

Chapter 2

Youth Homelessness, Reflexivity and Inequality in Late Modernity

Situating youth homelessness as part of late modernity means coming to terms with important changes in the relationship between social structures, youth inequalities, and subjectivities in late modernity. Over the last three decades, young people have faced dramatic increases in inequality and material insecurity, which has impacted differently on young people with different levels of resources. In this context, youth homelessness represents one of the most extreme manifestations of contemporary youth poverty. By engaging with sociological theories of social change, in this chapter I explore youth homelessness within the changing dynamics of power and privilege that have emerged from these social changes. In times of social change, youth homelessness is one consequence of the widespread pressure on young people to manage structural processes as personal biographical events. Far from a homogeneous or universal phenomenon, the youth period is structured by social conditions that shape the lives of all young people in different ways. In this chapter, youth homelessness is relocated within these structures, as a position within broader youth inequalities and a dimension of the insecurity that all young people confront.

As such, this chapter begins by outlining the relevance of sociological theories of social change, focusing in particular on changing social structures and the discourses that dominate public discussions about how young people should manage their lives. I outline the meaning and consequences of individualisation and the impact of neoliberalism, including their relationship to contemporary youth subjectivities, and provide an account of the emergence of the modern individual as the central character of late modernity. With this in mind, the chapter makes a case for the concept of reflexive biographical management as a way of analysing how young people's subjectivities respond to contemporary structural conditions. The second half of the chapter positions youth homelessness as a structural location within these dynamics. In the section titled 'Youth Homelessness in Context', I show how homeless youth are positioned within these wider processes of social change. This encompasses new inequalities across urban and rural areas, the increasing reliance of young people on increasingly unstable family relationships, and the significance of home in late modernity. Youth homelessness is thereby located as a late modern form of inequality which emerges from the individualisation process. The chapter begins with a theoretical exploration of young people in late modernity.

Theorising Young People in Late Modernity

Young people are often the first to experience the consequences of social change (Furlong and Cartmel 2007), and the problem of change is an opportunity for new reflections on youth identities. Across youth studies there is now a great deal of evidence that contemporary structural conditions encourage, or indeed compel young people to approach and manage their lives as individual biographical projects. This finding speaks to a reshaped relationship between contemporary youth inequalities and young people's subjectivities, and thereby to the way in which young people manage homelessness. Theories of late modernity, and especially the concept of individualisation, provide a means by which young homeless subjectivities can be embedded within these broader processes of social change.

Individualisation

Chapter 1 discussed the importance of issues such as rationality, responsibility and self-control as central stakes in the social construction of homeless subjectivities. In delineating a population of unruly subjects defined by their lack of these attributes, these narratives point towards the contemporary cultural significance of the individual, and the personal sovereignty that the modern individual is said to possess and exercise. The cultural valorisation of personal sovereignty is not specific to late modernity however, and the power of ethical norms centred on the deciding individual can be traced back to pre-capitalist systems of religious morality. With the moral importance of the human soul and the use of the Christian confessional as a form of social control came responsibility for virtuous conduct as a reflection of a person's immortal soul (Abercrombie et al. 1986). However, contemporary individualisation is not a part of religious systems of governance, but a secular form of individualism which emerges in response to processes of detraditionalisation and structural fragmentation. Nevertheless, the contemporary emphasis on the individual retains this moral dimension.

Social changes described as a movement to 'liquid' or 'late' modernity (Beck 1992; Bauman 2000) have created new modes of social organisation which have reshaped contemporary youth subjectivities. One of the central characteristics of late modern subjectivities is an individualised relationship to the structural conditions that contemporary young people face. As two of the theorists tracing this shift have argued:

The ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

The sociological significance of this renewed emphasis on individually crafted biographies comes from two interconnected social changes that have reshaped the

terrain on which young people's subjectivities are formed. These include structural fragmentation and detraditionalisation.

Structural fragmentation describes the weakening of social bonds that formerly provided collective sources of meaning and resources for identity. Beck (1997, p. 95) argues that prior to individualisation, modern capitalist societies were structured like a series of 'Russian dolls' which fit together to create relatively stable social collectives. In this context, a traditional gendered division of labour underpinned the traditional nuclear family, which itself supported stable sources of industrial employment that provided the material basis for collective modes of social life built around social class. Writing in this era, Clarke et al. (1976, p. 37) paraphrase Cohen (1991) to describe the social context within which working class youth in London grew up:

First, the extended kinship network, which 'provides for many functions of mutual aid and 'support' and 'makes for cultural continuity and stability.' The kinship system dependent, in turn, on the ecological setting – the working class neighbourhood. This dense socio-cultural space 'helps to shape and support the close textures of traditional working-class life, its sense of solidarity, its local loyalties and traditions', and thus provides support 'with the day to day problems that arise in the constant struggle to survive'. Third, there is the structure of the local economy, striking for its diversity as well as the fact that 'people lived and worked in the East End – there was no need for them to go outside in search of jobs.'

