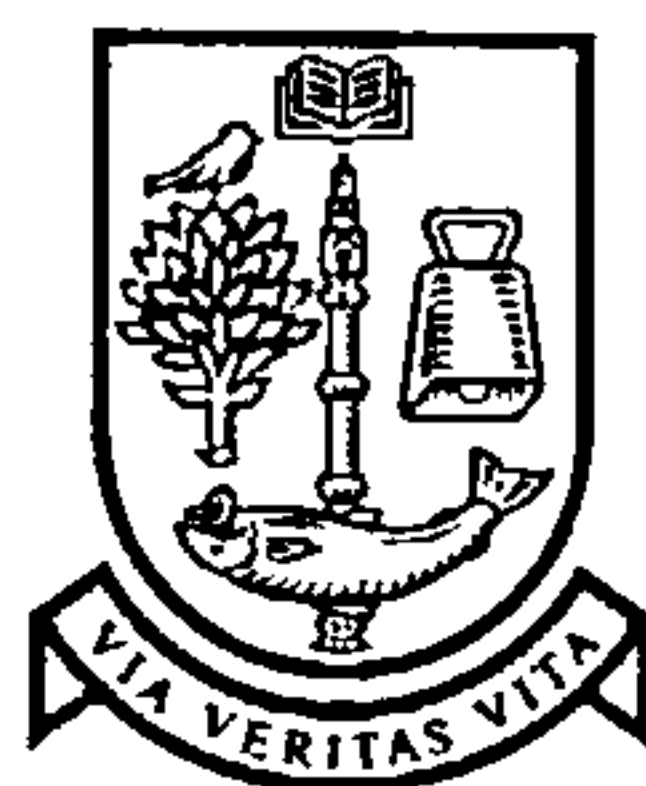


# Understanding Transitions through Homelessness in a Risk Society.

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## ABSTRACT

Previous analyses of homelessness have been accused of lacking theoretical and conceptual clarity. This study aimed to rectify this through an analysis of data collected using a qualitative longitudinal research methodology on the transitions through homelessness made by twenty-eight people in a Scottish city. This was informed epistemologically and ontologically by structuration theory and realism – that people operate within a structured and embodied external reality, that their actions and interactions then go on to recreate or transform, in an ongoing reflexive cycle.

Three key factors were found to influence the transitions the participants made – the access to different forms of capital (the resources) they had; their social networks and relationships; and experiences of ‘edgework’ (experiences of traumatic risk situations, such as domestic violence; or of voluntary risk taking such as drug use; that encapsulate the need to negotiate risk on both emotional and physical levels). These three factors played a key role in constituting the day-to-day lives of the participants, and it was due to an interaction of these factors that they all came to the point whereby they had to access services of the social welfare system as ‘homeless people’ to assist them resolve housing problems. These factors may affect anyone’s lives, but only when their resources are depleted to the point they have to rely on the state in this way do they become ‘homeless’ and enter the material and emotional ‘reality’ of homelessness. This is the new theory on homelessness, causation and individual actions, developed here – the ‘stressed’ theory.

By the end of the research the majority of the participants (nineteen) were living in their own tenancies. Nine remained without their own housing. It may have appeared that those who had their own tenancy had made integrative transitional passages out of homelessness, however the majority of the participants were actually found to be ‘flip-flopping’ on the edge of society, whether still homeless or not. When the fundamental structural reality they operated in had not changed, their risk of homelessness and the motivation for, or experience of, actions that appeared to have led to their homelessness, remained. In this way they were becoming trapped individuals.

Actions they engaged in to assert their agency were also actions that were motivated by, and then recreated, the structural reality they operated within – a reality of marginality and of a poverty of resources. This was also what provided the rationale for actions that may appear irrational, such as drug use, in the face of making a transition out of homelessness. A key aspect of these transitions however was that despite this, all the participants did continue to strive to make transitions, assert their agency, and engage in actions to gain more ‘meaning’ in their lives, illustrating the power and the potential for transformation that exists in each individual in society – power that could be harnessed through the implementation of policy and the development of knowledge, to address the suffering of emotional and material poverty that continued to exist even when homelessness, as a material housing problem, was objectively resolved.

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## CHAPTER ONE: HOMELESSNESS IN LATE MODERNITY

*'The dance on the periphery may not be leading anywhere, but at least it celebrates a refusal to sleep; a resistance to arrest; a mode of motion'*

(Gardiner in Cohen & Taylor, 1992: 236)

### 1.1 Introduction

The homeless person is an evocative social character of late modernity. Homelessness encapsulates many things: outsiders, poverty, inequality, criminality, fear, difference, pity, crisis, anomie, (Fooks & Pantazis, 1999; Somerville, 1992). The homeless may be perceived to be part of an underclass, culpable for their own situation and morally irresponsible (Macdonald, 1997), or part of a new poor of late modern society where inequality is widening (Bauman, 1998). With the advent of *'(f)lexible labour markets, greater job insecurity, the erosion of the Keynesian welfare state and a greater fragility in relationships (...) it is possible to fall further and faster and (...) risk and insecurity are now more pervasive* (Forrest, 1999:17). Within this structural context, homelessness can be viewed as *'a general metaphor for severe and typically multifaceted experiences of marginality and exclusion from mainstream society'* (Forrest, 1999: 17). This exclusion may be related to structurally based poverty, yet it is often the individual problem factors in the lives of people experiencing homelessness that come to define how it is discursively understood. The homeless become in this way an archetypal 'outsider' group – *'homelessness is distinguished by a lack of social status, invisibility or a 'problem' to others, with the homeless being seen as outcast and rejected, at the bottom of the social scale, disreputable and nicheless'* (Somerville, 1992: 532).

This thesis represents a new perspective on homelessness in late modernity, developed using qualitative biographical case studies. These were generated empirically through qualitative longitudinal research methodology. This theoretical perspective aims to provide an insight into how individual factors and structural context interacts and leads to homelessness, for some people, in some circumstances. The thesis presents findings that stem from an analysis concerned not only with transitions through homelessness, but also what these transitions illustrate about governance, identity, risk, and the ongoing interchange of how individuals both shape



and are shaped by their social and material world. The epistemological approach to this is underpinned by realist ontology. This ontology asserts that there is a real material external world that exists independently of any one individual. However it is through subjective understanding of this world, and the interactions that are played out within this material world, that society comes to exist. Therefore both this reality and how it is understood by and affects the actions of individuals, has to be explored, to be able to understand society. This externally structured reality therefore creates, and is created by, the individuals that operate within it – the realist approach used here is fused with structuration theory in this way - and this fusion provides the ontological and epistemological framework within which these findings can be understood.

Homelessness is a social problem that has been a key focus of recent policy developments and of ‘targeting’ by the state, particularly in the UK. This indicates the strong currency that homelessness has as a discursively understood phenomenon (Anderson, 2004; May, Cloke & Johnsen, 2005). There has been much academic research and debate into homelessness in recent years (For example, Kennett & Marsh, 1999; Jacobs, Kemeny & Manzi, 1999; Fitzpatrick, Kemp & Klinker, 2000). Many ideas have been developed about why homelessness occurs and how it can be defined and understood. However there has been little exploration of *transitions through* homelessness, over time, that actually focus on the *experiences of the individuals* making these transitions. This thesis aims to address this by presenting and analysing biographical case studies of the experiences of a group of people as they made transitions through homelessness. The social context in which the participants made these transitions is broadly conceptualised here as a ‘risk society’.

### *Why a Risk Society?*

Far-reaching changes have taken place in the social and political context that individuals operate within over recent years, on a global scale. Technological developments, the overarching success of global capitalism, changing welfare states, ecological change, and new patterns of family life, relationships, and employment markets, the ending of the Cold War, and the emergence of ‘new’ national terrorist threats, are just some of the factors that have led to this. These developments are

themselves recognised as being the (sometimes unintended) consequences of the process of modernity. This 'late modern period', has been famously encapsulated by Beck (1992; 1999) as a 'risk society'. This is a time of second, reflexive, modernity, distinct from, but following on from, first modernity, as the structures of full employment, the nuclear family, clear class, gender, and national identities, become increasingly fragmented and fluid (Giddens, 1991; 2002). Whether or not people may indeed fall 'further and faster' in these conditions (Forrest, 1999:17), it is argued that processes of individualisation and reflexivity have led to an increased awareness of potential risk, coupled with the continued desire to reflexively manage and negate it (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1999). This has affected individuals and how their actions are perceived in profound ways and discursively fed into the institutions and mechanisms used to govern society, as well as the individual lives of those interacting with and creating these mechanisms. There has been a burgeoning preoccupation with risk in recent years: from how risks are constructed and understood (Douglas, 1992); to how risk management strategies have fed into the social welfare system (Dean, 1999); to conceptualising voluntary risk taking (Lyng, 1990; 2005), for example. The concept of a risk society as it is used here engages broadly with theoretical approaches on the current preoccupation with risk that exists and how this preoccupation may have shaped both the actual structural reality individuals operate within, and how they ontologically experience this. This is the context of the risk society that this thesis refers to.

This thesis is about being homeless in late modernity, and how one group of people experienced their transitions through homelessness within these conditions. It is therefore about the negotiation of many risks over time. It is about how the participants experienced, and attempted to make, transitions through homelessness, and about the contact with a key institutional mechanism developed to address and regulate risk that the participants had - their contact with the social welfare system. It is also about how their identity and sense of ontological security was affected by being homeless and what happened over their lives, beyond 'being homeless'.

## *Research Aims*

This thesis examines homelessness, agency, structure, identity, risk and governance, and how these interacted to impact upon the transitions the participants here made. To explore this, firstly, their transitions into, through, and in some cases, out of, homelessness, were charted and analysed. This analysis developed to address three key research aims:

1. To examine the interaction and influence of agency and structure on the participants' transitions;
2. To assess the role services of the social welfare had on these transitions and the participants' circumstances;
3. To explore how other factors such as the participants' identity and sense of ontological security interacted with the situation they were in.

In the first chapter the empirical and theoretical context is set through a review of recent literature. In chapter two the research methods, methodology and the ontological and epistemological framework used is outlined. This includes a detailed description of how agency and structure are defined in this analysis. The data, how it was collected and analysed, and the characteristics of the research sample are then outlined. In chapter three the participants' biographies and the transitions into homelessness they took are outlined and analysed. The findings are then brought together to present a new theory of homelessness, causation, and individual actions. This theory is informed by structuration theory and realist ontology and uses the concept of edgework to develop this new theoretical approach to understanding homelessness. In chapter four the participants' actual transitions through homelessness over the course of the research are presented. Three transitional routes that they took are identified and discussed before summarising the findings of these two chapters. In this way the participants transitions through homelessness are charted and analysed before going on to discuss key factors that affected them.

In chapter five the role of the social welfare system, and the micro-level interactions that the participants engaged in as they negotiated with this system, are analysed, to assess the role that this system played in constraining or enabling the participants'



ongoing transitions. And in chapter six, the other factors that may have impacted on the transitions through homelessness that the participants took, particularly their sense of identity, the day-to-day interactions they engaged in, and the sense of ontological security they may have had, is explored. These findings are brought together, and concluded, in chapter seven, to provide a critical assessment of these transitions and the mechanisms identified that affected them.

In the remainder of this chapter, the theoretical and empirical context that underpins this analysis is provided. In section two and three homelessness is discussed. How is homelessness defined? Why does it occur? In sections three and four the system of governance underpinning these transitions is outlined. Then in sections five, six, and seven the broad social context of late modernity and theoretical perspectives on how, in these conditions of late modernity, risk negotiation, individualisation, and reflexivity now underpin the actions and transitions people take, is considered. This chapter concludes with a detailed discussion of a key concept used in this analysis – the concept of ‘edgework’ (Lyng, 1990; 2005a; 2005b). In section eight this concept is outlined in detail, before bringing the discussion full circle by considering how edgework can be used to analyse and understand homelessness in late modernity, in section nine.

## **1.2 Defining Homelessness in Late Modernity**

There is an ongoing debate about how homelessness should be defined (Speak, 2004; Tipple & Speak, 2005; Jacobs et al, 1999; Pleace, Burrows & Quilgars, 1997). However four distinct dimensions to this can be identified from the literature. These definitions are:

1. ‘Absolute’ homelessness – having no shelter at all, rooflessness, rough sleeping;
2. Homelessness pertaining to the nature or quality of the housing someone has;
3. Homelessness as a subjectively understood and experienced situation;
4. Homelessness as it relates to statutory definitions, or the welfare entitlement that exists surrounding housing in a given locale or time.

Each is discussed below.



### *Rough Sleeping and Rooflessness*

The first category has become synonymous with rough sleeping. This is the form of homelessness most prevalent in popular discourse. This is the image of the 'the homeless' person as the tramp, as someone sleeping on park benches, the cardboard cities of the late '80s and early '90s, for example (Fooks & Pantazis, 1999; Pleace, 2000). It is now widely understood that many people who experience homelessness will not necessarily be sleeping rough. Some people who are perceived to be rough sleepers, such as those begging on the street, may not necessarily be without housing or some form of accommodation (Fitzpatrick & Kennedy, 2000). Rough sleeping is a particularly extreme and visible form of homelessness, indicating that 'the social system is functioning inadequately' (Marsh & Kennett, 1999: 2) and rendering real the imagined character of the 'homeless person' that exists in popular discourse (Fooks & Pantazis, 1999). As such, specific policy measures to tackle and address this form of homelessness have been developed and implemented over recent years, particularly in the UK, in a continuing attempt to end street homelessness. Whether this is through targeted outreach services or through the implementation of anti-social behaviour legislation (Fitzpatrick & Jones, 2005; May et al, 2005) it highlights the continued problematisation of the actions, lifestyles, and circumstances of people perceived to be homeless.

### *Hidden Homelessness and Housing Conditions*

As already noted not everyone who is homeless will experience rough sleeping. Different forms of homelessness occur, that can be placed along a continuum of housing need (Bramley, 1988; Watson & Austerberry, 1986) relating to the nature or quality of the housing someone has. These include living in temporary accommodation such as hostels or Bed & Breakfasts; involuntarily sharing accommodation because no other form of housing is available; or living in poor or overcrowded conditions. These categories often relate to how visible or hidden that homelessness is. Webb (1994) defines visible homelessness as:

- rough sleeping in a public place that can be observed;

- being in contact with statutory or voluntary services designed to assist people who are homeless or being accommodated in housing for the homeless; and,
- therefore, being counted in statistics on homelessness such as the statutory homeless figures, or counts by agencies that work with people experiencing homelessness, such as the number accommodated in a hostel.

Those who are invisibly or hidden homeless may be experiencing some form of homelessness along the continuum of housing need outlined above but are not in contact with agencies to assist them with this. They may be staying with friends, for example, but are invisibly homeless, as they have no contact with the welfare system to resolve this, or may not be viewed by themselves or others as homeless. There is a complex intersection of the different forms of homelessness outlined above that makes a single definition of homelessness difficult to apply to any one universal category. For example, someone may have their own tenancy, but be accessing agencies that work with homeless people due to the threat of eviction they face – are they visibly homeless, despite being housed? Someone may be staying with friends and not view this as problematic, how meaningful is it to define them as homeless? Furthermore people may be in an ongoing cycle of changing housing circumstances, on a day-to-day basis – making it difficult, and perhaps futile to attempt to place one single definition of homelessness onto diverse housing circumstances. Adding a global dimension, Tipple & Speak (2005) argue that searching for a single definition of homelessness is futile and inappropriate, and that a range of definitions are required due to the relativity of homelessness. For example what may be viewed as overcrowded or unsuitable housing in one country may not be in another. To impose a single definition risks housing essentialism – whose definition should be used to judge how much homelessness exists in any one place at any one time, or the nature of that homelessness? If effective interventions to address homelessness are to be developed, the very range of circumstances, and relativity of the concept has to be acknowledged.

### *Homelessness and Subjectivity*

This definitional difficulty is not just due to global, geographical differences however. Homelessness is difficult to define because it can be experienced by an

individual on both *objective and subjective* levels. On an objective level the material housing situation someone has may be used (although as already outlined, consensus as to *which* housing circumstance may be defined as homelessness does not exist). However this becomes more problematic when the subjective aspect is introduced – how meaningful is it to define someone as ‘homeless’ if they do not perceive themselves to be? But if only subjective measures are used then anyone could be defined as homeless, in any circumstance, and all meaning for the term may be lost.

Somerville (1992) attempts to incorporate an understanding of both the objective and subjective dimensions of what it means to be homeless in his exploration of the meaning of home. Somerville argues that signifiers of ‘homelessness’ are the converse of what is valued about the ideological construct of ‘home’ (based on the study by Watson & Austerberry (1986)). The seven signifiers of home that Somerville identifies are shelter, hearth, heart, privacy, abode, roots, and paradise (1992:533). Homelessness therefore may involve a lack of material shelter, lack of privacy, comfort, and also merge into more subjective aspects: lacking a space to develop intimate relationships; lacking space to ‘call your own’; lacking a sense of belonging, and with it a secure sense of identity. At the most extreme subjective form, Somerville argues, homelessness may signify ontological crisis, anomie, purgatory, being ‘cast out’ of the paradise of belonging to society, being ‘outside’ on both objective and subjective levels.

### *Homelessness and Welfare Entitlement*

In the UK a single definition does exist in the form of statutory homelessness, however this can be viewed as a ‘tool for rationing social housing’ rather than encapsulating anything about what it *means* to be homeless (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000:8). What the existence of a statutory definition highlights however is the importance of how homelessness is defined and perceived, and how it is responded to, by the state. Homelessness, how it is perceived, defined, responded to, in every country, will to some degree be affected by the government response to it that exists and the welfare entitlement citizens of that country have (Tipple & Speak, 2005). Depending on the definition of homelessness used, the number of people experiencing it, or the nature of homelessness, it will also be perceived differently in



public and political discourse. This response to, and understanding of, homelessness also changes over time. For example, in the UK huge increases in statutory homelessness and visible street homelessness at the end of the 1980s galvanised a government response to this (Pleace, 2000; Anderson, 2004).

So there are many meanings attached to homelessness despite, at the most basic common-sense level, it being perceived to be about someone lacking their own housing. 'Homeless people' are often associated with pathological vulnerability or deviance and conceptualised as beggars, criminals, addicts, as an underclass or a new poor that poses a threat to mainstream society (Fooks & Pantazis, 1999; Forrest, 1999; Bauman, 1998; Pleace, 2000; Speak & Tipple, 2006). Rather than attempt to formulate a single definition of homelessness, this analysis engages with the fact that a tension exists between homelessness being perceived as an objective phenomenon relating to housing circumstance or need, and as something that is *also* understood and experienced discursively and subjectively.

What is equally important to understanding how homelessness is conceptualised, is a consideration of what *causes* it. There has been much focus and debate on this in recent years. Some of these debates are discussed below, before outlining the key factors to be considered in this analysis.

### **1.3 The Cause of Homelessness – a 'New Orthodoxy'**

Knowledge on what causes homelessness has dichotomised into explanations that focus on structural forces (such as housing supply; employment) and on individual actions, attributes or circumstances of the person involved (such as addiction, mental illness, relationship breakdown). Social, political, and academic discourses on homelessness have remained caught up in this dualism. Attitudes to homelessness, and political responses to it, have shaped and been shaped by, whichever side dominates at any one time, in an ongoing oscillation (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000; Marsh & Kennett, 1999; Pleace et al, 1997; Kemp, Lynch & Mackay, 2001; Anderson & Tulloch, 2000; Anderson, 2004).



Attempts to develop this dichotomy of agency and structure further, have been made in recent years. This has led to an accepted academic view that homelessness occurs due to a complex interrelation of structural and individual factors, occurring in certain circumstances to certain groups (May, 2000; Pleace, 2000; Pleace, 1997; Kennett & Marsh, 1999). For example Fitzpatrick, Kemp & Klinker (2000) in their comprehensive review of UK homelessness research identified housing trends; family fragmentation; and poverty and unemployment; as key structural trends that underpin homelessness. They also identified individual risk factors that may precipitate homelessness including: experiences of sexual or physical abuse; family disputes and instability; having been in care or prison previously; drug or alcohol misuse; mental health problems; school exclusions and lack of qualifications; and poor physical health. They argue, that within certain conditions, changes in circumstance over the life course, coupled with these risk factors, triggers an episode of homelessness for some people. The trigger points identified include: leaving the parental home after an argument; bereavement; leaving care or prison; deterioration of mental or physical health; or increased alcohol or drug use. In this way many complex factors interact and lead to a transition into homelessness, factors that may then exacerbate or sustain this situation.

This more developed understanding of homelessness and causation, moving beyond the traditional dichotomy of agency and structure that had prevailed, has been identified as a new orthodoxy (Fitzpatrick, 2005). The key assertions of this new orthodoxy into the cause of homelessness is that:

*‘- structural factors create the conditions within which homelessness will occur; and  
- people with personal problems are more vulnerable to these adverse social and economic trends than others; therefore  
- a high concentration of people with personal problems in the homeless population can be explained by their susceptibility to macro-structural forces rather than necessitating an individual explanation of homelessness.’*

(Fitzpatrick, 2005: 4)

A problem with this new orthodoxy however is that it still lacks any ‘clear conceptualization of causation’ (Fitzpatrick, 2005:5) or clarity on how and why these

individual factors occur. In fact this approach sidesteps the fact that what is structural such as family fragmentation, is also simultaneously experienced as individual (such as relationship breakdown or domestic violence). Furthermore how agency, or structure, are actually defined and conceptualised in these approaches is rarely clear. Fitzpatrick (2005), citing the work of Neale (1997) has proposed that structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) is used within an epistemological framework underpinned ontologically by realism to address this. She argues that this theoretical approach, applied to empirical research into homelessness, may assist in developing this new orthodoxy and beginning to unpack these relationships of causation. This analysis aims to do so, by examining not only the factors that may lead to or sustain homelessness, but also how they may be explained. This is grounded in an ontological approach acknowledging that whilst structures are generated by actions, actions are in turn constrained and constituted by those structures, in an ongoing hermeneutical cycle, compatible with both realism and structuration theory.

In chapter two how structure and how agency are conceptualised, and the epistemological framework used in this analysis, are outlined in detail. In the remainder of this section, three key theoretical ‘building blocks’ are introduced and discussed. These key factors pertain to: firstly, providing clarification of how inequality and poverty are conceptualised here, using different forms of ‘capital’; secondly, an exploration of the individual problems identified as causing homelessness and how they can be conceptualised; and thirdly, the role of governance and social policy to this. These three factors represent key tenets used here to understand and explain transitions into and through homelessness in late modernity.

### *Stratification, Resources and Forms of Capital*

Poverty (or at least having relatively few resources) is usually a key cause of homelessness identified throughout the literature. Different cleavages of stratification exist in society that affect the ‘life chances’ people have (Breen & Rottman, 1995). This stratification also relates to the resources their position within this social system provides them with. ‘Resources’ here refers to the range of cultural, human, social, material and economic capital that someone may have, such as education,

qualifications, networks, contacts, knowledge, possessions (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Halpern, 2005; Baron, Schuller & Field, 2000). These different forms of capital intersect to influence the life chances that an individual has. These forms of capital are defined here as economic capital (financial resources or income); material capital (material resources of value, such as property or equipment); human capital (their skills, education and knowledge); cultural capital (skills, knowledge and ideas they use to interact with others) and social capital (their social networks and the resources they allow access to). Taken together these forms of capital are used to refer to and explore the resources (or lack of resources) the participants had.

The use of these different concepts of capital is not unproblematic, and the value or meaning of social capital in particular remains contested (Baron et al, 2000; Halpern, 2005; Portes, 1998). In this analysis, social capital, is used in a narrow sense, defined as the *resources* that individuals' social networks (broadly defined as the people they have contact with, interact with and know) allow them access to. This parallels how the concept was developed in the work of Bourdieu, and highlighted by Edwards and Foley (1998). Social networks are organised around the norms and sanctions of different groups (Coleman, 1988; Halpern, 2005) and may generate negative as well as positive outcomes. Social networks may not necessarily act to generate more capital and can actually act to deplete it in certain circumstances (Portes, 1998). Both the positive and negative effects of social networks are explored in this analysis.

What is important in this section is that how the participants' level of resources are conceptualised in this analysis has been clarified. Their resources are conceptualised as the access to various forms of capital (cultural, economic, material, social, and human) that is available to people, due to their family, social networks, employment, education, and their material social situation. This availability may stem from birth and family background, but can change over time. Power dynamics that intersect with these cleavages of stratification are also important to recognise (Lukes, 1974). This refers to the power that groups, individuals or institutions have to determine, protect, or allocate who has access to which resources. Therefore individual life chances, whilst stemming from the access to resources someone has, are also underpinned by the power groups have to protect or promote this access over time.



Returning to the risk and trigger factors that are seen to cause homelessness – low educational attainment, long-term unemployment, for example – it is clear that people experiencing homelessness often lack some or all of these resources of human, social, cultural, and economic capital (and therefore may lack a degree of power within the society they operate within). This lack of resources, and lack of power, may lead to some form of exclusion from all or some of the activities of society. In recent years the term ‘social exclusion’ has been used to describe the outcome a poverty of resources may lead to. Forrest argues that homelessness can be viewed as a *‘general metaphor for severe and typically multi-faceted experiences of marginality and exclusion from mainstream society’* (1999:17). Homelessness has been a particular target of the current Labour government in their attempt to tackle ‘social exclusion’, and Pleace (1998) has argued that homelessness should be reconceptualised as a product of the processes of social exclusion. It has been argued that social exclusion as a concept allows for the dynamic and multi-faceted dimensions of inequality to be explored in a way that a focus on material poverty does not (Burchard, Le Grand & Piachard, 2002). However social exclusion remains a contested and unstable concept, and so is not explicitly used in this analysis. Using different forms of capital to understand the resources that the participants had instead allows for a more complex analysis, than using the term ‘exclusion’ or ‘inclusion’ alone, to conceptualise their material situation.

Clearly when developing a realist approach to understand homelessness, no one factor (such as economic poverty) however important, is enough to explain why certain outcomes occur or to illustrate the complex relationships that lead to certain outcomes. For example, if someone can only afford or only access housing through the state in areas with a high concentration of social problems, or where the conditions of the housing is poor, this may also impact on their health, well-being, and lifestyle. This may in turn erode the different forms of capital they have further, in a complex relationship (Smith, Easterlow, Munro & Turner, 2003). Some people may experience homelessness even when they have access to housing, or have enough financial resources to obtain housing. This homelessness may therefore have occurred for a variety of reasons, and not necessarily a lack of economic capital. The value of using different concepts of capital is that they illustrate the multi-



dimensional relationships and resources that interact and impact on the life chances people have, and the transitions they make, within an 'open' social system. In this open system it is recognised that one factor may not directly cause another to occur, but instead a complex set of mechanisms operate, in certain circumstances, to underpin and trigger the opportunities, actions, and outcomes that actually occur (Sayer, 2000).

The different resources someone has access to are important to understand their homelessness. However it is often the individual factors cited as causing homelessness that are emphasised (Fitzpatrick, 2005). These individual 'problem' factors prevalent in the lives of people experiencing homelessness may also underpin how it is discursively conceptualised and understood. These individual factors are an important aspect of this complex analysis, and are discussed below.

### *Individual Factors and Homelessness - Life on 'the Edge'*

Recent empirical studies into causes and processes of marginality and vulnerability have continued to highlight how individual factors identified as the risk and trigger factors precipitating homelessness may interact and compound each other (For example, Van Der Poel & Van De Mheen, 2006; Tyler & Johnston, 2006; Martijn & Sharpe, 2006; Mallett, Rosenthal & Keys, 2005; Cranes & Warnes, 2006). These studies identify drug or alcohol use; mental illness; relationship and family conflict; as key problems that can lead to and interact with homelessness. For example, once someone becomes addicted to heroin they may be more likely to become homeless. Once they are homeless they are more likely to be unable to cease their drug use, and so a cycle is created (Tyler & Johnston, 2006).

There is also increasing recognition of the prevalence of traumatic incidents<sup>1</sup> and abuse in the life histories of people who experience homelessness (Buhrich, Hodder & Teeson, 2000; Collins & Phillips, 2003; Hyde, 2005). Once people become

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<sup>1</sup> Such as childhood sexual abuse; violence; witnessing near death experiences. The APA (American Psychiatric Association's) definition of 'trauma' is that a person must have experienced, witnessed or been confronted with an event involving actual or threatened death or serious injury, or threat to physical integrity of self or others (APA, 2000). This is the broad definition used when 'trauma' is referred to in this thesis.

homeless they may face extreme vulnerability and trauma, with homeless people far more likely to be the victims of crime and violence (from both other homeless and non-homeless people) than the general population (Newburn & Rock, 2005; Lee, 2005). There are high rates of suicide among people who are homeless (Baker, 1997; Molnar, Shade, Kral, Booth & Watters, 1998) and high levels of social isolation and loneliness reported by people experiencing homelessness (Lemos, 2000).

Clearly then a life history characterised by the individual factors identified as causing or occurring alongside homelessness is often one characterised by trauma, difficulty, and a lack of resources. But why these individual problems occur, and the relationship of causation inherent to this - why they only lead to homelessness in some cases and not others - remains unexplored. To examine this aspect of homelessness, the individual problem factors (such as mental illness; drug use; traumatic incidents) that interacted with the participants' transitions through homelessness in this analysis are conceptualised as 'edgework' (Lyng, 1990; 2005a; 2005b). Lyng developed the concept of edgework to define voluntary risk taking. This encapsulates the process of negotiating on the 'edges' of normative social behaviour. Edgework, as Lyng defines it, may refer to a range of disparate acts from drug use to engaging in extreme sports. The point is that the experiential outcome or motivation for these actions can be understood as essentially the same. In this analysis, edgework is used broadly to conceptualise events or actions that carry clear risk *and* involve the negotiation of boundaries of normative behaviour. Edgework refers to actions that may involve negotiating, for example: *'the boundary between sanity and insanity, consciousness and unconsciousness, and the most consequential one, the line separating life and death'* (Lyng, 2005a:4).

These type of actions also encapsulate events whereby day-to-day life and 'normality' has been ruptured or transcended. This concept therefore brings together the disparate individual factors often prevalent in the lives of people experiencing homelessness, into one conceptual whole. The edgework people experiencing homelessness experience (such as mental illness and extreme violence) may not be 'voluntarily' undertaken but what is clear, from the earlier section, is that acts that may be defined as edgework are often prevalent in the lives of people who are homeless. These are acts that involve negotiating the edge of normative social

behaviour and a rupturing or break in 'normal' routine life that will be experienced emotionally. These acts and experiences include suicide attempts, drug and alcohol misuse, engaging in or being the victims of violence, mental illness, sudden breakdown in relationships due to violence or conflict. Therefore many people experiencing homelessness are engaging in extreme edgework. They are people often negotiating at the edges of normative social behaviour, engaging in actions that may be perceived as voluntary risk taking, such as substance use, or experiencing situations of extreme risk that have to experientially (and sometimes physically) be negotiated with, such as violence and mental illness.

Individual factors perceived to be the cause of homelessness, whether they are the 'cause' or not, also emphasise negative discourses that exist about people experiencing homelessness. They underpin perceptions of the homeless as addicts, criminals, deviant, anti-social or pathological 'victims'. And this discursive understanding of homelessness will continue to exist, as long as theoretical attempts to explain homelessness only recognise these factors often prevail in the lives of some people experiencing intense marginality. Just recognising these factors prevail, without actually moving forward in understanding *why* they occur, or how they may lead to homelessness in some cases and not others, means that understanding about homelessness and marginality will not move on either. Sometimes it is individual acts that lead to homelessness (as Cranes & Warne, 2006, identify) but this does not necessarily mean it *always* is, nor remove the significance of the structural context that this has occurred within. Individual problems and situations may be the objective *reasons* cited by someone as why their homelessness occurs, but this does not actually provide a relationship of causation. What actually caused that social context, at that moment, to lead to homelessness for one individual, when they may have already been negotiating with a range of difficult situations (poverty, drug use etc) prior to it? Why for other individuals would the apparent same situation not lead to homelessness? This is examined in chapter three on the participants' transitions into homelessness to develop what is called here the 'stressed' theory of homelessness and causation – a theory underpinned by a fusion of realism and structuration theory.



There is also another key aspect to understanding homelessness and why it occurs that is examined here. And this is how the mechanisms of the state operate to respond to and address homelessness.

