets, the opportunity to succeed in housing could present as challenging and that engaging in self-sabotage would avert them from having to address feelings of discomfort and other undesired emotions. Participant three declared that “some people set themselves up for failure in the beginning because they don’t wanna succeed, or they’re more likely afraid to succeed.” When asked more specifically about why some individuals may fear success and engage in self-sabotage, participant three elaborated, stating “I think it’s a mental illness.” Participant 18 expressed a similar understanding of self-

sabotage, stating that self-sabotage stems from “personal issues, I think. Low self-esteem.”

Participant 18 further articulated that “In one form or another, yeah, I think self-sabotaging is a mental illness. It’s like self-harm, right.” Additionally, participant 22 candidly stated that she herself engages in self-sabotage, noting that she does it “because I’m depressed.” When asked why she felt other people experiencing homelessness may self-sabotage, she stated:

Same reason. They’re depressed. They have a chemical imbalance and they’re depressed, and in combination with things that have happened in their life events, they’re depressed. Whether they admit it or not. Whether they know it or not, whether they’ve been diagnosed or not, they’re depressed. I didn’t know I was depressed, and I didn’t even want to admit it. It took a long time. They’re definitely depressed. Anyone that lives like this and doesn’t care about themselves and does drugs every day and this lifestyle, every single one of these people have depression. And probably more mental illnesses too, for sure.

In essence, these participants asserted that self-sabotage is more of a psychological phenomenon rooted in poor self-esteem and fear of success, rather than one specific behaviour or problem. With the exception of participant 22 who explicitly referenced depression as being the primary cause of self-sabotage, others referred to self-sabotage in a more nuanced fashion and attributed the fear of success as a mental illness in itself rather than an element of mental disorders. Finally, participant 12 shared the view that a self-sabotage stemmed from underlying fears and negative mindsets, noting that “it’s like limiting beliefs, we have things that hold us back that create cycles [so] that those things can happen. Self-destructive behaviour.” Ultimately, the perspective of these participants suggests that self-sabotage reflects apprehensions and anxieties that some

individuals may carry, whether knowingly or unknowingly, that work to limit their ability to exit homelessness and succeed in housing.

Chapter 6: Discussion & Conclusion

The findings throughout this thesis suggest that for many individuals experiencing homelessness, the process of transitioning into housing is not as simple or straightforward as it may seem. The connection between housing and identity, as well as lack of housing and identity, presents as a significant issue as individuals attempt to navigate changing status slots and identities that may be inherently linked to life on the streets. Individuals transitioning into housing and working towards housing stability may experience competing expectations from those around them, including homeless peers, support workers, or family and friends. Shared understandings of what it means to be homeless may endorse behaviours and beliefs that may impede the opportunity or desire to exit street life and jeopardize housing stability for those who succeed at obtaining housing. Importantly, participants expressed being acutely aware of such competing expectations, though such an awareness does not appear to mitigate the difficulties associated with exiting homelessness. While the existing research dichotomizes the phenomenon of self-sabotage as having an inherent tension between the viewpoint that it is either conscious or unconscious, the findings from this analysis imply that self-sabotage is innately rooted in both perspectives. Participants with lived experience of homelessness not only acknowledged the existence of self-sabotage but operationalized it through actions and behaviours such as spending rent money, having too many guests, or using drugs.

In sum, the overall theme that emerged in this analysis centres on the relationship between housing status and identity. Housing status plays a significant role in identity, therefore

the loss of housing and a homeless ‘status’ creates the potential for shifts in identity. In addition, discourses of homelessness may further contribute to identity and sense of self by outlining what it means to be homeless with regards to attitudes and behaviours.