Within this context, a significant body of youth studies research emerged which demonstrated how young people's identities fitted into the interlocking 'Russian dolls' of the nuclear family, industrial class structure, and communities based on social class. In different ways, studies such as Willis (1977), McRobbie (1978) and Brown (1987) showed that young people's identities were oriented towards reproducing forms of community similar to those of their parents, as well as drawing on collective understandings and explanations of the 'done thing' within this social and structural context. These communities provided a 'defensive class culture' (Clark et al. 1976, p. 37), which supported young people in constructing identities. It is important not to idealise this period: for the industrial working class, this ultimately resulted in working class boys getting working class jobs (Willis 1977) that were repetitive and poorly paid, while working class girls moved into nuclear families based on patriarchal assumptions that positioned women outside of public life. It was with these outcomes that a series of interlocking structures produced youth identities which drew on collective explanations for social life in order to reproduce the communities on which these structures were based (Farrugia 2013).

These interlocking structures have fragmented due to a collection of what Beck (1992) along with Giddens (1991) describes as disembedding processes. These are processes that break apart the coherence of these ways of life leading to the dissolution of collective sources of meaning and identity. This is what Beck (1992) has described as individualisation. Changes in the social organisation of work, changing and more diverse family structures, and a breakdown in the traditional gendered division of labour have all seen the formerly coherent Russian dolls break apart. The most important driving force for individualisation is the labour market. In

the contemporary capitalist labour market, workers are positioned as individual owners of labour power, a logic that works against the coherence of collective or traditional forms of social life. Whilst this has always been the case for capitalist societies, the individualising force of the labour market has been made more acute by changes in the social organisation of work that have, following the individualisation thesis, dissolved collectives based on social class. As part of deindustrialisation and the move to a service based economy, the contemporary youth labour market is increasingly fragmented and insecure, characterised by high rates of casualisation and low rates of pay. Young people are:

[M]ore likely to hold temporary contracts, work in the casual sectors of the labour market, in areas where their education or skills are not fully utilised or obtain fewer hours employment than they would really like...as a consequence, it can be argued that the life course has become more fluid, flexible and unpredictable. (Furlong and Kelly 2005, p. 222)

The result is a context of profound uncertainty and insecurity, as well as the absence of any material basis for the kinds of supportive communities described by Cohen above. In this context, Walkerdine et al. (2001) pose the following dilemma:

What used to be the working class is now dispersed into the service industry, their labour based on individual contracts, piecework, home work, and work in call centres, jobs for life having disappeared. The Fordist working class drew its strength and unity from the large numbers working in one location, with mass occupation of a single factory space. (p. 1).

If those traditional practices, as one of the sites where classed subjects have been constituted, have declined, then in what ways to subjects which previously understood themselves as working class now understand their class location? (p. 16)

The answer to this question from both social theory and youth studies is that subjectivities across social classes are now profoundly individualised (Farrugia 2013). In the absence of collective identities, young people must navigate an increasingly complex and insecure social environment as individuals, creating what Beck (1992) describes as biographical solutions to structural problems arising from the very social fragmentation that creates individualisation.

This structural fragmentation has been accompanied by the related process of detraditionalisation. With the increasing complexity in social organisation described above, traditional, 'taken for granted' or 'given' models for identity and social action have declined in their power and importance. Traditional class, gender, and family roles no longer provide an 'anchoring' (Giddens 1991, p. 87) for contemporary identities in the way they once did. Neither the nuclear family, nor the sexual division of labour that this structure presupposed can be taken for granted any more. Modern subjects do not do things according to 'how they should be done' but rather according to the ethic of individual self-fulfilment that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim describe above. The question of the 'right' way to live becomes the question of the life that is 'right for me.' The notion of individual self-fulfilment thereby becomes the central ethic of modern capitalist societies. However, detraditionalisation cannot be separated from another important cultural process, which is the power of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism

Whilst the individualisation thesis foregrounds structural processes, there are also important cultural or discursive processes through which this vision of modern subjectivity is imagined and promoted. This is provided by theorists working in the governmentality tradition, who identify the bodies of discursive knowledge or political rationalities through which societies are governed, and thereby provide an account of the relationship between social power relations and subjectivities. Following Foucault (1984) on the relationship between discursively constituted power relationships and social subjectivities, Rose and Miller (1992) analyse the creation and enforcement of moral and political norms through the constitution of society as an object of knowledge by various institutions including (but not limited to) the state. Societies are defined and managed through discourses which also constitute the social terrain on which subjectivities are constructed and practiced. In this way, dominant discourses, structural and institutional processes, and lived subjectivities all interact to produce the complex web of power relationships that make up late modernity. Theorists in this tradition have also been concerned with social change, and have also discussed the renewed significance of the choosing individual in contemporary modern societies.

These changes have involved a shift in the political culture of capitalist societies, with the move from welfare or social liberal to neoliberal forms of governance corresponding to the periods of 'first' and 'second' or late modernity. The sovereign individual is at the centre of both welfare liberalism and neoliberalism, but these two discourses differ in the way this subject is imagined. One of the central tenets of liberalism is the liberal political subject, who is a free individual endowed with universal natural rights which cannot be interfered with by the state. On the basis of this, liberal discourses create and delimit parts of the social which are off limits to direct government intervention. The economy and civil society are constructed as realms in which the liberal individual must be allowed to act free from a state with neither the capacity, knowledge or legitimacy to directly interfere in their actions (Burchell 1991). Governments that draw on welfare liberal discourses conceptualise the political subject as a citizen with social rights to education and protection from harm as well as responsibilities, such as work and participation in obligations to the welfare state. Following from these principles, the welfare state provided universal health, education and welfare benefits to allow the liberal subject to actively participate in society. In this way, the active freedom of the liberal subject became a condition of government (Rose 1991). This freedom remains central to neoliberal government, although is conceived differently.