### *Governance, Welfare States, and Homelessness*

The role the state has in developing mechanisms to address homelessness provides the final tenet to understanding homelessness here – and to understanding why it occurs in certain conditions for certain people.

The social welfare system in place in a given locale provides one of the key institutional contexts to how people negotiating with homelessness may (or may not) access resources to resolve it, and how they experience accessing these resources at micro-levels (Pleace, 1998; Tipple & Speak, 2005; Fitzpatrick et al, 2000; Cranes & Warne, 2006). Furthermore policy responses to social problems such as homelessness play a key role in the construction of these issues and how they should be responded to (Clapham, 2002; 2003; Anderson, 2004; Kennett, 1999; Jacobs et al, 1999; Pleace et al, 1997; Pleace & Quilgars, 2003). The causes of homelessness identified in empirical research, such as the risk and trigger factors Fitzpatrick and colleagues (2000) identified, illustrate that homelessness is often one aspect of a life course characterised by intense contact with the social welfare system: being in care as a child; contact with the criminal justice system; reliance on national health services to address poor physical or mental health, or addictions; long-term unemployment; and a reliance on unemployment or disability benefits for income, for example.

Pleace (1998) argues that it is the inability to negate the (structurally generated) effect of a lack of resources through an individual's access (or lack of access) to state support that some people have, that explains why homelessness occurs. He asserts that homelessness is not a 'discrete social problem' but what occurs due to the '*inability of a section of the socially excluded population to access welfare services and social housing*' (1998:50). In the context of the UK it is the model of neo-liberal governance, within the framework of '*unfettered capitalism*' that has led to a situation whereby some people who lack resources do not have access to the '*state*

*support and other welfare services that prevent most of the socially excluded population of the UK from experiencing (...) homelessness'* (Pleace, 1998:54). However what Pleace fails to note is that the effect of capitalism is not 'unfettered' in the UK, and various levels operate through the welfare state to provide some protection for different groups with the least resources. Furthermore, despite provision being made, for homeless families in particular, homelessness continues to occur. The question should perhaps be not what is it about the provision of welfare that excludes certain people from housing, but why does homelessness continue to occur despite the welfare state providing some protection for some groups.

The processes that lead to some people becoming homeless must be understood as an outcome of more than just a lack of resources coupled with individual factors, but also as an outcome of the political structures that are in place therefore. These structures define who should be provided with which resources and why. Homelessness may also occur when there is a failure in this system to provide what it is meant to. Studies have also shown, when the interactions with services of the social welfare system people have on a micro-level do not operate as they should, even if these resources exist, people may become or remain homeless - systems sometimes fail (Crane & Warnes, 2006). So both the macro-level welfare provision in place for people experiencing homelessness and how this *operates* on a micro-level plays a key role to understanding why and how people become or remain homeless.

So to summarise, there is a new orthodoxy, recognising that homelessness is caused by an interrelation of individual factors occurring within certain structural conditions. However the exact relationship of causation underpinning this remains undeveloped. What is apparent from this section is that structural context, individual factors, and the social welfare provision can all be considered key aspects to understanding homelessness, how it occurs, and why it is perpetuated. These three factors interrelate in complex ways. This recognition sets the conceptual framework for this analysis. In the next two sections this conceptual framework is developed in more detail, beginning with an exploration of how the policy framework currently in place to address homelessness in the UK has developed.

## 1.4 Homelessness, Policy and Governance

The social welfare system, and the interactions the participants had with staff and resources provided by this system, is a crucial aspect of this analysis. A major influence on peoples' transitions when they are negotiating with homelessness is social policy and the services of the social welfare system that exist to address it. This system is a means to organise, distribute, and allow access to the resources that may objectively generate outcomes that resolve homelessness. It also generates, and is a site of negotiation of, some of the discourses on homelessness and poverty that exist (King in Clapham, 2003). To the individual experiencing homelessness, homeless policy will be negotiated with through the micro-level interactions with statutory and voluntary sector services and agencies they have. These agencies are usually funded and managed as part of a broad government framework. In this section how the dominant political model in place in the UK has led to the current social welfare system the participants in this analysis negotiated with, is outlined, using a paper by Anderson (2004) as a framework.

### *Political Ideology and Changing Responses to Homelessness*

Anderson uses three eras of welfare in her analysis of housing, homelessness and the welfare state in the UK (2004) to present how this policy has developed. These are:

1. Post-war social democracy (1945 – 1979);
2. Conservatist neo-liberalism (1979 – 1997);
3. Labour's Third way (1997 onwards).

### *Post-war Welfarism*

The modern welfare provision to address homelessness stems from the introduction of the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, which was introduced towards the end of the social democratic post-war era of high welfarism. The first piece of homelessness legislation, the 1948 National Assistance Act was also introduced



towards the beginning of this period. Anderson (2004) argues that both the 1948 and 1977 Acts reflected the discourse that homelessness could be explained as a structural housing problem that could be remedied and addressed through the provision of social housing. This was in a time of high employment, when the welfare state was developing to 'insure' those who were particularly vulnerable in society against such risk, on the assumption they had or would contribute through their employment and related taxes if they could. During this period, public opinion on homelessness also began to be underpinned by the 'structuralist' perspective, with the screening of the film 'Cathy Come Home' in 1966, and the setting up of the housing campaigning organisation Shelter, both of which stressed homelessness could 'happen to anyone' and was due to structural forces rather than individual lifestyle, choice, or deviance (Jacobs et al, 1999; Pleace et al, 1997).

What was distinct about the 1977 Act was that it created a statutory definition of homelessness. This statutory definition meant that local authorities had a duty to house people if they were deemed to be 'unintentionally' homeless, in 'priority need' of housing (such as families with children, or pregnant women) and had a 'local connection' to the area they wished to be housed in. This represented a 'major step forward in provision for homeless people' (Fitzpatrick & Stephens, 1999: 415). However Anderson argues that this legislation and its application also actually reinforced and underpinned the ideology that there are two 'types' of homeless people, defined by their circumstances and the reason they are homeless. It is argued that this ideology was also tied to the different discourses of 'the poor' as either deserving or undeserving, and the states responsibilities towards them that then exists, underpinned by these discourses (Levitas, 1998; Pleace et al, 1999; Jacobs et al, 1997; Anderson, 2004). Anderson argues, that the statutory homeless are therefore those perceived to be deserving of state support, whose homelessness is not deemed to be 'intentional', or that are in 'priority' need of social housing, such as households with dependent children are. People who do not meet the statutory criteria of homelessness became defined as 'single homeless people'. This group may be without housing, but through the application of the 1977 Act were not perceived to be 'deserving' of state support to access resources such as housing (often they were perceived ideologically as those who could work and support themselves financially if they 'chose' to do so). Those not defined as statutorily homeless had few options to

resolve their homelessness through the welfare system, with temporary accommodation, such as a bed in a hostel, often the only provision made for them. So whilst the 1977 Act did appear to illustrate a shift in attitudes towards homelessness (that it is a housing issue and the state has a duty to provide housing) it actually also retained what Anderson (2004:374) has argued is the ‘centuries old’ division between the deserving and undeserving poor, and created two clear ‘types’ of ‘homeless people’, defined by the reason they are homeless, and the circumstance they are in. Finite resources such as housing do have to be distributed in relation to some criteria however, and the fundamental issue in the allocation of housing may be the extent to which the distribution of social housing is done in a fair and just way. What the 1977 Act indicated was a shift in policies, to a concern with ‘need’ rather than a system based on ‘insurance’, in the way welfare resources such as housing were distributed in the UK. However this distribution still related to whose needs were deemed most deserving of state support, and the reason for this.

### *Conservative Welfare Reform*

In the second era Anderson identifies, the neo-liberal Conservative era of 1979 – 97, it is noted that *‘the welfare retrenchment of the 1980s and 1990s contributed significantly to substantial increases in poverty, inequality and homelessness’* (2003:376). This ‘welfare retrenchment’ included cutting down the level of social benefits that young people (under twenty-five) could access, and effectively the end of any benefit eligibility for sixteen and seventeen year olds. This was done through the implementation of the 1988 Social Security Act (Hutson & Liddiard, 1994). Welfare provision was radically altered throughout this period, leading to a clear widening of inequality. Housing policy, it is argued, ‘spearheaded’ this process (Smith, 2005: 3). For example, there was also a sharp reduction in social rented housing available due to Conservative housing policies such as the ‘Right to Buy’ scheme, and a reduction in payments provided for unemployed people to pay for their ‘board and lodgings’. These policies were often implemented as a response to prevailing public and political discourses about ‘welfare reliance’ among some people who it was perceived could be in paid employment but ‘chose’ not to be (Hudson & Liddiard, 1994). This was in a time of increasing unemployment, economic crisis, and was underpinned by the liberal individualism of conservative

ideology. Coupled with this, other complex processes may also have underpinned this widening housing inequality. A general lack of housing being built and the quality of housing that remained available for people who accessed social housing to rent through the state, may all have contributed to an increase in housing shortages, and a concentration of social problems, throughout the 1980's (Mullins & Murie, 2006).

In England and Wales the 1977 homeless legislation was modified by the 1985 Housing Act, and in Scotland by the Housing Act (Scotland) 1987, but the content and effect of this legislation remained essentially the same throughout this period (Anderson, 2004). During this period (in part due to the policies and trends outlined above) there was a massive rise in the statutory homeless figures (Wilcox, 2002) and visible 'street homelessness' (rough sleeping) also increased (Jacobs et al, 1999; Pleace & Quilgars, 2003). Rough sleepers are often 'single homeless people', ineligible for housing under the homeless legislation, or people who have little contact with the welfare system at all (Pleace, 1998). Rough sleepers are also a highly visible manifestation of social problems – something that therefore requires a government response.

With massive increases in statutory and non-statutory homelessness, homelessness became high on the political agenda, and policy was introduced as a response to these rising figures. The response that was developed initially focussed on the highly visible, 'problem' group of rough sleepers, and included the introduction of the Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) in London in 1990. The RSI was gradually introduced throughout other areas of the UK, including Scotland in 1997. Despite numbers declining once more throughout the 1990's both statutory and street homelessness remained a sustained problem however and numbers of statutory homeless applications rose to a record high in 1997 (Randall & Brown, 1999). This was the context in which the Labour government came to power that same year.

### *New Labour, Homelessness, and the Social Welfare System*

The Labour government advocates a third way between social democratic and neo-liberal principles (Powell, 1999). Anderson argues that these principles have been adopted more as the '*rolling out of neo-liberalism, than the rolling back of welfare*'



(2004:369). However homelessness has been taken as a key target of Labour's endeavours to address 'social exclusion' and homeless legislation and policy has gone through a period of intense change under Labour. The devolution that has developed in the UK since Labour came to power in 1997 also means that, whilst broad frameworks of political ideologies and welfare provision still exist across the UK, important regional variations have developed with regard to homeless policy. Strategic approaches to provide accommodation, housing and support services have been put in place, and new legislation has been introduced through the Homelessness Act 2002, in England and Wales, and the Housing Act 2001 and Homelessness etc Act 2003, in Scotland.

In Scotland a strategic approach to tackle homelessness has been particularly developed. The work of the Homelessness Task Force (2002a; 2002b) reviewed the homeless policy in place and directly fed into the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and Homelessness etc (Scotland) Act 2003. Through the Homelessness etc Act 2003 the distinction between those deemed 'in priority' need and those who are not *should* be abolished by 2012. These strategic and legislative developments have been viewed as positive (Goodlad, 2004) and some commentators argue that Scotland now has the '*most progressive homelessness legislation in western Europe*' (Homelessness Monitoring Group, 2004:6). Central to those changes has been an increasing duty on local authorities to provide holistic strategic approaches to provide support services and accommodation for people who are, or may be at risk of, homelessness.

However this current welfare provision for people experiencing homelessness, across the UK, with its 'joined-up, holistic, person-centred', approach, and increasing concern with addressing the multi-faceted 'problems' of sub-groups of people experiencing homelessness (such as mental illness or substance misuse), still focuses on the individual experiencing homelessness and the problems that characterise their situation (O'Connell, 2003; Roche, 2004; Anderson, 2004). Pleace & Quilgars warn, a consequence of this may be that the "*characteristics*" of a marginalised group start to be used to explain their "*marginalisation*", while structural causation and indeed social construction are ignored' (2003:194). Whilst some housing policy may be concerned with addressing housing supply as a structural problem, through this drive to 'target' problem groups (such as drug addicts or rough sleepers) with

specialist support, 'the homeless' can continue to be conceptualised as problem individuals. Therefore the discursive divide remains, between seeing some homeless people as experiencing a housing problem that can be addressed by providing enough adequate housing, and others, (those experiencing problems such as drug addiction, or long-term and repeated episodes of homelessness) as 'different', culpable, and more 'problematic'. The introduction of increased policy measures to tackle anti-social behaviour focussing on the homeless (Fitzpatrick & Jones, 2005), alongside homeless policy providing more 'support' to people illustrates that different and contradictory discourses about the nature of homelessness and how to deal with it, are operating simultaneously. Therefore the provision of welfare through New Labour may be increasingly characterised by the neo-liberal ideal of individuality, responsibility and freedom but also developing illiberal policies to 'deal' with those whose actions do not appear to fit with this ideal (Dean, 1999).

The policy that underpins what this welfare provision entails, is generated within a broad framework of governance. This system of governance is one currently characterised by a neo-liberal, 'reflexive system' of governance (Dean, 1999) and a 'politics of behaviour' (Furedi, 2006). Coupled with this, is the recognition that in the conditions of late modernity, through a process of individualisation, people are increasingly encouraged to and are attempting to assert themselves as active, free agents in the actions they take (Giddens, 1991). Complex factors require to be analysed if the processes that occur, when some people become or remain homeless and some do not, within this system, are to be understood (Anderson, 2004). Returning to Neale (1997) (and paralleling Fitzpatrick's concerns about the limitation of the 'new orthodoxy') Anderson argues there is a need for a more developed understanding of the interplay of agency, actions, and identity, to explain homelessness within the policy context she identifies. The approach she proposes is to use structuration theory to sociologically analyse how homelessness occurs and is sustained. This is done in this thesis, with structuration theory used alongside realism as a compatible set of ontological and epistemological theories, used to explore and understand social processes.

It is in the exploration of this role of agents and structures – of individuals in society - and of how the social welfare system underpins this, that this analysis of transitions

through homelessness in a risk society is hinged. In the next section, a key theoretical perspective used throughout this thesis, Dean's (1999) theory of governmentality and the concept of reflexive governance, is introduced and outlined.

### 1.5 Governmentality, Risk, and Regulation

In this research, governance and the social welfare system are key units of analysis to understand the transitions through homelessness individuals take. The identity and actions of these individuals is another key unit of analysis. The concept of governmentality is therefore adopted as a theory to explore these issues because, as Dean argues *'this is a perspective (...) that seeks to connect questions of government, politics and administration to the space of bodies, lives, selves, and persons'* (1999:12). Through governmentality the role of government can be understood by identifying and analysing the practices through which people are governed, and come to govern themselves. These are what Dean calls the 'regimes of practice' that exist to direct the conduct of individuals and groups in society, through a process of governance. And the social welfare system (specifically homelessness policy and what it provides) is the 'regime of the practice' analysed here.

#### *Systems of Reflexive Governance*

Dean genealogically charts the development of neo-liberalism throughout history, to develop his argument that the current form of Western democratic government in place is a 'reflexive government'. Reflexive government is governance through processes, created by the 'folding back' of government onto itself. In this way individuals are increasingly given opportunities to govern themselves, but in doing so are then complicit in the ongoing governance of their actions within the structures and neo-liberal discourses that underpin this reflexive government. Thus individual action and responsibility for it is both promoted, and in turn regulated, by this system. There is now a 'politics of behaviour' for example, with policies increasingly focusing on individuals and their actions. This indicates a reorientation of the principles of the welfare state away from a focus on 'social' forces, and instead onto micro-level individual actions (Furedi, 2006).



The welfare system still exists, however Dean argues that the welfare *state* has been replaced by a '*performance government*'. In place of a unified welfare state there is now a myriad of different, fragmented, agencies providing the services that make up the welfare system. And it is the responsibility of individuals in society, as both the consumers and producers of these services, to ensure that they are providing and consuming the 'right' ones. If they do not, then they can be held accountable for this.

This accountability and the need to exercise choice 'responsibility' is what Dean calls 'new prudentialism'. The responsibility for regulating and managing the resources and risks that societies have is increasingly being placed on individuals, families, and communities, through this process of reflexive government: '*responsibilities for risk minimization become a feature of the choices that are made by individuals, households, and communities as consumers, clients and users of services*' (Dean, 1999:166). To assist these individuals, families, and communities, to exercise this responsibility there is a post-welfarist 'regime of the social'. This regime of the social is made up of government agencies, experts, social workers, social work departments and voluntary sector agencies, who have become '*partners and tutors*', assisting people avoid and manage the risks and resources they may have access to in a 'responsible' way through the dissemination of their 'expert' knowledge on these matters. Engaging in this partnership effectively should lead to a society of 'active citizens' who operate effectively (make the 'right' individual free choices). There is a need therefore to continue providing this 'expert' advice, so that each individual can draw on these resources to manage their lives, and this means this reflexive model of governance goes on generating itself.

### *Targeted Populations*

However, those who do not appear to be able to exercise their responsibility in the 'right' way – to maximise their resources, avoid the risks they face in society, and exercise their prudentialism, also exist. These are the unemployed; the poor; the homeless; for example. These groups become 'targeted populations' requiring the explicit intervention of specialist agencies to assist them become active citizens (and to manage them and the risk they may pose in the meantime). There has been a

proliferation of specialist agencies, often within the voluntary sector, but funded through central and local government, whose role it is to do this – they *‘are agencies and specialists for dealing with targeted groups. They employ technologies of agency to transform ‘at risk’ and ‘high risk’ groups into active citizens’* (Dean, 1999:170). By being supposedly ‘trained’ to exercise their agency, it is perceived that the individuals that make up these targeted populations should be able to choose and to demand the services they require to resolve the problems that made them part of a targeted population in the first place. People who continue to experience the problems that mark them out as a targeted population can then be implicated as causing their problems within this reflexive model – they have been given the opportunity to solve it, but have not utilised this opportunity effectively.

People experiencing homelessness are a population that has been ‘targeted’ in such a way. Furthermore the individual factors identified as prevalent in the lives of people experiencing homelessness means they are often experiencing a range of other problems, such as addiction, poverty, criminality, that has led to them being the target of many regimes of practice. These ‘practices’ and the services that have been developed under Labour since 1997 may be part of a ‘utopian’ pursuit (Dean, 1999:35) to alleviate exclusion (and end street homelessness) however an unintended consequence of this has also been that these people’s situation can be individualised and responsibility for it placed onto them. They may then be constructed as people who cannot manage the risks they face, and that may also pose a risk to others, due to their inability to exercise responsible choices through their actions. The situation that has led to them becoming ‘targeted’ (such as becoming homeless; addiction) can also be taken as evidence of their ‘inability’ to manage their life, thus creating a hermeneutical circularity of ‘blame’.

This model of reflexive government outlined here, is paralleled with the current provision in place for people negotiating with homelessness in Scotland in chapter two. What is also crucially important to this analysis, and also central to Dean’s theory of reflexive governance, is the concept of risk - of how the risks these targeted populations may pose to themselves and others is managed through this system. And this preoccupation with risk and risk management through the process of governance, can in turn can be cast within broader theoretical perspectives on risk and how it is

perceived, that prevails within and encapsulates the current social system of late modernity – the risk society as it is referred to in this analysis. This is explored below.

## **1.6 Homelessness, Risk Management, and the Risk Society**

Since the Second World War, significant changes have taken place in the social and political context that people operate within. This is occurring on a global scale and often as (an unintended but inevitable) outcome of the process of industrialisation, capitalism, and the liberalisation of governance that developed through modernity (Giddens, 1990; 2002; Beck, 1992; 1999). New cultural, economic, and social ways of living and being in late reflexive modernity are developing (Lash, 1994; Beck, 2000; Giddens, 1991). Beck famously has argued that life in late modernity is increasingly characterised by living in a risk society rather than a work society (1992; 1999). Different conceptualisations of risk and risk management have become increasingly significant in recent years to theorising how agents and structures operate and are governed. In this section, some key theories regarding risk, and how this preoccupation with risk and risk management underpins the social context encapsulated here as a risk society, are outlined.

### *The 'Risk Society' Thesis*

The explicit term 'risk society' was identified and popularised by the work of Beck (1992; 1999). Beck argues that the consequences of the ongoing development of modernisation through global capitalism, within a neo-liberal political framework, created a new 'phase' of modernity - a second modernity. The processes of globalisation, individualisation, the gender revolution, underemployment, and the increasing recognition of global, ecological risks that cannot be managed or insured against, has created, and characterise, the conditions of second modernity (Beck, 1999:2). And these processes are the consequence of the 'success' of first modernity, the 'success' of global capitalism, and the social and political systems that underpinned this, such as increased access to education, new technology, and new forms of communication and social relations.



Beck argues that in 'first' modernity, society was structured in such a way that the risks populations faced could be predicted, calculated, and insured against. As these structures (such as the welfare state; full employment; the nuclear family) fragment and change, a new ontological and social reality is emerging where the outcomes of this ongoing modernisation, or indeed of each individual's life course, cannot be predicted as it once could have been – all we can know is that there is nothing we can be sure of knowing. With this, the ability to control or rationalise risk is also no longer possible, but still something that governments, groups, and individuals seek to do. 'Knowledge' has become increasingly available to people, but paradoxically also increasingly undermined and questioned, through the continual development of 'new' (sometimes conflicting) information, technologies, and forms of communication. Due to this it is argued that individuals now live in an ontologically distinct period of uncertainty and precariousness – assessing, avoiding, aware of, risks, real or imagined, in every action and decision they make in a reflexive, individualised process. Structural changes also underpin this sense of insecurity, such as an increase in flexible or contractual employment, and increasing family fragmentation. Through this process of accelerated modernisation 'all that is solid' appears to be melting into air. And this ontologically affects individuals' lives and day-to-day actions.

### *Risk, Rationality and Emotion*

Marsh and Kennett (1999) have argued that in this structural context of second or late modernity there is now a 'new landscape of precariousness' where it is possible to fall 'further and faster' than ever before. In this context, homelessness now affects heterogeneous groups. They argue that the risk of homelessness may now become a reality for more people, and for more diverse reasons, than in previous eras. People are cast within the external structural reality of their lives, however there is also a need to recognise the 'emotional landscapes' they operate within (Smith, 2005: 7). Whatever structural context they are operating within, even one of precariousness and risk, there will be an emotional dimension to the choices and actions they take. Indeed as Smith (2005) found in her study of house buying in Edinburgh, choices that may be perceived as being underpinned by reason, risk management, and rationality (such as which house to buy, and how much to pay for it) may actually be particularly influenced by the emotional process that also underpins them (especially

when they occur within conditions of precariousness and unpredictability, such as a time of booming housing markets). For those operating on the edges of society, negotiating their risk of homelessness within this 'landscape of precariousness' the emotional landscape of their day-to-day interactions has to also be considered. Only then can their actions and the choices they made as they negotiate with these risks within a certain material reality, be better understood.

### *The Construction and Management of Risk*

Some perspectives on risk and risk management (such as Douglas, 1992) have focussed on the construction of risk as a concept. Reith (2002), for example, charted the ontological development of 'chance' and risk throughout modernity, since pre-industrial times, when such a concept had little meaning to societies governed by religious ideas of providence and fate. That societies and individuals can conceptualise risk and chance and attempt to predict, calculate and insure against the chance of such risks occurring, is itself an outcomes of the process of modernity, and the rationalisation and secularisation that accompanied this.

Dean, (1999) engaging with Beck's thesis, argues that social and political developments have led to a distinctly individualistic and reflexive ideology now underpinning the management of risks in society. There is always a rationale behind risk management, a governance of risk going on, underpinned by certain ideologies about who or what constitutes a risk. Different forms of 'risk rationality', to manage the risks faced by populations within societies, are identified by Dean as: insurance (against losses of capital); epidemiological (against loss of health and well-being); and case management. The 'case management' of risk refers to the management of the targeted populations, discussed in the previous section. Here, groups or individuals having been identified as 'at risk' of certain outcomes such as homelessness, or as being 'a risk' to the wider population, are defined as requiring intervention and management to minimise these risks. This intervention is done through and by different agencies of the state. These agencies have often been developed specifically to target these problem groups. These targeted populations are both managed and 'educated' through this case management system to become active citizens. And this system now characterises the current welfare state provision of

holistic, ‘joined up’ services, and different specialist agencies existing explicitly to address problems such as addiction, mental illness, and homelessness. In this way, structural processes that may actually have underpinned these outcomes become increasingly obscured. Responsibility for these outcomes or problems can be primarily placed onto the individual and their actions.

To understand why risk, or the management of risk, is now so important within late modern society, understanding the process of individualisation that has occurred is crucial. The process of individualisation has fed into how systems of governance operate, and the ontological experiences of people living within these conditions in profound ways. The impact this process of individualisation has had on the transitions and actions people take over their life is explored in more detail in the next section.

### **1.7 Individualisation – Risk, Reflexivity, and Transitions**

It is argued that one of the key developments characterising contemporary social life, and how it is experienced in late modernity, is the ongoing process of individualisation (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). As the predictable trajectories of life, such as the transitions through education, into employment, and into family life, have diversified, individuals now have to reflexively ‘negotiate’ with the options that are available to them in a constant process. This appears to allow them the opportunity to develop lifestyles, and create their own socio-biography, from the options they have, through the actions they take (Giddens, 1990; 1991; 2002). Beck argues that *‘(t)he ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern western society. Choosing, deciding, shaping individuals who aspire to be the authors of their lives, the creators of their identities, are the central characters of our time’* (1999: 9). But is this the case? And how does this impact on the actual transitions people take over their life?

#### *Understanding Transitions in Late Modernity*

Normative assumptions about the transitions people should take over the life course to ‘succeed’ would define homelessness as the outcome of a transition that has ‘gone



wrong'. Ezzy (2001) argues that transitions over the life course should take an 'integrative' course – for example, someone moving from their parental home to their own; moving into a larger home to have children; or moving somewhere for new employment; are all transitional stages that maintain an individual's integration to society over their life course. They adhere to the norms of society. 'Divestment passages' occur when the transitional events in life lead to what is perceived to be a failure in maintaining this integrative course over time.

Whilst it may be argued that there has always been a *degree* of complexity to the transitions people made over their life course (Goodwin & O'Conner, 2005), it is now also recognised that there are more options, choices, and unpredictability. It is argued that due to the ontological effect of individualisation, people *perceive* their individual choices to be the central tenet to how secure, or insecure, they are – *'they see their decision-making as individual 'choice' rather than the product of structured constraints'* (Ball, Maguire & Macrae; 2000: 2). Furlong & Evans (1997) note in their exploration of theories about young peoples' transitions to employment, that the loosening of these structures in late modernity, and the emergence of post-structuralist ideas has led to a language of 'negotiation' to describe the transitions people experience. This language implies and emphasises this individualistic perspective. However as Furlong & Evans also note:

*'The fact that people feel that they act autonomously and independently over their own biographies is not necessarily at odds with the view that much of their biography continues to be structured and determined by external factors. (..) The issue now is the relationship between structure and agency arising from 'manufactured uncertainty' – uncertainty created by acceleration of the information and the 'knowledge society' and the increase and diversity of individual risk situations'*  
(1997: 37)

There may be increased pluralism, flexibility, and choice, but it is an 'epistemological fallacy' that people are actually 'free' to develop their own position in society (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997) without acknowledging that the chance people have of being able to negotiate with the risks they face is still grounded to some extent in the external structures and institutions of that society. For it is through these

structures that people access resources with which they can ‘negotiate’ their own life course. This process of individualisation has led to a paradigmatic shift, with the individual, rather than the society they operate within, increasingly viewed as the key mechanisms affecting their life chances. How the course that life then takes, and is conceptualised and managed, as being potentially ‘risky’ or not, will then be underpinned by the system of governance these transitions are embedded within. This will then continue to constrain or enable the actions people take and the outcome of these actions. This assertion illustrates how realism and structuration theory can be used as compatible ontological approaches here. There is a material and social world that people operate within. However how they operate within in, and how they experience this subjectively, will be affected by and go on to affect this material and social reality, in an ongoing cycle. But what ‘reality’ are people operating in in late modernity?

### *Structure, Agency and Outcomes*

The existence of a ‘new landscape of precariousness’, and the effect of individualisation, has been asserted in the findings of a diverse range of empirical studies examining social processes and problems. These include studies such as that by Furlong & Cartmel (1997) discussed earlier, into young people’s transitions that identified an ‘epistemological fallacy’ of liberal individualisation now exists and underpins how people experience making transitions over their life course. Other studies can also be used to discuss this process, covering diverse topics, from drug addiction (Buchanan & Young, 2000; Buchanan, 2004), to community cohesion and immigration (Dench, Gavron & Young, 2006).

Buchanan (Buchanan & Young, 2000; Buchanan, 2004) argues that increased heroin use and rates of addiction, throughout the eighties can be directly related to the structural conditions this occurred in. As traditional industries, class identities and the relative security they brought declined, a generation of working class school leavers found themselves ‘surplus to requirements’: *‘With little to lose, and little to gain, many of these discarded young people turned to heroin. (...) A painkiller with euphoric properties heroin helped many young people block out the social economic realities of their lives’* (2000: 411). In a later analysis he ties the drug use his

participants engaged in to the individualised negotiation of risk they now face: *'uncertainty, choice, diversity and risk taking have become key themes of postmodern life. In this context it becomes much easier to view taking illicit drugs as just another of many life choice options, all involving inherent risks and benefits'* (2004:119). But it is also recognised that this drug use brings problems, and acts to further stigmatise and marginalise groups that are already structurally excluded.

Dench and colleagues (2006) in their study of community, social cohesion, and ethnicity in London's East End, assert that the conditions of late modernity (that have in part developed *due* to the post-war welfare state) such as increased individualisation and family fragmentation, directly account for the social isolation, disaffection, and racial segregation that exists there.

Both studies assert that the actual motivation for and outcome of the acts people engage in, within these conditions of late modernity, have been directly generated by the lived reality of late modern society. Once more the emotional landscape that people operate within, alongside the structural conditions, have to be penetrated and understood for broad social processes to be. These studies also assert, as Furlong & Cartmel do, that the structural underpinning of these social processes is becoming increasingly obscured, by the individualisation this structure promotes.

### *Individualisation and Identity*

Mythen (2005), in their critique of Beck's risk society thesis, argues that the modern discourse of risk relates to the desire people have to control and predict the future and this relates to the ability people have to assess which options carry more or less risk to them as they negotiate their life course. How their life course develops is supposed to fit with the lifestyle that they associate with the identity they feel they have. However as all these studies have emphasised, this life course is still grounded in and by the externally situated structured interactions people engage in as individuals. These interactions are embodied acts and grounded in normative assumptions, about how gender, age, ethnicity and class, for example, should and is acted out in certain contexts. This leads to the reproduction of these assumptions and also underpins social and political discourses that exist.



Therefore it is recognised in this analysis that the negotiation of risk is far more complex and multi-dimensional than one of pure ‘avoidance’ or ‘management’, particularly as people negotiate their life course in the conditions of late modernity. The concept of edgework discussed in the next section is used to highlight this. This concept, introduced earlier in this chapter, is used in this analysis as a progressive way to attempt to understand and conceptualise the individual factors often taken as the cause of homelessness. Edgework is used as a way to examine why these individual factors occur and how these factors impacted on the transitions that the participants made here. It also relates to the process of individualisation and modernisation that has occurred.

### **1.8 Edgework and Life in Late Modernity**

Risks are usually perceived as negative, however there can also be positive conceptualisations of risk – to gain the ‘best’ or most ‘fulfilling’ outcome may also require taking risks. Lyng (1990; 2005a; 2005b) examined this other side of risk negotiation and individualisation, in his analysis of ‘voluntary risk taking’. Voluntary risk taking is when people voluntarily engage in activities that are seen as ‘risky’ and negotiate at the ‘edges’ of normative, responsible, behaviour. These activities may include extreme sports, such as sky-diving; sexual activities such as promiscuity or sado-masochism; or behaviour such as excessive drug or alcohol use. Lyng argues that engaging in actions that carry clear risk (the risk of death; pain; unconsciousness; insanity; for example) can be understood as a way people can exercise their individuality and freedom within an increasingly rationalised, disenchanted, modernised society. It is *also* a way of facing up to the risks they now feel they face, evidencing ontologically that risks can be taken and overcome, as individuals.

