Manchester
Metropolitan
University

An Exploration into the Lives of Previously Homeless Young People who have Lived in Temporary Supported Housing as Adolescents: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Tara Stokes

Supervised by: Dr. Leanne Rimmer   April 2017

An Exploration into the Lives of Previously Homeless Young People who have Lived in Temporary Supported Housing as Adolescents: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

ABSTRACT

Previous research into youth homelessness has primarily focused on specific aspects within one's homeless experience. This study offers exclusive access to four young adults who experienced homelessness as adolescents. Exploration of their retrospective experiences has the potential to inform professionals of the key influences involved in helping one exit homelessness successfully. Participants were recruited through opportunity sampling, and semi-structured interviews were employed to ensure that flexible, rich and detailed accounts of their experiences were obtained. Through interpretative phenomenological analysis three pre-eminent themes were identified, these were 'Loss of Identity', 'A Sense of Belonging' and 'Positive Growth'. A conspicuous lack of referral was placed on the loss of one's physical home, and strong predominance was placed on the psychological loss of one's character and future. Participants demonstrated a re-established identity and self-worth through the community formed within the long-term temporary accommodation. Through participant's strong sense of belonging and acceptance, a new positive mental attitude was formulated, which enhanced individual's ability to overcome obstacles and aim for a positive future. The research suggests that homeless youths may be better housed in communal groups than in permanent housing alone.

KEY WORDS:	YOUTH HOMELESSNESS	INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS	COMMUNITY	OPTIMISM	SELF-WORTH

Introduction

'Homelessness' refers to individuals whom possess no fixed abode, ranging from street homelessness, to short or long-term temporary hostel or shelter accommodation (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2008). Dysfunctional backgrounds, abuse and family conflict prevail when analysing the preliminary lives of homeless young people (Gomez and Ryan, 2015; Kidd, 2007; Kirtz et al., 2000; Mallett, Rosenthal and Keys, 2005). These factors have demonstrated to have a devastating effect on one's academic and developmental lives (Tierney, 2015). Hence, many homeless young people have reduced access to opportunities (Rafferty et al., 2004). Moreover, as the Western economy grows, there is an increased prevalence on financial success and education, which segregates most homeless youths from the general population (Kidd, 2007).

Research into homelessness often focuses on the negative aspects of those experiencing homelessness (Rachlis et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 2010), and individuals experiencing homelessness are often represented as devious and troublesome (Parsell, 2011). This concept is outdated and the variety of reasons one becomes homeless is too wide to appoint blame on the individual due to presumed personal failings (Mayock et al., 2010).

Being homeless strips an individual of their previously affirmed identity, and often becomes the defining aspect of the individual's character (Boydell, Farrugia et al., 2016). The uncertainty of youth homelessness (Farrugia et al., 2016) and the immorality associated with young people who are homeless (Jones, 1995) can result in the loss of one's social identity (Parsell, 2010). The loss of social belonging and the perceived exclusion from mainstream society is of great detriment to individual's self-concept (Tajfel, 1982) thus often resulting in feelings of isolation and abandonment (Toolis and Hammack, 2015). The need to affirm with a positive identity is crucial to individual's ability to be resilient in the face of adversity (Parsell, 2011).

Parsell's (2011) study demonstrated the prospect of a malleable identity, which is multifaceted in terms of the scenario within the homeless experience. The capability to alternate between identities demonstrates that individuals can attribute themselves an alternate character, which is most appropriate in the given contextual situation. Boydell et al. (2000) found that participants predominantly described their homeless experience in terms of identity, both threatened and created. Individuals presented their experience in terms of past, present and future identities, past being glorified, and present highly negative; further suggesting that identity is changeable in accordance to one's circumstances. The capacity of individuals to attribute context dependant identities, suggests that homeless individuals are active agents in their experience of homelessness (Bell and Walsh, 2015). Exploring how individuals identify themselves during different aspects of their experience is therefore beneficial to establishing what influences the affirmation of a positive identity.

Belonging to a homeless social community, based on shared experiences, promotes individual's self-worth and enables the construction of an increasingly positive personal identity (Bell and Walsh, 2015; Holtschneider, 2016). One participant in Holtschneider's study demonstrates this, "while you're under this roof, we are a

family, we look out for each other" (Holtschneider, 2016:208). This coincides with the concept that enhanced social connectedness enhances psychological well-being among marginalised individuals (Fitzpatrick, 2017), and trust is an inherent dynamic of strong community formation (Hartnett and Harding, 2005).

Homeless communities whereby social inclusion and acceptance is apparent, challenges the dehumanising representations that individuals experiencing homelessness have been ascribed as outcasts (Walter et al., 2015) and morally disgraceful (Farrugia et al., 2016). Group membership enhances one's ability to cope with challenges (Jetten et al., 2014) and enhances self-concept (Johnstone et al., 2016) which is a vital component in re-establishing a sense of self-worth (Farrugia, Smyth and Harrison, 2016). However, by normalising the homeless way of life within their community, individuals can be demotivated to reintegrate back into a society that they feel is alien to them (Garrett et al., 2008).

It has been found that strategies of supported living – which involve supporting homeless youths in gaining the skills necessary for independence – have led to an increased sense of worth among homeless youths and increased likelihood of success in independent life (Holtschneider, 2016; Johnstone et al., 2014). Participants in these studies reported an increase in self-worth based on the bonds formed between other homeless individuals. Many individuals likened these relationships to that of family members, whereby trust, loyalty and empathy was apparent. The sense of belonging and acceptance within the shelter, are often more beneficial long-term than the physical housing. One participant articulated the importance of this. "I wasn't just a client. I was Melissa. I was part of something." (Holtschneider, 2016:213). Is it therefore paramount to homeless individual's well-being, to develop self-worth, social confidence as well as skills needed for independent living.