Since the mid 1970s modern societies have been governed under a political rationality that is increasingly neoliberal (Dean 1998; Jamrozik 2005; Pusey 1991). Rose (1996) identifies two changes in the move from welfare liberalism to neoliberalism which are important for understanding the construction of the contemporary individual: firstly, in the move from welfare liberalism to neoliberalism aspects of social life which were previously the objects of knowledge of the human

sciences are reconstituted as subject to financial and economic logics. With the aim of increasing efficiency through competition in the market, formerly public goods owned by the state under the rubric of universal provision for citizens are privatised. Use of public goods is reconstituted as operating according to the logic of individual consumer activity.

Secondly, the subject is reimagined as an active, autonomous, rational consumer. The neoliberal self is actualised through reflexive consumption within various social spheres (educational, familial, economic and so on). Active subjects who manage risk and reflexively construct their own biography (Rose 1996; Higgs 1998) and who are productive, flexible and entrepreneurial (Jessop 1999) are a condition for neoliberal governance. Those who do not thrive and consume are the target for techniques of surveillance which seek to act on their subjectivity. In Australia this has taken the form of welfare policies which focus on self-esteem, motivation and 'job readiness' through coercive 'workfare' schemes (Carson et al. 2003), whilst the privatisation of welfare calls upon those occupying low social structural positions to actively consume their own welfare services (Dean 1998). Through either therapeutic or coercive means, consumers of welfare are encouraged to make rational decisions to enter the labour market and actualise responsible, reflexive subjectivities.

For young people, neoliberal governmentality is central to the emergence of risk as a means by which to govern disadvantage. As discussed in Chap. 1, this discourse has defined a large, heterogeneous group of structurally disadvantaged young people as 'at-risk' of failing to actualise the kinds of active subjectivities imagined by neoliberalism. Through the technology of risk and risk factor analysis, problems which are the outcome of structural inequalities are analysed as though they were individual level variables, attributes of the disadvantaged young people the discourse seeks to understand (France 2008). The subject of this discourse is a rational individual, and risks are understood as factors that are negotiated rationally (Tait 1995). Kelly (2006) has argued that discourses deployed to govern these youth at risk aim to do so by working on their subjectivities in order to bring them into alignment with the ideal young subject of late modernity—the 'entrepreneurial self.' This is a form of rational, reflexive, self-managing subjectivity which is able to negotiate risk and insecurity in order to navigate their way towards a productive, independent adulthood. Drawing on neoliberal discourses, the technology of risk effectively constructs disadvantaged young people as the binary opposite of this ideal neoliberal subject, contributing to the view that inequalities amongst contemporary youth are an outcome of a lack of personal responsibility which results in an inability to manage risk. In effect, these discourses are designed to govern inequality through the construction of individualised subjects. Kelly (2001) describes this as 'responsibilisation,' in which individual young people are made responsible for the biographical events they experience.

Neoliberalism has been a driving force of individualisation. The structural insecurity and fragmentation described by Beck has been governed through policies designed to encourage more flexible and individualised relationships to social life and discourage collective explanations or solutions for social problems. The

cultural impact of neoliberalism also cannot be overestimated, with the valorisation of individual choice and self-actualisation through consumption dovetailing with the structural changes of late modernity to idealise a life of freedom, progress and wish fulfilment. However, this discussion of neoliberalism also serves as a reminder of the moral imperatives that underpin the valorisation of individual rationality and self-control, as well as the power relationships that exhortations to self-management serve to reproduce. The abject figures constructed in narratives of homelessness discussed in chapter one exemplify the other side of the idealisation of individual self-fulfilment, as well as the ongoing power of personal control as a moral imperative in late modernity. The concept of reflexivity is discussed below in this context.

Reflexivity

The consequences of these changes for subjectivity can be usefully approached through the concept of reflexivity, which situates the ‘choosing, deciding individual’ within the social fabric of late modernity. For Beck, reflexivity is a characteristic of late modern societies in general, describing a range of social processes that change the conditions for their own operation. As the process occurs, the conditions for its actualisation are altered due to factors immanent to the process itself. With regards to subjectivity, this means that contemporary subjects take themselves as the authors of their own biography, constantly reflecting on the kind of person they have become and wish to be. Life becomes a project which must be consciously contemplated and reassessed with changing social conditions. The modern individual can no longer just ‘be,’ but must continuously produce themselves as a project to work upon. In this way, the concept of reflexivity aims to account for the social genesis of individualised subjectivities and the importance of an ethic of personal fulfilment in late modernity, as well as linking these large social changes with the intimate details and day to day practices of young people’s lives.

The emergence of reflexivity goes hand in hand with a decline in sources of meaning which situate the subject within a collective. One of the driving forces behind this is the fragmentation of the industrial class structure and the resulting changes in the sources of identity available to subjects in late modernity:

To express this metaphysically, one could say that the concave mirror of class consciousness shatters without disintegrating, and that each fragment produces its own total perspective, although the mirror’s surface with its myriad of tiny cracks and fissures is unable to produce a unified image. As people are removed from social ties and privatized through recurrent surges of individualization, a double effect occurs. On the one hand, forms of perception become private, and at the same time - conceiving of this along the time axis - they become *ahistorical*. (Beck 1992, pp. 134–135, emphasis in original)

With the shattering of the mirror of class consciousness, modern subjects conceive of themselves as reflexive, rational individuals, as indeed they must in order to survive the insecurity created by the structural fragmentation that Beck’s metaphor

describes. The result is a form of individualised subjectivity represented by the fragments of a broken mirror. Lacking a collective identity, individualised subjects are blind to the interdependences which continue to exist between self and others. Structural inequality continues to shape the biographies produced in this modern condition, but it is experienced a personal rather than a social process.