#### *Edgework and Experiential Outcomes*

Lyng cites experiential ‘satisfaction’ or ‘escape’ as one of the key motivations for this edgework. People lose sense of time and space when they engage in these activities. They may transcend the reality they are in – reach a ‘higher state’ emotionally. They find self-actualisation by breaking free of the norms, structures,

and myriad of choices increasingly imposed on them as they negotiate within the social system of late modernity. In this way they are also asserting their sense of 'individuality' – something celebrated and promoted in late modernity.

This assertion of self, and transcendence of material 'humdrum' reality, is something that people may strive to attain in a variety of settings and in a variety of ways. Wood & Smith (2004) for example, use the example of musical performances to illustrate the importance of the emotional dimension of human interactions and actions within an embodied material setting. The musical performers talked of when the performance 'came together' or 'losing themselves', of the effect 'being better than drugs' (Wood & Smith, 2004:538). Musical performances may be relatively 'safe' actions but it was clear from this study, that this emotional outcome was a key motivation and outcome of this action. And to attain this outcome there were clear tensions and risks inherent - the tension they felt that the performance may 'fall apart', and of showing themselves and their vulnerability to the audience if they were to fully engage with them, and transcend 'normal' reality in this way. This study also showed the importance the embodied reality that people are in has in affecting the experiential outcome they gained from their actions on a micro-level. Sometimes the 'best outcome' for an individual relates to emotional rather than 'rational', material outcomes. Attempting to attain an experiential level of escape or pleasure carries an inherent risk as it involves negotiating outside the 'norm' of routine ordered reality. Many acts incorporate a degree of edgework and people are motivated to engage in these acts to continue striving to attain or overcome certain emotional states. Yet this also always carries some risk and is embodied and affected by the physical and material reality they are operating within.

### *The Paradox of Edgework*

Risk taking, striving to attain or manage emotional 'highs', can actually be a way of exercising individuality and resisting the rationalisation of modern society. Within the neo-liberal model of 'responsible' active citizenry, people should act in ways to avoid risks, individually, however. Therefore these acts are also something that could be conceptualised as 'irrational' within this neo-liberal model of responsible citizenship. The paradox of edgework, as Lyng uses the term, is that by being a

means of evidencing the ability someone has to engage with risk, these actions only actually draw them further into an individualised process of liberalised risk negotiation:

*'(P)eople may, on one level, seek a risk-taking experience of personal determination and transcendence in an environment of social overregulation, whereas on another level they employ human capital created by this experience, to navigate the challenges of the risk society'* (Lyng, 2005: 11)

At the same time as they attempt to transcend the conditions that have led to their disenchantment, they recreate them, and their need to rationally negotiate their lives and actions as individuals. There can be no escape; no real resistance. In this way the concept of edgework closely parallels Cohen & Taylor's 'escape attempts' (1992) first identified and outlined in 1976. They identify that, with the increasing promotion of the individual in society; people are engaging in escape attempts to assert their individuality within the structures of this society. These escape attempts include hobbies, holidays, constantly changing jobs, houses, or partners for example, and acts that have been listed here as edgework – drug use, extreme sports, etc. In this way people can temporarily escape the 'horrendous repetition' of the 'paramount reality' of day-to-day modern life. This reality has been brought about by the 'disenchantment' of modernity and the capitalist work society. The same paradox is evident however, as each attempt to escape only leads to a new routine once more, and the actions they engage in become increasingly 'packaged' and 'disenchanted' by a consumer society. This is a key consideration in this analysis, for as Cohen and Taylor argue, *'the ethos of possessive individualism extols the value of individual identity but the market economy of advanced capitalism cannot deliver the goods to everyone'* (1992: 225).

### *Edgework and Resources*

It is recognised that inequality, if not absolute poverty, is increasing in late modernity (Young, 1999; Hutton, 1995). Some such as Bauman (1998) argue that an individual's 'role' in society can now be understood through their capacity to consume within that society. The paid work (particularly within a global structure of



changing employment patterns) that someone engages in is becoming less a marker of their identity and place in society as their capacity to consume. It is through this capacity that they present their own individual identity, through what they 'choose' to consume. Due to the process of modernity, individualisation, and consumerism, Bauman also asserts that the 'poor' that continue to exist now have no role in society at all. Without the need for a surplus poor to show what befalls those who will not work, and therefore reinforce the work ethic, the poor are nothing but 'flawed consumers'. As such they have no 'place'. The poor in this context become portrayed as '*lax, sinful and devoid of moral standards*' (1998: 93), and therefore as requiring the 'control' of the state.

However, as has also been argued, this divide between the cultural aspirations and ideologies of the poor, (the excluded), and the mainstream, (the included), is an imagined one (Young, 2006). An individual's motivation and the factors that generate that motivation, to engage in certain activities of consumption, underpinned by the social conditions of late modernity, may be the same for all. The key difference is their *ability to do so* due to the resources they have. And in this way this argument returns to the concept of edgework, key to this analysis. Because the forms of edgework people can engage in, and how safely they can engage in it, will be affected by the resources they have.

This aspect of edgework - how it can be applied to the actions of people in situations of relative material poverty when it was originally developed to understand 'middle class' actions such sky-diving – is recognised by Lyng (2005:28). He cites the study by Katz (1988) into criminal behaviour and experiential emotional outcomes of this to do so. Lyng argues that for those with few economic resources, and little social status, criminal activity may be a way of not only accessing resources, but also of taking some *control* ontologically, over life, in the face of few other options, and to experientially transcend or escape the reality they are in. This need to escape, or to feel more 'alive' as an individual, is directly related to the structural conditions of society they operate within:

*'In connecting the experiential foreground and the structural background in criminal action, Katz sees the emotional experience of humiliation as the lynchpin. Humbled*

*by the prospect of entering a bureaucratic, technological society with limited resources and the stigma of lower class and minority status, aspiring criminals rely on emotional transformation as a way to escape (...) this reality is directly tied to the broader sense of disenchantment engendered by the rational imperatives of the modern social order.'* (Lyng, 2005b: 28)

The use of drugs for example (something often cited as an individual cause of homelessness) encapsulates edgework. Taking drugs is an act that may provide the means to 'mindscape' (Cohen & Taylor, 1992), to transcend space, time, and temporarily to alter the reality someone is in, as a form of escape or transcendence from it. In the earlier example of the experiential outcome of musical performances, one of the participants likened the positive effect of this to drugs – albeit 'better than'. This illustrates also that disparate acts can be discursively understood alongside each other as forms of edgework. And this understanding is due to the emotional effect of these acts rather than what they actually incorporate - because taking drugs is also voluntarily engaging in an activity that can involve going 'over the edge' and losing control, through addiction or overdose; it is an act that can be both conceptualised as criminal, or deviant; that can damage people's mental and physical health.

Acts of edgework such as drug taking are also embodied in a specific material location, and often embodied in interactional relationships with others. In some contexts it may be that behaviour defined as edgework can be understood as not so 'deviant' or risky – subculture theory is well recognised (Becker, 1966) as people engage in acts that are 'normal' depending on the environment they are in. Furthermore acts that may be deviant may also simultaneously be acts that adhere to 'the norm' promoted within societies. In the era of consumerism, addiction is a manifestation of rampant consuming and people can be 'addicted' to anything (Reith, 2004; Giddens, 1992). In this, the same paradox emerges - edgework such as drug use is about escape from the 'horrendous repetition' of day-to-day life, escape from the material reality someone is in, and a way of asserting their sense of individuality and agency. Addiction ultimately indicates a complete loss of control over this, a loss of individuality, of being controlled once more (Reith, 2005; Giddens, 2002; 1992). This leads to the final key point about edgework, as Lyng conceptualises it – it is

about going close to the edge, but *coming back*, the *management* of risk. To go over is to have succumbed to the risks that edgework encapsulates, to have failed to gain the benefit, and return safely from this. But as some people have more resources to engage in edgework than others, it may be some have less chance of going over the edge than others. In the next section, how the concept of edgework explicitly fits with the analysis presented here, and with homelessness, is outlined.

### **1.9 Edgework and Homelessness**

There are three key aspects of edgework that are particularly relevant to this analysis. Firstly, even the ability to engage in the voluntary risk taking that Lyng identifies is constrained or enabled by the resources people have, tied to the structural context they operate within. For example, not everyone may have access to the resources required to go sky-diving. However they may still have the same motivation to engage in some form of edgework or to escape or transcend the material reality they are in. And this motivation stems from the structural and social conditions of late modernity. These acts (drug use; criminality; sky-diving) may carry different risks but what is important about them conceptually is how they are experienced emotionally. This is the crucial motivation and outcome of these acts. Edgework in this way refers to acts that lead to a transcendence or rupturing of normal day-to-day life and interactions.

Secondly, edgework is understood as negotiating with the edges of normative behaviour and circumstances. The aim however is not to 'go over the edge' but to be able to control and come back from the edge of a risky situation. In this way it can be applied to actions and events that are *not voluntarily* undertaken, but that still involve the transcendence or rupturing of 'normal' life, ontologically, *and* having to negotiate with some clear risk. So as it is conceptualised here, edgework is about acts that involve some attempt to come back from the edge and negotiate control of a situation, in the face of clear risk. When these acts are voluntarily undertaken empowerment and escape may be gained. However even if they are not voluntarily engaged in, 'risky' situations are often highly charged, emotionally. Negotiating with voluntary or involuntary risks may involve many of the same skills and actions. Therefore traumatic incidents such as being assaulted, or mental breakdown, can also



be considered edgework, albeit involuntarily experienced. These also require a negotiation of risk, are highly charged emotionally, and are likely to rupture someone's sense of ontological security and 'normal' day-to-day life.

Thirdly, and crucial to this analysis, many people experiencing homelessness engage in and experience extreme examples of edgework. They are often negotiating with these edges of normative behaviour and social life in many ways, involving both voluntary and involuntary edgework. They have often had experiences of attempting suicide, mental illness, addiction, of extreme violence, of being in institutions such as prison due to criminal activities. They are often engaged in, or experience, highly risky situations. In this way the concept of edgework is used to bring these disparate individual factors that are often identified as 'problems' in the lives of people who are homeless together as a conceptual whole in this analysis. The motivation for engaging in these acts, or the emotional effect of them, are what is key, however unrelated these acts may appear to be. People who are homeless are often negotiating with risks on the edge of normative social behaviour, and this is experienced emotionally as well as materially, and may underpin their ongoing actions.

### *Edgework and Stigma*

There is a final key aspect about edgework and homelessness. When it occurs amongst those with few resources, they are then often targeted by services of the social welfare system to end, resolve, or manage the risk these actions encapsulate – be it substance use, mental illness, or abusive relationships. These acts may also be acts that carry the risk of being stigmatised – as an 'addict', for example.

It may also be that people who continue to engage in such acts – to strive to transcend the 'humdrum' rationalised existence of life in late modernity - may be stigmatised for more than the 'threat' their 'lack of control' appears to indicate. Young (2006) argues that they are also a source of resentment for the 'respectable' responsible citizens, whose feel that their individuality and actions are constantly curtailed by their avoidance and management of risk:

*'It cannot be an accident that the stereotype of the underclass: with its idleness, dependency, hedonism, and institutionalised irresponsibility, with its drug use, teenage pregnancies and fecklessness, represents all the traits which the respectable citizen has to suppress in order to maintain his or her lifestyle' (Young, 2006:23).*

So another tension exists about the edgework people engage in: it may carry risk, it may be viewed as irresponsible by the 'respectable' majority; and these risks may lead to negative outcomes for people if they 'go over the edge'. However there is also an appeal, and may be a resentment of the actions and freedom that some forms of edgework represent, from those who do not or will not engage in them. And this may discursively underpin the *fear*, *resentment* or *pity* directed towards those who appear to have 'lost control' of themselves. These emotional responses may underpin public discourse about visibly 'outsider' groups, such as the homeless, within the conditions of late modernity. This may generate conflicting or emotive discourses on these groups that are not grounded in the reality of their lives or circumstances, and affect how these problems are experienced or occur.

#### **1.10 Conclusion: Theorising Transitions through Homelessness**

So to summarise, in this chapter it has been highlighted that people have multifaceted motivations for the actions they take, and these actions may be enabled or constrained by the access to resources, and structured embodied interactions they have and engage in. By taking the 'wrong' action, and going over the edge, such as becoming an addict, attempting suicide, becoming homeless, for example, people's actions may construct them as those unable to exercise their agency responsibly. Within the neo-liberal ideology underpinning the conditions of late modernity, these people may then be perceived as requiring the intervention of the state, through a process of case management to come back over the edge. They are assisted to make the 'right' choices, and through this to resolve the problems in their life.

Using this as the theoretical starting point, this thesis presents an analysis of longitudinal qualitative biographical data on the transitions through homelessness a group of people took. It examines how they described and conceptualised these transitions. The role of the social welfare system, their identity and ontological

security, and the interaction of agency and structure, are explored. And this exploration takes account of the structural landscape of precariousness that they operated within, and how this may have impacted on the emotional landscape these lives were embedded within, in the risk society of late modernity.

Before presenting these findings, the ontological and epistemological basis to this analysis are outlined in detail, and the research methods, context, and sample, presented, in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER TWO: CHARTING AND ANALYSING TRANSITIONS THROUGH HOMELESSNESS**

### **2.1 Introduction: Researching ‘What Happens’ and ‘Why’ – Realism and Structuration**

The biographical case studies of transitions through homelessness analysed here were collated using a qualitative longitudinal research methodology. It is asserted in this chapter that data collected in this way can be used to illustrate both ‘what happens’ in material reality, and how this is understood, experienced, and described by those that it happens to. The data, collected through three waves of in-depth interviews over a year, particularly focused on the qualitative experiences of the participants as they developed their transitions through homelessness over time. Detailed biographical case studies of each of the participants were developed using this data. This research therefore charted the objective outcomes that occurred over their lives and explored how and why this may have been. A key aspect of the analysis was to identify the mechanisms that affected these outcomes, whether they were consciously recognised by the participants or not.

This concern with objective empirical reality and with how this is experienced subjectively, illustrates a realist approach (Bhaskar, 1979; Sayer, 2000; Pawson & Tilley, 1997) to how we can come to know about social processes. Adopting the epistemology of realism requires an ontological perspective that acknowledges actions and outcomes are grounded in an actual material and social world that exists. This reality exists independently of our knowledge of it, but can only be understood and explained by recognising and analysing the constructed nature of how social actors interact with each other, and how these interactions and the meanings that underpin them, recreate and affect what that material and social reality is.

This research encapsulates an intensive research strategy, as defined by Sayer (2000:21). It is concerned with examining how social processes (such as transitions into and through homelessness) operate; what mechanisms produce certain changes; how the individuals studied actually act; and, focused on a relatively small number of cases. The aim of this intensive approach is to produce causal explanations and

theoretical ideas on the production of certain outcomes and events. In this approach causation is not viewed positivistically - as something that occurs in a linear relationship: that A causes B. Rather it is recognised that events occur due to a complex relationship of causation and circumstance. Many divergent factors interact that potentially can trigger and cause an outcome to occur, in some circumstances, for some people. Uncovering causation from a realist perspective is about uncovering the different mechanisms that may explain certain outcomes, without asserting that these same factors will necessarily *always* lead to that outcome, for *all* people. So this is the realist conceptualisation of causation used to explore the participants' transitions and lives here, utilising data collected through an intensive research strategy.

This realist approach complements the theory of structuration – that people produce, and are the products of, the society they live in, generated in an ongoing hermeneutical relationship (Giddens, 1984). This is the ontological approach taken here. This ontology fuses the theory of realism and structuration, through asserting that there is a material reality that exists. This reality is both created by and influences the individuals that operate within it, through the embodied experiences that they have. This embodiment is also influenced by how it is subjectively experienced – by the emotional landscape that these actual material events and emotional reactions are embedded within.

Blaikie (2000:10) argues that research must always be concerned with what, why, or how questions, but also acknowledges that the results of this will be limited within the parameters of time and space. Giddens (1984) too notes that social research must be sensitive to the time-space constitution of social life. In longitudinal research such as this, these parameters of time and space were stretched, and another dimension of complexity added. The multi-dimensional levels of identity, meaning, knowledge, and each interaction that went on in the day-to-day life of the research participants, are not all listed or explored here. In this way this may be considered a soft realist approach, identifying and analysing key outcomes and mechanisms that have affected these outcomes, rather than a stringent form of realist evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Two key issues were focussed on in the development of this analysis. One is the role the social welfare system had in affecting or changing the material context the participants operated within. Another is their identity, and how being homeless

may have affected this and in turn their ontological security, tied to the day-to-day life and interactions the participants experienced. By examining these factors, using this realist-structurational ontological and epistemological approach, a new understanding of social processes operating, that may be used to explain transitions people take over their life course, has been developed.

In the next section of this chapter how structure and agency are defined here is explained. In section three the research context is briefly outlined and in section four the specific context of the statutory and voluntary sector services that the participants could have accessed to assist them with their transitions through homelessness are described. In section five, the research participants and their circumstances are introduced and the methods used to collect the data outlined. In section six qualitative longitudinal research is explicitly discussed. In all research, the interactional nature of the research process, set within a framework of socially located power relations (Skeggs, 1997) means that certain ethical considerations have to be built into the design and implementation. Research such as this, that involved one-to-one interviews, and interactions over time with people experiencing a range of issues identified as problems in their life, such as addiction, homelessness or mental illness, is considered sensitive. The ethical considerations that underpinned this research process are presented in section seven. In this way the process that generated the data analysed here, and the key epistemological and ontological concepts used, are defined.

## **2.2 Understanding Agency and Structure**

This thesis represents a secondary analysis of data gathered by the author, initially used in a piece of policy research. Throughout the data collection the aims to be addressed in this thesis, and the theoretical framework to do so, were developed. This theoretical and epistemological framework was then used to underpin a new analysis of this empirical data, with the aim being to address a recognised 'gap' in theoretical accounts of homelessness (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Neale, 1997). This new account particularly focuses on why homelessness occurs, and how the transitions through homelessness the participants took, developed. Research into the cause of homelessness, and the influence of agency and structure to this, usually lacks any



clear conceptualisation of what is actually being referred to as agency or structure. To remedy this, how these concepts are defined in this analysis, is outlined below.

### *Defining Structure*

In this analysis the realist perception of what ‘structures’ are, is the starting point used to develop this definition. This account of structure starts with the proposition that there is an external world that exists, independently of our knowledge of it. The social ‘structure’ here refers to what is called ‘the real’:

*‘[T]he real is whatever exists, be it natural or social, regardless of whether it is an empirical object for us, and whether we happen to have an adequate understanding of its nature’ and ‘the real is the realm of objects, their structures and powers. Whether they be physical, like minerals, or social, like bureaucracies, they have certain structures and causal powers’* (Sayer, 2000:11).

Therefore it is understood here that the social welfare system, for example, creates, and is part of the structural context (the ‘reality’) that people operate within. The social welfare system provides some of the actual options people may be provided with to access resources. This system may also constitute the actual environment and set of interactions they engage in to access these resources. The social welfare system is not an actual material object that can be measured or grasped. This does not mean that it does not exist however, or that it does not profoundly affect the material and social environment someone may experience. This is the external structured ‘reality’ that an individual operates within. Furthermore the social welfare system, and the context it generates, is only one aspect of what constitutes the entire social structure individuals operate within. Many different external processes, institutions and environments intersect, interact and overlap to generate the entire structural ‘reality’ that people operate within. Structures are external to any one individual, and will exist regardless of any one individual. Yet they only constitute ‘society’ due to individuals shared understanding of them. This understanding of the reality they operate within impacts on their actions and interactions, and in this way goes on to produce or reproduce this externally experienced structural context once more, in an ongoing structuration of society. Clearly then this realist definition of structure is

compatible with structuration theory, as the epistemological standpoint from which this analysis is developed.

### *Structuration and Ontological Security*

In structuration theory it is recognised that social ‘structures’ are both enabling and constraining. Structural principles must exist for people to have the capacity to act and make knowledgeable choices within the society they operate in. As these principles become increasingly embedded they become the structural properties that underpin the institutions of that society (Giddens, 1984). People are socialised and physically embodied in and by the society they live in. Situated structured principles construct how they should or can act and interact with others, within that society. These actions and interactions are then implicit in recreating these very rules and resources. This embedding of structural properties has a temporal span that overlaps each generation, and outlives any one individual. However this does not mean people lack the capacity to act in ways that may transform or alter these principles over time either:

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

This continuing recreation over time and space is necessary to maintain the boundaries of social life, and the ‘ontological security’ individuals require to operate within society. People follow, and recreate these structural principles, to maintain this ontological security. Some routine and predictability of social action and outcome is required in the socially situated micro-level interactions of day-to-day life for people to communicate, interact and operate socially. However this ontological security can breakdown if this predictability is disrupted by what Giddens terms ‘critical situations’. Therefore the actions people engage in can implicitly be understood as stemming from their desire to maintain their sense of ontological security, within the structural context they operate within. This is security maintained through the predictability of their routine, through the predictability of how interactions should play out within these routines, and from their understanding of their *role* within the

structural reality they exist in. If this 'normal' day-to-day life and role is ruptured, people may face ontological crisis. They then have to attempt to negotiate this, and regain some sense of internal ontological security once more by adapting to the situation they are now in through a process of resocialisation (Giddens, 1984:63). Therefore, ontological security is an important concept through which transitions can be examined and understood.

So structure refers to the institutions, social processes and ideologies that exist independently of any one individual but that constitute the society, and external 'reality' they are embedded in, in day-to-day life. This reality is also created by their actions however, actions which may be underpinned by the sense of identity and individuality that they have.

### *Defining Agency*

Agency can be understood as the sense of individuality, of being 'an individual' that someone has. Agency does not refer to actual actions or outcomes, but to the internal processes, independent of but embedded in structures, that individuals subjectively experience. This may impact on how they act, tied to their sense of identity and the need to maintain the sense of ontological security they have. *Acts* of agency are actions underpinned by this process. Therefore agency here does not refer to the actual 'doing', but the internal narratives that people have of their lives that affects how they act, and is embedded in the course that life has taken. A degree of agency is always being exercised in the choices and actions people take. There is always some capacity for choice to be exercised as people negotiate the day-to-day activities and interactions they engage in (Giddens, 1984).

This internal process of 'agency' relates to each individual's ability to construct a narrative identity – a conceptualisation of who they are, over time. The work of Ricouer (1991a; 1991b; 1992) on narrative identity, and Goffman (1959) on 'social role' are used to illustrate this. In this way it can be asserted that identities are also structured by the society people operate within.



Ricoeur (1991a; 1991b; 1992) argues that through a process of 'emplotment', the actual events that occur, and how people present them and make sense of them as part of their 'story' of life, become interwoven subconsciously by them, over time. In this way they can maintain a sense of narrative identity over time – they are the 'same' person today as yesterday - even if their circumstances change. By constructing a cohesive internal narrative of the different events that have occurred in their life, they can maintain their ontological security and sense of identity. This sense of identity and social role is crucial to the ongoing structuration of social life through the interactions they engage in. And the need to maintain this internal narrative sense of identity will impact on, and be impacted upon, the actions they engage in in day-to-day life, within the external structural reality they are embedded in. This 'sense of self' will be subjectively affected by the knowledge people have, and the ideas this knowledge underpins about who they may become in the future. Their narrative is taken from all the 'texts' – discourses, ideology, experiences, interactions, and media, they have been exposed to over time. This will also affect the 'possible selves' that they may have in the future, the outcomes or identities that they can imagine they could have and aim to be (Markus & Nurius, 1986). These possible selves have to ontologically fit within the past they have experienced if they are to maintain a sense of narratable identity. Through this process of emplotment people weave a sense of identity that brings together the disparate events that objectively happen in the material reality they operate within, from the textual and discursive representations and knowledge they have access to. This will also impact on how they act, or feel they should act, in the embodied material reality they are embedded within, to maintain this 'plot'.

So Ricoeur argues that a sense of cohesive identity, and social role, is maintained over time, through the process of emplotment. Similarly Goffman (1959) argues that all social encounters, in the time-space of 'day-to-day life', are structured around people maintaining their role within the micro-level social interactions they engage in. People are grounded by their sense of identity, and the interactions they engage in, within certain social settings, to continue to attempt to maintain or negotiate the role and identity they have there. Therefore their actions are affected by this internal awareness of identity, of the 'individual' they perceive themselves to be. Their actions are also then affected by how they, and those they interact with, play out their

roles, and perceive they should act within that situation. Transitional events over the life course, where the ‘plot’ of someone’s life is changing are important to explore: in this way how people attempt to maintain their ontological security, their sense of identity, and how their actions may affect the transition they make, can be better understood.

So agency provides the internal rationale behind many actions - actions engaged in to represent and assert the sense of identity, and individuality, that someone has. This process may be crucial to maintain ontological security. There is an ongoing tension inherent in this, as people must strive to maintain their sense of identity, as they make transitions through many changing contexts, interactions, and actions, over their life. These contexts and actions may not always ‘fit’ with the narrative plot of their lives, but they have to maintain a narratable identity, to maintain their sense of ontological security. However these actions and this sense of identity are also constrained and constituted by the material context, and the structural reality, that an individual is embedded in. Their actions will go on being influenced by, and feeding back into the reproduction of these structures over time. The identity someone has both acts to create, and is created by, the structured reality that people operate within, and the discursive knowledge about this reality they hold.

One aspect of that material context, used as a specific unit of analysis here, is the interactions with the social welfare system that the participants had. Other factors also operate to influence people’s material reality – particularly the social, economic, and human capital that they have. Material context alone is not enough to understand the actions that people take however, or the motivation that may subjectively underpin those actions. In this analysis identity and ontological security are explored as another crucial factor to understanding the transitions through homelessness the participants made. Before going on to present these findings however, the context that underpinned these transitions, and how it is conceptualised in this analysis, is described and clarified.

## **2.3 The Research Context**

In this and the next section some contextual information is provided to illustrate the material reality that the participants were operating within, and how this may have affected their transitions through homelessness. However it is also clarified that this analysis was about the individuals whose case studies are analysed, rather than the specifics of the situation they operated within.

### *Local and Global – Conceptualising the Research Context*

This research was conducted in Glasgow, a large city in Scotland. In Scotland there were 57,020 applications made to local authorities under the homeless legislation in 2004/2005. Over the last decade these figures had risen considerably from 41,495 in 1994/95 (Scottish Executive, 2005a). Glasgow has a sustained problem with homelessness with 10,627 statutory applications in 2004/05, accounting for 22% of those in Scotland. This is less than in the previous year, when the data analysed here was collected. In this year the statutory homeless figures in Glasgow were 12,712 (Scottish Executive, 2005a). These statistical figures are limited in the scope they have to really illustrate the extent or nature of homelessness. Not everyone who applies through the statutory system will be deemed eligible for housing. However this application process is an important point for people to access welfare services for the homeless, and these figures do illustrate that homelessness represents a clear social problem in Scotland.

Although it is recognised that Glasgow has a particularly high concentration of deprivation (with over 50% of the neighbourhoods in Glasgow defined within the most multiply-deprived 15% of neighbourhoods in Scotland) Glasgow also shares many features with other post-industrial urban areas in the UK and has recently undergone a period of sustained attempts at regeneration and economic development (Scottish Executive, 2005b).

As already asserted, this analysis is not concerned with the *specific* demographic, social, and economic characteristics of the city or country it was set in. Rather the focus is on the individual experiences of the research participants and how they described these experiences as they negotiated their transitions through homelessness



within the *broad* social structure of neo-liberal, post-industrial capitalism, in a time of reflexive late modernity.

Whilst acknowledging that certain locations bring with them a specific micro-context, the broad context of this research is urban life in late modernity. This conceptualisation is underpinned by the idea of ‘global cities’ (Sassen, 1991). It is asserted that through a process of globalisation, urban environments are increasingly assimilating. Social processes and problems occur and are played out over and above the local context they occur within. This local context is still important. The embodied experiences people have will be underpinned by the micro-level setting they occur within. However it is also asserted that urban post-industrial cities share similar features and problems, and that these features and problems often have occurred as part of the process of modernisation and urbanisation, so can be analysed broadly as phenomenon generated within this context.

In chapter one, the current legislation and political approach to addressing homeless in Scotland was described. To illustrate how this system is conceptualised here, in these broad terms, the extent to which this system illustrates the outcome of the reflexive system of governance Dean (1999) identifies, is discussed below.

### *A Reflexive System of Governance – Homeless Policy in Scotland*

It is asserted here that the model of reflexive government parallels in many ways the social welfare provision currently in place for people negotiating with homelessness in Scotland. There is a raft of different support services and accommodation options available to people experiencing homelessness, provided through both statutory and voluntary sector agencies, funded primarily by government bodies. The management and provision of these services is based on strategic reviews and research (such as the work of the Homelessness Task Force, 2002a; 2002b; Homelessness Monitoring Group 2004; 2005; and the Homelessness Strategies in place through local authorities, such as Glasgow City Council, 2003). There has been an increased emphasis on the need to consult people actually experiencing the problems these policy and service developments aim to address, and to involve them in the organisation of the services they access in a reflexive process (the development of a

city wide 'service users forum' as part of Glasgow City Council's Homelessness Strategy (2003) is an example of this). There is an emphasis on providing 'choices' for people who are experiencing homelessness in the services they access. However these 'choices' exist due to the competitive tendering for funding to provide different services that agencies now have to engage in. These tenders have to fit with new services that are required as part of the strategic, reflexive ongoing development of services to address certain identifiable problems. The services are then subject to intense monitoring, and need to achieve certain 'measurable' outcomes, to justify their ongoing existence.

Within these strategies there is often a discourse of addressing 'holistically' and using a 'person-centred' approach to working with someone to address the multi-faceted problems they are experiencing (such as mental illness, homelessness, or substance misuse). The new national funding stream of Supporting People (that funds some homeless services) is an example that can be used to highlight this ideology. This system focuses on individuals, and their circumstances, to assist them address their problems 'holistically' and develop the skills to live independent lives through the advice and support of social welfare professionals, in a '*working partnership of local government, probation, health, voluntary sector organisations, housing associations, support agencies and service users*' (ODPM, 2004: 1).

These developments may be part of the 'utopianistic goal' that Dean (1999:35) identifies neo-liberal governments are pursuing, to improve society through reform. However as Dean also highlights, these 'utopian' goals are underpinned by the neo-liberal ideology that human beings are active individuals that *can and should* be reformed, and that targeting them through social policy can effectively do so.

People are now often referred to a range of different support services that work in partnership to assist them to 'manage' their lives. In this way they are 'targeted' due to the problems they are experiencing (O'Connell, 2003; Anderson, 2004) in a 'case management' system, as individuals. The intended outcome of this is that they will become responsible citizens (Dean, 1999). Whether this outcome has been achieved or not is 'evidenced' through the monitoring of these services. Certain outcomes, such as the number of service users who have obtained housing over a year, and

stayed there, or the number of service users who have gained employment are particularly focussed upon to do so.

As was highlighted in chapter one, people experiencing homelessness are often negotiating with a range of other 'individual' problems such as addiction, poverty, mental illness, physical illness, unemployment, and contact with the justice system. This may lead to them being the target of many of the 'regimes of practice' of this social welfare system.

All of the participants whose lives and transitions were analysed here were recruited to take part in this research through different services they were in contact with to assist them resolve their homelessness. How these services operate to target and assist people who are homeless is an important aspect of this analysis. These services made up much of the day-to-day reality the participants experienced as they made their transitions through homelessness. To illustrate what this reality may have been, some of the different services and accommodation options that the participants accessed as they make their transitions through homelessness are described below.

## **2.4 Homeless Services in Glasgow**

In Glasgow contact with the statutory homeless system is typically made by an individual or family going to a central office in the city and presenting as 'homeless'. This office is where most applications for housing from the local authority, under the current homelessness legislation, take place. It is open twenty-four hours a day with a large waiting room where people wait to make this application and to find out the outcome.