Toolis and Hammack (2015) studied the lived experience of currently homelessness youth. One participant described their experience as a transformation of self, and discussed how resilience and strength learnt through hitting rock bottom, aided the individual to turn around and gain a more positive sense of self-worth. The participant described their entrance into homelessness with clarity, "Like I was nothing, like I was a nobody". Supporting this prospect of time reliance through an experience, Santa Maria et al. (2015) also found that homeless youths optimistically situate their future as full of hope and envisage a positive self-identity after homelessness, which hopes to be determined in this study.

The psychological transition into adulthood takes place through adolescence; this process is often premature amongst homeless youths who are faced with adult responsibilities in advance of most of their peers (Schmitz and Tyler, 2016). It is therefore important that future research incorporates a retrospective account of the whole experience as young people adapt over time (Thompson et al., 2013).

Although there exists a wide range of literature on the issues surrounding homelessness, and the lives of homeless people, much research focuses on the lives of adults and young people who are homeless at the time of the research. To obtain a comprehensive, holistic and participant-lead description of the homelessness experience, research looking back on one's previous experience of

homeless is vital. This study will hence interview formally homeless young people. This has the potential to help shape policies and intervention tactics (Santa Maria et al*.,* 2015), by identifying the most significant elements of one's experience, which assisted their ability to successfully exit homelessness.

Formally homeless individuals can relate their experiences from a different perspective to currently homeless people, who are caught up in the situation, and the constant stresses involved in homelessness. Currently missing in literature is the acknowledgement that homeless youth retain valuable insights into the lived experience of homelessness and the strategies they utilise to cope (Altena et al., 2014; Toolis and Hammack, 2015). Youths who reside in temporary accommodation is increasingly prevalent in British society (Crisis, 2015). Therefore exploring the lived experience of those who have experienced such, will enhance understanding, and aim to make the experience less turbulent to the developmental lives of young people. The proposed research will highlight the challenges overcome by homeless youth, whilst not underestimating the difficulties they face in order challenge the pessimistic ideologies they are often assigned.

Research Questions

The proposed research intends to explore the lived experience of homelessness, through young people who have previously lived in temporary accommodation. Research question 1 aims to explore the way in which participants perceive and make sense of their experience. Research question 2 makes use of the retrospective approach, as individuals can explain their entrance into homelessness with the benefit of hindsight. Answering this question has the potential to minimise distress during the transition into homelessness for future young people. The final research question intends to explore methods, contexts and social influences in regards to the participant's ability to overcome obstacles. In conclusion, these questions aim to offer a well-rounded understanding of the lives of homeless young people.

1. How do individuals construct their experience of homelessness?
2. How do youths respond to becoming homeless?
3. How do youth overcome challenges during homelessness?

Methodology

Design

The study employed an exploratory design utilising a qualitative approach, and data was obtained through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Eliciting detailed and unique information is a significant element of this study, as it aims to understand the experience of youth homelessness holistically (Long and Godfrey, 2004), rendering an qualitative format obligatory (Silverman, 2013; Singh, 2007).

When interviewing marginalised youths, data quality is enhanced by allowing them the freedom to openly discuss their experiences (Fernandez, 2002). Moreover, the subjective lived experience should facilitate unprecedented topic exploration (Eatough and Smith, 2008). Thus, the method of data collection chosen was semi-structured interviews, as they facilitate the potential for detailed, subjective (Sandelowski, 2004) and unique information (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Shuy, 2003) of guided topics (Stebbins, 2001) to be explored. Also, the freedom of absconding from the predetermined questions enables the researcher to guide further detail from interesting elements of the interview (Shuy, 2003) which is vital in qualitative exploratory research, to understand a lived phenomenon from an individual's 'insider's perspective' (Eatough and Smith, 2008).

Epistemological Position

The methods arose from the empiricist epistemological stance of the researcher, which emphasizes that all concepts originate from the lived experience (Willig, 2013). The whole experience needed to have been lived to gain a thorough understanding of youth homelessness, therefore individuals who were no longer homeless were recruited, as they had lived the full experience. The research questions were hence formulated to explore the whole experience. The lived experience is detailed, unique and integrated with meaning and constructions (Josselson, 2009) which semi-structured interviews facilitate (Brinkmann, 2013). Therefore interviewing individuals who have experienced homelessness will provide a factual account of their unique experience. IPA also disconcerts an empiricist framework as it aims to construct meaning from direct experience (Willig, 2013) through interpretations that are directly grounded in the data (Lawthom and Tindall, 2011).

Participants

Four participants (three female and one male) were purposefully recruited through opportunity sampling, in line with the IPA sample recommendations as connections and meanings are best constructed from a smaller sample (Smith et al., 2009; Smith and Osborn, 2008). Individuals who have lived through an experience are regarded as experiential experts (Smith and Osborn, 2003) who will be able to offer detailed responses, which is vital to insightful IPA. Furthermore, subjects who are able to assess an experience retrospectively, with the benefit of hindsight, offer a unique insight into a transitional phenomenon (Jedlowski, 2001; Metts et al., 1991).

The inclusion criteria required participants to have been homeless and consequently lived in the same temporary accommodation for a period of time during their youth. It was also mandatory that participants currently resided in fixed housing, as the study intended to explore central factors which influenced the successful movement to

permanent housing. It was deciphered that only individuals under 25 years old would be approached, as one can construct their account differently if the time lapse between the experience and the present is great (Bruner, 1991). The participants were known previously to the interviewer, therefore previously established rapport was a benefit of this participant cohort (Kagan et al., 2008, Walsh and Bull, 2012).