In this context, the sociology of youth has come to focus increasingly on themes such as insecurity, precariousness and complexity as dimensions of the youth period, as well as re-examining the problems that social change poses for understanding inequality (Andres and Wyn 2010; Chisholm and Hurrelmann 1995). These changes create a generational shift in the way that young people manage their lives, and that reflexive biographical management is a central defining feature of the 'post-1970s generation' (Wyn and Woodman 2006). Given the claims made about the consequences of social change for subjectivity, it is no surprise that research on youth subjectivities has come to focus on the problem of reflexivity and the way that it relates to inequalities. The ongoing importance of structural inequalities in young people's lives has led to anxieties and debates about the meaning of reflexivity for understanding contemporary youth. Furlong and Cartmel (2007) have described a focus on reflexivity as part of the 'epistemological fallacy of late modernity', and many authors worry that an excessive focus on reflexive subjectivities plays into the hands of neoliberalism (Roberts 2012). However, these theories of social change can also be used to rethink how inequalities are reproduced on the level of identities, and indeed holds the potential for rethinking youth homelessness as part of the changing social fabric of late modernity.

Reflexivity and Inequality

In a context where all contemporary young people are under pressure to manage life as a personal biographical project, it is possible to think of reflexivity as a means to connect social inequalities with personal identity work. A beginning to this project is suggested by Beck, who argues that individualisation processes actually represent a new and powerful way in which contemporary identities become standardised according to the logic of individualising structures and institutions:

This differentiation of socio-biographical situations is accompanied at the same time by a high degree of *standardisation*. Or more precisely, *the very same media which bring about an individualisation also bring about a standardization*. (Beck 1992, p. 130).

With the fragmentation of collective identities, the forms of subjectivity available to modern subjects become even more dependent on the labour market, the market in consumer goods, and institutions such as the welfare state. Each of these operates according to a logic premised on the rational, sovereign individual. Constructing a biography under these conditions means reflexively navigating an uncertain social terrain in order to experience a form of subjectivity which, Beck argues, actually becomes standardised according to the logic of these individualising forces.

Reflexivity thereby reflects the complexity of the social environment in which it emerges. Reflexive subjectivities do not necessarily gain more control over their environment, but are constituted in the logic of the individualising forces discussed above.

The evidence from the sociology of youth suggests that the social demands created by individualisation processes are socially differentiated, and that while reflexive identity work is an important part of all young people's identities, it takes different forms depending on the resources young people have available (Farrugia 2013). An example of this can be found in the work of Ball et al. (2000), who find that young people's relationship to themselves and approach to life is shaped by pre-existing assumptions based on their social relationships and level of social resources, but that the insecurity and complexity of the modern youth period means that these social resources must be mobilised reflexively if they are to translate into meaningful identities. A similar process is found by Walkerdine et al. (2001), who compares middle class young people on a 'conveyor belt' to success to young people with limited capital and no educational qualifications. For these disadvantaged young people, reflexivity means the struggle to construct a life in a context of profound insecurity. Parry (2006) shows that despite the lack of resources, disadvantaged young people continue to adhere to the importance of reflexivity and apply narratives of personal failure and success to their own lives.

In relation to subjectivity, this means that reflexivity is not merely a form of identity, but a practice through which structural processes are reproduced or changed. Beck summarises this in the following way: "*The individual...becomes the reproduction unit for the social in the lifeworld*" (1992, p. 90, emphasis in original). Social processes are reproduced at the level of individual reflexive subjects. The idea of self-creation becomes the *ethic* through which individual subjects create reflexive subjectivities constituted in the subject's interaction with their social and cultural environment. This means that reflexivity becomes a site at which wider social processes, including those which create inequality, can be analysed. The concept of reflexivity situates this process historically, as part of the changing terrain of late modernity. In this way, reflexivity ties social and structural changes together with changing forms of identity work to situate young people's identities as part of broader processes of social change.

With this in mind, the evidence summarised in Farrugia (2013) also suggests that despite the cultural emphasis on choice and rationality in late modernity, the individualisation process may actually erode young people's capacity to exert control over their social environment. Indeed, in the case of neoliberalism, the same processes that valorise personal responsibility are also those that undercut the capacity to exercise control over the structurally produced problems that may emerge. Discussing the contemporary meaning of individuality, freedom and control, Bauman suggests that individualisation is a particularly disabling process for those who experience disadvantage:

...there is a wide and growing gap between the condition of individuals *de jure* and their chances to become individuals *de facto* – that is, to gain control over their fate and make the choices they truly desire. It is from that abysmal gap that the most poisonous effluvia contaminating the lives of contemporary individuals emanate. (Bauman 2000, p. 39)

[O]nce the ‘negative freedom’ had been struggled for and won, the levers needed to transform it into ‘positive freedom’ – that is, the freedom to set the range of choices and the agenda of choice-making – [have] broken and fallen apart. (p. 51)

Bauman is describing a gap between the nominal or ‘in principle’ freedom which modernity offers from traditional ways of life and the actual possibilities for action and identity available to modern individuals. The modern individual is nominally free, but remains dependent on structural processes for their possibilities for action. The same change that liberated the modern individual from traditional ways of life also eventually fragmented and destabilised the collective structures which provided stability and protection against the insecurity which has come to characterise modern societies. Individualisation has disembedded modern subjects from traditions and collective structures, and re-embedded them into a context in which their structural location remains paramount in determining the content of their biography, but which lacks the security of previous eras.