Discourses about the Homeless Subculture & Expected Behaviours

The findings in this analysis demonstrate the centrality of identity construction and/or identity work. In particular, by exploring how individuals experiencing homelessness create, change, or maintain their identity, the influence of homeless subcultures and street networks emerged as key to understanding how and why self-sabotage occurs. While Chamberlain and Johnson (2018) contend that many friendships forged on the street are based on necessity rather than shared values, the homeless subculture also “resides in the fact that it is a patterned set of behaviours and orientations that are a response to the predicament of homelessness” (p. 1254). This issue was conveyed when participants described the competing expectations between staying connected with street peers while trying to achieve housing stability. Participants grappled with the potential for loss of friendships and connections if they stepped back from engaging in the homeless subculture, but also noted the risk of maintaining the attitudes and behaviours of the homeless subculture after moving into housing.

Continuing the theme of peer influences, street networks, and identity is the conception of categorical discourses of homelessness. A categorical discourse carries expectations of behaviour, an example of which used by Clapham (2002) is that of old age. From a pathways perspective, Clapham (2002) states that “the categorical discourse may carry expectations of appropriate housing behaviour” such as living in retirement communities or supported living environments (p. 65). In this analysis, the categorical discourse of homelessness may carry with it expectations of behaviour from other group members, but uniquely, homelessness also

encapsulates discourses of freedom and non-conformity which for some may reflect a total lack of behavioural expectations altogether. Examples of such expected behaviours as outlined by participants include illicit drug use, congregating in large groups, or having too many guests, while the discourse of freedom and non-conformity instead insinuates the absence of social norms and obligations that would otherwise constrain or influence behaviour. Thus, for individuals transitioning into housing who remain socially connected to the street or homeless subcultures, the categorical discourse of homelessness and the expected behaviours associated may not align with other social groups expectations of appropriate housing behavior.

Ultimately, the findings of this research suggest that maintaining social connections with homeless peers after transitioning into housing may pose as a significant threat to housing stability. The issue with maintaining ties to the street after exiting homelessness appears to centre on the dominant discourses of homelessness that are shared by those within this group as well as those outside of it. For those within the group, there are existing discourses and shared beliefs about what it means to be homeless and how to behave within street culture. For some individuals, maintaining connections on the street after transitioning into housing requires that they continue to engage in the normative behaviours of the group, many of which may present as challenges to tenancy sustainment. Johnson and Chamberlain (2018) suggest that individuals who attempt to “straddle” the line between expected housing behaviour and participating in the homeless subculture will experience liminality and are likely to feel like an outsider in both of these worlds until they commit to one or the other.

Identity & Street Entrenchment

For individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness or street entrenchment, the subject of identity was readily apparent. Many participants reflected on the notion that their

identity centred on both the ability and willingness to live unsheltered, articulating that after experiencing the freedom of living outdoors, transitioning into housing would be of great difficulty. This view also points to the relational dimension of liminality as discussed by Chamberlain and Johnson (2018), substantiating the idea that the experience of homelessness may cause some people to become so disaffiliated from mainstream society that their sole priority is surviving on the streets. For those who could be considered street entrenched, there was a belief that living outside could actually be better than being housed, with participants referencing being “hooked on the streets” or that “homelessness itself is an addiction.” This view was also reinforced by some participants with comparably short homeless histories or minimal engagement with others on the street; they contended that obtaining housing after homelessness may make some individuals feel trapped or claustrophobic. In this sense, the meanings derived from homeless identities and experiences made the prospect of living indoors seem uncomfortable or even outright unbearable, and participants expressed that it would be a challenge to behave in line with the expectations of domiciled society after identifying with the homeless subculture for so long.

Housing, Identity & the ‘Unexpected’

Understanding the circumstances that individuals experiencing homelessness attributed to their housing loss was a critical component of this analysis. A recurring theme emerged among participants who stated that their transition into homelessness stemmed from unexpected and adverse life shocks that caused actual housing loss (e.g., fire or flood), the loss of supports necessary to obtain or retain housing, or even the capacity and desire to stay housed.