The table below details the relevant demographics of the participants (Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Age Participants became Homeless	Length of Time Homeless (months)	Length of Time in Temporary Accommodation (months)	Type of Accommodation during Homelessness
Alistair	22	16	23	12	Street Sleeping, Sofa Surfing, Emergency and long-term hostel
Ava	23	17	9	8	Sofa Surfing and Long-term Hostel
Hannah	21	16	10	7	Street Sleeping, Sofa Surfing and Long-term Hostel
Zoe	21	17	18	14	Emergency and Long-term Hostel

Procedure

Ethical approval (Appendix 1) was obtained in accordance with the BPS guidelines from MMU prior to the research commencing. In line with the theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research (Smith et al., 2009), open questions were formulated in relation to the research questions and question formatting guidelines by Smith and Eatough (2007). If participants disclosed interesting unexpected themes, these could be pursued by the researcher (Eatough and Smith, 2008). A narrative questioning format was used, as past experiences are best told through autobiographical stories (Bruner, 1991). Prompts were also permissible to elicit further information from interesting points propagated by the participant (Lawthom and Tindall, 2011) and to ensure detailed responses (Fowler, 2013).

Six participants were asked in person if they would be interested in participating in the study. Two individuals repeatedly cancelled interview slots, and therefore their participation was omitted.

An official invitation letter (Appendix 2), and the information sheet (Appendix 3) detailing the research aims and structure were e-mailed to participants one week prior to their scheduled interview. This time lapse was permitted to enable participants to read the forms thoroughly, absent of pressurised time constraints. Participants were then asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 4). The consent form informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study or the interview at any point without any consequence up until the 20th January 2017 when a reason would be required as the analysis would have commenced. Participants were also informed of their right to decline to answer any questions, the knowledge that the data would be held securely, and that pseudonyms would be allocated throughout the report to warrant anonymity. Participants agreed to the use of anonymised quotes, and for the interview to be audio recorded using a Dictaphone.

A pilot study provides opportunity to detect flaws in the interview schedule and hence refine it (Yin, 2016). It was required to ensure that the questions elicited detailed responses that would facilitate the level of depth required for IPA therefore a pilot study was conducted with the first participant. Each interview commenced face-to-face in a convenient and familiar location for the participant (Runswick-Cole, 2011). Location familiarity contributes to the individuals being more open and honest about their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The interview durations ranged from twenty-five to forty minutes and were audio recorded using a Dictaphone.

Following the interviews, a de-brief form (Appendix 5) was given to participants. Itr detailed the researcher's and supervisor's contact details, in the event of subsequent enquiry or to request withdrawal of their data. The details of two counselling organisations were also provided in the event of any psychological distress following the interview. The interviews were then transcribed (Appendix 6).

Analytical Strategy

The lived experience is complex, idiosyncratic and unique (Smith, 2011) permitting the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the most appropriate method of data analysis. IPA encompasses the detailed and holistic exploration of how individuals perceive and construct an experience ideographically (Howitt, 2010; Smith and Eatough, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). Active interpretation of one's lived experience with regard to the wider context is permitted through IPA (Smith and Osborn, 2003). IPA aims to construct meaning within individual's experience and identify connections and themes to understand and make sense of the whole lived experience from the individual's perception (Smith and Osborn, 2008).

The first step in IPA is for the researcher to minimise the manifestation of previous assumptions (phenomenological reduction) through acknowledging that individual experiences will differ, enhancing one's ability to attend to the data with an open mind (Lawthom and Tindall, 2011; Lemon and Taylor, 1998). The data was analysed in accordance to guidelines set out by Lawthom and Tindall (2011). Initial ideas were noted when transcribing each interview, and the researcher familiarised oneself with the data sets and made notes of relevant themes and concepts that were grounded with the individual's accounts (see Appendix 7 for extract of annotated transcript). Repetitive reading of the data is vital to IPA, as it requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the data, which enhances responsiveness to the accounts (Lawthom and Tindall, 2011). Identified concepts were then grouped together and compared across the data, and then they were condensed to form the main themes (Brown and

Locke, 2008; Smith and Osborn, 2008). The analysis was then member checked through the presentation of the themes and interpretations to each participant (Birt et al., 2016). No deviations from the original analysis were requested.

Quality Criteria

IPA advocates that themes and interpretations derived from data analysis must be directly evident in the participant's words (Lawthom and Tindall, 2011). Thus, this research encompasses a strong credibility, which is vital in compiling trustworthy and accurate findings (Elliott et al., 1999; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The ability to empathize and engage with participants is also a skill that enhances the reliability of the interpretation (Smith and Osborn, 2008) and enhances the rigor of a study (Davies and Dodd, 2002). Consequently, the rapport and prior shared experience of the explored phenomena, offered an exclusive and strong element to the research, as trust was established (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This enabled more in-depth and insightful accounts of one's experience to be disclosed (Gomez and Ryan, 2016), which may not have occurred in more formal and structured interviews with unknown professionals.

The more elaborate and meticulous the accounts, a greater understanding of the topic is facilitated (Davies, 2000; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Wolcott, 1994), which can enhance the transferability of the findings to other individuals experiencing similar circumstances. Such detailed accounts would be difficult to access using quantitative methods, as it is less flexible and less personal (Long and Godfrey, 2004). In addition, individuals who report experiences alongside peers such as in group interviews, can influence one another's accounts (Assink and Schroots, 2010). Therefore, individual interviews were utilised to enhance the study's reliability (Long and Godfrey, 2004). Furthermore, to mitigate researcher bias, all themes and interpretations were member checked (Birt et al., 2016), which enhanced credibility of the research.

Analysis and Discussion

This research contributes to the under researched area of youth's experience in temporary housing during homelessness (Altena et al., 2014). Exploration of their experiences is beneficial not only to policy-makers, but also to the participants who expressed a sense of empowerment through being listened to (Gomez and Ryan, 2015). Through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, three main interlinked themes were identified as central to the participant's constructions of their experience. These themes were 'Loss of Identity', 'A Sense of Belonging' and 'Positive Growth'.