Their application is assessed under the conditions of the homeless legislation, and some form of accommodation or advice should be offered. If applicants are not deemed in 'priority need' of housing (this has been single homeless people without dependent children), or are not viewed as 'unintentionally' homeless, they then often have few options other than a bed space in temporary accommodation, or may not be offered any accommodation at all. Due to the introduction of the Homelessness etc Act 2003, this 'priority need' distinction is being phased out, and is due to be



abolished by 2012. After then *all* people defined as statutorily homeless will be entitled to permanent accommodation regardless of their circumstances. However for this to operate effectively there will have to be an adequate supply of the right sort of accommodation available, and this may not always happen. Some people may not wish to stay in the accommodation they are offered. There are people who remain without any form of accommodation even after going through this process. If they are offered temporary accommodation then this will be a room in a hostel; a temporary furnished flat; accommodation in privately owned Bed & Breakfasts; or a room in a supported accommodation project or rehabilitation centre.

When someone makes a homeless application they will also have their related 'support needs' assessed at the centre and may be referred to other agencies that make up the welfare provision, such as health, or addiction workers. They may already have contact with professionals such as this, and be referred to housing or homelessness services by them. Once they are in the 'system' in this way, they may also apply for a permanent tenancy. However it may take some time for one to become available for them. Social rented tenancies are provided through Housing Associations, or until recently, the local authority. In Glasgow a transfer of all local authority housing stock to the Glasgow Housing Association took place in 2003, and permanent accommodation now has to be accessed via a Housing Association (Gibb & MacLennan, 2006). The process of gaining a permanent tenancy is dependent on the supply and quality of socially rented housing available. Many people spend long-periods in temporary accommodation, or have to spend time in a supported accommodation to address problems such as addiction, before they will be offered their own tenancy or one becomes available that they are able to live in.

The traditional image of the welfare assistance provided for people who are homeless often relates to how basic necessities (such as food or clothing) are distributed to rough sleepers. These services, such as soup kitchens, continue to exist (sometimes provided outside of the social welfare system, by Christian groups for example). However a wide range of specialist services now operate to assist people who are or have been homeless. To provide some illustrative examples of these different services, accounts of services typical of those that the participants were recruited through, are described below.

### *Street Work, Soup Kitchens and Drop-in's*

Outreach street workers actively locate and make contact with people who are rough sleeping and focus on 'crisis intervention' to provide food, clothing and advice to them. These workers will then assist them to gain accommodation through the social welfare system, and will continue to have contact with them until this is done. They will also encourage them to access other resources and services (such health care) they may need. They may assist in facilitating this by meeting with them and providing transport for them to attend clinics or meetings with other professionals. Sometimes the people the outreach workers work with will not actually be without accommodation of some kind, but may be part of a street homeless 'culture' and only have contact with outreach workers.

Soup kitchens, cafes, and drop-in's also operate, to provide food and facilities for people who are homeless. The people who use drop-in's may be perceived to be rough sleepers, but they may not necessarily be roofless. Some may be living in a hostel for example. Often these drop-in services, unlike the rest outlined here, are not funded through the social welfare system but through Christian organisations. The opening hours for such services may be limited with some only open once a week or for a few hours a day. Drop-in's are often a locus for outreach street workers to make contact with people who are homeless, and for other sources of advice and information to be distributed. Some drop-ins also have facilities such as showers or washing machines that people can use, or may have medical or other professionals that attend them at certain set times each week to provide other services.

### *Temporary Accommodation*

Temporary accommodation is funded through Housing Benefit or other government funding streams. Therefore people usually have to be eligible for Housing Benefit to be able to stay there, or must pay for it themselves. Some forms of temporary accommodation, such as Bed & Breakfasts or hostels provide literally just a room with a bed, and access to a bathroom and perhaps cooking facilities or a canteen. Some temporary accommodation is provided in the form of furnished flats, in a block

of other temporary flats, managed by a housing authority or agencies. Supported accommodation usually involves being provided with both accommodation (such as a bedroom in a project) and being allocated a support worker based in that accommodation unit. These workers assist people address individual problems that they have and obtain housing, usually through the developments and implementation of a structured Care Plan.

Some fictional examples of the different sorts of supported accommodation projects the participants lived in over the course of the research are outlined below:

*Smith House* - A five bedroom shared house for men with support staff available on-site twenty-four hours a day. These workers oversee the management and organisation of the house and are allocated to each resident to develop a Care Plan with them. Residents could only access this accommodation by being referred from other agencies such as the local Social Work department. This was a 'dry' project meaning residents must abstain from any alcohol use whilst accommodated there, including when they are outside of the house. It was aimed at men with high support needs, that had previously had problems with addiction to alcohol or drugs before moving there.

*Brownfield Project* - A twelve-bedroom hostel for women with communal kitchen and sitting areas, staffed twenty-four hours a day. Residents were provided with 'low level' support by their allocated key worker. They were expected to find permanent accommodation or move to more specialist supported accommodation, within six months of first being accommodated there.

*Sundale House* - A shared house for both men and women, with seven rooms, staffed only during office hours (9-5). This form of accommodation was intended to be an 'in between' stage for people who had been living in supported accommodation staffed twenty-four hours a day, before they move into their own tenancy. The house has communal facilities, such as a sitting room, but all the rooms also had their own cooking facilities and bathrooms attached.



*Knockhill Unit* - A block of flats, with an office on the ground floor, and support workers available during office hours to advise or assist residents if required. After six months residents could choose to live in their flat permanently and get a permanent lease or move to another tenancy, but staff would continue to be available to support and advise them or assist residents to resolve any problems or conflict they had. There was an emergency phone line provided that could be used to contact support workers outside of office hours, if required.

Another form of accommodation that many of the participants had experienced living in were residential rehabilitation units. People live in these units while they address addiction or other problems they have. Sometimes people are accommodated in these rehabs rather than serve a prison sentence, and contact with people outside of the rehabilitation unit is limited or not allowed.

People may be accommodated in different forms of temporary accommodation for years before they are offered their own tenancy. Sometimes they move multiple-times to different forms of temporary accommodation, or decide to leave and stay elsewhere, such as with friends, for a period. Housing Support, Resettlement, or Tenancy Sustainment Workers, are also often allocated to people during this time to assist them access and move into their own tenancy.

#### *Housing Support, Resettlement, and Tenancy Sustainment Workers*

Housing, resettlement or tenancy sustainment workers provide one-to-one advice and assistance to individuals to assist them obtain their own tenancy. They are allocated to work with an individual after an initial referral and assessment is made. They will then help them to apply for a tenancy through different housing authorities, to complete the application forms, and make contact with the agency processing the application, for example. Once people are offered a tenancy their worker may visit it with them to ensure it is 'suitable'. Once people move into their own tenancy their worker will provide practical advice and assistance to help them 'settle' there, such as setting up electricity and gas supplies to the property; information on where to obtain furniture and ensuring 'payment plans' for utility bills and rent are in place. In the case of the organisation that the research sample was recruited through,

resettlement workers would continue working with someone for up to six months after they obtained their own tenancy. If someone continued to require support with their housing after this they would be allocated a Tenancy Sustainment Worker.

Tenancy Sustainment Workers also assist people on a one-to-one basis, the aim being that they maintain their tenancy long-term or avoid becoming homeless despite being at risk of it (such as having been served an eviction notice). Tenancy Sustainment Workers meet with people in their tenancy, to ensure that any problems they are having that may affect their housing are being addressed, such as ensuring they are paying their rent, and accessing the right benefits. They also provide people with information on other agencies or services they can access. These other agencies and services may include those that provide training or advice for people who have been homeless, such as employability projects.

### *Employability and Resettlement Training*

There is a social policy emphasis on addressing poverty and exclusion through paid employment. To promote this, employability projects have been developed to assist homeless people develop their skills and access training and employment. These projects also often provide training on 'life skills' or 'personal development'. These courses sometimes run over a period of set weeks, and the tutors may also act to provide some support and advice to the people who are on them. They may refer them to other agencies that can assist them with problems such as addiction, or access to housing. Some employability projects include setting up work placements for people.

There are also training services that focus on resettlement rather than employment, providing training courses and advice on moving into a tenancy, or budgeting, for example, for people who are homeless.

There are also a range of different Service User Forums, and volunteer programmes that operate. These provide service users and 'ex-homeless' people who have used homeless services the opportunity to comment on the services they are accessing.

People who have used these services may also work as volunteers to advise other people experiencing homelessness.

### *Reflections on Homeless Services*

In this section some of the different forms of accommodation and services that people can access when they are homeless have been briefly outlined. Within this reflexive welfare system that exists many different services now operate to assist different groups of people with the problems they have. Often the definition of homelessness used by these services is broad – for example, the employability projects are funded to work with homeless people. The eligibility for this however may be that someone is at risk of homelessness or has previously been homeless. Often these agencies work with people generally perceived to be ‘vulnerable’ and that lack other sources of support, rather than people with clearly defined single issue that they require support with – such as homelessness or addiction. However they will also usually be referred to specialist agencies (such as addiction or health services) to actually assist them resolve the other problems they have.

These agencies and the services they provide, although operated by different voluntary and statutory bodies, are increasingly funded and managed within a broad strategic framework. This framework has been developed to address problems such as homelessness through the implementation of government social policy in a holistic, strategic, ‘joined-up’ way. Although the emphasis is often on providing ‘choices’ and a ‘person centred’ approach to supporting people, the way these services operate (such as who they can work with, and for how long, or the age group they are allowed to work with) can also be highly restricted, and monitored closely. The funding for these services, and whether they can continue to operate, is then tied to the outcomes they can show they have achieved through the service they provide.

Through this increased emphasis on ‘joint working’, and funding frameworks that incorporate all sectors into partnership in a reflexive process, it is asserted here that voluntary and statutory sector services are increasingly merging into a complex web. This web of services can be seen as collectively constituting the ‘social welfare system’ as it is referred to here. However these agencies can also be in direct



competition with each other for funding. They may also sometimes be in a constant cycle of trying to maintain their funding, and have to alter or change the service they provide or who they can provide it for, depending on the current funding agreement they have, with the government agency that provides that funding.

This analysis focuses on the experiences of the individuals who were making a transition through homelessness, rather than the operation of the services they had contact with to assist them. However there are clearly many other issues on the management and implementation of these services that could have been explored, and that should be in other studies on transitions through homelessness that people make.

## **2.5 Research Sample and Data Collection**

In this section the research design, sample, and data collection is outlined to make transparent the research process that generated the data and case studies analysed in this thesis. The data collection for this thesis was conducted at the same time as homelessness legislation and policy changes (outlined in chapter one) were being introduced. Some of the sample had experienced many years of living in temporary accommodation provided for people experiencing homelessness by the time of the first interview. Their previous application for housing under the homeless legislation had occurred before these changes were introduced. Their transitions through homelessness may have spanned over twenty years. The aim of this analysis is not to examine or assess the nuances of this policy change. Rather the aim is to examine theoretically the role that the welfare system, and that structure, agency, and identity have, within the social system of late modernity, that impacted on the transitions the participants made, as individuals.

This thesis represents the outcome of a secondary analysis of data gathered by the author at the early stage of this PhD. This data was initially used for a piece of policy research to assess 'what works, for whom, in what circumstances, in relation to individual's pathways through homelessness'. This research did engage with recent policy changes that had been made, and the specific context of Glasgow that the research was carried out in. The intention of this secondary analysis is to provide a

more radical theoretical perspective on transitions through homelessness, utilising the richness of this data. This analysis is outside the paradigm of homelessness policy and evaluation that the data was primarily collected for. The need for research and analysis on policy issues, such as homelessness, to ‘step back’ from this policy process has been highlighted by Pleace & Quilgars (2003) and this secondary analysis in the form of PhD thesis illustrates a model that can be adopted to do so.

The development of the research design, methods, and data collection was underpinned throughout by this intention to also use the data for an academic PhD thesis. All of the research was conducted by the author, who was employed at that time as a researcher, in the agency the participants were recruited through. Each of the participants gave their explicit written permission for the data they provided to be utilised in a PhD thesis, and the gatekeeper organisation gave written confirmation that the data is the intellectual property of the researcher, and could be used in this way. Although the same baseline questions were asked at each interview, additional questions were included in the final interviews to assist with meeting the aims of the PhD. Nevertheless, it must be clear that as a secondary analysis of data initially collected for another purpose, limitations do exist. This particularly relates to the sample, as this was chosen as the PhD was only primarily underway. This sampling process is outlined in the next section.

### *Sampling*

The sample was selected from a sampling frame of seventy people. All of these people were accessing at least one of thirteen different services provided to assist people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, managed by an agency in Glasgow. These thirteen services included examples of all of those outlined in the previous section – such as street outreach, supported accommodation, and employability training.

These seventy people all completed a structured questionnaire on their route into homelessness; their current situation; other related aspects of their life such as employment, health, and social networks; and the different welfare services they had been or were in contact with. This was done as part of an evaluation of these services,

and as an examination of routes out of homelessness. At the same time as they completed the questionnaire, they gave their written permission to have their circumstances 'tracked' over time and to be contacted about taking part in the in-depth interviews in the future.

From this set of seventy, thirty people were selected to cover a cross-section of age, gender, current housing situation, previous experiences of homelessness (for example, some had experienced repeated homelessness, others had not) and contact with welfare services they had had. These thirty were asked to take part in a life history interview, and three waves of in-depth interviews on their current circumstances, conducted at six monthly intervals over twelve months. Twenty-four participants took part in each of the three in-depth interviews. Some contact and a second interview was conducted with a further four, who had also taken part in the first interview and life history, over the twelve months the sample were researched<sup>2</sup>. Therefore twenty-eight people had their transitions through homelessness explored over the time of a year in their life and detailed biographical case studies on their lives were developed by this research. Some of these people had obtained their own tenancy after recently being homeless. It is the data from these twenty-eight people, that is analysed in this thesis.

The different forms of homelessness that the participants had experienced over their lives were diverse. Some of the participants had slept rough on the streets for years; others had never slept rough, but lacked permanent accommodation and were moving between hostels and Bed & Breakfasts; some of the participants had their own tenancy at the time of the first interview, but were still receiving support to 'maintain' this housing, having previously been homeless; two were accessing homeless services after being served eviction notices for their housing but had not had to leave that housing. Therefore the sample covered a diverse range of different circumstances, and people that had experienced many different forms of 'homelessness'. The participants also spanned a wide age range, gender divide, and could be considered at different 'stages' in their transitions through homelessness.

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<sup>2</sup> The data collection actually took eighteen months, however this covered approximately twelve months of each of the participants' lives. The first set of interviews took four months to complete, and each subsequent interview was conducted at six month intervals from the last, with each participant.



The sample consisted of thirteen female and fifteen male participants, with an age range of twenty-five to sixty (the full breakdown of the characteristics can be found in appendix two). The mean age was thirty-nine. In keeping with the typical profile of people experiencing homelessness in Glasgow at that time (Fairlie, 2006) all were white, and had been born in the UK. Eighteen of the sample had experienced repeated episodes of homelessness prior to the initial interview.

The characteristic of the sample at each phase is summarised below:

**Table A: Characteristics of the Research Sample**

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Number housed in own tenancy at first contact</i>
Questionnaire sample (N:70) (Sampling Frame)	Average age: 38 Range: 25 - 62	40 Male 30 Female	31
Initial qualitative sample Interview/life history (N:30)	Average age: 41 Range: 25 - 61	17 Male 13 Female	11
Sample retained throughout research (N:28)	Average age: 39 Range: 25 - 60	15 Male 13 Female	11

*The Interview Process*

During the life history interview baseline information relating to the different housing the participants had lived in over their entire life course was gathered. This baseline

information included the location of their accommodation, who they lived with, how they occupied their time during this period of their life (such as education they were engaged in, employment, leisure activities), how they felt about that period of their life, and what happened to change this situation. This narrative began from when they were born. The processes that led to the participants becoming homeless, what they did to resolve or negotiate with this situation, and how they subjectively felt about this, were also specifically explored. These same baseline topics, and any changes that had occurred, were then explored at each of the subsequent interviews, starting with a clarification of the participants' current circumstances at the first interview. The participants were also asked about what their plans for the future were, the services they were accessing, and general views they had about homelessness.

In keeping with a realist approach, it was important the participants had an opportunity to discuss and describe their experiences in their own words, whilst also ensuring the baseline questions on what was 'actually happening' in their lives were adequately covered. For this to be achieved, semi-structured interview schedules were used (appendix one). Each interview schedule also contained questions specifically focussing on the services of the social welfare system that the participants had or were accessing, and how they felt about these services. In the final interview general questions on the participants' views on homelessness, what causes problems such as homelessness to exist, how the social welfare system can be used to address it, and what actions or circumstances they attributed to causing homelessness, were also included.

The interviews were conducted at a variety of locations, including the researcher's office, interview rooms on the premises of homeless services or accommodation projects, the participant's own tenancy, rooms in supported accommodation projects, and cafes. The interviews were taped and then fully transcribed. Notes were also kept about key changes to the participants' circumstances. These were updated after each interview and stored in the same database as the contact details. At each interview the research process was discussed with the participants and they signed consent forms giving permission for the information they gave to be stored and used in the research as outlined in the consent form. The interviews were conducted in as relaxed and discursive a manner as possible. The majority lasted between one and two hours

each, with the initial interview/life history interview usually spanning over three hours (with a break provided in between). Therefore over a hundred and fifty hours of narrative data was systematically collected and then used to develop the case studies analysed here.

In this section, practical aspects of the interview process have been outlined. It is also recognised that these interviews were a social interaction, embedded in situated power relationships, making up part of the day-to-day activities the participants engaged in. This situated and interactional aspect of the research process is explored in more detail in section six on the ethical considerations of this research. Below, some other practical issues concerning the analysis are clarified.

### *Data Analysis*

For the purpose of this thesis the data collected during the interviews was analysed using two strategies. Firstly, each of the participants' life histories and what happened to them over the course of the research was used to develop detailed biographical case studies. These case studies particularly focussed on the reasons they gave for changes that had occurred over their life course and the order these events occurred in – for example, why and when they moved into a rehab after having their own tenancy; how long they lived in the rehab for; and why and where they moved after this.

Separately, the baseline questions and topics covered at each interview were listed in a single document, under sub-headings. All the participants' comments on these issues were then collated and listed under each subheading. In this way every comment on a certain question or topic that the participants had made could be referred back to and analysed easily. Each comment was coded with the participants identifying number (for example, X1) and the number of the interview with this participant it had come from (for example X1.1 or X1.2). If further clarification or detail was required about that comment then the entire transcript it came from would be referred back to.



In this way both what happened to the participants and how they described it could be analysed, contrasted, and then presented. There was also a degree of reflexivity inherent in the analysis. During the research I was immersed in the lives of the people studied, and also the workings of the social welfare system and this could not have helped but influence the understanding of these issues I have. Having said that, this analysis and the findings presented here, developed purely from the data. This data was analysed to address the aims outlined in chapter one, using the epistemological and ontological framework discussed in this chapter. Throughout this thesis case studies of the participants are used to illustrate the findings, with some additional quotes from them used to further illuminate these points. All the names used are pseudonyms.

### *Defining Homelessness in this Research*

As was discussed in chapter one, what homelessness means may encapsulate a diverse range of material, social, psychological, and ideological dimensions and therefore a single definition is not always appropriate. However for the purpose of this research, an objective definition of homelessness, narrowly relating to the material housing circumstance of the participants, was adopted. This was solely to chart the participants' housing transitions. It is important to emphasise this definition is only a tool for the analysis, and is not intended to convey or override the other dimensions of homelessness that are also explored.

To chart the participants' transitions through homelessness in this analysis, 'homelessness' is defined as *being without permanent housing*. Permanent housing is defined as a legal tenancy or ownership of a house or flat. This encapsulates some of Somerville's indicators of home explored earlier – such as shelter; privacy; abode; and security. Being or remaining homeless in this way therefore refers to any housing situation where the participants did not have their own permanent housing. This includes living in temporary accommodation; staying with friends; being in prison with no other housing available once they are released; and sleeping rough.

Different forms of homelessness may be experienced, and may occur as part of an individual's 'housing pathway', throughout their life (Clapham, 2002). This is

recognised, whilst also recognising that a degree of clarity as to how homelessness was defined in this analysis is required to empirically chart the transitions through homelessness the participants made. This is needed if the objective outcomes – ‘what happened’ to the participants over the course of this research - is to be clearly charted, before going on to analyse their qualitative and subjective understanding of it.

So this definition provides the objective form of homelessness used to chart the participant’s transitional outcomes. People experiencing homelessness will be negotiating with a range of other, related, issues in their life, simultaneously, through the myriad of interactions they engage in on a day-to-day basis. The actions they take as they negotiate transitions through their life course may be motivated by the pursuit of a range of outcomes that do not relate to their housing situation, such as developing relationships. These aspects of the transitions people make have also been explored in this analysis.

### *Characteristics of the Sample*

What was particularly significant about the sample was that they were all in contact with a range of welfare agencies (such as statutory addiction and health services, the criminal justice system) and were all recruited through an agency they were accessing to assist them resolve their homelessness. In this way they can be seen as all being the target of different ‘regimes of the social’, and people whose homelessness was deemed to require more than just housing to resolve but also specialist support for them to ‘resettle’ into mainstream society and live independent lives. It is important to highlight that the participants may not have perceived themselves in this way, but they did represent people who had been case managed in some way by the services of the social welfare system. Some people may make a transition through homelessness in very different ways than the participants represented here, and without any contact with the social welfare system. The sample whose lives are analysed here may have been particularly manifest of discursive ideas about ‘homeless people’ that exists. Many had slept rough, had problems with addiction, had a high level of contact with social welfare and justice systems, for

example. However the value of this research is that the complexity of their lives, and how they experienced these things in their lives, has been explored.

Another key value of the longitudinal methodology of this research is that people's situation, and the contact they had with the social welfare system, changed over the course of the data collection. Therefore the experiences of those who lost all contact with these services, but were still negotiating their transition through homelessness, could be explored, alongside the experiences of those that remained within this system, or that made a transition out of homelessness and obtained their own housing.

Having said that, a limitation of this study that also must be flagged here is the limitations inherent when only a small sample is explored. The participants' homelessness is not meant to be statistically representative of anyone, and everyone, that may experience homelessness, due to the qualitative nature of the methodology. The difficulty in defining homeless was outlined in chapter one, and the group whose biographies have been analysed here were all people who had become visibly homeless. At the point of the first interview they were in contact with the social welfare system specifically to access support services, advice or accommodation for homeless people. They were all single homeless people and had a range of other problems in their lives. They were accessing welfare services to assist them with this. Despite the diversity of age and split between gender represented here, they were all white (and from the UK). This means that the sample did not incorporate some 'new' groups such as asylum seekers, or those from black or minority ethnic group, that may also experience problems such as homelessness<sup>3</sup>. These detailed and rich biographical cases studies still provides a valuable data set however. This provides a systematic study of people 'on the edge' and negotiating transitions over time within the conditions of late modernity. This analysis used these case studies to develop a robust new theoretical account of homelessness – an account that may then be built upon and developed in the future, by incorporating other groups, and larger samples.

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<sup>3</sup> At the time of the data collection these groups were not particularly represented in the homeless population of Glasgow.



This qualitative longitudinal research methodology provided rich biographical data to explore transitions through homelessness and to explore how processes of governance, identity, agency and structures, interacted with this however. How this methodology was operationalised in the data collection is outlined below.

## 2.6 Conducting Qualitative Longitudinal Research

The value of qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) is increasingly being recognised across the research community. A recent feasibility study on qualitative longitudinal research conducted by the Economic and Social Research Council for example, highlighted that:

*'Within the wider research and policy communities the move towards QLR is fuelled by growing interest in processual features of social life, dynamic notions of career, contingency and the particular purchase that qualitative methods have on complexity and context.'*  
(Holland, Thomson & Henderson, 2004:1)

With these points in mind it is clear that this methodological approach lends itself well to this analysis of transitions through homelessness. It allows for social processes, change, and the complexity of social life to be explored over time in a way other methodologies may not allow. The potential difficulty, and the level of resources required to conduct such research however is also clear (Pickering, Hinds, Lynn & Tipping 2002; Holland et al, 2004). Long-term contact with the sample has to be maintained. This is likely to be time and labour intensive (and perhaps at times impossible). This difficulty is particularly apparent in research into groups who may be considered transient or difficult to contact, such as young people leaving home, or people experiencing homelessness. Perhaps due to this, few studies have been carried out with these groups, despite the recognition of the value of this methodological approach.

Recent studies that have conducted longitudinal qualitative research include those by Ball, Maguire & Macrae (2000) on young people's transitions; Cranes & Warnes (2002) study of the resettlement of older homeless people; and Craig, Hodson, Woodward & Richardson's (1996) and Fitzpatrick's (2000) research on homeless

young people. All of these studies highlighted the need for persistence and commitment if ongoing contact with research participants is to be maintained. In Fitzpatrick's (2000) research, twenty-five young people were 'followed-up' after taking part in an initial interview. The concept of 'maximum' information - actual responses from the young people, such as an interview or questionnaire being completed, and 'minimum' information - information on that individual being obtained from agencies or other contacts (Smith & Gilford, in Fitzpatrick, 2000) was used to define the results of this follow up. In Fitzpatrick's research, maximum information was obtained from eleven participants who took part in a second interview or completed a questionnaire, and minimum information on another eleven.

As was outlined earlier in this chapter, in the research presented in this thesis maximum information, (information obtained in an actual interview with the participants) was obtained throughout with twenty-four participants. These participants took part in all three interview stages. A further four participants took part in two interview stages, but only minimum information could be obtained about them at one stage (for three participants this was at the third interview). These twenty-eight participants, whose lives were followed for a year, make up the sample in this research. How this ongoing contact was maintained is discussed below.

### *Tracking Homelessness – Strategies and Results*

In a feasibility study on tracking homelessness by Pickering and colleagues (2002) key points that could assist in maximising contact when conducting longitudinal qualitative research were identified. These were explicitly utilised in this research and were: obtaining stable points of contact; the same researcher being used throughout to maximise commitment and rapport; flexibility and persistence; a signed consent form; incentives (in the form of a flat rate of £10 for 'expenses' per interview); face-to-face and frequent contact being pursued with the participants wherever possible; and the researcher maintaining a presence in the environmental niche of the research. Ongoing contact with the participants was especially facilitated by obtaining as many stable points of contact as possible from them at the first interview (such as the contact details of professionals they worked with; their family;

their mobile telephone numbers) and updating this contact information at each subsequent interview.

Two of the thirty people who took part in the first interview did not have any contact with them maintained. In one case this was due to offending history that came to light after the initial interview (they were a schedule one sex offender and a decision not to continue contact with them was made) and in the other, being unable to locate them despite using all the contacts they had provided. The data from the initial interviews of those not researched longitudinally was omitted from this analysis.

Minimum information often had to be obtained about the participants (by contacting the other people they had listed) for actual contact with the participants to be made and an interview arranged. This meant that maximum and minimum information on their circumstances was often gathered, and a complex framework of both 'what was happening' and how they described this, implicitly developed. The focus of this research is on the actual narratives of the participants, however their transitions through homelessness and related aspects of their life were also charted throughout. Notes on their circumstances were kept in a research diary. This diary was updated regularly, whenever information on the participants' circumstances had been obtained. This information could come from themselves, people who knew them, or professionals they were working with them. The diary was also useful to assist in maintaining contact with the participants, as it contained the most up-to-date information on their known whereabouts (the numerical code used to identify them was used in this diary and not their actual names).

Obtaining maximum information and conducting longitudinal research could be challenging, time consuming, and required a high level of perseverance. Some of the interviews had to be rescheduled repeatedly before being carried out, even once contact was made with the participants. Making this initial contact could take weeks of following up all the leads that the participants provided. However it should not be assumed that such as methodology will necessarily bring with it problems. Some of the participants could be contacted via mobile phone number, at their current accommodation, or by letter, throughout the research. One called my office at the third interview stage asking if it was time for their next interview. In any research



there may be challenges and limitations to the data collection. Longitudinal qualitative research is certainly a methodology that can be used successfully to develop detailed biographies of research participants and to chart transitional stages over the life course. However for this to be successful, careful records, consistency, and perseverance has to be adopted by the researcher. This methodology also brought additional ethical issues. Particularly due to the need to collect and store participants' names and contact details over time; and the ongoing relationship with participants that the researcher develops. These ethical issues are discussed in the next section.

## **2.7 Ethics and Reflections on the Research Process**

Ethical considerations are now an integral part of any social research process. Ethical considerations concern designing and applying research, underpinned by moral principles. These principles are intended to prevent harm occurring to either the research participants or the researcher, due to the research process (Sieber, 1993). This concept of ethics underpinned the development of this research (which was also approved by the University Senate Ethical Committee).

Ethical considerations were also particularly important in this research because it examined issues and topics considered 'sensitive'. Lee & Renzetti (1993) discuss the problem of defining 'sensitive research' – often it is research viewed as controversial, or may be on issues considered sensitive or personal to discuss. How 'sensitive' research is, may also depend on the perceived vulnerability of the group being researched. Research into groups that may be considered more 'vulnerable' than the general population, due to their lack of power, may also therefore be considered sensitive. Clearly, as was discussed earlier, people experiencing homelessness often lack resources, and may lack a degree of power, within certain social settings. Therefore they may be defined as vulnerable. However power also flows and intersects across levels of difference (age, gender, ethnicity, class, etc). The participants were all perceived to be, and researched as, knowledgeable, active individuals, albeit individuals experiencing a certain social situation that may be defined negatively. I would argue that in this research it was not their 'homelessness' or any specific characteristics of the participants that made the research sensitive, but

the sensitivity of the *topics covered*, and specific issues brought about by the need to *maintain contact* with the participants over time.

Having said this, it was also important to have an awareness of key aspects that related to the ethics applied to this research. These aspects were, firstly, identifying and minimising any potential vulnerability the participants may have been experiencing. Secondly, ensuring that they were *fully informed* of the research process at each stage. Thirdly, ensuring that any risk that they, or the researcher, may have faced in the course of the research was *identified and addressed* whenever possible. Each of these ethical issues are discussed in more detail below.

### *Discussing Sensitive Issues*

Research into homelessness such as this involved discussing topics such as drug and alcohol addiction; criminal activities; traumatic incidents such as sexual assault; domestic violence or childhood abuse. These are certainly topics considered sensitive to discuss by most people. However the definition of ‘sensitive topics’ given by Lee & Renzetti as issues that ‘*potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding and/or dissemination of research data*’ (1993: 5) is used here. Therefore the participants disclosing sensitive information during the data collection was not in itself threatening or harmful to them or the researcher. Sensitive information could be upsetting or difficult to discuss, but could also be important and provide new information on the mechanisms that affected their lives. The participants were viewed as knowledgeable and active agents, reflexively making their transitions through homelessness and rationalising the outcomes and events that occurred through the knowledge they had. Therefore their capacity to choose what they disclosed during the interviews had also to be accepted. To minimise the potential upset of discussing sensitive issues, probing questions were never used to find out details about these difficult issues (such as abuse people had experienced). The participants chose how much information to disclose on these topics and were informed at the start of each interview that if they did not wish to answer any question or wanted to have a break from the interview at any stage they could.

### *Confidentiality, Consent, and Storage of Data*

Some of the participants did disclose sensitive information during the data collection, and due to threats they may have faced from others (such as abusive ex-partners), it was crucial that all the contact details remained confidential and were only accessible to the researcher. It was also important to ensure that the principles of the Data Protection Act were upheld, and the information stored and processed as agreed on the consent form. To do so all transcripts, tapes, and information on the participants was marked only with a numeric code that correlated with each individual's contact details and consent forms. These contact details, consent forms and the research diary were kept separate from the actual transcript data in a locked cabinet. The participants contact details were stored on a password protected computerised database. Both of these only the researcher had access to. Any changes to the participants' contact details were added to this protected database. Any identifying names of people or places were removed from the transcripts and the tapes were destroyed or taped over once the transcription was completed and checked. In this way the respondents' personal details were protected, kept secure under principle seven of the Data Protection Act, and the data anonymised.

Anonymity and confidentiality can also be problematic in the writing-up of the research. It was made explicitly clear in the consent stage that the respondents details - their histories, experiences, and quotes from them - would be cited in reports, or presentations, and used in this thesis. However there was still a responsibility that lay with myself as the researcher to use this information and quotes carefully. As Mann (1996) argues, research that covers sensitive topics can run the danger of becoming voyeuristic rather than constructive. How people write about the experiences of those they research, and the choices researchers make about how they interpret or present these experiences, requires careful consideration and transparency (Corden, 1996). This underpins the choices made in this thesis about which quotes to use and which experiences to describe.