From a pathways perspective, the theme of unexpected and adverse life shocks is a principal illustration of how individual human agency and social structures are not experienced

in isolation from one another. Clapham (2002) contends that housing pathways follow along with other life pathways, and the meaning that each individual attaches to housing reflects personal identity and lifestyle choices. Lee et al. (2021) assert that there are many members of disadvantaged populations who experience adversities but at no point in time end up experiencing literal homelessness, and attribute the difference between those who sustain housing and those who lose it to the notion that “some people are somehow more likely to be impacted by sudden, unexpected events” (p. 4). The conceptual framework of housing pathways may provide some explanation to this notion on the basis that for some people, the meaning(s) that a particular housing holds and the contribution it provides to their sense of identity are so significant that they are more simply more vulnerable to succumbing to triggers. For example, participant 22 derived meaning and identity from sharing housing with her son but experienced a rift in this meaning after he chose to move out. Having previously experienced homelessness during young adulthood, this participant achieved housing stability after her identity shifted as a result of motherhood. Living with her son attached meaning to her housing status that became lost when her position as a parent changed and her primary identity was no longer centred on caregiving. The categorical identity of ‘parent’ became conflicted and the common discourses on family may have ruptured for this participant, resulting in a reversion to homelessness.

Discourses of Self-Sabotage

While the literature available on self-sabotage and homelessness demonstrates different meanings and interpretations, a primary tension centres on whether self-sabotage is a conscious or unconscious act. While some participant reflections of self-sabotage echoed this dichotomy, the general findings of this thesis suggest that self-sabotage is inherently both conscious and unconscious, as well as dependent on the discourses that surround each individual experience of

homelessness. Individuals who identified strongly with street culture reflected on discourses of self-sabotage that emphasize the ability and willingness to live unsheltered. When participants faced challenges with housing transitions, the act of self-sabotage was not innately negative and, instead, centred on the fact that they did not fear the outcome of housing loss because they had dealt with it before. Participant 11 articulated this discourse of self-sabotage noting that after multiple experiences of homelessness, she carried a mindset of “it doesn’t matter” and “I know I can survive out there.” Participant 27 shared similar sentiments, reflecting that some people simply “adjust easily” to life on the streets. Similarly, participant 26 articulated feeling that it was easier to “crash it all at once”, noting this would allow him to move on and start again, an undertaking that may feel easier after years of surviving on the streets as opposed addressing the problems at hand.

By exploring this discourse of self-sabotage, it can be seen that at face value, some participant reflections suggest a conscious awareness of their actions. However, the underlying dynamics at play contributing to these acts of self-sabotage seem somewhat unconscious. For example, while participant 11 was innately aware that she could survive on the streets if need be, the actual dynamics that drove her to ascribe to this mindset are unclear. I suggest that an unconscious acceptance of homeless discourses and identity may precede intentional behaviours that could be deemed self-sabotage.

Another significant viewpoint shared by participants was that self-sabotage reflected two interrelated discourses of homelessness, namely freedom of choice and non-conformity as well as the expectations embedded within homeless subcultures. The notion that street life allows and encourages illicit behaviours was seen as a driving force for self-sabotage, with most participant discourses of self-sabotage and housing loss being operationalized this way. Participants

reflected on common expectations of street life that would not be compatible with the expectations of housing such as congregating in large groups, not abiding by rules, or using ‘street drugs.’ The discourse of drug use as a cause of self-sabotage was overwhelmingly noted by participants, either referencing their own challenges with substance use or that of their peers. Drugs were identified as being “the most dominant force” on the streets, a discourse that may persist for those who continue engaging in street culture even after securing housing. Aligning with the pathways framework from Clapham (2002), many participants suggested that the dominant discourse of drug use would continue even after individuals move into housing, suggesting that the financial implications of addiction would be the biggest barrier to securing and sustaining housing. Participant 14 synonymized self-sabotage with problematic drug use, noting that some individuals spend all their money on drugs despite plans of moving into housing. Reflecting on this discourse, participant 14 summed up this conceptualization, stating “I would say that’s self-sabotage, isn’t it?”