Loss of Identity

All but one participant made inherent reference to an overwhelming sense of loss during the initial stages of experiencing homelessness, which corresponds with previous findings (Boydell et al., 2000; Farrugia et al., 2016; Parsell, 2010). However, there was a conspicuous lack of referral to the loss of one's physical home and materials, and strong predominance placed on the psychological loss of one's beliefs about their own situation, character and future. This had disastrous implications on participant's well-being, accentuating the sensation of entrapment (Brueckner et al., 2011) and loss of hope.

> *"It threw everything what I thought I was out (Interviewer: In what way?) cos you have to become summat you're not, like pretend it's not… horrible to be pushed out from everything and become in a situation what you shouldn't be in at that young age like I didn't know what I was supposed to think." (Hannah, lines 31-35).*

> *"You don't see any way out like you're on your own to try and sort something you can't imagine out and your kinda go into meltdown and numb … that's not who I am, I was on a downward spiral and thought that was that.' Ava (lines 28-30).*

Hannah describes how she felt compelled to portray a character which was not representative of her former established identity, and which she did not like. The fake character she portrayed was more hostile than her actual self was. It engulfed her, and playing this character diminished her feelings of self-worth. She played this part to protect herself, but in doing so, began to her feel that her real self was inadequate and could not cope with the situation. Parsell (2011) also found that individuals enact identities to cope with various aspects of homelessness. Whereas Boydell et al., (2000) found that one's past identity before homelessness was idolised. This study however, demonstrates an insufficient sense of previous self, thus enacting a character to cope with the situation.

The connotations of the lack of control regarding Ava's entrance into homelessness indicated a sense of fear and confusion, which for Ava established a psychological barrier between her and her peers. This barrier enhanced her feelings of isolation as her situation went against her perceived established norms of what young people should be doing, rendering herself abnormal and an outsider. Tajfel's (1982) social identity theory contends that the perceived negativity of one's social group is reflected in one's sense of self-worth.

Zoe and Ava initially demonstrated feelings of angst towards being defined as a 'homeless person' due to their negative stereotypes of individuals who are homeless. Participant's need to separate themselves from the street homeless community

initially affected their acceptance of themselves and others in their situation. This was incipiently an obstacle to establishing a sense a belonging, as demonstrated by Zoe (line 67) and Ava's (line 18) referral to feeling "lost". Farrugia, Smyth and Harrison (2016) contend that the displacement of stability and original social group identity diminishes one's sense of worth. This initially hindered their ability to develop a positive mental attitude, however through connecting with the YMCA community they were able to overcome this and warrant a new increasingly ambitious and optimistic attitude.

> *"I didn't really wanna be called homeless, people liken you to stinky alcis on the street begging, so … I didn't actually call myself that, otherwise you're like dirty and that's not fair, no one knows your story.' (Ava, lines 8-10).*

> *"I wouldn't want to be a beggar with nothing you know." (Zoe, line 31).*

The young people in the current study imply a lack of control over their entrance into homelessness (Farrugia et al., 2016) thus leading to individuals to distance oneself from this label as a coping mechanism (Phelan et al., 1997) to avoid negative stigma and pertain a sense of self-worth (Gonyea and Melekis, 2016). It could be suggested that this indicates a conception that the adult homeless population have more control over their situation. It may be useful for future practice to discuss one's long-term future options with newly homeless youth as this may reduce discernments of inevitability.

Alistair expresses a loss of pride through labelling himself a "burden" whilst 'sofa surfing', which was detrimental to his well-being. The conception that youths who 'sofa surf' are in control of their housing situation (Uhr, 2004), is disavowed as Alistair expresses his anxiety at the uncertainty of when he will be asked to move on and where he will go. Young people often express that despite the increased safety of 'sofa surfing', their feelings of being a burden and fears of being intrusive results in them returning to the streets in a bid to salvage some self-sufficiency (McLoughlin, 2016). The prospect of being a burden was a significantly different experience for Alistair who mentions always priding himself as being self-reliant. This led to Alistair returning to the streets before being placed in an emergency shelter. When Alistair was able to reside in the YMCA long-term housing, the stability provided helped him focus on his own issues, rather than being over faced with the prospect of having nowhere to sleep that night.

> *"People feel sorry for you … your mate's parents feel sorry for you because you're having to stop at their house and you've got nowhere else to go after that … you see it in them that they feel bad that they've got to say I'm sorry but you're gunner have to find somewhere else to stay and it makes you feel like a burden, you have no choice but to find a sheltered spot in town." (Alistair, lines 52-56).*

Alistair further asserted that his loss of self, character and future was total before he became homeless. He requested that the reason for his troubled background not be reported in this study. The support, acceptance and trust that he received at the YMCA was therefore incredibly meaningful to Alistair and his appreciation of the people there enabled him to respond to it whole-heartedly. This resulted in him being able to turn his life around completely.

A Sense of Belonging

In line with previous findings (Bell and Walsh, 2015; Holtschneider, 2016) a sense of belonging and community found through solidarity was a substantial element of all of the participant's accounts. The social connectedness that transpired in the YMCA hostel was based on mutual trust and respect.

Zoe, Ava and Alistair explicitly describe how a home encompasses acceptance and love. This was unanimously expressed by the participants to be a more important feature than permanent accommodation. Whereas Brueckner et al. (2011) reported that youths felt a 'home' consisted of stability which was only found in permanent housing.

"You either live in a house or a home and the YMCA was a home because of the people around you, you didn't feel homeless there cos it was your residence and you came back to people who loved and supported … that's a family, and that's forever." *(Zoe, lines 42-45).*

"A home isn't just a roof over your head, but it's the people that make a place a home, I felt like it was a complete family." (Alistair, lines 41-42).

It was expressed that the small hostel size facilitated a trusting and close-knit community. The relationships formed in the YMCA enhanced self-agency and affiliation. Through connectedness, their prior negative perception of the world was replaced with sanguinity, and they established a new-found ability to accept the homeless community and hence themselves.