Drawing on Bauman’s metaphor above, for many this means that the ‘levers’ which they must use in order to act are no longer available to them. Individualised inequality therefore has a distinctive character which comes from the gap Bauman identifies between individuals in principle and individuals in fact. While all modern subjects are disembedded from traditional ways of life and from communities based on class cultures, the outcomes of this remain uneven. Those who occupy powerful structural locations find new avenues for social action available to them. However, contemporary disadvantage is at least as disempowering as previous forms of classed inequality. As Bauman and Beck both emphasise, the process of individualisation has created a large mass of perpetually insecure and disadvantaged people. Those who occupy disadvantaged structural locations no longer have access to even the benefits of life in the industrial working class, since this collective has been fragmented into a heterogeneous array of insecure social positions lacking a collective identity. For the disadvantaged, individualisation may actually be a process whereby older sources of material and cultural resources are destroyed. This has resulted in a growing anxiety about the ‘underclass,’ a term which describes a large mass of very disadvantaged people with seemingly no avenues of escape from structural disempowerment (Lash and Urry 1994). In the sociology of youth, this is reflected in the debate over the meaning and purpose of the term ‘underclass,’ as well as governmental concern over what the British government has referred to as “status zero youth,” or young people who are neither in education, training, or work (MacDonald 1997). Metaphorically, it could be said that the fragmentation of collective structures has created more holes for disadvantaged people to fall down, longer distances to fall, and less ladders allowing them to climb back up.

The experience of homelessness amongst young people can be usefully understood as a part of this structural context. Below, I situate contemporary youth

homelessness within these processes, drawing on the social conditions described by authors in the sociology of youth. As one aspect of modern inequality, “youth homelessness” is a structural location which emerges at the intersection of other structural processes, including inequalities in the labour and housing market, as well as changing family structures. Understanding this form of inequality in terms of the distinctive features of late modern social structures provides a conceptual link between the subject positions constructed by the young people in this book and wider power relations structure the biographies of all contemporary young people.

Youth Homelessness in Context

Perhaps the most widespread assumption of much homelessness research is that youth homelessness is a discrete social problem that has specific, isolatable causes or risk factors. Understanding youth homelessness in a social context is thereby often reduced to understanding the ‘causes’ which create this problem. In the process, homelessness is constructed as a separate and distinct ‘social problem’ with specific causes, rather than an intrinsic part of the social fabric of late modernity (Farrugia and Gerrard 2015). Rather than isolating youth homelessness through a search for disparate risk factors, in this section youth homelessness is positioned as an acute form of contemporary youth inequality and a dimension of the structural divisions that shape all young people’s lives. Far from an extraordinary deviation from the ‘mainstream,’ homelessness is a part of the social changes traced by the individualisation thesis. This can be seen through a theoretical exploration of three social domains: youth, or the overall shape of the youth period across urban and rural areas; family, or the consequences of individualisation on young people’s position in their families; and home, or the need for a secure personal foundation and the increasing uncertainty of the material means by which to satisfy this need. For understanding subjectivity, youth homelessness can be seen as an individualised form of disadvantage that emerges from the social dynamics of these three domains and that compels a reflexive attitude to life.

Youth Inequalities and Family Support

The previous chapter discussed how many academic constructions of disadvantaged or ‘at-risk’ youth construct them as deviant from a normative developmental pathway defined by milestones such as full time work and family formation. In the developmental model, young people begin in a position of dependence and irrationality. They are dependent on their family and those around them for their existence and identity. Moreover, they are irrational in the sense that they are hormonally and neurologically predisposed to take risks and generally behave in irresponsible ways (Bessant 2008). As time goes on, young people mature, reaching

universal age based developmental milestones. As these milestones are reached, young people move from dependence and irrationality to a mature, independent adulthood. This adulthood is marked by full time work and nuclear family formation, usually by the early or mid-twenties. However, this developmental pathway is not only disconnected from the material realities facing disadvantaged young people, but reflects what Blatterer (2007) calls a cultural ‘normative lag,’ in which the experiences of one generation (those born during the ‘baby boom’ after the second world war) are universalised and used to judge the biographies of other, subsequent generations (Wyn and White 1997).

These biographies, and the landscape of inequality they are structured by, have changed as individualisation reshapes the youth period (Dwyer and Wyn 2001). Deindustrialisation and structural fragmentation have made the youth period increasingly insecure, and this insecurity has influenced different young people differently. On the one hand, du Bois-Reymond (1998) has described a ‘cultural elite’ of young people who are faced with an increasing array of life options. The structural advantages these young people enjoy has resulted in the idea of the ‘choice biography’ as a means to describe how detraditionalisation and structural fragmentation has created more diverse forms of life which must be reflexively negotiated. du Bois-Raymond shows that while these young people are uncertain about the future, they are nevertheless confident in their own personal ability to construct a successful biography. On the other hand, the insecurity that these same changes create has also resulted in many young people living in entrenched structural disadvantage. These young people are effectively excluded from the labour market, the education system, and other areas of social life which young people must engage with in order to build lives (MacDonald 1997).