By connecting the suggested causes for self-sabotage to the various mechanisms or ways participants operationalized self-sabotage, participant reflections in this analysis had some overlap with ideas from Stanhope et al. (2012). Stanhope et al. (2012) suggest that in some cases, self-sabotage reflects patterns of rule breaking done in a deliberate effort to fail and resulting in the loss of housing, a theme which does align with participant reflections that operationalized self-sabotage through explicit, harmful behaviours. Importantly, however, most participants in this analysis did not see self-sabotage as a deliberate effort to fail, more commonly insinuating that while the behaviours themselves may be deliberate, their resulting outcomes were not. Put simply, while many participants attributed the discourse of homelessness and resulting expectations as problematic and damaging to tenancy, most didn’t see these behaviours as being

purposeful or done with the explicit intent to lose housing. Generally, these behaviours were described as a result of identifying with the homeless subculture and engaging in activities linked to a homeless lifestyle even after obtaining housing.

Ultimately, it can be contended that the various discourses presented on self-sabotage convey both conscious and unconscious processes. By exploring discourses of homelessness and identity, participant reflections suggest an awareness of the competing expectations between homelessness and housing, but a lack of insight into where these expectations stem from or how to address them. It appears that while many knowingly engage in behaviours that would jeopardize the opportunity to secure our sustain housing, the driving dynamics behind these processes were generally unknown to participants. The unconscious attachment to identities and understandings of what it means to be homelessness may result in conscious decisions that can be viewed as self-sabotage.

Policy Implications

The major policy implication of this research centres on the significance of how experiencing homelessness impact's identity. On the street, identity is shaped and sustained through discourses of homelessness. Individuals form connections with other peers on the street and often engage in behaviours that are deemed normal or expected based on the common understandings of what it means to be homeless. Especially in instances of chronic homelessness, disaffiliation and street entrenchment may be difficult to overcome when so much of one's identity is linked to their homeless status. As previously noted, providing access to housing alone is not a facilitator to successful exits from homelessness, and even with supports many individuals will struggle to sustain housing (Stanhope et al., 2012; Patterson et al., 2014). Thus, in order to effectively address homelessness, scholars, policy makers, and service

providers need to place greater emphasis on the role that identity plays in exits from homelessness.

One policy/program area to consider that may improve understandings of self-sabotage and service outcomes surrounds how service providers think and talk about self-sabotage. Stanhope et al. (2012) reflect that the term sabotage “clearly carries judgement” and often suggests an “unjustified or irrational undermining of services on the part of the service user” (p. 266). This language fails to demonstrate the complex nuances involved in self-sabotaging behaviour, many of which have been demonstrated throughout this thesis. In particular, Stanhope et al. (2012) state that the use of the term sabotage inherently implicates service users rather than considering issues within service provision that may contribute to self-sabotaging behaviour. Responsibility for service disengagement and self-sabotage is placed upon service users without any consideration of how inadequacies in available services and programs may play a role in this phenomenon (Stanhope et al., 2009). While it is important to acknowledge that there are some instances where the term sabotage may be applied more correctly, such as instances where there is a demonstrated fear of success by the service user, there are a myriad of other circumstances that may be labelled self-sabotage without consideration of what role inadequacies within programs and supports may play. Often, self-sabotaging behaviours may earn service users a label of “being difficult” (Koekkoek et al., 2006, as cited in Stanhope et al., 2012, p. 262).

Examples of self-sabotage discussed in this thesis such as breaking rules, spending rent money, or actively engaging in drug use suggest a need for greater attention within service provision given the underlying dynamics that may contribute to these behaviours. Reflecting on the homeless experience and homeless identity, the language used by service providers regarding self-sabotage, such as the label of being difficult or wanting too much too fast, does little to

actively understand the complex factors that lead to sabotaging behaviour. By implicating service users and invoking the term sabotage, service providers effectively see self-sabotage as “part of the trade” (Stanhope et al., 2009, p. 461). This perspective minimizes the need to explore the nuances surrounding self-sabotage that would have implications for future service provision. Changing the framing of how self-sabotage is discussed in service provision may be a necessary step towards implementing more tailored services in response to the unique factors associated with homeless to housing transitions, such as identity. While self-sabotage may indeed be an inherent part of service provision, without attempting to explore and address the underlying dynamics of the homeless experience and identity, it is likely that self-sabotage will continue to impede housing stability.