Contrarily to adult homelessness, family conflict often precipitates homeless circumstances for youths (Salomonsen-Sautel et al., 2008) leaving them feeling isolated and alone (Bell and Walsh, 2015). This displacement of emotional belonging initiates homeless youths forming close bonds with others in their situation, whom many liken to a family (Farrugia et al., 2016; Stablein, 2011). The current study's referral to the individuals in the YMCA as 'family' extended beyond the residents. It included the staff and the ex-residents who visited. This reduced anxiety at the prospect of leaving the establishment, as they had the knowledge that there would always be support. This opposes Bell and Walsh's (2015) findings that individuals often return to homelessness to remain part of the community.

The family connotation encouraged residents to take on their own roles. For example, Alistair considered himself a protector and Zoe considered herself an arbitrator. These roles made the participants feel significant and worthy and helped them to develop positive aspects of their own personalities. Alistair described that the YMCA environment accentuated positive aspects of his personality, which had been overpowered by anger from his past.

"I felt like a protector not only for myself but for the other people in the YMCA as it was very much a family and we looked after each other." (Alistair, lines 64-65).

Having a contributing role to a social group significantly improves individual's self-concept (Tajfel, 1982) as their prior conceptions of being un-contributing members in mainstream society is opposed, thus reinstating a sense of self-worth (Bell and Walsh, 2015).

Participants describe how towards the end of their stay at the hostel, there was a change in management who had different ideas as to the role of the hostel. The new policy was seen to help youths experiencing homelessness by getting them moved

into permanent accommodation as quickly as possible. In doing so, it lost what the residents considered to be the most important elements of the home; which had been trust, acceptance and time to heal from previous losses.

In accordance with these aims, the new management installed CCTV outside resident's rooms and made rules such as residents could only have visitors if they had sought permission from staff twenty-four hours in advance. This alienated the residents who felt frustration at the removal of trust, and the implementation of rules which took away their ability to make even small decisions in their own lives. This reinforced the initial degradation participants felt during their entrance into homelessness (Gowan, 2010). There was also a re-emergence of psychological issues that had appeared to be resolved. This led them to withdraw from staff in a bid to protect the community that they had formed. This demonstrated the importance attached to people, as they were still in the same building, but the core components of the home were threatened leading to feelings of instability.

> *"******* Housing who were meant to help people they said stuff to rile you on purpose, they seemed to like starting fights." (Alistair, lines 31-32).*

> *"I only left because ****** Housing took over and changed everything." (Zoe, line 68).*

It can be seen that Alistair considered that the way the staff dealt with him re-evoked his anger. This suggests that simply putting individuals who are homeless into physical housing would not help them overcome their issues, and connectedness and support is more significant in developing the self. It could therefore be suggested that professionals should aim to bond social-capitals with young people in similar situations. Professionals could then house them together rather than housing individuals in single occupancy flats, which have been found to increase loneliness among individuals experiencing homelessness (Rokach, 2006). This utilises Wyn and White's (2014) proposition that youths should be viewed as 'webs of belonging' rather than independent to peers. Due to the emotions evoked as participants discussed the change of management, further elaboration of the topic was not invited by the interviewer.

Despite the unpleasant end to the participant's times at the hostel, the bonds formed there gave them the strength to overcome the changes being imposed upon them. Participants continue to describe the hostel as an overall positive experience. A place where they healed, and a place that gave them hope. This demonstrates the new-found ability to choose to take the positive from a negative situation, which was learnt through the community of the YMCA.

Positive Growth

Towards the end of the interviews, participants demonstrated resilient attitudes and personal growth from their experience. All participants were able to see the experience as a transition and had developed the skills to help them overcome adversity with a new positive mental attitude, thus demonstrating their high resilience levels (Thompson et al., 2011). Participants all stated that they would not change any of it.

As previously reported (McAdams, 2006; Rew et al., 2001) homeless young people who demonstrate resilience are more likely to succeed in their future lives and retain

social connectedness. Alistair demonstrates his positive growth through referral to his prior anger issues. The ability to overcome his anger made Alistair feel gratitude towards the people that helped him thus enhancing his ability to grow from his experience.

*"I was really f****** angry, I wasn't a nice person." (Alistair, line 8).*

"I don't have any anger issues anymore which is pretty good like I can't remember the last time I got angry." (Alistair, lines 89-90).

Through acknowledgment of their hardship, participants were proud of how far they had come in controlling their lives. Alistair described how his time in the YMCA taught him how to speak to people, which is a vital skill in obtaining employment. The embracement of supported housing for homeless youths has also been previously found to be the perceived most important factor in intervention outcomes (Altena et al., 2014).

"It taught me how to speak to people, I used to talk at them. I now work in a law firm, that made a difference. I have a lot of love for people now, and the YMCA did that for me." (Alistair, lines 113-114).

"Like yeah I know I've done good now to like be where I am, I'm not where I wanna be yet but I've always got my friends what I made there… you've gotta take stuff from the whole situation … I feel like considering, we're bossing it." (Ava, lines 171-174).

The ability to reflect on one's self-development enabled participants to feel great pride in their current situation as shown by Ava and Alistair. All participants describe their experience as ongoing, as a learning process.

All of the participants talk very highly of the original staff, whom they likened to guardian figures. Through individual and group support sessions, staff were able to help residents enhance the positive parts of their personality and become aware of the negative aspects. The small hostel size was undoubtedly influential in the staff member's ability to build meaningful professional relationships with the residents. There has been no previous research assessing the effectiveness of hostel sizes and the likely ability of individuals to succeed. Individuals became de-stabilised despite remaining in the same building during the management change, demonstrating that how the facility is run is more important than retaining familiar environment. This opposes findings by Manzo (2003) who suggested that emotional attachments to a place enhances stability. Therefore small hostel size should be seen as interdependent to a respectful and trusting environment.