The language used has also been mainly put in the form of Standard English, with only specific Scots or slang words that were integral to the quote maintained. In this way it is hoped that the comments from the participants focus on the content of what



they said rather than the accent they had or how this accent was interpreted in the transcripts. The age given for them throughout is the age they were at the beginning of the data collection.

### *Avoiding and Addressing Risks in the Research Process - Limits of Confidentiality?*

Ironically in an analysis concerned with the negotiation of risk as a central tenet to life in late modernity, throughout the research design and data collection, potential risks to the research participants or the researcher had also to be considered and minimised. As already discussed, a key aspect of this was to ensure the contact details and information the participants gave remained confidential. The interviews were also arranged with the participants to be in locations they felt comfortable in, and also somewhere safe for the researcher to travel to and conduct the interview. Travelling expenses and taxis could be provided to facilitate this.

As the participants' circumstances changed, or at the first interview, there was the possibility that they could disclose information that indicated they faced risks to their safety or health. (For example, at the second interview stage, one participant was staying with a friend who had physically assaulted her.) Research that includes discussion of sensitive topics or of risks that the participants face, *'throws up potential limits to absolute confidentiality'* in the research process (Eardley, 1996: 73). This research was no exception. The extent to which the circumstances of the participants should be discussed with professionals that could have assisted them or the extent to which contact with these professionals was encouraged, had to be considered. Given that this research charted the transitions through homelessness the participants took, the extent the researcher should intervene, potentially influencing these transitions or jeopardised their confidentiality, was also recognised as a difficult issue.

The decision was made in this research that if any information was disclosed that indicated a participant was at risk from serious threat, first, it would be confirmed whether they were currently in contact with professionals who could assist them. If they were not in contact with support agencies at that time, information leaflets on potential sources of support were provided, and if the participant wished to contact

these agencies, this would be discussed with them. The opportunity to make contact with these agencies would then be provided by making an official referral, or providing them with a telephone line to contact that agency themselves. Although this only actually occurred twice during the research, it clearly indicates that even in an analysis that critically assesses the social welfare system, the research could at times be implicit in continuing the participants' contact with the social welfare system, in a reflexive relationship. This approach was felt ethically to be the most appropriate system to adopt however. By providing the participants with access to, and information about support agencies, and never disclosing information about them to other agencies without their knowledge, potential harm to the research participants could be minimised whilst not compromising the research relationship. It was also made explicitly clear at the consent stage that the participants were voluntarily engaging in the research and no service or support was being actively provided to them.

### *The Situated Nature of the Data Collection*

That I was an employee of the organisation<sup>4</sup> that the participants were recruited through also brought issues. On the one hand this meant that I was immersed in the workings of one sector of the social welfare system. I could see first hand how services are funded and managed within this system, and develop a clear understanding of how these services actually operate. I had regular contact with professionals and agencies to obtain minimum information about the participants, in an ongoing, informal manner. On the other hand, however, there may have been a danger that the research participants associated the research with the organisation it was conducted through and this could have affected the interactions they had with me, and the information they presented.

Bearing these points in mind, my position as an independent researcher within this organisation allowed for a unique position in conducting the research. I benefited from close contact with professionals and people experiencing homelessness in a key environmental niche of the research. I had enhanced access to resources to be able to

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<sup>4</sup> To promote the anonymity of the participants the name of this organisation is not disclosed here.

conduct the research, such as meeting rooms and taxi expenses. The longitudinal aspect of the research also led to contact between the participants and myself developing independently of any agency. I contacted them at their own tenancy, through friends or relatives of theirs, or by mobile phone, for example. On a micro-level the double hermeneutic implicit in social research may particularly be an issue when conducting qualitative longitudinal research. The researcher and the interview process could have potentially influenced the participants' actions and transitions, over time. Whilst this is acknowledged, it is also something that no qualitative research is likely to avoid.

## **2.8 Conclusion: Researching Social Processes**

The interactional nature of most social research means that it will *always* to some extent be embedded in the social situation being studied. In-depth interviews always require a degree of interaction between the research participants and researcher. This interaction will be socially situated, with age, gender and class all factors influencing it (Edwards, 1996). The research itself will be a part of the day-to-day activities and interactions that those studied are engaging in and may in turn feed into the future actions of those involved. Research findings may also go on to influence the social context that they were produced from.

It is particularly due to the double hermeneutic implicit in research, that robust, innovative approaches such as this continues to be developed. What is also important is that a clear epistemological and ontological framework was set, as it has been here, to underpin this development of valid social scientific knowledge.

The value and richness of this data, and the potential it has to be used to provide this new theoretical perspective on transitions through homelessness means that this represents an original piece of research that provides new ideas and findings on homelessness, governance, identity, and social processes occurring in late modernity. Furthermore this was one of the first empirical studies to explicitly use a longitudinal qualitative methodology to follow transitions through homelessness in the UK.



By utilising a qualitative longitudinal methodology, a robust examination of how agency and structure affects the transitions people make over their life course, and the mechanisms or factors that influence this, could be made. It is acknowledged that there is a hermeneutical relationship implicit in the narratives analysed here. Knowledge and ideology about homelessness, and its causes, will affect how people defined and made sense of their experience of homelessness, and how they described negotiating with this situation. It is through research such as this that different dimensions of, objectively, what actually happened over time (such as gaining permanent housing), subjectively, how it was presented and experienced, and the ‘fit’ that exists between these material and emotional dimensions, could be explored.

Using a fusion of realism and structuration theory as the ontological and epistemological framework for this analysis, a new perspective has been developed to assist in understanding transitions through homelessness in the structural, material and emotional context of late modernity. This is termed as the ‘stressed’ theory of homelessness, causation and individual actions. This terminology for a new theory of homelessness comes from an amalgamation of the key concepts and ontology used in the development it – *structuration*, *realism* and *edgework*.

The findings of this analysis, and the theoretical perspective developed from it, are presented and developed over the next four chapters. In this way, the transitions through homelessness that the participants made can be understood, and applied to a broader understanding of life in late modernity – of transitions in an apparently increasingly ‘risky’ society.

## **CHAPTER THREE: BECOMING HOMELESS – UNDERSTANDING TRANSITIONS INTO HOMELESSNESS**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the participants' biographies are analysed, and how and why they became homeless is presented. In section two, their life histories are outlined, and three key mechanisms identified that affected the transitions they made are discussed. In section three how and why the participants actually became homeless is examined. In the remaining sections of this chapter these findings are developed further, using the theoretical framework and concepts outlined previously. In section four a concept called here 'the rationale of irrational behaviour' is presented. This is used to conceptualise the motivation for some of the individual factors that appear to cause homelessness people have. Edgework has already been outlined as another key concept used in this analysis, and in section five edgework and the participants' homelessness is discussed. In section six these findings are brought together to illustrate the complex processes that occurred when the participants became homeless. In this way a new theory of why homelessness occurs, for some people, in some circumstances, and not other, within the current conditions of late modernity, underpinned by the principles of realism and structuration theory, is developed. In the final section of this chapter these findings are summarised, before going on to then examine what happened to the participants once they were homeless in the next chapter.

This chapter is primarily concerned with the transitions into homelessness that the participants took, however other transitions (such as changing employment or relationship status) over their life course are also discussed. As was outlined previously, individual transitional stages over the life course should take the form of integrative passages (Ezzy, 2001) – a transitional period followed by a clearly defined new social status. Usually there are normative assumptions about what an acceptable new status should be, relating to the status someone previously had. Divestment passages conversely occur when there has been some separation from this status, and transitional periods have led to a negative status, such as becoming unemployed or homeless. Normative assumptions about this situation would be that

people should attempt to reintegrate back into a positive social status, through another integrative transitional phase (such as gaining employment or housing) once more. This concept of integrative and divestment passages is used to chart the transitions the participants made throughout this thesis.

As already outlined, edgework is used here as a way to understand both voluntary and involuntary risk taking – actions that involve negotiating with the ‘edges’ of normative behaviour and experiences of extreme risk and trauma. Lyng (2005) argues that voluntary risk taking can be understood as a way to exercise agency (assert a sense of individuality and identity) through the ability to engage in risky acts. Crucially though, the power asserted through this agency lies in the ability to return from this edge, to remain integrated into normative social life *despite* engaging in edgework. The motivation for edgework therefore can be understood as a way to try to escape from, or to transcend and resist, the institutionalised routines and structured reality, of everyday modern life. It has also been asserted here that forms of edgework also occur *involuntarily*, when people are in high-risk situations or experience extreme trauma or psychological problems, such as nervous breakdowns, attempted suicide, or serious assaults. Whether voluntary or not, all these experiences involve having to find a way to return from this edge - to manage risk, both physically and emotionally. They also involve experientially being removed from normal day-to-day existence and routines – adrenalin ‘rushes’ may occur for both negative and positive reasons – but in all situations encapsulating edgework they are likely to occur. These actions and events are underpinned by the processes of individualisation, rationalisation, and ontological disenchantment that has occurred in late modernity and are important factors affecting the participants lives and transitions.

To begin this analysis of these lives and transitions is to return to the beginning, to the participants’ childhoods and upbringing. Their biographies are discussed in the next section.



### **3.2 Transitions over the Life Course – Resources, Relationships, and Edgework**

All of the participants had come to be defined as homeless people; or people at risk of homelessness, by government agencies, at some point in their lives. This was what they all shared, despite the many differences they also had. But what had led them to this point? And what similarities did they share that may be used to explain these transitions into homelessness they eventually all took? These questions are answered here by presenting the data from the participants biographies collected during the life history interview.

#### *Biographical Life Histories*

The majority of the participants (sixteen) grew up living with their parents (and siblings if they had any); two were brought up by their grandparents; four of the participants spent some time in borstals, care homes, or approved schools as they grew up, although they also spent periods living with their parents; and a further six of the participants had been taken into care permanently as children (two of these were then adopted by other families). Most had lived in socially rented housing as they grew up (or for those taken into care, in care homes). If their parents worked, it had usually been in low-paid manual or service sector employment. Most of the participants left school at sixteen, or before. If they had been employed this was usually in relatively low-paid service sector or manual employment. Therefore the participants occupied roughly the same socio-economic or ‘class’ position (or at least had similar levels of access to the different forms of capital that underpin individual’s ‘life chances’).

Some of the participants (seventeen) had experienced a degree of economic and social security before their experience of homelessness. In the most extreme cases however, the participants’ lives had been characterised entirely by severe poverty, chaos, and traumatic incidents occurring throughout. Some of the risk and triggers that may lead to homelessness, outlined in chapter one, and already recognised in homeless research (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000), such as material poverty; unsettled family backgrounds; experiences of childhood abuse; were evident in the lives of the participants. Not all had unsettled childhoods however. Becoming homeless, for

some of the participants, occurred after long-periods of being integrated and settled in their lives.

The following two cases, of Elizabeth and Henry's childhoods, and transitions they made throughout their life, are presented below to illustrate typical examples of the participants' life histories. Using these cases studies, three key factors that influenced all of the participants' lives are identified and highlighted. Each of these factors is then explored in the remainder of this section.

### *Elizabeth's Story*

Elizabeth was forty-one years old when she was took part in the first interview. She was living in supported accommodation. Elizabeth had had a relatively stable childhood and her life had initially taken integrative passages. As the quote below describes, she had been employed, married and had obtained her own housing:

*'All my life I've stayed in [the same area]. I've not moved out of it. [I lived with] my ma and my dad [growing up]. We all got on...it was fine, and everything was alright. I was sixteen when I left school. And I got a job as a machinist, on sewing machines, in a factory. I got married. This was when I was about nineteen, twenty. We got a council flat.'*

(Elizabeth, 41)

Elizabeth did not have access to a high level of economic or human capital through her education or employment, but she had experienced a degree of economic and social security, and was integrated into the community she lived in. Over time however Elizabeth's life became characterised with insecurity, and traumatic incidents. Due to domestic violence, she left the flat she had with her husband and returned to her mother's home:

*'I stuck that [house with my husband] about eighteen months and then I was hospitalised. I used to get beating's. Until I got up, and just left one day and then I moved back in with my mum.'*

She then obtained her own tenancy, but continued to experience domestic violence from new partners over the next ten years. She had a mental breakdown and returned to living with her mother at one point. Although she had experienced periods of what may be defined as hidden homelessness (staying with her mother, for example) these times of living with her family also provided her with important sources of social support and security. She only *identified* her first episode of homelessness occurring once she was in her thirties, after she became addicted to heroin (she began using heroin with a partner) and had to leave the flat she was living in. By now she had become estranged from her family due to her drug use:

*'I was on the drugs and I had to leave [partner's relatives house]. It was about then that I had nothing, nowhere to go.'*

She began to sleep rough, before entering a rehab. She then moved into the supported accommodation, where she was living at the time of the first interview.

### *Henry's Story*

Some of the participants, such as Henry's, entire life course was characterised by extreme insecurity, vulnerability, and traumatic events. Henry was also forty-one years old, and living in supported accommodation at the first interview. He had been physically abused by his father, and taken into care for his protection in his childhood. He spent the rest of his childhood in and out of different care homes, borstals and sometimes returned to his father's house. He had never had his own tenancy and had spent his entire adult life either in prison or staying with relatives or partners:

*'I remember the first house I stayed in. We stayed up above a shop. (...) I was put in a children's home when I was about 11, initially for care and protection, then from there, it just sort of got worse. All they homes are mental. (...) And my old man was dead strict, if I came back with my shoes all dirty or something, playing football, he gave me a [beating], he took his frustration and anger out on me all the time. I got put in another home again. Then I was in an approved school. I was in there right*



*till I was about 17. I was then either always in and out of jails, prisons, or I was staying with relations.*’ (Henry, 41)

Henry had a very convoluted housing history. He had entered supported accommodation after being in rehab. He had moved into the rehab after the woman he had been staying with had left her house and the locks had been changed. He said he had decided at this point to ‘go homeless’ for the first time in his life. After applying for housing through the statutory system, he had first been accommodated in a Bed & Breakfast and then a hostel, before entering a rehab:

*‘I got pissed off – I didn’t know how to go homeless. Folk said you’ve got to be referred by the Council. So I just tried it one night and that was it. Down at the [central office where applications are made] and they took me to a bed and breakfast over the weekend.’*

So participants such as Henry had experienced being accommodated in institutions, traumatic incidents such as abuse, and had engaged in edgework such as criminal acts or substance use, throughout their lives. Their lives were characterised by divestment passages, separating them from normative social status and integration. Others such as Elizabeth had experienced some degree of integration over their life course – employment, a settled family upbringing, and their own housing. What all the participants shared was that they had relatively low levels of human, social or financial capital, *and* that their lives had become characterised by traumatic experiences and forms of edgework (such as addiction and violence) at some point. It is this prevalence of edgework, and understanding how and why this occurred that much of this analysis is concerned with. This is because this is one of the key factors that influenced the participants’ lives, and also something that has been conceptually neglected in previous studies of homelessness – these factors, such as trauma and criminality, have been recognised but not theorised.

Three key social mechanisms could be identified (illustrated by Elizabeth and Henry’s experiences) that significantly influenced all the participants’ transitions over their lives. These were:

1. Relationships and social networks;
2. Access to resources that the participants had due to their material socio-economic position; and,
3. Experiences of edgework - both involuntarily due to extremely traumatic events occurring, or voluntarily, due to substance use or criminal acts, for example.

These three aspects of the participants' lives interacted in complex ways. It could also be argued that these three factors are crucial mechanisms that affect everyone's lives. Each of these mechanisms, and how they affected the participants' lives, are discussed in the remainder of this section.

### *Social Networks and Housing*

Social networks and relationships played a key role in affecting the participant's lives and circumstances. They affected both their material situation, how they experienced their lives on a day-to-day basis, and how their housing pathways developed. For example, some of the participants left their parental home after an argument, in an unplanned way. They then had a period staying with friends temporarily, and then obtained their own housing, but gave this up when they moved into a partner's house. They may have made contact with their parents again over time, and when their relationship with their partner broke down, moved back to their parents' house. This may all have occurred without them attempting to access housing of their own (either social rented or privately) or without them perceiving themselves as having housing problems in any way.

So the participants' social networks played an explicitly important role in influencing their *housing transitions*. It was often through these networks they obtained accommodation temporarily at many points in their lives. This highlights the importance of social networks for informally providing access to resources such as housing. However this was only possible, or at least unproblematic, if their friends or family had housing of their own, and enough room for them to be able to stay there, which also illustrates that it is the resources social networks provide access to, rather than the existence of these networks, that generates the other forms of capital people within that network have access to. The pressure or conflict that could occur when

people were living in crowded or temporary situations (such as staying temporarily with a friend, sleeping on their sofa, and not legally meant to be there) meant that this situation often broke down. This was another key similarity in the participants' lives as they became homeless – their social networks had often depleted or ruptured over time. Often they spoke of 'using up' all the friends or relatives they could stay with, to the point that they had to apply for housing as a homeless person through the social welfare system. Often domestic violence, relationship breakdown, or bereavement were precursors to their homelessness and their social networks had begun to break down.

### *Social Networks and Other Factors*

Relationships also affected other aspects of the participants' transitions and lives, such as where or how they gained employment (through contacts with people they knew, for example) or engaging in activities, (such as drug use) with friends or partners. It was often difficult situations that involved relationships, such as physical fights, the ending of a relationship, or a bereavement, that triggered divestment passages in their lives. Sometimes this was experienced as a highly traumatic incident, such as being severely beaten by someone they knew or witnessing someone's death. In other cases, it marked the beginning of a gradual erosion of security, after moving in with a friend after separating from a partner, for example. Either way, relationships, social networks, and how they changed over time, played a key role in influencing the transitions they made.

There is one further key tenet to understanding the influence and effect that relationships had on the participants' circumstances, and that is the physical or emotional trauma that could occur when they went wrong. Their relationships affected, and in many ways constituted, the material and emotional landscape that the participants operated within. They had a profound effect on how the participants ontologically experienced their day-to-day life.

Changes in relationships are often experienced as transitional periods – going from married to divorced, for example. Many of the participants had experienced intensely abusive relationships over their life course. Even experiences that may at times be



inevitable over the life course, such as bereavement, or relationship breakdown, are still traumatic and may involve a degree of edgework, as people attempt to manage the emotional effect of this. In such circumstances, the social contacts that people have may provide them with both emotional support and may also be a source of material or financial capital. However this will depend on the level of resources this network has access to, or are willing to provide.

So relationships and social networks can have negative as well as positive effects, they may deplete, as well as increase, the resources someone has access to. They can be a source of trauma and difficulty as well as support and well-being. What is unavoidable is that they are something that will affect everyone's life course significantly, and that certainly did so here.

What was also clear was that the participants were all positioned socially in a socio-economic position whereby the resources they had were not enough to negate their need to rely on the state to access housing, when other sources of support provided through their social networks were depleted, or did not exist. Many people experience periods staying with friends or relatives over their life course, without this being defined as problematic by them or others. The difference is perhaps that some people have access to a high enough level of resources (or the people they know do) to maintain accommodation or gain their own in the future without this reliance on their social networks ever becoming problematic, or being something that they have 'no choice' but to do. When it does become problematic (they are asked to leave after an argument, for example) and *they have no other means to access housing themselves with the resources they have*, they have to access the state to gain accommodation, as a homeless person, or sleep rough. In this way they became defined as a homeless person. And almost all the participants here had experienced this at some point. Some had such limited social networks, that they had no other source of accommodation or support they could access when they experienced a crisis in their life, and had to rely on the state for support to deal with this immediately. Some had relied on the state for such support all their lives – such as those who had been in care as children.

So whilst social networks, the social capital they provide access to, and the relationships that the participants had, were important, other level of resources, of economic, material and human capital, remained crucial mechanisms affecting their lives, and eventual transitions into homelessness. The participants' education and employment experiences are summarised below to illustrate the socio-economic position, and access to resources relating to this, they had.

### *Resources and Capital: Education*

All but one of the participants left mainstream education by the age of sixteen. Some of them described school as 'alright' or they 'got on fine', and some had obtained standard grade level qualifications. However the majority described their experiences of mainstream schooling negatively:

*'I had a hard time at school, just the reading and writing I can't do it. Never got any help with it.'* (Brian, 35)

*'I used to work in packaging, it was a factory. I started work at thirteen. I didn't learn anything at school. Didn't go back.'* (Helen, 35)

The majority had never returned to mainstream education after leaving school. Some had attended college at different points in their lives and some had accessed Adult Learning Courses. Some of these courses were specifically for people who were experiencing homelessness. These courses assisted them with their 'life skills', computing, or literacy, for example. None had a degree level qualification, although some had other qualifications relating to the employment they had had, such as licenses to operate machinery from when they worked in construction.

### *Resources and Capital: Employment*

Four of the participants said that they had never 'worked' or been employed. The majority (twenty-four) had engaged in some form of (usually manual or service sector) employment. This included working in kitchens, bars, shops, factories, bakeries, as cleaners, as security guards, as builders, roofers, floorers, in construction,

as panel beaters, mechanics, or dental nursing. While some of the participants were in stable (albeit relatively low-paid manual or service sector) employment for long periods over their life course, others had had more peripheral employment experiences, engaging in the formal and informal economy, and long periods of unemployment.

### *Barriers to Employment*

None of the participants were working in formal employment at the time of the first interview, or since their most recent episode of homelessness had begun. The reasons the participants gave for not being employed was either that they were unable to work due to health or other problems (such as addiction or their homelessness) or that the cost of paying their own rent in whatever form of accommodation they currently had (such as being in a hostel, or a socially rented flat) was higher than the income they could attain through paid employment. The following quote from Brian illustrates a transition out of employment one of the participants made and another barrier to employment that the participants identified. Brian started claiming Incapacity Benefit whilst in a rehab due to his drug addiction. He was living in temporary supported accommodation when he discussed this:

*'I've always worked, up until about four years ago, I'm on the sick the now, I'd never thought about going on the sick in my life, but the rehab put me on it, and then I came out and stayed on it, but I still know people, there's a guy, I used to work with, he's working at a hotel, he's asked me to go and work with him, but he thinks I'm still staying at my ma's though, so, I don't think I can do that. Not until I've got a house'*

(Brian, 35)

So it was Brian's addiction that had led to him initially ceasing his work. Then he felt unable to work until he had his own house once more. Due to the perceived stigma of the situation he was in he told people he was staying with his family instead of in accommodation for homeless people.

### *Exclusion and Stigma – the Duality of Edges*



The participants often recounted how, due to the stigma of their social circumstances and the status this brought (such as being homeless, or a drug addict) and the accommodation they were in (such as supported accommodation, a rehab), they felt uncomfortable 'fitting in', and integrating with mainstream society. This could inhibit them from engaging in activities (such as employment or training) that involved interacting with people in mainstream society. This relates to the key point argued in this section – that as they became homeless, and for many of the participants throughout their lives, they were people negotiating close to the 'the edges' of society, on different levels. Objectively the actual socio-economic position they had was characterised by their low levels of resources, and they had often had to rely on the state for social and economic support. They were also emotionally (and often physically) negotiating on the edge of what is normal or safe behaviour and circumstances, due to the edgework they experienced. And both these objective and subjective 'edges' had to be constantly negotiated by the participants to avoid risks as an individual. However these were also situations imbued with stigma that could then affect the interactions they engaged in, in actual material reality. This stigma, stemming from both their material situation and how it was emotionally experienced, could then lead to the participants becoming further excluded from mainstream society, on both objective and subjective levels. This effect is termed here as the 'duality of edges'. This duality also may have impacted on, and been affected by, other sources of economic capital the participants had, explored below.

### *Resources, Capital and Edgework: Illegitimate Sources of Incomes*

Over their life course, some of the participants had engaged in illegal means to generate income, such as begging, prostitution, drug dealing, or working in the informal economy. In this way they may have been individually attempting to negate the effect of their low socio-economic status and the relative poverty it brought. For example, the income from this did sometimes provide the participants with the means to pay for housing privately. Despite this rationale, these were also acts deviating from what is considered normative social behaviour, and engaging in such acts usually involved a high degree of risk. As they increasingly went 'over the edge' the emotional and material factors that underpinned this interacted to lead to further problems in their life. Claire's case can be used to illustrate this.

### *Claire's Experience of Generating Income*

After being in care as a child, and then becoming homeless when she left care, Claire obtained a flat and started a college course. However she said that she could not afford to be in full time education, and pay her rent, so she returned to working in prostitution (something she had done previously). This was often dangerous and emotionally distressing however. She said to 'block' out this work, to escape the reality she was in, she started to use heroin (once more). She became addicted to heroin, left college, left her flat, and became homeless once more:

*'I was living in a flat and then I got into prostitution and then from getting into prostitution I started taking heroin again to forget the fact that I was working... and then I lost my place on my college course 'cause I was more interested in chasing my next hit, and then I lost my flat.'* (Claire, 26)

This was another episode of homelessness in a life course characterised by repeatedly gaining and losing tenancies. In Claire's case the very acts she engaged in to assist her integrate into society, (such as attending college) could also lead to the situation whereby she resorted to actions that led to further divestment in her life, such as working in prostitution. Due to the lack of economic resources she had, she had to try to generate income with the only human capital she had – selling herself, through her work in prostitution. In a spiralling effect the actions she engaged in as an individual to try to improve her situation were acts involving high degrees of risk and stigma, and so actually led to her material situation deteriorating once more. And in this way, this deterioration of her situation could also be individualised, although it stemmed from the low level of resources she had, which was structurally grounded. It may also be that working in prostitution had initially been an option to Claire due to the social network she had – she worked with women she knew, and had first started working in prostitution due to contact with other women who worked that she had.

Another crucial mechanism identified here that affected all the participants' lives in profound ways was the prevalence of edgework (involuntarily experienced traumatic incidents and voluntary risk taking such as drug use) they had experienced. This

edgework clearly interacted with the other mechanisms identified here that affected their lives – such as engaging in criminal acts to generate financial income; experiencing intense grief or depression due to bereavement, or being involved in an abusive relationship.

### *Trauma and Edgework*

Edgework here both encapsulates voluntary risk taking and also the experience of negotiating experientially at the edge of normative behaviour (such as attempting suicide or life threatening violence) sometimes involuntarily. Forms of edgework were another key factor influencing the participants' lives. They had all experienced a high concentration of acts that encapsulate negotiating the edges of normative behaviour, such as drug use; experiencing or engaging in extreme violence; attempting suicide; criminal acts. This is another important mechanism that interacted with certain factors in their lives, to trigger the outcomes that occurred. The following quotes from Margaret and Rachel are used to illustrate some of the intensely traumatic incidents the participants had experienced:

*'When I was sixteen I was raped by three guys (...). I tried to kill myself twice, but that was about a year later, I took a nervous breakdown'* (Margaret, 43)

Margaret had been taken into care as a child, due to her mother's alcoholism. She was raped shortly after she returned to live with her mother, aged sixteen. She had been homeless, living in hostels, sleeping rough and staying with people she knew, ever since. She had chronic alcohol problems. Rachel had also been in a cycle of repeated homelessness and had experienced violent relationships all of her life, as she described for example:

*'Then I got married, when I was seventeen, I was getting battered about, but I didn't really drink then. I ended up stabbing him, my first man, and in prison for a time. (...) Then the next one he was worse, he did this to me [leans over and shows a large scar on her head] with a bottle.'* (Rachel, 46)



Traumatic incidents were prevailing factors affecting almost all the participants' lives. This may indicate that these factors – actions and experiences that can be conceptualised as edgework – have to be recognised and understood to understand the homelessness that the participants studied here experienced. Furthermore these actions and experiences often interacted with and exacerbated other forms of edgework they then engaged in - such as alcohol or drug use. The emotional effect of the victimisation some of the participants had experienced, or the physiological effect of their drug use, could also exacerbate or lead to a deterioration of their mental health. It may also be that the lack of resources they had made them especially vulnerable to such incidents. So the low socio-economic position the participants were in and the lack of resources they had not only structurally marginalised them, but may also have meant they were more likely to engage in or experience edgework, due to this marginalised position. This vulnerability could include being housed in areas with high crime rates, or not feeling that they could leave an abusive partner because they had no-where else to go. The material and emotional triggers and effects of the trauma they had experienced interacted in complex ways over their lives.

So the participants must be understood as people who had faced both intensely traumatic incidents and risks in their lives (almost all of the women and some of the men discussed sexual and physical abuse they had repeatedly experienced; and many had attempted suicide, for example). They had also often engaged in acts that may be considered deviant or dangerous (such as intravenous drug use, criminal acts such as assaulting and robbing others, working in prostitution). But these experiences and actions have to be understood, explored, and recognised for their situation, and what may have led to their homelessness, to be fully understood. At some point in their lives they had gone 'over the edge', and become archetypal 'outsiders'. What is a crucial question to consider here is why this edgework came to be so prevalent in their lives, and how they experienced and dealt with this? They had gone over the edge – but how and why had this occurred? To understand this requires a consideration of both the material and emotional landscape that people operate within.

### *Emotional and Material Landscapes of Poverty*

The stigma that accompanies such actions and circumstances (as violence; criminal acts; drug use; vulnerability such as being abused; poverty) meant that the participants also felt that they were (and may have been perceived by others) to be ‘*other*’ to those who had not visibly gone over the edge in this way. At some point in their lives they had become increasingly stigmatised and outside the ‘norms’ of social life.

Why this may be so, can be explored by reiterating the work of both Young (2006) and Buchanan (2004). Young (2006) for example argues that a low socio-economic position leads to a ‘double stigma’ being experienced. Groups living in acutely deprived material situations (relative to the rest of society) not only suffer due to this poverty, but also feel subjectively an intense humiliation due to this – a sense of being ‘nothing’. But they are still operating within society and have an ongoing need to assert themselves, and engage as individuals, with their society. They attempt to assimilate, or escape this, through the only actions they can – often actions that encapsulate forms of edgework. These actions may also be normalised within the material reality they operate within, and so be rational actions to assimilate to broad norms and ideals that people are culturally exposed to.

Buchanan (Buchanan & Young, 2000; Buchanan, 2004) also identified a similar process in the lives of drug users. He argues that material deprivation and the psychological ‘hopelessness’ of being structurally marginalised in an increasingly individualised society may explain the prevalence of addiction in housing areas with a concentrated lack of resources. Drug use is a form of escape from this material situation. But it is also a stigmatising act, and once people have become stigmatised they face increased barriers to overcoming their marginalisation. Their initial drug use stemmed from being in a marginalised situation and the material and emotional affect of this. Their drug use then exacerbated this marginality. It was a process such as this – a duality of edges – that led to the participants’ homelessness here. Their structural position generated positions of relative insecurity, imbued with risk. As they attempted to cope with this situation on both material and emotional levels, the acts they engaged in to do so may have only acted to further marginalise them, in a

vicious circle, until their security eroded to the point they became explicitly homeless.

Before going on to examine the participants transitions into homelessness the key points from this section are summarised. Firstly, key factors underscoring the transitions they made over their life course have been identified as: their social networks; their access to material resources; and the edgework that they had experienced. These key mechanisms interacted within the material and emotional landscape the participants operated within. Two key factors can be identified that characterised the material and emotional landscape that they operated within. These were, firstly, their marginalised socio-economic position and low level of resources they had; and secondly, the concentration of extremely difficult and traumatic situations they had experienced, either voluntarily or involuntarily, such as domestic violence, rape, mental illness, engaging in criminal acts, and addiction. The participants' lives all came to share these two key similarities.

**3.3 Transitions into Homelessness**

The participants usually cited individual factors as the cause of their homelessness. In the questionnaire that the participants completed prior to taking part in the in-depth interviews, they were asked what they thought caused their initial housing problems. The result of this are summarised in Table B below:

**Table B: Reasons given for initial housing problems (N: 28)**

Alcohol misuse	5	Domestic violence	4
Drug misuse	4	Breakdown of family relationship	3
Breakdown of couple relationship	3	Bereavement	3
Mental illness	2	Leaving care	2
Harassment in local area	1	Other	1

So substance misuse, and changes in relationships, often experienced suddenly or traumatically, were the causes the participants were most likely to identify to explain their housing problems. These are mechanisms already identified as important factors



influencing their lives – particularly social networks (or the breakdown, loss, or absence of them) and actions that encapsulate edgework, such as substance misuse or mental illness. The results of this provide the initial answers that the participants gave to explain their homelessness, however through the in-depth interviews more complex relationships of causation could be identified.

These individual factors, often identified as causing homelessness, are the factors that have become synonymous with discursive ideas about homeless people as addicts, alcoholics, mentally ill, ‘other’ to the mainstream. Clearly on one level these individual factors are what cause homelessness, although as the new orthodoxy would assert, this is only within and due to certain structural conditions. What requires further consideration is what *causes these individual factors*, and why they only result in homelessness for some people, in some circumstances, when anyone may experience them.