These changes have also created new inequalities between young people in urban and rural areas, and rural youth homelessness has become a significant and unrecognised problem. In a country as large as Australia, rural young people have always been placed at a disadvantage in relation to their engagement with education and their access to basic services, and neoliberal policies have exacerbated this geographical inequality. Whilst rural areas are often seen as idyllic sanctuaries from the pressures of a globalised modernity, the social changes connected with individualisation have had a strong impact on rural youth. The decline of manufacturing and agriculture in rural Australia has taken place alongside the emergence of a service sector located primarily in urban metropolitan centres. Young people in rural Australia now face an increasingly precarious social landscape, with educational and employment opportunities increasingly concentrated in the city (Farrugia 2014). As Cuervo and Wyn (2012) have argued, these geographical inequalities mean that rural youth make up one of the many ‘deviant’ populations created by the developmental approach to youth.

This insecurity is exacerbated by social policies framed by the assumptions of neoliberalism and the developmental approach to youth. Both wages and welfare benefits are means tested and set at low levels which increase with age. The youth wage system stipulates that young people are paid less than others for the same work, and with increasing unemployment and longer periods spent in education has

contributed to an increase in the dependency of young people on their families (Schneider 2000). This policy environment can be attributed to assumptions about the relationship between young people and the family: wages and welfare benefits are designed on the assumption that young people have access to family support, and that they will remain dependent on their families until they become adults. The discourses deployed in order to govern the youth period remain based on a model which views young people as progressively moving towards dependence to independence and adult responsibility (Wyn and White 1997).

Despite the emphasis on independence and responsibility in these social policies, their effect has been to make young people more dependent on their families. It is the family that has stepped in to provide young people with security in an increasingly insecure world, a process which Hutson and Liddiard (1997) describe as 'taking the strain' created by unemployment and hostile social policies. The period of time during which young people are dependent on their parents has increased. Young people are living with their parents for longer, and often return home after leaving (Hartley and Wolcott 1994; Schneider 2000). Family support is crucial for young unemployed people, providing them with resources and a stable base from which to take small or casual jobs and accumulate experience in the hope of gaining a more stable foothold later on. For very disadvantaged young people, family support can mean the difference between engaging with the labour market, or experiencing further marginalisation such as homelessness (Parry 2006). Essentially, in this individualised context, disadvantaged young people have only themselves, and their families to rely on.

Family support is also crucial for young people to engage with the housing market. Under a neoliberal policy regime that has emphasised subsidised homeownership over the provision of social housing (Jamrozik 2005), the cost of housing has increased steadily over the period of time described by individualisation theorists (Beer et al. 2007). The same policy focus has led to a massive underinvestment in public housing. Australian public housing has become residualised, synonymous with areas of extreme disadvantage and unable to cater for the housing needs of the population (Jacobs et al. 2010). The availability of public housing is poor in both urban and rural areas: whilst cities are increasingly being rebranded as spaces of consumption for the middle class, rural areas often lack any housing services at all. For these reasons, young people require support from their family in order to achieve independent housing of their own. Jones' (1995) analysis of the pathways into housing taken by young people shows that young people coming from middle and upper class family backgrounds receive substantial material support from their families, and often remain reliant on them for financial assistance in times of need. Disadvantaged young people are unable to access such resources, and when family relationships do not allow young people to return to the family home if necessary, homelessness is often the result.

However, whilst the family has increased in importance for young people, it has also become more unstable, a process related to the increasing detraditionalisation of social relations. Increased dependence of young people on their parents often destabilises families, since it can result in financial problems, particularly for those

families who are less able to continue to support their children (Aquilino and Supple 1991; Hartley and Wolcott 1994). These structural pressures have increased at a time where the detraditionalisation of family life has meant that the meaning of intimate relationships is no longer taken for granted. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that the increasing fragmentation and institutionalised individualism of the labour market has meant that intimate relationships become more contingent and must be constantly renegotiated to deal with the pressures and aspirations of all members. Rising divorce rates and changes in family structures reflect this trend. Whilst the family is, in a sense, one of the stages on which these structural processes are played out, its conflicts are experienced as the outcome of individual dreams, aspirations and life plans. The social is made personal and reflected in family instability and change.

Young people's relationship to the family reflects the instability of contemporary social structures. In order to deal with insecurity, young people must rely on the family, itself an unstable institution. Despite this instability, the family is increasingly important, precisely because of the insecurity which young people face outside of the family. Essentially, the family is what provides young people with the ability to construct identities in other areas of social life by providing the security required to engage with the labour and housing market. The implications of a lack of family support for the subjectivities available to young people experiencing homelessness can be better understood through a discussion of the relationship between family and home.

Home

As the title of many studies about "leaving home" indicate (Ainley 1991; Jones 1995; Tang 1996) those young people who have yet to leave their parents house and create a home of their own are said to be "at home" when they are in the family home. These studies indicate a widespread cultural association of home with family, particularly for those who have not reached the normative age at which young people are expected to leave the parental house and create homes and families of their own. In the case of young people who have not yet "left home", this means that being at home means living with their family of origin. However, examining the meaning of home reveals the importance of home for young people facing the consequences of individualisation, and has important implications for the subjectivities of young people who are home-less.