The participants described how adversity has helped them learn to appreciate the good times. Their time in the YMCA has given them a sense of self-worth, an appreciation of community and good people. They appreciated the help that the original staff had given to develop the skills to move on and the tools to hopefully succeed in their lives. They still proudly describe themselves as 'YMCA kids', thus still identifying themselves as a close-knit group that can still call on each other in times of need. Alistair says that during his time in the YMCA he gained satisfaction and felt that he gained status from helping others. This sense of belonging and optimism is summed up in Zoe's assessment of the YMCA community, who she refers to as 'family for life'.

Limitations and Future Research

The study was only conducted with individuals who resided in the same small YMCA hostel, therefore results could not be accurately transferred to other settings or large YMCA hostels. This research could be replicated using individuals who had previously lived in larger temporary accommodations. Furthermore, Jedlowski (2001) suggested that where autobiographical memories are elicited influences the depth of the recall. Therefore, if the study was to be conducted again, it would be beneficial to conduct interviews in a location relevant to the discussed experience. Moreover, the researcher lived alongside the participants during their shared homeless experience, so despite the presence of trust eliciting personal details, this may have lead participants to miss out key elements of their experience due to assumed shared knowledge. The study also highlighted the significant affects that changes in management can cause. Due to the strong emotions evoked and word limit constraints within the present study this could not be adequately explored. Future research should examine this in depth.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the ability to reflect on how the researcher influenced the study (Finlay and Gough, 2003). How my personal and epistemological positioning affected the study will be discussed in accordance to Willig's (2008) reflexive model whereby prior experiences, beliefs, values and pre-assumptions can shape the research (Watt, 2007).

I was motivated to conduct research into youth homelessness having lived through the experience in my own adolescence. I acknowledged that different individual's accounts of the same experience were likely to differ to my own. Hence, to moderate my experience or beliefs influencing the direction of the interview (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004), participants were encouraged through open questioning to discuss their experiences of homelessness freely.

My emotional attachment to the participants motivated me to accurately capture their experience. The shared experience enhanced my ability to empathise and understand participant's accounts and interviews where the researcher has experienced the area being explored elicits more detailed information than an unknown academic (Gomez and Ryan, 2015). However, despite the research benefits of having experienced homelessness in my own youth, I felt that my personal connection to the participants and the topic put me under great pressure to achieve a mark which reflected my insight.

My empiricist epistemological stance suggests that knowledge only comes from the full experience (Hossain, 2014) where participants are the experimental experts (Smith and Osborn, 2003). I wanted to capture young people's retrospective experiences with the aim of informing policy-makers of key elements involved in helping one overcome homelessness. Therefore, I designed the research using participants who had exited homelessness.

In accordance with my empiricist epistemological stance, IPA was the most relevant method of analysis (Willig, 2008) to capture the lived experience. Initially I found using IPA challenging, however I felt that it would provide the greatest depth of analysis and capture the lived experience holistically.

My interpretative competence was enhanced by my insight into participant's experiences due to my own experience of youth homelessness. This gave me a unique and intuitive understanding of their perceptions. However, it was important that I grounded my analysis in my data to ensure I interpreted the data accurately without my own intuitions and experience getting in the way. To reduce potential bias through prior assumptions, member checking was therefore a vital element of the study.

I had the belief that the common stereotypes of homeless young people were inaccurate and constricted. This potentially led me to underrate some of the negative aspects of individual's experiences whereby blame could be attributed, such as drug use in the hostel. However, due to the aims of the study, exploration of extensive topics such as drug use was not permitted and assessing the influence of social drug use should be researched in the future.

I found both researching past literature and engaging with the data fascinating. I believe that much can be drawn from my study both regarding future research areas

and practical implications. Moreover, participants in the study reported feeling empowered that their personal accounts were significant in research.

References

Altena, A., Beijersbergen, M. and Wolf, J. (2014) 'Homeless youth's experiences with shelter and community care services: Differences between service types and the relationship to overall service quality.' *Children and Youth Services Review*, 46 pp. 195-202.

Assink, M. and Schroots, J. (2010) *The dynamics of autobiographical memory*. 1st ed., Toronto: Hogrefe.

Bell, M. and Walsh, C. (2015) 'Finding a Place to Belong: The Role of Social Inclusion in the Lives of Homeless Men.' *The Qualitative Report,* 20(12) pp. 1974-1994.

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C. and Walter, F. (2016) 'Member Checking: A Tool to Enhance Trustworthiness or Merely a Nod to Validation?' *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13) pp. 1802-1811.

Boydell, K., Goering, P. and Morrell-Bellai, T. (2000) 'Narratives of Identity: Re-presentation of Self in People Who are Homeless.' *Qualitative Health Research,* 10(1) pp. 26-38.

Brinkmann, S. (2013) *Qualitative interviewing*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Brown, S. and Locke, A. (2008) 'Social Psychology.' *In* WIllig, C. and Stainton-Rogers, W. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Brueckner, M., Green, M. and Saggers, S. (2011) 'The Trappings of Home: Young Homeless People's Transitions Towards Independent Living.' *Housing Studies*, 26(1) pp. 1-16.

Bruner, J. (1991) 'The Narrative Construction of Reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 18(1) pp. 1-21.

Chamberlain, C. and MacKenzie, D. (2008) 'Youth Homelessness in Australia 2006.' *Youth Studies Australia,* 27(1) pp. 17-25.

Crisis. (2015) *The homelessness monitor: England 2015.* London: Crisis UK. [Online] [Accessed on 28th November] http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homelessness_Monitor_England_2015_final_web.pdf

Davies, D. (2000) 'Contributions from qualitative research.' *In* Davies, S., Nutley, S. and Smith, P. *What Works? Evidence-Based Policy and Practice in Public Services*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Davies, D. and Dodd, J. (2002) 'Qualitative Research and the Question of Rigor.' *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(2) pp. 279-289.