For many of the participants, traumatic incidents in their life (for example, being assaulted by a partner; or attempting suicide) were the crisis points that triggered their explicit transition into homelessness. It was these traumatic events that were the precursor to them applying for housing through the homelessness legislation that exists. At this point they were often referred to other services of the social welfare system to assist them resolve the ‘problems’ they were experiencing. This point is illustrated in more detail by presenting Tommy’s transition into homelessness, below.

### *Tommy’s Story*

Below, Tommy describes how accessing statutory homeless services through the welfare state was the defining moment in his transition into homelessness. This was the moment he *felt* he became homeless, subjectively, although this occurred within a cycle of increasing insecurity encapsulated by mental illness, leaving his family, staying with friends, and then sleeping rough:

*‘I had manic depression. I left my family, and I spent a couple of weeks with a mate, a week somewhere else, and they couldn’t handle me either, so I spent some time in the hills, and then I spent a long time in hospital. I’d attempted suicide. And when I*

*left the hospital [social workers took him to apply for housing at a centralised office for people who are homeless] I had nowhere to go. I didn't really consider myself as homeless until I ended up in hostels. It wasn't until going through the application form and that was when it kind of hit me that if I don't get housing benefit then obviously I couldn't get somewhere to stay. So that was the kind of the first time I thought "I'm homeless". Felt in the system.'* (Tommy, 33)

Using some definitions of homelessness, it could be argued that Tommy became homeless before he entered the welfare system in place to respond to homelessness, and in many ways this is true. He was staying with friends without his own permanent accommodation, then sleeping rough. In some cases however these housing situations (such as staying with friends) were maintained for long periods of time by the participants and were not something that they equated with being homeless. What was also clear from Tommy's case, once again, was the prevalence of edgework, the vulnerability, trauma, and concentration of voluntary risk taking, that the participants had experienced. In Tommy's case, extreme psychological illness (the line between sanity and insanity) and attempted suicide, (the ultimate act of going over the edge perhaps, voluntarily attempting to destroy yourself). Often this edgework interacted with their material marginality, to lead to the point whereby they relied on the state not only for resources such as accommodation or income, but also to provide some form of social or emotional support.

It was usually when the participants accessed homeless services through the social welfare system, or applied for housing through the statutory homeless legislation, that they themselves began to define their housing situation as homelessness. This event may have occurred within the context of them being in a cycle of insecure housing situations that may be defined as hidden homelessness, such as staying with friends, relatives. It was through accessing this homeless system they became visibly homeless. The significance of this is that they then perceived themselves to be a homeless person, and became categorised or targeted by the state, due to this. So this was how they explicitly made their transition into homelessness.

What was distinct about them accessing or becoming targeted by welfare services to address homelessness was that this was when their housing situation had to be

explicitly problematised in 'reality'. This occurred both internally and externally – they had to identify that they were homeless, and were recognised as such in their interactions with the institutions of the state. Their situation became defined as negative, unacceptable, something they had to, or were choosing, to resolve. A divestment passage had occurred that had led to them having a negative social status. So even if people do not have their own legal housing this may not necessarily be problematic to them, or be viewed as such. What is crucial to highlight here is that if this does become problematic *within the structural context* that they have no other capital available to obtain housing without *reliance on the state*, then their situation, and how this should be responded to, became the responsibility of the state. Therefore it was this interrelation of individual factors occurring within certain structural conditions, whereby some people have less resources than others, that caused homelessness. This finding reasserts the academic orthodoxy of homelessness and causation, developed over recent years.

For the participants, accessing the welfare system to resolve their homelessness was the process they often described as what defined them as a homeless person. This process occurred alongside other issues in their lives, such as mental illness or drug use, that acted to further define the participants' situation as problematic, or them as problem people. Many could already be considered people on the edge of society, as discussed in the previous section, due to their poverty, or engaging in criminal acts, before they explicitly made a transition into homelessness in this way. By becoming homeless they then became targeted by services of the state to resolve this however. They were visibly over the edge.

Different forms of homelessness do exist. What has been highlighted as crucial in this chapter is that it is this process of accessing the welfare system that defined the participants as homeless people. This then defined them as people lacking the ability to provide *themselves* with housing as individuals, within the current social structure. The reason for this reliance on the state was often perceived to be their individual problems such as mental illness or addiction. Due to this they could also be stigmatised, manifestations of those who were over the edge, and outside of society - undeserving. But what led to these individual problems occurring, and what structural



factors and conditions may be identified to explain this? This is explored below, using the cases of Val and William.

### *Val's Transition into Homelessness*

Val was fifty-nine when she took part in the first interview. She was living in her own tenancy at this point, after recently being homeless. Val had lived a relatively settled life. She was a housewife, had brought up her children, and had sometimes worked informally. She had always lived in socially rented housing. She identified that her problems started when she moved into a new 'scheme':

*'I was married for 36 years before I lost my husband four years ago, and we were up in the [previous] house for over 20 years. I think that was really the cause of my downhill kinda slope, once we moved to a new scheme and that. It was just, there was nothing to do and the men's work just dried up and the men found it easier to go to the pub. We ended up taking a drink because of the boredom.'* (Val, 59)

Val had been moved to the new scheme when her old house was demolished as part of housing policies to regenerate certain areas. Her quote succinctly illustrates how factors that may be considered structural, such as housing policies and changes in employment opportunities, can affect individuals and their actions, profoundly. In this case Val felt that intense boredom, disaffection, and alcohol use, that had stemmed from this structural reality. Val began to use alcohol heavily after her husband died. She blamed this on the boredom, isolation and grief she now felt. She said none of her family or friends were housed nearby or could afford to regularly travel to see each other. She became homeless after being admitted to hospital. This was after she was found collapsed in her flat by a housing officer. She had collapsed due to chronic alcohol use. From hospital she entered the statutory homeless system (and was provided with a room in supported accommodation) before obtaining her own tenancy once more, a year and a half later:

*'And eventually I ended up in hospital with drink problems. I wasn't caring, you know, I was just waking up in the morning, opening a bottle and just sitting there all day. I was myself then, once he [husband] went, that was me. (...) I was taken into*

*hospital through my drinking, and gave up my house. From there I went into [temporary accommodation]'* (Val, 59)

Structural and societal changes that were underpinned by social welfare policies could be identified as some of the mechanisms that caused Val's homelessness. These structural changes underpinned the individual factors that led to her homelessness – her isolation and alcoholism. The grief of bereavement; alcoholism; and isolation may be experienced by anyone. However it is asserted here that if they have a high level of resources it is more likely they can negate or avoid it. For example if Val had had more economic resources, she may have been able to afford to travel to see people she knew. She started to use alcohol heavily to escape her emotionally experienced grief and isolation. If people have enough economic resources to pay for their own housing privately they may be able to live in an area close to people they know, or where social problems are not concentrated. They cannot do this when they rely on the state for housing as Val did. It may also be that people with a high level of resources can appear to be less affected by the negative outcome of these structural changes (unemployment, family fragmentation, for example) because they can use these resources to manage their own lives as individuals and buffer themselves from the emotional negatives of these outcomes, in this way. They may still experience grief or isolation, but have more resources to negate or buffer the effect of this. This then obscures how profoundly important structural factors and inequality are in influencing people's lives – on both material and emotional levels.

In Val's case an interaction of the emotional trauma of bereavement, of becoming socially isolated, coupled with excessive alcohol use that almost led to her death, were the actual events that underpinned her transition into homelessness. These appeared to be individual factors but can also be understood as being structurally bound, within the material reality of time-space she operated in. Her transition into homelessness occurred when she left her rented flat, and became explicitly reliant on the support services of the social welfare system, due to no other resources or support being available to her. And this situation stemmed from the structural, social, and political changes that had occurred over her life. The reliance on the state, and breakdown of other forms of community based support and resources she may once

have accessed, occurred in part due to the very existence of this welfare state, that she now relied upon, and social policies introduced by it, over the years. (Similar processes have been identified in studies of neighbourhood change such as that by Dench and colleagues (2006) in the east end of London.)

Another example of how structural and individual factors interrelated to trigger the participants' homelessness in complex ways can be illustrated in the case of William.

### *William's Transition into Homelessness*

William was twenty-nine years old and living in supported accommodation when he was first interviewed. William had been in care as a child. He moved to stay with his family when he was sixteen. He then stayed with relatives until moving in with a girlfriend. During this time he was working casually in manual employment:

*'I started working not long after [moving back to family]. [I was] Working for a friend's firm [in manual labour]. Eventually I started selling drugs, as you do. (...) I had been using cannabis at the weekends. It wasn't until my late teens that I took anything, eh, hard drugs. Then I got introduced to cocaine but it's quite expensive [so I started selling it to make extra money].'*

After he split up with his girlfriend he moved in with a friend and lived there for three years. He became addicted to heroin, as he describes in the following quote:

*'I went to stay with a friend. I think the first time I ever took heroin was when I was 25 cause I was doing that much coke I needed something to 'come down'. I woke up one day a heroin addict. I gave up work. As soon as I started taking heroin, drugs were the be all and end all of me. They sort of took right over my life, you know, nothing else mattered.'*

(William, 29)

He stopped working once he was addicted to heroin. After a year William went into rehab to address his heroin use and then moved in with relatives. He began to use heroin again. He then moved into a hostel for homeless people and his transition into



homelessness was complete. He discusses in the quote below the processes that led to this relapse and eventual homelessness:

*'Within a week [out of rehab], I was back using heroin [with friends]. It was just the scheme. Maybe it's just a bit about being insecure in yourself, not wanting to be different, wanting to be one of the boys and all that sort of thing. I went to stay with my [relative] for about a month, then she realised I was back using heroin and she said, "I can't have you staying here", you know. So I moved into the hostels and I just got completely worse. Started injecting heroin and in that clique. It was brutal.'*

(William, 29)

So again, in a complex relationship, certain individual mechanisms interacted, over time, to lead to William becoming homeless. For long periods he stayed with friends or relatives, and did not see this as problematic. However when his addiction became problematic he had to leave and now lacked the resources to obtain housing without accessing accommodation for homeless people through the state. So it appeared to be individual factors, particularly his drug use, that led to William's homelessness, but if this transition into homelessness is to be understood, a key question remains - what led to these individual factors, such as his drug use, occurring?

As already outlined, Buchanan (Buchanan & Young, 2000; Buchanan, 2004) has argued that increased drug use and addiction throughout the 80s and 90s can be understood as something that occurred due to structural changes, such as the decline in manual industries. He argues that for working class youth with few opportunities ahead of them, living in declining housing estates, and socially marginalised, drug use could be understood as a rational response, an alternative to 'boredom and monotony' (Buchanan, 2004:127). This 'disaffection' caused by structural changes characterising late modernity may again be used to understand why these individual factors that cause homelessness (the edgework that the participants may have experienced) have come to underscore some people's lives:

*'(W)hen the excluded and economically unwanted face the prospect of growing up in hostile individualistic society that promotes free enterprise and innovation, the*

*emergence of a drug sub-culture could be interpreted as an unconscious but direct alternative'*  
(Buchanan & Young, 2000: 419)

Is this process what underpinned William's heroin use and drug dealing? If so, once again, far reaching structural changes can be used to understand why the individual factors that led to homelessness occurred.

William's example also highlights the oscillating effect that on a micro-level, social relationships and networks can have on the transitions people make. He was able to stay with friends and relatives, as a 'buffer' to his visible homelessness for some time until he had to apply for accommodation through the welfare system and entered a hostel. However it was also the influence of the situation he was in - and people he knew - that created the conditions whereby his drug use became a rational choice. He was engaging in activities to 'fit in', in this material situation. These relationships and the social networks someone has are recognised here as constituting an important part of the structural reality people are embedded in, and the interactions they engage in within this. Once again there is a material and emotional dimension to this. The process identified through these examples, used to conceptualise why these individual factors (that constitute voluntary risk taking) may occur, is here termed as the *rationale of irrational behaviour*. This relates to classical sociological theory on symbolic interactionism such as the work of Becker, (1966) and Goffman (1959) and developed by Giddens (1984) in structuration theory. This concept is outlined and discussed in the next section.

### **3.4 The Rationale of Irrational Behaviour**

As already discussed, social networks can have negative as well as positive effects. The day-to-day activities and interactions that William engaged in could involve substance use, such as alcohol, or drugs, for example. It is asserted here that within a certain social context, the roles people adopt to fit in, to maintain the cohesion of the situation they are in, may involve engaging in activities that appear irrational as responses to the individual management of risk over their life course. For example, in William's case, his heroin use and drug dealing; Val's case, her alcohol use; and Claire's case, working in prostitution and heroin use. It has already been outlined that

these may have appeared irrational but why they engaged in them could also be understood. So there is a tension between being responsible and controlling actions, and in some contexts, those *same actions* that should be avoided being the *means* to fit in with the social role expected, or the means to *escape* or *resist* the material situation someone is in. If the micro-level context that someone is experiencing (their structural reality), is one whereby certain activities (such as drug use) may bring some relief from or resistance to that situation, as an ‘escape route’ (Cohen & Taylor, 1992) the irrationality of engaging in them can become increasingly understood as a rational response. It is also argued here that the structural conditions of late modernity may have led to these actions being likely to occur – people engage in edgework as a means to individually find some self-actualisation or control in the context of an increasingly disenchanted, modern society; or to escape the isolation or disaffection they feel by being marginalised and ‘poor’ within the structural conditions of inequality and poverty that exists. Some of these actions also provided them with the means to engage in activities that are promoted within late modernity – to consume, and in this way to have a role, for example.

It could also be argued that some forms of involuntary edgework, such as mental illness, may be underpinned by the social changes that have occurred due to the process of modernity - the anomie of the rationalised iron cage, identified in classic studies such as that by Weber (1930), and Durkeim (1952), for example. And the extreme actions – such as being violent towards others – that have occurred when someone experiences involuntary edgework (such as being assaulted), may also be underpinned by the pressures and reality of the cultural and social existence of life on the edge in late modernity. Many of the participants had been both victims and perpetrators of violent actions.

This ‘*rationale of irrational behaviour*’ means many individual actions that appeared to cause the participants’ transitions into homelessness can be understood as structural. These actions (that appear individual) both stem from, and can then also have, structural implications – they feed back into the discursive knowledge that exists about these actions and how they are viewed, in turn feeding into how social identities, and people that engage in these actions, are defined and conceptualised.



This in turn then feeds into how these actions are managed and governed in the material world.

### *The Universality of Edgework*

Furthermore this process of negotiating with irrational actions is something that everyone may be experiencing in the increasingly individualised and liberalised conditions of late modernity. Everyone engages in some actions that may appear irrational if they are purely understood as a means to avoid risk. Actions can also have contradictory outcomes - an action that may lead to positive effects can also have negatives. People are increasingly being informed (through systems of governance, and the media) of risks they face, and of their responsibility to manage these risks. This includes the risk fatty food has to their health; the need to recycle due to environmental concerns; that they should to avoid excessive alcohol use; that people should exercise certain amounts a week; for example. Yet most people still eat fatty foods at times (with obesity at record levels); do not recycle everything they could, (environmental concerns continue to escalate); drink excessive alcohol at times (as media stories of binge drinking illustrate). Even engaging in positive actions such as exercise may have negative outcomes, such as injury. Within the conditions of late modernity, it is asserted here, everyone is increasingly becoming 'edgeworkers' to some extent. People have to constantly weigh the risk that each activity may bring alongside the experiential pleasure or escape it also brings, with responsibility to do so placed on the individual. And many people are going over the edge – as the obesity and alcohol related death figures are testament to. These actions may not appear to be as extreme cases of negotiating risk, of engaging in edgework, as those that the participants here had experienced however the process that underpins them may be understood as the same.

The actions people take may not be entirely rational as a response to managing risk, yet they are rational as an emotional response to the material situation they are in, and the interactions they have to engage in, within certain contexts. They are rational perhaps as a means to escape or resist the pressure of having to negotiate and manage the knowledge, choices, and risks people now perceive they have. These actions may also be understood as actions that have become possible or endemic due to the

structural conditions of late modernity – the rampant consuming and excess of food that leads to obesity, for example. As social action become increasingly individualised, norms and constraints break down, leading to actions underpinned by the anomie and over-socialisation of late modern society. Yet for those whose edgework involves actions that are close to the edge of clearly defined societal norms of accepted behaviour, the similarity in the actions between them and others, and what motivates these actions, may not be recognised and may lead to stigma, and further ‘exclusion’ for them. But increasingly many people are going over the edge in one way or another, negotiating with these proliferating ‘edges’ as they make individual choices in the management of the risks they face and lifestyle they have – and this myriad of options and choices are only possible due to the current structural reality we now operate within.

### *Edgework, Risks and Resources*

How this negotiation of risk, or the forms of risk taking people may experience, are tied to the resources they have. Those who have a low level of resources and engage in edgework may be perceived to be different from and ‘other’ to the supposedly responsible mainstream, yet many people engage in what could be considered deviant acts at times, if their actions were entirely rationally played out as a means to avoid risk. The people ‘over the edge’ become the feared and imagined others. However it is asserted here that their actions must also be understood as actions underpinned by the structural conditions people operate within. These actions are damaging, and can be ‘anti-social’ on an individual level. They cause real, individual suffering – but this may stem from collectively experienced structural conditions. This returns to the duality of edges identified earlier, and how this interacts to affect people’s lives – they become materially and emotionally marginalised and excluded due to their resources and accompanying social status.

So to summarise this argument, both William and Val’s cases highlighted the processes that occur as people make transitions into homelessness – their social, economic, and human capital became increasingly eroded as they become ‘alcoholics’, ‘drug addicts’, and had to rely on the social welfare system. Often this reliance was not only to address their lack of accommodation, but also the other

problems in their life, such as addiction, that underpinned this situation. It was individual acts that may appear irrational – excessive alcohol or drug use for example – that the participants cited as the cause of their homelessness. However it is argued here that these acts can also be understood as part of a broader structural context, and the emotional landscape this context has created. These individual factors, often cited as the cause of homelessness, then often comes to define how the people experiencing it are discursively understood and labelled in popular and political discourse.

This is the process that occurred as the participants made their transition into homelessness. Their material situation led to increased edgework, which eventually led to their resources being depleted to the point they had to rely on the state for housing. Their material situation then continued to deteriorate. Key to this is the concept of edgework, and how experiences of edgework interacted with the participants' homelessness. This is discussed in the next section before these findings are brought together to present the new stressed theory of homelessness and causation in the final section of this chapter.

### **3.5 Going over the Edge – Edgework and Homelessness**

'Trips to the edge', away from normal social interactions and actions, trips away from everyday life and routine, can bring relief, excitement, or escape. However they also bring risk, the risk of not returning to this ordered routine from which ontological security is generated, and of going over the edge (Cohen & Taylor, 1992). The extent to which people can safely engage in different forms of edgework and the actual risk this edgework entails is dependent on the resources they have. Forms of edgework that Lyng first identified, such as sky-diving, are likely to be out of reach of those with few resources. Whatever socio-economic position an individual has however, the motivation for voluntary risk taking may be the same, whether they gain escape or transcendence through extreme sports, the use of substances, or criminal behaviour. Furthermore, involuntary forms of edgework people may experience such as grief and bereavement, mental illness, and victimisation, *may* be harder to manage for those with low levels of resources, even through they could occur in anyone's life.



If someone is 'outside' of normal society, they may then become further excluded, culturally. It has been argued here that some of the edgework the participants engaged in, such as substance use, could be understood as way to escape the structural reality they were in, and the low social status and lack of resources they had. It could also provide them with the means to escape from or control the trauma they had experienced. In this way it was caused by structures, and in an ongoing cycle, these structures continued to exacerbate this situation by triggering individual actions that acted to embed them within these structures of marginality, poverty, and trauma. The participants had to attempt to manage or control the effect of their edgework individually – come back from the edge – and this could be intensely difficult, psychologically. The following cases of Francesca and Helen are used to illustrate this point.

### *Francesca's Edgework as Control*

Francesca was living in supported accommodation when she was first interviewed. She was twenty-eight years old. Francesca cited drug use as the cause of her homelessness. She found it intensely difficult to cease using drugs, as it was a way to take some control over her life, ontologically, and to escape the material and subjective 'reality' she was in and the experiences she had had, as the following quote illustrates:

*'Because of everything that's happened to me when I was younger [abuse, violence, rough sleeping, working in prostitution] it's about finding coping strategies because for so many years, it was just...taking drugs, get absolutely mad with it and then not have to think about it. And now that's not the case, I'm not taking drugs, so – I don't know how to cope and I freely admit I don't. So I'm either sobbing my heart out or I'm screaming like a maniac.'* (Francesca, 28)

In this way, actions such as substance use could be understood as not only a form of escape, but as a way of taking some *control* over her situation. This could be a way to gain control through individual actions, over the emotional pain she was experiencing. The alternative for her was to go over the edge in another way – to

psychologically break down. The paradox inherent to this is that these actions (the edgework the participants engaged in) only ended up leading them further over the edge in other ways. This could trigger more problems in their lives, and create more trauma and vulnerability for them that they then had to reconcile with. The edge, back over into 'normal society', receded further from them, with each difficult situation and divestment passage they experienced. This spiralling effect is explored in more detail in the next chapter. Helen's case can be used as a simple illustration of this.

### *Helen's Cycle of Edgework*

Helen had experienced repeated homelessness over her life. She was addicted to alcohol and drugs. Her children were taken into care due to this. Often it was distressing incidents (such as being assaulted or finding out her children were to be taken into care permanently) that triggered actions such as her alcohol and drug use. This then led to her making a transition back into homelessness:

*'I know why I ended up put out of [my house], cause I got a social worker came up telling me my daughters weren't coming back, so I suppose that was my way of escaping. It was the wrong way but anyway, I ended up mad with drink, drugs. Seven days a week.'*

(Helen, 35)

In this way the participants became trapped in a cycle of engaging in edgework as the experiential ontological means they had to handle what actually happened to them and the structural reality they were in. This then further exacerbated the marginality they were experiencing within that structural reality. Through these acts they could assert some control as an individual, or attempt to escape and manage the effect of the traumatic incidents they had experienced. However this edgework was also what often appeared to be the cause of their homelessness. In 'going over the edge' - becoming addicts, mentally ill, being abused - they only became embedded further in a negative material situation, where they felt they lacked control. The few means they had to assert their individuality, or manage risk, within this structured reality, remained the same. So too did the very need to control and manage risk individually

that they felt they had. And both these outcomes may be understood as a product of the structural conditions of late modernity.

It is true that the participants' homelessness was 'caused' by an interrelation of individual factors and trigger points, occurring within a certain structural context whereby they had a lack of resources to negate this, as recognised in the 'new orthodoxy' to understanding homelessness (Fitzpatrick, 2005). However the analysis here goes further and asserts that this structural reality may also generate the *conditions that lead to the individual factors* seen as causing homelessness. There is an emotional and material context that means these actions became rational responses to the structural situation the participants were in, on a micro-level. The motivation for their edgework may have been generated by the structural reality they were in, such as the pressures of being 'poor', stigmatised, of being surrounded by trauma, difficulty, and poor material conditions, in a world of increasing inequality. They then had few resources they could use to negate the ongoing trauma and difficulty they faced.

Furthermore the socio-economic position someone has will affect the capacity to negotiate with risk they have, when something goes wrong in their lives. Individual factors that cause homelessness (addiction or bereavement for example) could occur in anyone's life. It is asserted here that the key difference in circumstance that means these events lead to homelessness, is when people lack the resources of human, social, cultural, or financial capital to *negate the effects* of these individually experienced events. The motivation for people to engage in edgework can be rationalised, but depending on the material situation someone is in, and the access to resources they have, the outcome of their edgework may be very different.

In the participants' lives they all at some point had come to rely on the state for social and financial support. In this way they were defined as 'homeless people', and became stigmatised and outside of mainstream society. The individual factors that cause homelessness may occur in anyone's lives. It is due to structural factors that they may be more likely to occur in some people's lives than others however. Then the resources people have, will underpin the ability to manage these events without going visibly over the edge they have. And these resources are distributed through



the structures and institutions of society that exist. Anyone may go over the edge, but if they were already close, the chance that they will increase.

### **3.6 A New Theory of Homelessness and Causation**

In this section a theoretical perspective that develops the current orthodoxy that exists on homelessness and causation is presented. It is recognised that within certain structural conditions, individual factors and events interact to trigger homelessness, and this has been reaffirmed by this research. However to go beyond this, what is called here the ‘stressed’ theory of homelessness and causation has preliminarily been developed here. This is used as terminology, through an amalgamation of the key concepts used – structuration, realism and edgework. This theory is not purely realist (certainly not in a critical realist sense) but one informed by structuration theory, and informed by realist ontology. The concept of edgework is used in this theoretical approach to try to develop a greater understanding of why some individual factors appear to lead to homelessness, for some people, in some circumstances, and not others. Actions and outcomes are grounded in an actual material and social world that exists. This reality exists independently of our knowledge of it, but can only be understood and explained by recognising and analysing the constructed nature of how social actors interact with each other, and how these interactions and the meanings that underpin them, recreate and affect what that material and social reality is. This stressed theory of homelessness and causation has been developed by examining how certain events may have been triggered within the reality the participants operated within that led to homelessness. The role that individual actions (agency) and the society people operate within (structure) had in triggering these events is critically assessed. So this perspective represents the outcome of a fusion of structuration theory, realist ontology, and the concept of edgework to this analysis.

#### *Agency, Structure and Causation*

Clearly the edgework (such as drug use or mental illness) that ‘caused’ the participants homelessness could occur in anyone’s life. This does necessarily always cause homelessness. However it is argued here that it is the resources people have access to due to their socio-economic position that allows some people more

protection from the risks traumatic incidents bring. If these events do occur in their life, some people have the resources to maintain a stable and positive social status, whilst they recover from this trauma. In this way they can avoid further divestment passages in their life course – they return from the edge and negotiate with it successfully. Even if they do go over, (become an addict for example), this may remain hidden, so long as they retain a predominantly integrative social position until they resolve this. In this way they retain the appearance of someone who can manage their own life course, as a liberal active citizen, even if they are engaged in some of the same activities (drug use, alcohol use, or are experiencing intense psychological distress) as those who do not retain this status.

For example, if someone with high levels of social, economic, and human capital, leaves a partner suddenly, they may immediately be able to move into housing of their own. They may move temporarily to live with friends or family who also have high levels of resources (and as such may have their own house with a spare room). In doing so they may also access a degree of emotional support that assists them manage excessive alcohol use or depression that may accompany the stress of their relationship breakdown and sudden divestment passage. Due to their own access to resources of human and financial capital (through their employment and income) they may have no concerns about obtaining their own housing again in the future (such as a private rented tenancy). They will be able to continue their integrative passages and maintain the positive social status and ontological security this provides, over their life course, due to the high levels of social, economic and human capital they have. This capital acts as a buffer to the individual problems anyone may experience in their lives. This outcome may occur despite having experienced the same forms of edgework, such as alcohol use, as a response to the trauma of their relationship breakdown, as someone who lacked these resources and therefore had rely on the state at some point to access housing, as their lives spiralled into divestment passages.

Those who have to rely on the state then become a ‘homeless person’ and in this way the person who goes on to become visibly homeless, experiences a further divestment passage. This reliance on the state leads to them being constructed as ‘other’ to those who do not appear to explicitly have to rely on the state to access resources, such as

housing and social support. In this way the focus goes onto the individual factors cited as the cause of their homelessness, and negative stigmatising discourses about 'homeless people' as deviant, or other to the mainstream are recreated, when they were actually acting in the same way as many people who do not go on to experience homelessness. This also illustrates that anyone may, technically, experience homelessness due to these factors. Anyone may experience divestment passages that eventually lead to the erosion of all the resources they have, and could become homeless in this way. However it is asserted that it is the structural reality of late modernity, that has created the conditions whereby some people are more at risk of traumatic incidents, or certain forms of edgework, than other people, although they are all expected to individually attempt to manage these risks. Furthermore this reliance on the state for housing profoundly affected the material reality that the participants operated within. The housing conditions and location they are housed in will be determined by this due to their reliance on state housing. Areas with high levels of concentrated poverty may generate the conditions whereby this goes on spiralling in a negative effect – as the rationale of irrational behaviour outlined earlier illustrated.

The individual factors *seen as causing homelessness* can occur in anyone's life. Homelessness could happen, in principle, to anyone, but it is obviously still much more likely to occur in the lives of those already on the edge of society and marginalised socio-economically. Furthermore this structural reality can be understood as what generates the motivation for these individual actions – addiction, relationship breakdown, or mental illness, for example, that lead to homelessness. Their need to rely on the state then problematises these actions, in the lives of some people, more than others.

It is therefore asserted in this analysis that structuralist accounts that focus on the housing supply that exists (although important) are therefore not enough to understand why homelessness endures. It is the emotional landscape alongside the material context that generates it that needs to be taken into account. People may become homeless even when housing is available for them. The following case of Connor is used to illustrate this point.



## *Connor's Story*

Connor was forty-seven years old, and living in supported accommodation when he was first interviewed. After a relatively settled life, living with his parents, and engaging in casual manual labour, Connor had experienced alcoholism and then extreme mental illness in his thirties. He had obtained his own tenancy, but abandoned this tenancy to sleep rough. He continued to repeatedly access housing through the social welfare system and receive treatment for his mental illness and alcohol addiction. He also repeatedly left these tenancies. It appeared to be his individual actions, and his own 'choice', to sleep rough again. Whilst his homelessness, on a micro-level was due to his individual actions, complex mechanisms operated to trigger this, as the following quote describes:

*'The last week [in rehab] they said, we've got you a house, and they gave me a house in [area]. I said, 'oh no. I used to fight up there when I was a wee boy, they were like, "they're men, they've grown up." So I was leaving anyway, I gave myself another two weeks in that house, and I just went skippering [rough sleeping]. I left that house, I left in a panic. I felt safer lying out on the street than when I was in my own house. I could hear people through the wall, "they're talking about me". And I was just keeping on drinking more and more.'* (Connor, 47)

In this case, for example, Connor was housed in an area he believed he may be victimised in, and this exacerbated his mental illness. He also found it difficult to cope with the day-to-day routine of life in his own tenancy, and the interactions and isolation he experienced there. He was without ontological security. Connor's alcohol use and his abandonment of his housing could be seen in some respects as one of the only ways he had to actually assert some control as an individual on a micro-level, over his life. It was something that he did to resist or escape the *material situation* that the structured reality he was in had led to. This structural reality was particularly embodied in the housing he was provided with by the state and the conditions and location of this housing.

So due to his low level of resources he had few means to assert control over his life, or deal with the ontological insecurity he was experiencing. However his actions only

led to him experiencing another negative situation, repeated homelessness and increased vulnerability. Some people may become homeless despite having enough financial capital or state support to access housing. This may occur due to their very need to assert their individuality, or to escape from the structured reality they are in, a structured reality that the housing they live in plays a large part in constituting. Therefore both structure and agency did interact to lead to the participants' homelessness.

### *The Specificity of Homelessness and Causation*

It may be acts that appear highly individual that cause homelessness on a micro-level, but these acts can only be understood by considering the broad structural reality people operate within, and the effect that this may have on them. The amount they can then control or change their situation is also underpinned by the access to resources they have - resources distributed structurally through the institutional mechanisms of society.

Ultimately the management of risks such as homelessness people face, is still underpinned by their socio-economic position within the structural conditions of the society they live in. That is not to say some people with a high level of resources will never become homeless, or that people at risk of homelessness will not sometimes be able to negate this risk. What is asserted here is that structural factors have created the conditions whereby the individual factors that may lead to homelessness have become prevalent. The ability someone then has to negate this is tied to the capital they have. Some people do not have the social, economic, or human capital to negate the effects of these individually experienced problems themselves and have to rely on the state to provide them with this support. These groups may then be defined as also culturally distinct from the mainstream. In this way the differentiation between those who have to access or be targeted by the state explicitly, to negotiate with risk, and those who do not, may be becoming the key cleavage of stratification in society in the conditions of late modernity – a key form of differentiation between groups. Indeed the participants did often increasingly engage in deviant or damaging acts as they went over the edge, but a rationale for this edgework due to the emotional and material landscape they operated within, has been provided in this chapter. The actual

difference is not that people engage in these acts of edgework, but the ability that people have to hide or buffer the effects of this, and the risks they face, with the resources of human, social, or financial capital they have. Poverty may generate the conditions that lead to some forms of edgework becoming a rational choice, and also exacerbates the stigma that accompanies these actions. The conditions of late modernity has generated the motivation to engage in acts of edgework that people have, but not the equal distribution of the resources required to come back from the edge when people do.