Home has been understood from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (Mallett 2004). Some, such as Saunders and Williams (1988) understand home as the household, one of the fundamental structural units of society. Others emphasise the ideological functions of home, arguing that home is a fictional ideal of domestic bliss which serves to obscure the classed and gendered power relations that constitute the actual private sphere and its relation to the public (Bowlby et al. 1997; Haraven 1991). Here I focus on the role that home plays both as a place for certain

social practices, and as a sign representing citizenship and political power. Homelessness is the absence of both of these: the inability to practice certain forms of identity work, and the disempowerment that exclusion from home creates.

Dovey (1985) views home as one part of the phenomenological experience of certain binaries or dialectical tensions. On this view, home is constituted in the social dialectics of self/other, private/public, inside/outside, order/chaos, familiarity/strangeness. The meaning of home reflects these binaries. Many empirical studies investigating the idea of home for young people often begin by asking participants what home means to them. In this literature, home means a physical space that one creates, decorates, and has control over (Lahelma and Gordon 2003). Home is a place of autonomy and freedom, and a space one can exclude others from at will (Peterson 2000). It is a physical home base which one is responsible for and can feel secure and comfortable in, providing safety and protection (Arnold 2004). Home is where one can prepare for the outside world in privacy (Stephen 2000). Home means peace, normality, comfort and stability (Lahelma and Gordon 2003). Home is also the place where certain kinds of identity work can happen. Home means a place to construct and work on the self, to manage relationships by creating a boundary between self and other (Peterson 2000). For the homeless young people in Robinson (2005), the comfort and security of home means that home is where one can construct a positive and valued identity. Home also means stability, history and authenticity. Home is the locus of the biography, providing a stable biographical reference point (Lofgren 1997), a place of rest as opposed to movement or journey (Dovey 1985). Home, then, is a haven which protects the self against the anonymity, chaos, danger and unpredictability of the public sphere. Venturing into the public requires preparation that is only possible at home.

While Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) describe the increasing contingency of intimate relationships as a response to structural complexity and instability outside the family, Finch (1989) suggests that in a period of social change, family relationships remain the most stable because they have a distinctive moral meaning. Asking whether kinship relations are 'special', Finch concludes that family relations are distinctive in that they provide a sense of social 'place' which is less contingent than other relationships. Kinship relations create bonds which are taken for granted. Family members do not have to 'become' part of the family. Rather, a person is born into their family, and in one way or another is related to it for life. Family relations also involve a sense of obligation and responsibility which is distinct from obligations associated with other relationships. Although the exercise of these obligations cannot be taken for granted, they retain a distinct moral character. As moralised relationships, family provides a sense of one's 'proper' place in the world. The family situates its members in relation to the rest of society and provides a sense of authenticity and rootedness. In this way, the idealised fantasy of home is inseparable from the idealised and moralised significance of family in late modernity. On an ideal level, both family and home represent personal history, stability, and authenticity. This ideological meaning of home can also be understood through a discussion of the relationship between the public and the private.

The distinction between the public and the private is foundational to modernity (Slater 1998). The public/private distinction has been subject to feminist critiques which have argued that the privateness of the private has been used to ignore or legitimise gendered power relations within the home (Gamarnikow et al. 1983). It is important not to romanticise the idea of home. However, examining the way the public and the private have been socially constructed provides an insight into the ideological meaning of home, family, and the private sphere. According to Slater (1998), the public and the private represent other binaries which are foundational to modern societies. Nature/culture, emotion/reason, consumption/production are all reflected in the meaning of the private and the public respectively. The private is seen as the place for intimacy, authenticity, and personal identity. The public is seen as impersonal, the space for reason, rationality and production. Yet the two are mutually constitutive. The private sphere, as the root of authenticity and identity construction, is idealised as the place where the public individual's true needs and desires originate. The public sphere is idealised as the space in which public individuals engage in trade, work, and public debate. The authenticity of the private sphere thus legitimises the activity of the public.

As one dimension of the private sphere, the home is critical for participation in the public. Arnold (2004) shows that historically the home has been a symbol of morality and a symbol of the rationality of the public individual. At the time when property ownership was a condition for entering public life, home ownership was a symbol of a productive contribution made to society and hence to the public sphere. "Notions of home represent economic independence, hard work, and the idea that one belongs in this world..." (Arnold 2004, p. 71). Home therefore means responsibility, productivity and morality. A home is also a material necessity for voting and employment, making home a precondition for full engagement in society. Essentially, to be a member of the public, both materially and symbolically, one must also have access to the private. Public existence requires a home. Labour market legislation and welfare policy is built on the assumption that young people can, and should, remain at home with their parents until a certain normatively prescribed age. Lower youth wages and lower benefit levels for younger welfare recipients both assume that young people can and should remain in the family home, and act to create this dependency. Young people outside the family home are therefore outside of their proscribed place in the private sphere. With these considerations in mind, the characteristics of youth homelessness as a structural location can now be explored.