Eatough, V. and Smith, A. (2008) 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.' *In* Willig, C. and Stainton-Rogers, W. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology.*

Eatough, V. and Smith, A. (2007) 'Phenomenological Psychology.' In WIllig, C. and Stainton-Rogers, W. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Elliott, R., Fischer, C. and Rennie, D. (1999) 'Evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields.' *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 38(3) pp. 215-229.

Farrugia, D., Smyth, J. and Harrison, T. (2016) 'Moral distinctions and structural inequality: homeless youth salvaging the self.' *The Sociological Review,* 64 pp. 238-255.

Fernandez, M. A. (2002) 'Creating community change: Challenges and tensions in community youth research—an issue brief.' *JGC Issue Brief*, pp. 1–8.

Finlay, L., & Gough, B. (2003) *Reflexivity: A practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences.* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Fitzpatrick, K. (2017) 'Understanding community connectedness among homeless adults.' *Journal of Community Psychology*, 45(3) pp. 426-435.

Fontana, A. and Frey, J. (2000) The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. *In* Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
Fowler, F. (2013) *Survey research methods*. 5th ed. Sage publications. 112.

Fowler, F. (2013) Survey Research Methods. 5th ed., London: SAGE Publications.

Garrett, S., Higa, D., Phares, M., Peterson, P., Wells, E. and Baer, J. (2008) 'Homeless youths' perceptions of services and transitions to stable housing.' *Evaluation and Program Planning,* 31(4) pp. 436-444.

Gomez, R. and Ryan, T. (2015) 'Speaking Out: Youth Led Research as a Methodology Used with Homeless Youth.' *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 33(2) pp. 185-193.

Gonyea, J. and Melekis, K. (2016) 'Older homeless woman's identity negotiation: agency, resistance, and the constructions of a valued self.' *The Sociological Review,* pp. 1-17.

Gowan, T. (2010) Hobos, hustlers, and backsliders. 1st ed., Milleapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hartnett, H. and Harding, S. (2005) 'Geography and shelter.' *Journal of Progressive Human Services,* 16 pp. 25–46

Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (2004) 'The active interview.' *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice*, 2, 140-161.

Holtschneider, C. (2016) 'A part of something: The importance of transitional living programs within a Housing First framework for youth experiencing homelessness.' *Children and Youth Services Review,* 65 pp. 204-215.

Hossain, F. (2014) 'A Critical Analysis of Empiricism.' Open Journal of Philosophy, 4 pp. 225-230.

Howitt, D. (2010) Introduction to Qualitative Methds in Psychology. Essex: Pearson.

Jedlowski, P. (2001) 'Memory and Sociology: Themes and Issues.' *Time and Society,* 10(1) pp. 30-44.

Jetten, J., Haslam, C., Haslam, S., Dingle, G. and Jones, J. (2014) 'How Groups Affect Our Health and Well-Being: The Path from Theory to Policy.' *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 8(1) pp. 103-130.

Johnstone, M., Jetten, J., Dingle, G., Parsell, C. and Walter, Z. (2016) 'Enhancing Well-being of Homeless Individuals by Building Group Membership.' *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 26(5) pp. 421-438.

Jones, G. (1995) 'Youth homelessness and the 'underclass'.' *In (MacDonald, R.)* Youth, the 'underclass' and Social Exclusion. New York: Routledge.

Josselson, R. (2009) 'The Present of the Past: Dialogues With Memory Over Time.' *Journal of Personality*, 77(3) pp. 647-668.

Kagan, C., Burton, M. and Siddiquee, A. (2008) 'Action Research.' *In* WIllig, C. and Stainton-Rogers, W. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Kidd, S. (2007) 'Youth Homelessness and Social Stigma.' *Journal of Youth and Adolescence,* 36(3) pp. 291-299.

Kirtz, P., Lindsey, E., Jarvis, S. and Nackerud, L. (2000) 'How runaway and homeless youth navigate troubled waters: The role of formal and informal helpers.' *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 17(5) pp. 381-402.

Lawthom, R. and Tindall, C. (2011) 'Phenomenology.' *In* Banister, P., Bunn, G., Burman, E., Daniels, J., Duckett, P., Goodley, D., Lawthom, R., Parker, I., Runswick-Cole, K., Sixsmith, J., Smailes, S., Tindall, C. and Whelan, P. Qualitative Methods in Psychology A Research Guide (2nd ed.,) New York: Open University Press.

Lemon, N. and Taylor, H. (1998) 'Caring in casualty: The phenomenology of nursing care.' *In* Hayes, N. *Doing Qualitative Analysis in Psychology,* East Sussex: Psychology Press.

Lincoln, Y. and Guba. E. (1985) 'Naturalistic Enquiry', California: SAGE Publications.

Long, A. and Godfrey, M. (2004) 'An evaluation tool to assess the quality of qualitative research studies.' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7(2) pp. 181-196.

Mallett, S., Rosenthal, D. and Keys, D. (2005) 'Young people, drug use and family conflict: Pathways into homelessness.' *Journal of Adolescence*, 28(2) pp. 185-199.

Manzo, L. (2003) 'Beyond house and haven: toward a revisioning of emotional relationships with places.' *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 23(1) pp. 47-61.

Mayock, P., Corr, M. and O'Sullivan, E. (2010) 'Homeless young people, families and change: family support as a facilitator to exiting homelessness.' *Child & Family Social Work,* 16(4) pp. 391-401.

McAdams, D. (2006) *The redemptive self: Stories Americans live by.* New York: Oxford University Press.

McLoughlin, P. (2016 'Couch surfing on the margins: the reliance of temporary living arrangements as a form of homelessness amongst school-aged home leavers.' Journal of Youth Studies, 16(4) pp. 521-545.