The individual events that can trigger homelessness, may occur in anyone's life, but may be more likely to when they have few resources that can act as a buffer to various risks they face. Ultimately the resources people have is usually what prevents them becoming homeless and relying on the state for social support and accommodation when these individual events occur. In this way many people never become homeless, although they have actually experienced the same processes and events in their life as someone who does. Some of these events may also be more likely to occur in the lives of people with few resources, or they may have fewer means to assert their individuality or escape from late modern life in other commodified ways (such as through extreme sports), than those with high levels of resources.

### *The New Theory of Homelessness and Causation*

It is important to highlight that this theory has been informed by the ontological and epistemological approach outlined in chapter two. Realist ontology as it has been defined here, and structuration theory, were fused to develop this framework and this is not realist in a pure Bhaskarian sense. However this incorporates the following key tenets, as a means to understand how individual actions can appear to lead to homelessness:

1. This theory is concerned with material and social reality, a reality that is structurally generated and that all individuals operate within and 'actual' events happen. It has been argued that this structural reality has generated conditions whereby actions that encapsulate edgework occur or are motivated to, as a form



of escape or resistance from this reality people are operating within. The resources people have within these conditions that they can use to negotiate with or engage in risk are not equally distributed. Social problems do occur; they are real. People do actually lose their housing; experience traumatic incidents; use drugs, for example. However:

2. How these actions and outcomes are interpreted and understood, and the resources that people have to engage in or negate them, will lead to very different outcomes for some people than others, even though they may experience the same individual 'real' problems.
3. For those who go on to become visibly homeless, or need to rely on the state to access resources, their individual actions become the focus of why they are in that situation. The broad structural underpinning of why people engaged in those acts in the first instance becomes obscured. This broad structural underpinning is the reality of life in late modernity. As this structural underpinning has not changed, it then once more generates the same need to engage in edgework that people initially had, and the same risk of homelessness occurring in their life goes on unchanged. The fundamental structural precursors and context that led to their homelessness remain the same.

Therefore some homelessness will continue to occur despite objective policy measures or structural concerns that focus on the housing supply and the support services that people who are homeless can access, providing apparent solutions. This is not because it is due to the individual actions of those that are homeless, but that the conditions of late modernity have created the conditions whereby some people will continue to try to escape, as individuals in the only way they can, on an emotional level. They go over the edge. Furthermore this material reality is also particularly embodied in the condition and location of the housing they are provided with, through the implementation of policy to resolve homelessness. Within the conditions of late modernity homelessness may happen to 'anyone' but is more likely to happen to and affect those who have a low level of resources due to the lack of a buffer from the effects of this they have. This structural reality impacts on the emotional reality people experience and in this way triggers individual actions or may underpin traumatic incidents occurring that they then cannot reconcile with an integrated 'normal' life and existence, in an ongoing cycle.

It is not just the supply of social housing provided by the state that leads to homelessness occurring for some people and not others with the conditions of late modernity, but also the *very need* someone has to access the state as a ‘homeless person’. This leads to the housing they are provided with, and the material reality they then enter. This need to rely on the state is underpinned by their socio-economic position, but it is this very position and this very reliance, within the conditions of late modernity, that can also be understood as having created the social context whereby addiction, mental illness, violent acts, for example, have become for some people, endemic. This was illustrated in the cases of Val, William, and Connor. These problems may occur among those with a high level of resources, but it is easier for them to be hidden or negated in their lives. People with resources can engage in or experience edgework and be more likely to return from this edge – some may not, addiction and mental illness for example, do affect people across the social spectrum. In some cases even people who once had a high level of resources may find them eroded to the point they too become homeless and rely on the state. But it is still those whose socio-economic position has always been one of having few resources that are more *at risk* of such an outcome, and have fewer means to assert themselves as individuals within these conditions. And the key point here is that the motivation or cause of such acts of edgework can be understood as the actual conditions of life in late modernity, and the structural reality this brings. Policy measures and housing supply are important to address homelessness, and this is explored in chapter five. The point is that they are not the *only* mechanisms that need to be understood to address it, and these measures themselves create the material reality people operate within, that may trigger what appears to be problematic individual actions.

### **3.7 Conclusion: Understanding Transitions into Homelessness**

So to summarise this chapter, three key mechanisms have been identified that affected the participants’ lives. These are social networks, resources, and edgework. These mechanisms are created by and interact with the material and emotional reality they operate within.

The participants have been identified as people on who were on the edge of society in two ways. Objectively, they were on the edge of society due to the low socio-economic status they all had. Subjectively they were negotiating with the edges of normative behaviour, due to traumatic events that had occurred over their life, or the risky actions, such as drug use, they engaged in. This duality of objective and subjectively experienced marginality – that generated the material and emotional reality they operated within - is an important consideration throughout this analysis. The prevalence of traumatic incidents in the lives of people who are homeless, and the effect that this may have on their material situation and emotional well-being, is also a key factor highlighted here.

At some point in their lives all of the participants had become homeless (or in two cases faced the risk of homelessness due to eviction). The participants cited individual factors such as substance use, mental illness, and relationship breakdown as the cause of their homelessness. However it is argued here that it was accessing accommodation and services for the homeless through the social welfare system that actually led to the participants becoming defined as homeless. This ultimately occurred due to their socio-economic position, and the lack of resources they had access to in relation to this, rather than due to the individual factors they identified as causing their homelessness. It is also asserted here that the differentiation between those who have become targeted by the state to manage risk and those who do not is an increasingly significant cleavage of stratification within late modernity despite the same risky actions or situations having potentially been experienced by both groups. It is the ability that people have to negate or hide their edgework, due to the resources they have access to, that actually differentiates them rather engaging in or being at risk of that action. Furthermore the material reality the participants operated within may have created the conditions whereby this edgework could be rationalised and normalised.

Edgework is something we may all increasingly be engaged in, however what is important to highlight from this chapter is the *amount of extreme edgework* that many of the participants had experienced - of negotiating at the edges of normative 'safe' behaviour; the edges between consciousness and unconsciousness; life and death. The ability to negotiate successfully the risks of this edgework is grounded in the



structural position, and access to resources that someone has. It may *appear* to be an act of voluntary risk taking - irrational actions - that lead to some people's homelessness. However these actions could also be seen as a rational response to deal with the day-to-day life they had, given the intense trauma, vulnerability, and poverty that all the participants in this research had experienced. Therefore it is a form of escape, or resistance to this situation, and in broader terms, to the very structures of late modernity, that generate these actions, and therefore the existence of homelessness, within these structural conditions. This is the stressed theory of homelessness and causation developed in this analysis, and underpinned by theoretical accounts of life in late modernity.

People may 'fall further and faster' in the conditions of late modernity, but how far and how fast they fall will still be related to the starting point they came from. Those with a high level of resources of human, social, and economic capital, will have more material resources, social capital, and opportunities, to negotiate safely with or keep away from the 'edges'. These resources are tied to their structural socio-economic position people's life chances stem from.

In the next chapter, more objective research findings are returned to in an exploration of what happened to the participants once they had become homeless and the outcome of the transitions through homelessness they made.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: BEING HOMELESS – MAKING TRANSITIONS THROUGH HOMELESSNESS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the participants transitions through homelessness are charted and analysed. In section two what happened to the participants once they became homeless and the outcome of their transitions over the course of the research is presented. Three transitional routes have been developed to conceptualise these, using the concepts of integrative and divestment passages. These routes are termed:

1. Spirals of divestment passages
2. Developing integrative passages
3. Flip-flopping effect of integration diverging

Each of these routes are outlined and discussed in the subsequent three sections of this chapter, sections three, four and five. This analysis highlights the importance of charting the objective outcomes, and actual material circumstance someone is in, alongside how they experience and describe this, if transitional processes are to be really understood. In the section six how the stressed theory of homelessness and causation can be applied to the transitions through homelessness the participants made is discussed. Then the findings of this, and the previous chapter, are brought together to summarise the argument presented in this thesis so far, in the final section.

What the participants all shared at the point of the first interview was that they were people who had gone ‘over the edge’. Their lives had become characterised by not only their lack of resources, but also their experiences of extremely traumatic or risky situations - their experiences of edgework. They had all come to be defined as homeless people, and were in contact with agencies of the welfare state to assist them resolve this. Some had been homeless (sleeping rough and living in hostels for example) for most of their lives. Others had made a recent transition into homelessness, or had only faced the risk of becoming homeless. What they all shared at their first interview was that they were all people trying to make a transition

through homelessness and in contact with agencies of the welfare state to assist them do so.

At the outset of the data collection, the outcome of the participants' transitions through homelessness could not have been predicted. As already outlined in chapter two, the objective measure of homelessness used to chart the outcome of the participants' transitions here was whether the participants were living in their *own* housing (such as a tenancy leased in their name) or not, at the end of the research. In the end, some of the participants did remain homeless; some moved into their own tenancies; and some continued to live in their own tenancies, having recently been homeless prior to the first interview.

In the next section what happened to the participants when they first became homeless is discussed, before presenting the outcome of their transitions through homelessness, charted in this research.

## **4.2 Transitions through Homelessness**

When the participants first became homeless and applied for housing through the statutory homelessness legislation, the majority (twenty-two)<sup>5</sup> were accommodated in large-scale hostels. Almost all (twenty-five) of the participants had spent some time being accommodated in large hostels and temporary accommodation, such as Bed & Breakfasts. Two had not actually lost their tenancies, but were referred to services for homeless people after being served eviction notices. Only one other participant, Val, had not been accommodated in a hostel at some point and she had lived in supported accommodation for over a year before moving into her own tenancy once more.

### *Living in Hostels and Temporary Accommodation*

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<sup>5</sup> Two had not actually had to apply for housing under the homelessness legislation, and four had had other experiences, such as moving into supported accommodation from hospital, or sleeping rough for long periods.



Overwhelmingly, the participants described living in hostels negatively. They found their rooms and the conditions were often cramped, dirty, or insecure. They often felt threatened or were actually victimised whilst living there. Other studies into hostel life have also found similarly negative experiences (such as Ann Rosengard Associates, 2001; Glasgow Street Homelessness Review Team, 2000). The quote from Frank illustrates the conditions many of the participants described:

*'You just had a wee room, with your bed, and your wardrobe. People were throwing urine out the windows, and God, it was smelling. It was really dirty. (Frank, 39)*

Sometimes the participants spent many years living in hostels, or moving between different forms of temporary accommodation, once they became homeless. Francesca's case is used here to illustrate how the participants experienced this and the effect it could have.

#### *Francesca's Experience of Living in Temporary Accommodation*

Francesca had started rough sleeping after her, and her partner, (who were both addicted to heroin) were evicted from their flat. She had then been admitted to hospital with hypothermia, which she had contracted whilst rough sleeping. She moved into a hostel from hospital. In the quote below she describes her experience of living in a hostel:

*'That homeless hostel broke me. Emotionally and physically. I believe that they break so many people. They are hell on earth, just the whole environment in general, the whole ramming, like chicken farms, ramming all of the chickens all into one building as many as you can, these are people, these are people with feelings and emotions, and a lot of them might not act like it, but, at the end of the day they are.'*

(Francesca, 28)

The quote from Francesca highlights how negative the experience of living in hostels could be. This related not only to the material conditions there, but also the effect that this environment had on her ontologically – the hostel 'broke her, emotionally and physically'. The participants often spoke of how they felt living in hostels exposed

them to greater risk than staying with friends, or even than sleeping rough. These risks included being exposed to increased drug or alcohol use, being assaulted or victimised there, and their mental or physical health deteriorating. For example, once living in a hostel, rather than improve, Francesca's situation continued to deteriorate. Her drug use increased, and she started working in prostitution with the other women she had met there. She then attempted suicide. She was admitted to hospital once more and then moved into a rehab. From there she moved into supported accommodation. She was living in this supported accommodation when she took part in the first interview.

Once the participants became homeless they usually all spent some time moving between different forms of temporary accommodation. A central consideration in this analysis is this identification of the 'dehumanising' effect that these material conditions may have had. As Francesca said 'these are people, with feelings' although they 'may not act like it'. The stigma and difficulty of the material reality they were in, once they became homeless could also affect them ontologically in profound ways. For example, after Francesca moved into a five bedroom supported accommodation project, where she felt more settled and that she felt was 'homely', she began to feel more positive about her life, and that she could make a transition out of homelessness:

*'About a fortnight after I moved in here, once I settled down, after that I'd say I started feeling more positive. I could start getting into, that there is life, and there is light at the end of that tunnel.'*

So both the actual material situation the participants were in once they became homeless, and how this affected them emotionally, were important. What is also important to highlight here is that, rather than their situation improving after they accessed the 'system' in place to provide accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, many of the participants found that their situation continued to deteriorate. Many were now in a cycle of homelessness that could span many years.

### *Cycles of Homelessness*

After initially being accommodated in a hostel, the majority of the participants repeatedly moved between different forms of accommodation. This included being moved to another hostel due to conflict with other residents; being moved to a supported accommodation project because a bed space became available; and leaving hostels and staying with friends or sleeping rough for short periods (sixteen had slept rough at some point). Sometimes the poor condition of the temporary accommodation they were provided with, was enough to lead to them 'choosing' to leave and sleep rough instead, as was the case with Steven:

*'I became homeless when I left my family, it was 7 year ago or something. I stayed anywhere, just anywhere, I went to my sister for a while, sometimes I stayed in the hostels. I couldn't handle those places at all, it was all just dirty in there, it's filthy. You'd get a disease going by the door. So I bought a tent and I stayed in a field.'*

(Steven, 51)

Once they had accessed this system of homeless accommodation, the participants often spent years moving between different accommodation units. Sometimes they stayed temporarily with friends and relatives during this cycle. Sometimes they slept rough. Eighteen of the participants had had tenancies and lost them repeatedly over their life, as part of this cycle of homelessness.

Almost all<sup>6</sup> of the participants therefore were in a cycle of homelessness, moving between different institutions, temporary accommodation, and staying with friends, prior to the first interview. At the point of their first interview seventeen were living in temporary accommodation and eleven had their own tenancies. Those living in their own tenancies had recently moved into them after being homeless, or had recently been served eviction notices. Six of those living in their own tenancies at the point of the first interview had experienced repeated episodes of homelessness over their life. What was distinct about all of the participants, at this point, was that they were all were in contact with services of the welfare system meant to assist

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<sup>6</sup> The two participants who did not actually lose their tenancies had been referred to homeless services. One of the two had spent time staying with friends and relatives and sleeping in his car previously. He had also accessed soup kitchens and other services for people who were homeless.



people resolve or avoid homelessness. Therefore they had all at some point become identified by the state as visibly homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Over the course of the research the housing situation of the participants continued to change. In what way this would change could not have been predicted at the outset of the research and one of the key aims was to systematically track these changes.

### *Charting Outcomes – Transitions through Homelessness*

Over the year in their life that the research explicitly followed, nine of the participants moved into their own tenancies, eight remained homeless, one became homeless once more, and ten of the participants continued to live in their own tenancies, after having previously been homeless or at risk of homelessness. Put more simply, at the end of the research, of twenty-eight participants, nine were still homeless, and nineteen were living in their own tenancies. Despite it being impossible to predict at the outset of the research, in the end about half of those without housing at the beginning of the research obtained a tenancy and half remained homeless.

In table C, how the participants' housing situations changed over the course of the twelve months of the research, is summarised:

**Table C: Transitions through homelessness (N:28)**

At First Interview	At Third Interview			
	Own tenancy	Moved into tenancy	Homeless	Total
Living in own tenancy after period of homelessness	8		1	9
Homeless		9	8	17
Living in own tenancy but at risk homelessness	2			2
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>28</b>

As has already been highlighted, the value of longitudinal research such as this is that the complex transitions that the participants took over a year - resulting in some maintaining their tenancies, some moving into a tenancy, and some remaining homeless - could be charted and examined in detail.

*Understanding Transitional Phases*

Three transitional routes have been identified and developed that appeared to represent the transitions that the participants took. Each of these are discussed in the next three sections, to highlight the complexity of their transitions and to show how a realist approach such as this is required. The objective events that had occurred in the participants’ lives, such as gaining a tenancy, were rarely subjectively experienced in linear or simplistic ways.

These transitional routes were developed, using the concept of integrative and divestment passages (Ezzy, 2001). These were identified by bringing together what had actually, objectively occurred during these transitions (such as where they had been housed; what support services the participants had accessed; why they had

moved from there), with how the participants had qualitatively described and experienced this (such as how they felt about this housing; what happened to cause them to move from there). These routes are:

1. Spirals of divestment passages
2. Developing integrative passages
3. Flip-flopping effect of integration diverging

Each are outlined and described in turn in the next three sections. They are also used to illustrate how the different outcomes of the participants' transitions through homelessness, such as remaining homeless, and moving into a tenancy, occurred.

### **4.3 Spirals of Divestment Passages**

Divestment passages occur when transitional stages lead to a social status that separates someone from what would normally be the expected or the 'positive' outcome (Ezzy, 2001). They are what happens when things 'go wrong'. The paradox inherent in such passages is that once they occur, and have led to a negative situation, it may be more likely that further divestment passages will follow. These passages lead to a negative social status, relative to the position someone was in before. Normative assumptions would be that people should attempt to regain the status they had had previously. However this may not occur – instead a process of spiralling divestment such as that discussed here.

All of the participants had experienced spiralling divestment passages as they become homelessness. As was highlighted in the previous section, accessing accommodation for people who were homeless did not necessarily trigger a more integrative phase in their transitions through homelessness. Instead the material conditions the participants were experiencing now they were homeless, could lead to further divestment passages.

The same mechanisms that had influenced their transitions into homelessness – social networks and interactions; edgework and trauma; low levels of resources - continued to affect their lives once they were homeless. In Francesca's case for example, once



she moved into a hostel, the conditions there and interactions she engaged in led to her increasing her drug use, and working in prostitution. Both could be rationalised as ways to cope with the situation she was in on a micro-level. However as her social status and material reality continued to spiral downwards the emotional and physical effect led to more divestment. Eventually she had reached the 'bottom', separated from status, and she had attempted suicide.

For the majority of the participants, their situation had continued to spiral downwards in this way after they became homeless. In the quote below, Brian described how he felt once he became homeless:

*'You get stuck in the hostels and you can either go down as far as you can go and then you die, or you can get back up. I had to go away down to the bottom before anybody would do anything for me'.* (Brian, 36)

Brian, and many of the other participants, felt that the conditions they experienced once they became homeless acted to continue triggering more problems and divestment in their lives. Their social status continued to be separated from normative, integrating routes. Their material situation often deteriorated. Often the edgework such as drug use they engaged in or experienced also increased – they became addicts, homeless, and increasingly separated from society.

Bess's case provides another example of this. Bess had become homeless gradually. After leaving her parents home, she had lived in accommodation provided through informal employment, in hotels. Due to her alcohol use and after being assaulted by her employer, she left her current employment. With nowhere else to go, she had applied for accommodation under the homeless legislation. She was then provided with a room in a supported accommodation. Her situation continued to deteriorate there. She attempted suicide, in a highly traumatic situation, as the following quote illustrates:

*'I took an OD [overdose], it was like a proper cry for help, do you know what I mean? They found me because they did a room check, a guy tried to rape me when I*

*was blanking out. I was in hospital for I think it was about three days. And then I moved here [Supported accommodation].'* (Bess, 25)

She was admitted to hospital and moved into another supported accommodation. She was living there at the first interview, and moved into her own tenancy over the course of the research. All of the participants had experienced these spiralling divestment passages at some point. The transitions of the nine participants who remained homeless by the end of the research were particularly illustrative of this ongoing spiralling effect and this is discussed below.

### *Remaining Homeless and Spirals of Divestment*

Nine of the participants were homeless at the end of the research. This group consisted of two women and seven men, with an age range of 35 to 60. Those who remained homeless throughout the research did represent people particularly experiencing these spirals of divestment, and often that had done so for many years. They had few, if any, resources of human, social, or economic capital, and were in a long-term cycle of repeat homelessness. They had all spent long periods of their lives in prison and hospitals; they were barred from local shops and welfare services; some had visible scars and disabilities; they had chronic health and behavioural problems; they often described feeling acutely stigmatised and 'outside' of mainstream society. They also engaged in extreme edgework, alcohol and drug use, suicide attempts, risky behaviour such as criminal acts or violence towards others. So in the structural context they operated within these were people who were acutely marginalised – over the edge materially, and also negotiating at the extreme edge of normative social behaviour. Frank's experiences can be used to illustrate this.

### *Frank's Story*

Frank was thirty-nine and living in supported accommodation at the first interview. He had spent most of his life in and out of prison and staying with relatives or partners. He had been in borstals and care homes as a child. He was addicted to heroin. Over the course of the research Frank was evicted from the supported

accommodation where he had been living at the first interview. He was evicted due to ongoing drug use, staying overnight with his new partner, and violent behaviour:

*'It ended up they took me to the door [he was asked to leave supported accommodation]. I was using drugs again. The relationship went wrong, see when you've been on drugs for years and you've not had a relationship, you're not prepared – relationships are hard. They [support workers] tell you not to get involved in relationships for at least a couple of years after you're clean, but I'm a man. It's difficult.'* (Frank, 39)

He then moved to a large hostel. His drug use continued to increase and he began shoplifting every day to fund his habit. By the third interview he was in prison for shoplifting:

*'I feel I came so far and now I've come so far backwards. I know, I need to get into a rehab. This is the third time I've tried to get myself sorted though. I prefer myself clean. The pressures though, relationships, just, it's hard.'*

Frank's situation illustrates this ongoing spiral of divestment that these participants experienced. They had adopted individual survival techniques in the day-to-day actions and interactions they engaged in, such as shoplifting and using substances. In doing so however they only continued to be further separated from integration to mainstream society. The edgework they engaged in was not always voluntary risk taking either. These were people on the edge of society in many ways and were also victimised by others. This victimisation occurred both symbolically (due to the intense marginality and stigma they faced<sup>7</sup>) and also literally (due to regularly being assaulted and attacked on the street, as the majority of them had been<sup>8</sup>). They personified the image of the homeless person as 'outsider', as both vulnerable and threatening.

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<sup>7</sup> They were banned from or often moved on from public places by police or other people.

<sup>8</sup> For example, one of the participants who remained homeless was attacked by a group of young people whilst he was sleeping rough over the course of the research. He temporarily lost the sight in one eye and had had his throat slashed.



Over the course of the research they all moved between different forms of accommodation, such as staying in supported accommodation units, hostels, Bed & Breakfasts, sleeping rough, staying with friends or relatives, being in rehabs, prison, or hospital. By the final interview three of the nine who remained homeless were living in supported accommodation; three were staying with friends or relatives; one was living in a hostel; one was in prison; and one was in a residential rehab. They remained in insecure material housing situations, in a cycle of spiralling divestment. This spiral effect had taken them far from integrative, normative social status and circumstances.

Their cases illustrate once more the intensely risky and traumatic events that people 'on the edge' of society, such as those whose lives were explored here, may have faced. Whether this was through what may appear to be voluntary risk taking, such as intravenous drug use, criminality, suicide attempts, or involuntary situations such as violence and sexual assault, the participants were all negotiating with extreme edges, emotionally and physically, once they become homeless. They had to find a way to cope with this, on a day-to-day basis. With each divestment passage their lives took, they had more difficulty and insecurity to consolidate with subjectively, as individuals. As they moved in this cycle of homelessness, any material possessions that they had were usually lost. Their resources of human, social, or material capital, which were already low, only continued to erode.

### *Trapped in the Cycle?*

This spiralling divestment effect was apparent as the participants became homeless. Their situation continued to generate conditions that recreated or exacerbated their problems and marginality. The actual provision made for people once they are homeless and reliant on the services and institutions of the social welfare system may create the conditions whereby these spirals of divestment continue. For example, the pressure and tension of living in hostels, coupled with the drug and alcohol use that was endemic there, could lead to violence between the residents. This could lead to them being evicted from this accommodation, with nowhere else to go, and lead to them sleeping rough. In this way they became further marginalised and alienated. Or they could experience intense vulnerability and victimisation in temporary

accommodation, such as being attacked or sexually assaulted by other residents, as Bess's example illustrated. This situation was created by the very condition of being homeless, which further exacerbated their vulnerability. Both the material conditions the participants experienced, and how these conditions and the events that occurred there, emotionally, affected them, had to be considered to understand the actions that they then engaged in when they were homeless – the rationale of irrational behaviour.

Once homeless many of the participants went completely 'over the edge' in the edgework they engaged in - increasing their substance use; having mental breakdowns; attempting suicide; engaging in, or being victims of life threatening violence, for example. This situation was exacerbated by the conditions of the accommodation they had been provided with as homeless people in the first instance. Their situation then continued in this spiral of divestment, often until they reached a point of complete destitution, or a life-threatening situation, such as attempting suicide, occurred. They reached a 'breaking' point. This was when their situation then changed once more. Sometimes they move into a rehab, were admitted to hospital, moved into another supported accommodation, for example. For some of the participants it was at one of these points their lives began to take what appeared to be more integrative passages – or at least was the point that they described retrospectively as when their lives began to improve. Nineteen of the participants were living in their own tenancies at the end of the research. In the next section how these transitions developed is analysed.

#### **4.4 Developing Integrative Passages**

Integrative transitions occur when transitional phases lead to a clearly delineated new social status that adheres to the 'taken for granted' normative assumptions about the social status someone should have. In this way transitions occur that continue integrating to the society someone operates within. For the participants here, gaining their own housing was clearly a key outcome required for them to adhere to normative ideas about how integrative passages should develop. Normative assumptions would be that homeless people want to obtain their own housing and that once someone moves into their own housing they are no longer homeless and have reintegrated to society. Nineteen were living in their own tenancy at the end of

the research and so in this way appeared to have made successful transitions out of homelessness.

Obtaining their own tenancy had usually been part of a long process, occurring after they made many ‘micro’ integrative transitions. These ‘micro’ transitions included moving to semi-supported accommodation from one that was staffed twenty-four hours a day; ceasing alcohol or drug use; making contact with relatives; accessing training courses for people who were homeless. These were all actions that seemed to adhere to the norms of expected ‘responsible’ behaviour, to assist them to reintegrate into society. However each of these ‘micro’ transitions brought new challenges and risk. For example, contacting family once more, ran the risk of being rejected. Ceasing to use drugs brought the pain of withdrawal symptoms, and brought the risk that they would relapse once more. Many changes had to occur as the participants made their transitions through homelessness, and each change potentially brought new risks or difficulty.

### *Obtaining a Tenancy – Integrative Transitions?*

Some of the participants did appear to make fairly linear integrative transitions through homelessness. After moving into a rehab, and then supported accommodation for example, they moved into their own tenancies and continued to live there throughout the research. Many of the participants’ transitions followed this route – after an initial spiral of divestment, they had moved into temporary accommodation, and then their tenancies.

Usually obtaining their own tenancy was something that was planned and prepared for with the assistance of various agencies and professionals of the social welfare system. These interventions of the social welfare system are analysed in more detail in the next chapter. For example, all<sup>9</sup> of their tenancies were socially rented. They all had resettlement workers that assisted them gain their tenancy, and the majority also had long-term housing support workers that continued to visit them once they were housed. Despite some of the participants spending periods living in accommodation

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<sup>9</sup> Francesca obtained a flat through a private landlord, paid for through housing benefit.



provided outside of this system, such as staying with friends, only one obtained their own tenancy privately, without the advice of housing support workers (and this tenancy was paid for by Housing Benefit). Therefore the integrative transitions presented here were fully embedded in the welfare system in place to resolve homelessness. The participants lacked the resources to be able to negotiate any other housing circumstance within the current housing market and remained reliant on the state even if they did obtain housing.

The one participant that did obtain her own tenancy privately was Francesca. Her experience is described below. Her experience shows how important charting the participant's transitions both *objectively* (their housing circumstance), and *subjectively* how they experienced this was, to really understanding how these transitions developed, and illustrates they rarely actually took clearly integrative routes.

### *Francesca's Transition out of Homelessness*

Francesca's experiences of being homeless and living in temporary accommodation were described in the previous section. Francesca's life appeared to have taken an integrative transition out of homelessness after she entered supported accommodation. She left the supported accommodation to move into a flat with her partner in both their names. By the third interview she had moved out of this flat, and was living in her own privately rented tenancy, paid for by Housing Benefit.

However when the qualitative account of this transition is analysed it is one that involved less clear integration. She still had a life imbued with risk and insecurity. She said she felt 'forced' to leave the supported accommodation she was in to move in with her partner because they were abusive and threatened her. While she was staying with them she experienced extreme physical violence, including being stabbed. She left and moved into her own private tenancy, but this was close to where her (now ex-)partner lived and was managed by the same landlord as the flat she had previously lived in. She continued to see her ex-partner, and sometimes was threatened and assaulted by them. She continued to use drugs heavily, and was also on methadone.

Charting her transition objectively, it appeared to end with an integrative outcome. She had made the transition out of homelessness and was living in her own tenancy obtained through a private landlord. She had a degree of integration (she did like the flat she lived in and felt relatively settled there, she also had started to spend time with her family, who had helped her move there) but also continued divestment. She was still close to the edge - relying on Housing and other benefits financially, engaging in drug use, experiencing traumatic incidents and vulnerability through the threats and assaults made to her by those she knew. Her situation may have improved in that she had her own tenancy at that point, but she was still fundamentally in the same risky situation as before, marginalised, close to, if not over the edge.

This was the case for many of the participants whose lives had appeared to take integrative passages. Val's experience for example, can be used to further illustrate this point and also how the key mechanisms already identified here (social networks, edgework, and resources) continued to interact to affect the participants' lives, as they made their ongoing transitions.

### *Val's Transition out of Homelessness*

Val's transition into homelessness was outlined in chapter three. Val was living in her own tenancy at the first and second interview, after moving there from supported accommodation. However between the second and third interview she began using alcohol heavily once more, and was admitted to hospital, after collapsing. She attributed this relapse to the isolation and loneliness she felt, after a relative she had been spending time with had moved to another area. This was the same process that had led to her homelessness in the first instance. In that case it was after the death of her husband that she had become isolated and her alcohol use had increased. In the following quote, from the third interview, she describes the process that led to this relapse:

*'I've been OK but I relapsed over a month ago and I went into hospital. Since she [relative] moved I just felt lonely. I was hitting the drink and I just happened to collapse and I was taken to the hospital. The thing is I was seeing her almost every*

*day. Of course she's got her own life, but I just felt down and numb and alone. I did it gradually, I didn't just go on a binge. When you're on your own it's terrible, you go to the pub to get a wee bit of company and of course that sets you off with the drinking. During the night you've got the telly, whatever, but during the day...*

She had moved back into her flat after four weeks in hospital but continued to experience problems with isolation, loneliness, and alcohol use. Val may no longer have been homeless, but her life continued 'flip-flopping' back and forward between potentially integrating and potentially divesting passages, in an ongoing cycle. In this way she was trapped in limbo in this space on the 'edge'. And this was something she experienced on both material and emotional levels. So despite making an integrative transition through homelessness, her life remained close to the edge. The same fundamental factors that had led to her homelessness – low level of resources, reliance on the state for material and social support, poor health, social isolation, emotional distress, and her alcohol use - remained key mechanisms affecting her life. She remained caught up in the duality of edges identified earlier – that material marginality, impacts subjectively, leading to edgework, and the negotiation of the boundaries of normative behaviour as a form of escape. This duality could lead to further spirals of divestment. The resources she had continued to deplete. She had come to rely on the services of the welfare state for social and material support. And as was argued in the stressed theory of homelessness and causation developed in this thesis, this outcome only occurred in the first instance due to the structural reality of life in late modernity Val was in. Without this structural reality altering, her risk of homelessness remained, despite certain mechanisms (her access to support and housing through the welfare state) having operated to resolve this problem on the surface level.