Youth Homelessness as a Structural Location

Homelessness is what happens when family, and home, are no longer available to young people. When this happens, they are placed in an extremely insecure structural position, which over time is exacerbated by the specific effects of homelessness as a form of material deprivation. Young people are no longer able to

stay at home for a range of reasons, usefully understood as those factors which young people are 'running from,' and things which they are 'running to' (Rosenthal et al. 2006). The first category includes reasons which have forced young people to leave a situation which they feel is less desirable than the uncertainty of homelessness. Family conflict, violence, trauma, physical and sexual abuse all fall into this category and are common experiences for these young people. The second category describes a desire for independence which some young people report as a motivating factor in leaving home. However, as the authors suggest, these categories are difficult to separate. The desire for independence takes on a new meaning when understood in relation to family violence or abuse. The significance of family conflict and violence is common to most literature on the precipitating causes of youth homelessness from a variety of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998; Fitzpatrick 2000; Mallett et al. 2010; Powers et al. 1990; Sykes 1993; Smollar 1999).

Class background is also an important factor in creating the conditions for youth homelessness (McCarthy et al. 2009; van der Ploeg and Scholte 1997; NYC 2008). Most of the participants in Fitzpatrick (2000) were from working class backgrounds, and Burrows (1997) finds that a past experience of homelessness is more common amongst working class adults. Class is therefore an important aspect of the conditions which lead to homelessness, and youth homelessness should be understood as a part of the broader relations of inequality which structure the biographies of all young people (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). However, structural inequality has a particular character for young people experiencing homelessness due to their lack of family support.

When for whatever reason young people no longer have access to family support and the family home, they are placed in a position of extreme insecurity. Despite the importance of processes which have destabilised the conventional nuclear family, family remains one of the most important sources of structural stability for contemporary youth. Family resources provide the security required for young people to interact with a labour and housing market that is stacked against them. Families have become increasingly important due to the same processes that have destabilised them. Without family support, young people in a uniquely individualising structural location: they are in a uniquely insecure position, and dependent on institutions for their day to day needs.

As described by a number of studies (Fitzpatrick 2000; Sykes 1993) young people experiencing homelessness find it extremely difficult to continue to engage with school and work, and most are unable to continue in either of these contexts. The experience of homelessness makes it difficult to find work, and often forces young people to drop out of education, since more basic necessities such as food and accommodation take priority. Instability with regards to accommodation means that young people are often moving from place to place, staying at the houses of others or in various accommodation institutions. They are marginalised from the labour and housing market, and experience insecurity with regards to the basic necessities of life. In order to survive these conditions, young people become

dependent on the institutions which comprise the homelessness service delivery sector.

If, in a detraditionalised society “[n]eeding to *become* what one *is* is the hallmark of modern living,” (Bauman 2002, p. xv) then home, and family, become doubly important. These are the only remaining contexts in which one does not need to become, and can simply be. Home and family become havens against the instability and contingency of the outside, providing anchors for identity in a context where all identities seem contingent, and feeling authentic requires identity work (Giddens 1991). In the absence of home, young people experiencing homelessness are excluded from access to the private sphere, and the identity work this allows. Despite the increasing contingency of family relationships, family ties remain one of the few sources of ‘rootedness’ available to contemporary youth. One does not have to *become* who one is in these contexts. Without a home, constant identity work is the only option. Homelessness is therefore an individualising phenomenon: it involves tremendous structural insecurity, requires contact with institutions for survival, and disconnects young people from the only taken for granted, traditional source of identity remaining in late modernity: the family. This means that while youth homelessness is a structural location and a part of broader relations of inequality, it is unique not only in its acuteness, but also in the implications for identity construction. Homelessness takes away the usual anchors for identity in the sense described by Giddens (1991). In terms similar to Bauman’s cited above, youth homelessness represents the largest gap between being free in principle, and being free in fact, that may exist in modern societies.

Conclusion

Youth homelessness is often seen as a discrete ‘social problem,’ extraordinary to the normal operation of capitalist societies (Farrugia and Gerrard 2015). Young people who experience homelessness are usually written about as unruly or deviant populations who bear risk factors that impact on their capacity and inclination to responsibly govern themselves. In the process, narratives about homelessness act to construct a ‘mainstream’ of morally responsible young people on a normatively prescribed pathway to increasing self-governance signified by successful work, educational and family transitions. In this sense, the construction of youth homelessness as a discrete social problem is a means by which these ideal young subjectivities may be constructed and the moral boundaries which separate them from the unruly and irresponsible homeless may be drawn.

In response, it is vital that youth homelessness research is situated within a critical perspective on the social conditions shaping all young people’s lives. In the movement from ‘first’ to ‘second’ or late modernity traced by both the individualisation thesis (Beck 1992), a shift in the patterns of social organisation and modes of subjectivity that shape young people’s lives has created youth homelessness as a position within the dynamics of power and privilege that shape the youth period.

Whilst insecurity is now a structural feature of the youth period, individualisation has influenced different young people differently. Whilst all young people are encouraged to aspire to a life of opportunity and self-actualisation, the resources required to construct these identities are distributed unequally. Under the same emphasis on individual self-governance, young people have been made increasingly dependent on their families for material support by lack of welfare benefits, low youth wages, and a hostile labour and housing market. Youth homelessness is what happens when family support is taken away.

Despite the widespread cultural associations between homelessness, irresponsibility and moral failure, youth homelessness is a particularly visible example of the demands placed on young people to self-govern in conditions of uncertainty. In this sense, youth homelessness is a particularly profound form of individualised disadvantage and a manifestation of the structural demands placed on young people in late modernity. Going forward, this book will explore the way that young people's subjectivities are forged in the reflexive management of homelessness and of making home. The next chapter moves from a focus on youth homelessness as a structural location to consider the way that young homeless subjectivities are assembled within the universe of cultural meanings available to them in late modernity.

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