Metts, S., Sprecher, S. and Cupach, W. (1991) 'Retrospective Self-Reports.' *In* Montgomery, B. and Duck, S. *Studying Interpersonal Interaction.* New York: The Guilford Press, pp. 162-173.

Parsell, C. (2011) 'Homeless identities: enacted and ascribed.' *The British Journal of Sociology,* 62(3) pp. 442-461.

Phelan, J., Link, B., Moore, R. and Stueve, A. (1997) 'The Stigma of Homelessness: The Impact of the Label "Homeless" on Attitudes Toward Poor Persons.' *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 60(4) pp. 323.

Rachlis, B., Wood, E., Zhang, R., Montaner, J. and Kerr, T. (2009) 'High rates of homelessness among a cohort of street-involved youth.' *Health & Place*, 15(1) pp. 10-17.

Rafferty, Y., Shinn, M. and Weitzman, B. (2004) 'Academic achievement among formerly homeless adolescents and their continuously housed peers.' *Journal of School Psychology*, 42(3) pp. 179-199.

Rew, L., Taylor-Seehafer, M., Thomas, N. and Yockey, R. (2001) 'Correlates of Resilience in Homeless Adolescents.' Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 33 (1) pp. 33-40.

Rokach, A. (2005) 'Private lives in public places: Loneliness of the homeless'*. Social Indicators research,* 72 pp. 99-114.

Rokach, A. (2006) 'The Loneliness of Youth Homelessness.' *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth,* 13(1-2) pp. 113-129.

Runswick-Cole (2011) 'Interviewing.' *In* Banister, P., Bunn, G., Burman, E., Daniels, J., Duckett, P., Goodley, D., Lawthom, R., Parker, I., Runswick-Cole, K., Sixsmith, J., Smailes, S., Tindall, C. and Whelan, P. Qualitative Methods in Psychology A Research Guide (2nd ed.,) New York: Open University Press.

Salomonsen-Sautel S,. Van Leeuwen, J., Gilroy, C., Boyle, S., Malberg, D. and Hopfer, C. (2008) 'Correlates of substance use among homeless youths in eight cities.' *American Journal on Addictions.* 17(3) pp. 224–234.

Sandelowski, M. (2004) 'Using Qualitative Research.' *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(10) pp. 1366-1386.

Santa Maria, D., Narendorf, S., Bezette-Flores, N. and Ha, Y. (2015) '"Then You Fall Off": Youth Experiences and Responses to Transitioning to Homelessness.' *Journal of Family Strengths,* 15(1) pp. 1-42.

Schmitz, R. and Tyler, K. (2016) 'Growing up before their time: The early adultification experiences of homeless young people.' *Children and Youth Services Review,* 64 pp. 15-22.

Shuy, R. (2003) 'In-person versus telephone interviewing.' *In* Holstein, J. and Gubrium, J. *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns.*

Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. Sage publications, 103-105.

Singh, K. (2007) *Quantitative Social Research Methods*, New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd.

Smith, J. (2011) 'Evaluating the contribution of interpretative phenomenological analysis.' *Health Psychology Review*, 5(1) pp. 9-27.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009) *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. England, London: Sage.

Smith and Eatough (2007) 'Interpretative Phenomenological Anslysis.' *In* Lyons, E. and Coyle, A. *Analysing Qualitative Data in Psychology*, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Smith, J. and Osborn, M. (2003) 'Interpretive phenomenological analysis.' *In* Smith, J. Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods. London: Sage.

Smith, J. and Osborn, M. (2008) 'Qualitative psychology: a practical guide to research methods.' *In* Smith, J. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 53-80.

Stablein, T. (2011) 'Helping Friends and the Homeless Milieu: Social Capital and the Utility of Street Peers.' *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography,* 40(3) pp. 290-317.

Stebbins, R. (2001) *Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences*. London: SAGE Publications.

Tajfel, H. (1982) *Social identity and intergroup relations*. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thompson, S. J., Pollio, D. E., Constantine, J., Reid, D., & Nebbitt, V. (2002). Short-term outcomes for youth receiving runaway and homeless shelter services. Research on Social Work Practice, 12, pp. 589–60.

Thompson, S., Ryan, T., Montgomery, K., Lippman, A., Bender, K. and Ferguson, K. (2013) 'Perceptions of Resiliency and Coping: Homeless Young Adults Speak Out.' *Youth & Society*, 48(1) pp. 58-76.

Tierney, W. (2015) 'Bringing it home: understanding the lives of homeless youth.' *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 28(6) pp. 757-758.

Toolis, E. and Hammack, P. (2015) 'The Lived Experience of Homeless Youth: A Narrative Approach.' *Qualitative Psychology,* 2(1) pp. 50-68.

Uhr, R. (2004) *Couch surfing in the burbs: young, hidden and homeless.* Brisbane: Queensland Community Connections.

Walsh, D., & Bull, R. (2012). Examining rapport in investigative interviews with suspects: Does its building and maintenance work?. *Journal of police and criminal psychology*, 27(1), 73-84.

Walter, Z., Jetten, J., Dingle, G., Parsell, C. and Johnstone, M. (2015) 'Two pathways through adversity: Predicting well-being and housing outcomes among homeless service users.' *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 55(2) pp. 357-374.

Watt, D. (2007) 'On becoming a qualitative researcher: The value of reflexivity.' *The Qualitative Report*, 12(1) pp. 82-101.

Willig, C. (2008) Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology.' 2nd ed., New York: Open University Press.

Willig, C. (2013) Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology. 3rd ed., New York: Open University Press.

Wolcott, H. (1994) Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, Analysis and Interpretation, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Wyn, J. and R. (2014) Rethinking Youth. 1st ed., Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Yin, R. (2016) Qualitative research from Start to Finish. 2nd ed., New York: The Guilford Press.