While evidence-based programming such as Housing First have identified the significance of promoting social and community integration after exiting homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2013b; Gaetz et al., 2016), this research demonstrates the inherent difficulty of leaving behind the identity and connections tied to the homeless experience. Individuals who are rehoused but remain involved in the homeless subculture may feel disconnected not only to their homeless peers because of their change in status, but also as though they don’t fit in among the domiciled community. This in turn may impede the ability to meaningfully engage in social/community integration, leaving some as “part of society, but sometimes never fully integrated” (Thomassen, 2009, p. 19, as cited in Chamberlain & Johnson, 2018, p. 1260). While Chamberlain and Johnson (2018) suggest that programs without a focus on social inclusion and community integration are unlikely to improve outcomes of housing retention, this analysis suggests that community integration may not be achievable until individuals have redefined their

sense of self. Based on this, greater efforts should be targeted towards providing resources and opportunities to establish a positive identity outside of the homeless discourse.

A final area of policy recommendation centres on how identity may contribute to self-sabotage. The findings in this analysis outlined that while many participants consciously engaged in deliberate behaviours that put their housing in jeopardy, the underlying dynamics of these actions were largely unconscious and individuals lacked insight into the sources of their own behaviours. The behavioural expectations associated with a homeless identity can be obstructive to housing stability, but without an understanding of these processes there is little to be done to improve residential transitions. Here, one suggestion that aligns with ideas from Farrell (2010) would be to focus attention on making conscious the unconscious processes that reproduce experiences of housing loss. By prioritizing efforts at establishing a therapeutic relationship between service users and service providers, case managers may gain opportunities to help homeless clients garner a deeper understanding of their own unconscious motivation. Farrell (2010) persuasively sums up the significance of this idea, stating “without basic awareness of the unconscious conflicts, the sustainability of a long-term placement for chronically homeless people may be compromised” (p. 252).

Contributions to Existing Research & Directions for Future Research

The findings of this thesis offer contributions to existing research that signify the necessity of exploring homeless to housing transitions. Contributing to the Housing Pathways framework proposed by Clapham (2002) and Clapham (2003), this thesis illustrates that the pathways framework is a useful mechanism for exploring the significance of identity and homeless discourses. The concept of categorical identities and the expected behaviours tied to these identities offers insights into how future research on chronic homelessness and street

entrenchment may benefit from exploring this element of Clapham (2002) and Clapham's (2003) framework.

With regards to the literature on self-sabotage, the findings in this thesis corroborate some of the ideas presented by Stanhope et al. (2009) and Stanhope et al. (2012) who offer one of few explorations of homelessness and self-sabotage. Aligning with Stanhope et al. (2012), this analysis suggests that self-sabotage is a very real phenomenon within the lives of individuals experiencing homelessness, and while the term 'sabotage' is primarily used by service providers, people with lived experience resonate with it. However, there remains an unresolved tension within academic literature regarding whether or not self-sabotage should be deemed as conscious or unconscious, a matter which this thesis may offer a solution to. A handful of definitions exist that are used in explaining self-sabotage; however, the majority of such definitions are based in the conscious versus unconscious argument, meaning that to define self-sabotage one must subscribe one side of this dichotomy over the other. Given the dynamic experience of homelessness, a 'one size fits all' definition of self-sabotage may not adequately explore the nuances at play when individuals sabotage their chances at success. Therefore, one key contribution from this analysis is that self-sabotage may be more appropriately defined through its operationalization. By focusing on the acts that people experiencing homelessness describe as self-sabotage, there remains opportunity to explore the underlying nuances of this phenomenon regardless of the presence or lack of intentionality.

An additional direction for future research on self-sabotage would be to consider a comparative analysis of this concept from the perspective of case managers and individuals experiencing homelessness. The idea of self-sabotage explored by Stanhope et al. (2009) reflected the notion of service disengagement, a subject that was not discussed at any point by

participants in this analysis. Stanhope et al. (2012) also demonstrated that acts of self-sabotage are done in a deliberate effort to fail, which also contradicts some of the participant statements discussed previously. It appears that the way service providers view and talk about self-sabotage may be innately different than how people experiencing homelessness view and talk about it. A comparative analysis may shed light on whether these differences are real or perceived, as it would otherwise be difficult to compare between studies due to methodological considerations including how self-sabotage is conceptualized or defined, what kind of questions are asked, and other key disparities.

Limitations

There are a few notable limitations of this study pertaining to the sample size as well as the diversity of housing status among participants. Given the scope of this thesis, the sample size was limited in order to meet the time constraints for completion. A total of 28 participants were interviewed for this project, though only 25 were subsequently analyzed. Utilizing a larger sample size may be ideal in future research to ensure a range of perspectives can be included and increase the probability of reaching a point of saturation. While achieving data saturation may be arduous in qualitative research exploring individual experiences and accounts, it is plausible that using a larger sample size may yield a greater number of insights and allow for the repetition of ideas until few to no new themes emerge. In addition, while individuals experiencing homelessness as well as those who are housed with a history of homelessness were included in this project, they were not equally represented. Only four participants disclosed being housed at the time of their interview, and the remaining participants were either actively homeless or at a transitional stage. Including fewer housed participants in the project may present as a limitation on the basis that there were fewer retrospective accounts of housing challenges from those in a

position of greater stability. That said, including a larger number of unsheltered participants also offers some benefit in that they were equipped to thoughtfully reflect on the factors that contributed to their most recent and/or lifetime experiences of homelessness as well as the barriers they perceive to achieving housing and housing stability moving forward. The viewpoints of unsheltered participants could be perceived as offering a more realistic or authentic image of poor housing retention.

An additional limitation to this project is that the recruiting location for interviews took place at a drop-in centre offering extensive services for health, income security, food insecurity, practical supports and more. Some research suggests that individuals experiencing chronic homelessness who have become disaffiliated and entrenched into street life actively choose not to access services as a method of maintaining positive identity and self-reliance (Osborne, 2002; Farrell, 2010; Bell & Walsh, 2015). This presents as a limitation on the basis that the study participants included may not offer a clear picture of true street entrenchment given that they are accessing services. However, it is conceivable that many individuals accessing the drop-in centre only do so for meals, a necessary decision given the urban locality provides little to no options for any form of tent sites or campsites that would provide a reasonable possibility to cook meals independently.

Conclusion

This thesis opened with a quote from Padgett (2007) who described the transition into housing after homelessness as a “phenomenological experience” (p. 1926). The literature explored throughout this thesis highlights that housing transitions are neither simple nor straightforward, and, in most cases, the dynamic factors that contribute to the initial homeless experience can have just as significant a role in the experience of exiting homelessness. A critical

takeaway from this analysis is that while improved access to affordable housing is necessary to help reduce homelessness, housing alone cannot meaningfully address the problem of homelessness when there are so many competing dynamics at play. This issue is demonstrated through comparative analysis between Canada and Finland, where policies that emphasized the right to housing were not sufficient at addressing homelessness without consideration of person-centred elements that encourage housing stability. Exiting homelessness is best described as an ongoing process, where the end of this process is the achievement of housing stability, though defining housing stability has its own challenges and limitations. This thesis used qualitative interviews to gain reflections from 25 individuals either actively experiencing homelessness or who are housed with a history of homelessness. Participants reflected on their own experience of homelessness or the experiences of other street peers, emphasizing that the very discourses about homelessness are a significant barrier to housing transitions. The shaping of identity through experiences of homelessness and participation in street entrenched social networks carried with it expectations of behaviour that do not align well with expectations of housing, complicating the process of moving into housing for those who continue to engage with the street lifestyle. Importantly, the notion of self-sabotage that has been used in service provision to explain difficult housing transitions was a concept that many participants in this analysis resonated with, though further exploration is needed. Ultimately, homelessness is multidimensional and the various barriers that may impede housing transitions and housing stability suggest that exiting homelessness is indeed a phenomenological experience.

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