### *The Space by the Edge – the Space Between*

Val's example illustrates the complexity of the different factors that converge and interact over people's life course. Their transitions through homelessness may take what appears objectively to be integrative passages, as they are no longer defined as homeless. However other areas of their life may continue along divestment passages that could spiral once more. Their social status was caught, flip-flopping in the space



on the edge of society. Many of the participants – both those who remained homeless over the course of the research and those that obtained tenancies – were experiencing this flip-flop effect. They were making transitions, but could not move far from the marginal ‘edges’ of society they were at, materially. And this also impacted on their lives subjectively and emotionally. In this way their risk of going over the edge, of experiencing homelessness once more, and their reliance on the state remained, despite their housing status changing.

In this realist analysis, these qualitative aspects of the participants’ transitions can be explored alongside the actual housing transitions they made over the course of the research. By analysing these aspects together it is clear that the extent to which the participants could really integrate beyond their homelessness, within the structural context they operated in, was limited. Some of the participants *appeared* to make integrative transitions out of homelessness by obtaining their own tenancies. However their transitions were actually characterised by a flip-flop of integrative and divestment passages, interacting with, and triggering each other. This flip-flop effect is discussed in more detail below.

#### **4.5 Flip-Flopping Effect of Integration Diverging**

So rather than the participants’ transitions taking clearly integrative routes, they were actually characterised by this flip-flopping effect. Sometimes they would have a period of what appeared to be integration, but the fundamental structural situation they were in remained the same. Most of the participants remained ‘close to the edge’. Furthermore as their transitions developed and their circumstances changed, they often faced new risks or challenges they had not faced before, such as living on their own, or managing their own tenancy. The pressure or difficulty of this could act to trigger further divestment passages. Claire’s experience can be used to illustrate this.

##### *Claire’s Transition out of Homelessness*

Claire was first interviewed when she lived in a supported accommodation. By the second interview she had moved into her own tenancy, and was still living there at

the third interview. However between moving from supported accommodation to her own tenancy she relapsed with her drug use. She was evicted from supported accommodation and moved into an emergency rehab. This move was organised by the staff at both projects. In the following quote she describes the process that led to her relapse:

*'I relapsed, I ended up in a rehab for three weeks. I felt like I banging my head off a brick wall in there [supported accommodation]. I did feel pressured to just take it [her new tenancy] by that time, I really wanted to get away from [supported accommodation]. I couldn't handle that life anymore, the 'them and us', you feel pressurised to hang about with the other women, because there's nobody else to talk to. In that building you just feel isolated. I can't really remember much about being in rehab to tell you the truth. I had drug psychosis from the amount I'd taken.'*

(Claire, 26)

Again, Claire's experience highlights an earlier point – that the actual material conditions people find themselves in when they are homeless can also be the trigger for ongoing divestment passages, and for engaging in edgework as a means to cope with or escape this, emotionally.

As the participants made their transitions, even in ways that appeared integrative, the material situation they were in could affect them emotionally, triggering actions that could potentially lead to further divestment passages. In Claire's case she felt she was 'banging her head against a brick wall', she felt pressurised to move into the first tenancy she was offered. She risked losing this tenancy after she relapsed. In this case, with the support of staff, she moved from the rehab to her own tenancy a few weeks later. She managed to maintain a degree of integration, and continue making her transition out of homelessness. However as the following quote highlights, actually moving into a tenancy could also be intensely difficult. This new situation brought with it new problems (and risks) for the participants to manage and negotiate with:

*'I mean things are still really hard. Like just learning all the simple things in life again, things people like you take for granted, learning what's right, learning what's*

*wrong, after six years on drugs. I mean how long does a loaf of bread last you? Now you have everything to learn. [Moving in it was] Like the silence, was going to cave in on you.'*

(Claire, 26)

All of the participants experienced this flip-flop effect to a degree, including the participants who remained homeless and whose transitions were characterised by spirals of divestment, and this is explored below.

### *Remaining Homeless and Flip-flopping Effects*

The participants that remained homeless continued to try to access different forms of accommodation, such as rehabs or supported accommodation over the course of the research. They may have ceased their drug use or alcohol use for short periods, before relapsing. In this way they were caught up in a cycle of transitional phases. They were constantly attempting to make what were perceived to be integrative 'micro' passages out of homelessness, such as going from sleeping rough to being accommodated in a rehab, but these moves only occurred for short-periods, before spiralling back. A crucial aspect of this flip-flopping was that it was often events that occurred *due to the participants trying to make integrative passages* that actually *created the conditions that caused this ongoing divestment*. For example, once they entered temporary accommodation they could no longer use drugs, and may have been evicted if they were caught doing so. The physical and psychological effect of ceasing their drug use could lead to difficulty and conflict with other residents. This conflict could then lead to them being evicted. Once people were 'over the edge' the spiralling effect of ongoing divestment could be particularly difficult to negate – they became trapped by this and so the cycle of homelessness they were in was maintained and could not be broken.

The actions that caused this divestment may have appeared to be individual - such as continuing to use alcohol, or conflict with other residents. However it is asserted here that they were also outcomes and actions generated within the structural context of the material situation they were in. So those that remained homeless appeared to be caught in a spiral of divestment passages that interacted with integrative passages also in this flip-flopping effect. They experienced short-term integration (such as



moving into supported accommodation) that ended with another divestment passage, spiralling them into increasingly vulnerable and difficult situations. Each time this occurred any form of capital or access to resources they had was eroded once more and their ontological security shattered as they 'failed' once more to make a transition back over the edge. What is particularly important in this analysis is that the mechanisms and circumstances that caused these divestment passages are identified and explored. This is done in the next two chapters.

### *The 'Reality' of Transitional Stages*

Obviously transitions over the life course are not experienced in simplistic ways. Even when they take what appears to be positive integrative passages that assimilate to the 'taken for granted' norms of society, such as a homeless person wanting to move into their own tenancy, the qualitative experience of this can be intensely difficult, complex and multi-faceted. During transitional phases such as these, different aspects of someone's life may be changing, simultaneously. These different aspects flip-flop back and forth, some diverging, some integrating, each time creating a new material reality that may hold new risks and require new transitions to be made to negate these risks. Furthermore there was always also a subjective, emotional aspect to these transitions. As the material situation the participants were in changed they had to subjectively reconcile this new 'reality' with the person they were, the abilities they had, and the new social role and interactions they were engaging in. For many of the participants these transitions through homelessness were experienced as intensely difficult, despite of (and in some cases also due to) an apparently positive outcome having occurred, such as gaining their own tenancy. Furthermore, the structural conditions they operated within had not fundamentally altered. The same circumstances and triggers that had caused their homelessness in the first place often remained. This is a pivotal factor, crucial to understanding these transitions through homelessness, and how they developed.

Transitions over the life course occur objectively, and can be defined by certain outcomes, but how they are subjectively, emotionally, experienced will also always interact with and affect them. Due to this duality, barriers to making integrative transitions out of homelessness could be identified that were structural (the actual

material reality the participants were in, the actual resources they had) and agent-led (the actions that stemmed from the desire to assert their individuality the participants had). These are explored in more detail in the next two chapters. In chapter three the stressed theory on homelessness and causation, underpinned by structuration theory and realist ontology, was developed. In the next section of this chapter, this perspective is contrasted with the transitions through homelessness the participants made to further assert this theory. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings presented so far.

#### **4.6 Stressed: A New Theoretical Perspective on Transitions through Homelessness**

In this chapter the participants' transitions through homelessness have been charted and analysed. One of the key assertions is that, even for those participants who made a transition out of homelessness, the structural conditions that they operated within had not fundamentally changed. And it has been identified here that, as it is these structural conditions that create the motivation and circumstances that generates the individual factors that caused their homelessness, the participants' risk of homelessness remained the same. The same lack of resources and concentration of edgework that led to their homelessness continued in their lives. Furthermore, their lives continued to be embedded within the services of the welfare state and the resources that they could access from this. Their structural position as individuals who had to rely on the state to assist them (or target them) to negate risk in their life also remained, even though they were in a more secure position on this continuum, now that they were not homeless.

One of the participants who was homeless at the end of the research, Helen, had recently moved into her own tenancy at the point of the first interview. She became homeless once more over the course of the research. Her case is examined in this section to assess how the stressed theory of homelessness and causation outlined in chapter three fits with the experiences the participants had as they made their transitions through homelessness.

## *Helen's Story*

Helen had experienced repeated homelessness since she left home aged fourteen. Over the years she had lived in hostels, refuges for women fleeing domestic violence, supported accommodation and rehabs. She had stayed with friends and partners, although these relationships were often violent. She had had her own tenancy a few times, and each time had become homeless once more. Sometimes this was due to leaving abusive partners. Sometimes this was due to being evicted or abandoning it. She had been addicted to heroin, used drugs regularly, and had chronic alcohol problems. At the first interview she was living in her own tenancy. She had recently moved there from a supported accommodation project:

*'I've been there from the end of March, my house. And I've not lost that, and I'm like - couldn't believe it. And I've not got an inkling to go back and take a bit of smack, and that's the first step, do you know what I mean? It's the first step back.'*

Over the course of the research she began spending more time at her partner's flat. She gave up her tenancy to move into her partner's, with the intention being that this would be changed to be legally in both their names. However, due to domestic violence she left suddenly, with nowhere else to go, and became homeless again:

*'I hadn't done nothing, and next he grabbed me by my hair, and I ran down the stairs, out like that...he kicked me out. I feel so frustrated, so angry. I've had to leave everything.'*

(Helen, 35)

This divestment passage in her life could not be predicted or planned for. With the lack of resources Helen had, and at that moment, in the street, in just the clothes she was wearing, she called her housing support worker. She was admitted to a hostel. She was homeless once more. She had no possessions. She began to use alcohol and drugs heavily. She was living in the hostel at the third interview.

Just as relationship breakdown often triggered the participants' initial transition into homelessness it could go on doing so over the course of their lives, particularly if they remained in the situation whereby they had to rely on the state for housing.



Helen had been in close contact with services of the social welfare system most of her life. When her social and material security broke down due to domestic violence she had no one else to call that could assist her other than her support worker. She lacked the human, social, or financial capital to be able to obtain accommodation herself 'privately'. She could not afford a private rented flat, did not feel she could emotionally cope with having her own tenancy at that point, and had no other friends or family that she could stay with or obtain support from. So she remained reliant on the social welfare system, and accommodated within this system once more. She became defined as homeless once more due to this reliance on the state for both material and emotional resources. This reliance was due to the structural situation she was in however, rather than the individual factors that had occurred in her life. These factors (domestic violence, drug use) did interact with this situation and did cause 'real' damage. They could occur in anyone's life, but are likely to lead to different outcomes if they have the human, social, and financial capital to negate the spirals of divestment that may then occur. At times we all come close to some 'edge' in life, but most have resources to negotiate with this and return from it unscathed. These resources however have to be understood as being more than financial, they may also be found through social, human, and cultural capital. A lack of any of these may lead to a greater risk of divestment occurring when people make transitional stages in their life. A lack of them all multiplies this risk.

As was highlighted in the previous chapter, social networks, resources and the participants' edgework particularly influenced their transitions – at times leading to spirals of divestment. For example, as in Helen's case, after leaving an abusive partner, and entering a hostel, she had found herself in a difficult material condition. She had no clothes, and was back in a hostel. She had no other social networks and was attempting to manage the emotional effect and trauma of violence; of relationships breakdown; and of leaving her home. She started using substances heavily, the 'step backwards' she had been worried about. And if, due to her substance use, she had to leave the accommodation she was in, her life would keep spiralling once more.

Taken within the context of Helen's life, where she had experienced repeated homelessness, addiction, mental illness, repeated abusive relationships - this was yet

another trauma for her. On a micro-level, her escape or resistance to this structural reality was through substances. Although in some ways her relationship and moving into her partner's flat was the cause of this episode of homelessness, what had been her alternative? A life where she had never entered a new relationship? Never taken the risk of moving in with a partner? Her motivations for doing so may be the same as anyone else, but she lacked the resources to avoid homelessness when the risk that this relationship went wrong became reality. Each time she became homeless, her resources became further eroded, as she spiralled back into the divestment passages of homelessness and addiction, and had more traumatic incidents to reconcile with in her life.

### *The Stressed Perspective on Transitions through Homelessness*

Just as was the case with Claire and Val, whose stories were outlined earlier, Helen may have made a transition out of homelessness, but the structural conditions and the resources she had access to within these conditions, had not fundamentally changed. In this way the risk she had of repeated homelessness remained the same. She had been, and continued to be, supported and assisted by professionals within the social welfare system. Without this when her relationship went wrong, she may have become destitute. However this reliance also highlights how a key cleavage of stratification in society may be developing between those who have to rely on the state and those who do not, to negotiate with risk. And that whilst the outcome of this negotiation is still structurally grounded, this may be becoming obscured. For example, if Helen could have paid for her own accommodation, or had friends with a high level of resources that she could have moved in with, then she would not have relied on the welfare state and would not have had to move into a hostel.

Anyone may experience domestic violence but the outcome is likely to be different depending on the resources they have. Over the years, all forms of social, human, cultural and financial capital Helen had, had become tied to the social welfare system – a system she was embedded in – therefore when something went wrong in her life, this was the only resource she had to assist her with this problem. Her motivation to engage in relationships may have been no different from those who have a high level of resources, but the outcome of this, if it goes wrong, was likely to be. Anyone's

resources may become depleted at points in their life, but if they have less to begin with, the likelihood they will become homeless and then enter a socially alienating spiral of divestment is greater. And this desire to continue to negotiate new outcomes, and new micro-transitions means that people have to keep negotiating with risks over their life, whatever resources they have to begin with.

Even more fundamentally, it has been suggested here that the material reality some people operate within, underpinned by the structural conditions of late modernity, may have led to the conditions whereby forms of edgework are more likely to occur. Both Helen and her partner were addicted to substances, they often had violent arguments, and saw few opportunities for their material situation to change. Her reality, of poverty and emotional despair, had remained the same, even though she had been provided with resources such as housing.

Of course what happened to Helen will not happen in every case when two people who have been homeless, or are addicted to substances move in together. Her and her partner could have stayed together. People with high levels of resources may become homeless due to domestic violence also. The point from this stressed perspective is that it is much *less likely* to lead to this outcome, or perhaps even to occur. And this likelihood is structurally generated. For those who do have to rely on the state, within these structural conditions, the individual actions they engage in will be interpreted as the cause of their homelessness, and their situation individualised. Indeed, these individual actions are, on one level what did lead to their homelessness, but many mechanisms are operating that trigger this. Policy measures, such as providing support services or more housing through the state, may be developed to address homelessness, but this does not mean the fundamental structural conditions the participants operated within had changed. And neither therefore had their motivation or need to experience edgework, created within these conditions. In this way, the risk of homelessness occurring once more, and the conditions that generated this risk, remained.



#### **4.7 Conclusion: Analysing Transitions through Homelessness**

In the final section of this chapter the findings of this, and the previous chapter, are brought together and summarised. In particular four key aspects have been identified.

Firstly, from the participants' life histories it was ascertained that although some had more than others, they all had relatively low levels of human, social and economic capital, due to the socio-economic position of their birth, and institutional resources of educational and employment experiences they had. Another key similarity in all their lives was that at some point they had become imbued with experiences of highly traumatic incidents, and involuntarily experienced risks, such as abuse, mental illness, attempted suicide. Many had also engaged in extreme forms of voluntary risk taking such as intravenous drug use. Due to this they faced a 'duality of edges', materially lacking resources, and also facing stigma and intense emotional trauma. These were people often negotiating at the edges of normative behaviour, within a precarious or difficult material reality.

Secondly, the transitions that they did make over their life course were particularly influenced by their social networks and relationships; the edgework they engaged in or experienced, such as drug use or abusive relationships; and the lack of resources they had. Their homelessness occurred due to an interrelation of these factors – their social, economic and human capital became increasingly depleted due to their edgework, coupled with the low level of resources they already had. Due to this they had to rely on the state to access accommodation, and had to access services or apply for housing as a homeless person under the homeless legislation that exists.

The participants' homelessness was indeed caused by individual factors and trigger points, occurring within a certain structural context whereby they had a lack of resources. This is why there is high prevalence of such problems amongst people experiencing homelessness. This is recognised as the 'new orthodoxy' to understanding homelessness in contemporary western societies (Fitzpatrick, 2005). In this thesis, this orthodoxy is reasserted – this is how homelessness and causation can be understood – this is how structure and agency interacts. However a perspective that develops this further has also been provided. This structural context and the

interactions people engage in within it, may also generate the *conditions that lead to the individual factors seen as causing homelessness* and provide a rationale for actions that may appear irrational as a means to avoid risk. Furthermore these individual factors may technically occur in anyone's life, the key difference leading to homelessness is when people lack resources of human, social, or financial capital to avoid them, or negate the effects of these individual factors - to negate the risk of going 'over the edge' their edgework may bring. If they cannot negate this risk, they then have to access the social welfare system to obtain accommodation, and in this way became defined as a 'homeless person'. This is the stressed theory of homelessness and causation developed here. Anyone *may* become homeless, but they are more likely to when they have a low level of resources. Anyone may engage in or experience extreme forms of edgework, but they are far more likely to be able to do so 'safely', be able to 'buffer' the effects of this, or engage in acts not deemed 'deviant' when they have a high level of resources to do so. The social context of the late modern risk society underpins both the resources people have access to, and the motivation or conditions that generate this edgework. And this will affect and be affected by both the material and emotional landscape that they operate within.

Thirdly, the participants had all experienced different housing situations in a cycle of homelessness, such as staying with friends, rough sleeping, being in temporary accommodation, as they made their transitions through homelessness. However by the end of the research, nineteen of the twenty-eight participants had their own tenancies and so objectively appeared to have made a transition out of homelessness. Three routes were identified to analyse the transitions through homelessness they took. These are: spirals of divestment passages; developing integration; and a flip-flopping effect of integration diverging.

Spirals of divestment passages had occurred for all of the participants as they became homeless. With each divestment passage their lives took, their resources and social status was eroded, and could lead to further divestment occurring in a 'vicious cycle'. The transitions of those who remained homeless over the course of the research particularly characterised these spirals.

Those who made a transition out of homelessness may have appeared to have made integrative passages. However by analysing both the actual outcomes that occurred as the participants made their transitions, and how this was qualitatively experienced, it became clear that the participants' transitions were actually characterised by a flip-flopping effect of integration diverging. New challenges and risks they faced as they made these transitions and as their circumstances changed, could lead to another divestment passage. Making a transition out of homelessness could be intensely difficult on both material and emotional levels. Furthermore the fundamental structural conditions of late modernity they operated in had not changed just because they had obtained housing. They still lacked resources, were reliant on the state, and experienced extreme forms of edgework. Therefore their risk of homelessness, and actual situation, remained the same – close to or over the edge.

A fourth, key issue identified here is that the participants' transitions were particularly embedded in the social welfare system. The participants whose experiences are analysed here particularly illustrate the lives of people that had at some point actually gone 'over the edge' in late modern society – objectively due to their lack of socio-economic resources, and subjectively negotiating the edges of normative behaviour. In this context, their edgework could be seen as a form of potential resistance or escape from the material reality they were in, and also as being generated by this material reality. However this edgework then often only led to more trauma to be reconciled over their life course, and to them being labelled with the discourses of deviance and 'lack of control' that these activities are imbued with. They then became explicitly targeted by the services of the social welfare system when they attempted to resolve their homelessness. The distinction between those who have become explicitly targeted in this way to manage the risks they pose or face in their lives, and those who are not, may be becoming a key cleavage of stratification in late modernity. Their actions may not be so different, but how they are interpreted and responded to, is. And this will go on to further alienate and isolate people, so that their actions and lives become increasingly problematic. This point is developed in the next two chapters.

Overall, chapters three and four have illustrated three key similarities in the participants' lives, similarities that underpinned their transitions into and through



homelessness. These are - firstly, that the participants lacked a level of economic, human, social, and physical capital, capital that may act as a 'buffer' against the processes that lead to homelessness; secondly, the processes leading to their homelessness involved having to negotiate with risks, circumstances, and actions on the 'edges' of normative social behaviour, such as mental illness, substance misuse and physical violence; and thirdly, the participants were negotiating with being homeless in the structural context of late modern, neo-liberal society. These conditions generated the material reality and the motivation for the edgework they engaged in. These conditions were what actually caused their homelessness rather than these individual factors perceived as causing it. These actions and events, and the damage they can cause, are real – they did occur, and on one level, do trigger homelessness. However they are underpinned by a structural context that may be becoming obscured, and the focus has gone onto these individual factors. This has led to individuals who experience such acts, becoming targeted by the state, to manage the individual risks they both face and encapsulate. This may not occur if they have the resources to hide or buffer the effect of the same events.

The welfare system in place to address homelessness has undergone massive changes over the last decade, and it was argued in chapter two, now approximates a model of Dean's 'reflexive governance'. How this system influenced the participants' transitions and experiences is explicitly analysed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: HOMELESSNESS, THE SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEM AND ‘TARGETED POPULATIONS’**

### **5.1 Introduction**

As is clear from the previous two chapters, the participants’ transitions were embedded within the contact with the social welfare system that they had. It was highlighted in chapter one that the social welfare system is one of the key institutional contexts to how people negotiating with homelessness may (or may not) access resources to resolve their homelessness in the UK. All of the participants here had relied on this social welfare system to access certain resources such as housing for most of their lives. Some had spent time accommodated in institutions such as care homes, prisons, hostels, hospitals – institutions that operate as part of this system. Applying for accommodation as a ‘homeless person’ under the homeless legislation, and accessing services and accommodation for homeless people to assist them resolve it, was a pivotal point when the participants themselves identified that they were ‘homeless’.

In this chapter the micro-level interactions with key services of the social welfare system that target and assist people who are homeless that the participants had are analysed. This is done to assess how these services impacted on their transitions and circumstances. Two key forms of ‘targeting’ by services designed to assist people who are homeless within this system have been identified. These are:

1. Being accommodated in supported accommodation units; and,
2. Having a housing, resettlement, or tenancy sustainment worker.

All of the participants had some contact with these services and this is explored, in turn, in section two and three. After presenting and discussing how these services appeared to impact on the participants’ transitions through homelessness, these findings are critically analysed in the next three sections. This is done by examining how, firstly, the participants were constructed by the social welfare system; secondly, how they in a reflexive process, then constructed the ongoing need for these specialist services; and thirdly, by examining how even attempting to reject this

targeting only brought them back into the system once more. In this way some of the unintended consequences of how the current welfare system operates are identified. It has been argued here that the system of governance that underpins this current system is one characterised by a system of reflexive governance and this system of governance galvanised the development of the services and the homeless policy that the participants interacted with as they made their transitions through homelessness.

In this reflexive system of governance, Dean identifies a regime of the social, characterising neo-liberal welfarism, that is made up of a myriad of government agencies, voluntary sector services, of experts, social workers, specialist housing support workers, key workers, psychiatrists, advocates, etc. Their role is to assist and educate people, to avoid the risks they face, and manage the resources they have, in a responsible way, as liberal individuals. Populations experiencing social problems such as homelessness and drug addiction, are case managed by these regimes of the social, with the aim being they become ‘active citizens’ – active liberal individuals. The focus of this targeting is their individual actions and lifestyle. This is perceived to be the key to triggering certain outcomes and assisting them to improve their lives and resolve the problems they have. By accessing these services the participants had become part of a ‘targeted population’ (Dean, 1999). This is the theoretical perspective used to underpin the analysis presented in this chapter. But how did the participants experience being targeted in this way? And what was the consequence (both intended and unintended) of this, for them?

To answer this, key services the participants all interacted with as they made their transitions through homelessness are explored in the next two sections, beginning with an examination of the participants’ experiences of living in supported accommodation.

## **5.2 Supported Accommodation**

There are many different forms of temporary accommodation provided for people who are homeless. Supported accommodation projects have been specifically focussed on here, as how they operate encapsulates an active targeting of the residents, aimed at assisting them change how they behave and attain ‘positive’



integrated lives in the future. The majority of the participants had lived in supported accommodation at some point in their transition through homelessness.

Supported accommodation projects are usually small-scale shared accommodation units with communal facilities. Each resident is allocated a room and a key worker. The role of the key worker is usually to assist the resident maintain some stability in their lives; access other services, such as drugs counselling; manage their appointments and time; discuss problems they are having and how to respond to them; and eventually, to assist and encourage them to move into their own tenancy. Some supported accommodation projects also provide courses or activities for residents to participate in, and many are staffed twenty-four hours a day. So they provide more than just accommodation, but also support for their residents to manage their lives, and change them, usually with the intention being they will then move into their own tenancy in the future.

At the time of the first interview, fifteen of the participants were living in supported accommodation projects. They had usually moved into supported accommodation after periods in hostels or residential rehabs. Being accommodated in supported accommodation is usually dependent on their place being funded through the welfare system. Of the fifteen who were in supported accommodation at the time of the first interview, nine moved into their own tenancy over the course of the research and six remained homeless throughout the research. All of these six, and some of those who obtained their own tenancy, had moved between different forms of accommodation in a cycle of homelessness over the course of the research, such as hostels, or staying with friends.

The participants' experiences of living in supported accommodation, and how this may have impacted on their transitions through homelessness, is explored in this section and two key findings are identified. Firstly, supported accommodation units were like 'training', representing an intense level of targeting on a micro-level, to become active citizens. Living there was seen as positive by most of the participants however. Secondly, not abiding by the rules and ideology of this targeting could trigger ongoing divestment passages in the participants' lives. It is asserted here however that by not abiding by these rules, the participants may have been exercising

their agency (asserting their individuality) in the only way they could within the confines of the system they were in. These findings are illustrated and discussed below.

### *Supported Accommodation as 'Training'*

The participants' comments on supported accommodation highlighted that living there felt like training: training them to 'take responsibility', to behave in the 'right' way, to make the right choices and to be able to reintegrate into society. The following quote from William illustrates how the participants typically described the experience of being in supported accommodation, retrospectively, once they had moved into their own tenancy:

*'[Supported accommodation] was a good time you know, it took a lot of responsibility off me, like that I have now. Bills: I didn't have to worry about all that, so it was a good experience. Then again a lot of that is false in that you don't deal with stuff, it is not real life, but it is good in that it gives you that taste of freedom, to make mistakes, to learn by them, without getting chucked out, you know. Everyone has choices in life, but it is how you do it.'* (William, 29)

So as William noted, living in supported accommodation was a positive experience, but one that he also saw as not being 'real' life. He did not really have control over his choices, but was being taught to make the right choices, to manage his 'freedom' and the pressure this 'freedom' brought, before moving into his own tenancy once more. Similar themes were highlighted by other participants, such as Brian, who is also here commenting on supported accommodation retrospectively, after obtaining a tenancy:

*'It's like a boot camp! It's like training, it trains you for going back out into your own place, it calms you down, it takes all the bitterness away, it helps you, in the hostels you get away with everything, but [in supported accommodation] they get you back on track, like how to behave, but you need to want it yourself as well.'* (Brian, 36)

So some of the participants described living in supported accommodation as a time when they had the opportunity to ‘relearn’ the ability to act responsibly and to exercise their agency ‘correctly’. The ability to do so was something they felt they had lost after the spiral of divestment they experienced whilst they were homeless. They were provided with the opportunity to ‘relearn’ this responsible behaviour – to come back over the edge - by the targeting of professionals within supported accommodation. However they also felt it was ultimately ‘up to them’, to their individual actions, to utilise this opportunity and be able to make their transitions through homelessness successfully. These narratives clearly highlight that although the experience of being in supported accommodation could be positive, the discourse of how it is to be an ‘active citizen’ – to utilise the opportunities that they have, as liberal, responsible, free agents - was imbued in the participants experience of living there. This discourse may also have fed into their comments on the services they accessed, and the factors (such as their actions) that they perceived to be what affected the outcome of the transitions through homelessness they made.

### *Supported Accommodation as Control*

A tension also existed - at the same time as the participants were being trained to be responsible agents, many of them also felt that through this process of being housed in supported accommodation, they lost their freedom, and their capacity to assert themselves as individuals. Their behaviour could be highly constrained, and the choices they had over where they were accommodated was actually decided by others, such as their social workers. They were dependent on following the advice of the professionals working with them; on abiding by the rules of the supported accommodation (such as no alcohol or not staying away over night); and on the choices that the staff there could make (such as whether to evict them or not if they did break the rules). The following case of Connor is used to illustrate this and the participants’ reflexive awareness of it.

### *Connor’s ‘Choices’*

Connor was accommodated in supported accommodation during the first two interviews. For over ten years he had moved between different hostels and rehabs,



sometimes sleeping rough and sometimes moving into a tenancy, before leaving it once more. He had chronic mental illness, and was alcoholic. By the third interview he had moved to a residential rehab with the advice and planning of his workers. At the second interview he said that he did not want to move to the rehab, but that it had been the only 'option' decided to be appropriate for him by his social worker. This was because he had been consuming alcohol in the supported accommodation. In the quote below he sums up the tension outlined above. Whilst being 'trained' to take control of his life by this system, he also had control taken away:

*'The system can work for some people, but this pressure on you to stop drinking, to stop taking drugs, it's too great, the pressure is overwhelming in you. They're saying, you're either in this [supported accommodation], or it's rehab, or it's the street. That's my options; options? Choice? That's no choice at all, that's staying within the system, they've got choice for you, they're choosing for you, they're saying you're going to the street if you stay on drink or drugs, or we can give you a nice rehab. No rehab is nice!'*

(Connor, 47)

So at the same time as promoting the participants' capacity to make the right 'choices', their actions and choices were highly constrained by being within this system. They had to 'choose' to act in certain ways. The rules that exist in supported accommodation may be necessary to objectively manage how these services operate, however the form these rules take (such as not allowing alcohol; not having guests; not being allowed to stay away overnight and having to be in at a certain curfew time) also illustrate that the people accommodated there were currently not viewed as able to make 'responsible choices' or manage the 'risks' they faced themselves. Therefore they had their actions highly constrained whilst they were being targeted to manage the potential risk their 'freedom' posed to them. This was the risk that they may continue to engage in individual actions perceived to have caused their homelessness, such as drug or alcohol use, or spend time with people who may provide them with the opportunity for these actions, for example. But as was argued previously, these actions could also sometimes be understood as a rational response to the material situation they were in.

### *Supported Accommodation and Discourses of Individualisation*

This also illustrates that the participants own individual choices and actions were being emphasised as the mechanism led to them successfully making a transition out of homelessness or not. However being accommodated in supported accommodation was something that occurred due to the participants' reliance on the social welfare system to access resources. So their circumstances and the way they could act within this situation was still ultimately tied to the social structure (and the marginal position of power or access to resources they had within this structure).

Their reliance on the social welfare system to resolve their homelessness meant their transitions through homelessness were shaped and constrained by the case management of them by the professionals within it and the options this system provided. The discourse of individualisation and liberalisation that underpins this current system of governance may obscure this, and the emphasis was on their own choices, action, and agency, however. Whilst it may be necessary that people abide by the rules that exist in supported accommodation, this form of support was also clearly imbued with the discourse of neo-liberal ideology. The very process of being targeted in this way, when people did not adhere to this ideology, could lead to them being further 'cast out' of the system, for example, if they were evicted. In chapter four, three different routes that could be used to explore the course the participants' transitions took over the course of the research were identified: spirals of divestment passages; developing integrative passages; and a flip-flopping effect of integration diverging. Below, how the experience of being targeted, and of how the system in place to manage supported accommodations could be the actual trigger for the ongoing spirals of divestment passages some of the participants experienced, is explored in more detail.

### *Supported Accommodation and Divestment Passages*

For the participants who remained homeless over the course of the research, one of the key triggers for their ongoing homelessness was being evicted from a supported accommodation unit. Often over the course of the research they had to leave supported accommodation due to their continued alcohol or drug use, lack of

‘engagement’ with their support workers, or not abiding by the rules, such as curfew times. Eddie’s case is used here to illustrate this.

### *Eddie’s Story*

Eddie, a forty-two year old man, was living in supported accommodation at the first interview. He had been homeless and addicted to heroin for over twenty years. Over the course of the research he moved multiple times, due to being evicted from supported accommodation. At the point of the third interview he was living with a friend, temporarily. In the following quote, Eddie describes how this happened:

*‘They [the staff at supported accommodation] just said “well there’s nothing more we can do for you” you know...I’d stopped, like I wasn’t playing their game sort of thing, I wasn’t going to sessions, I wasn’t going to key working, I wasn’t going to [day courses] and all that. So they passed me onto a hostel, the rooms the same but there is about fifty guys there. Then [the hostel staff] said “you need to move out” and my social worker told me they’re the kind of place where they want you clean [not using drugs or alcohol] so I moved to my pals, they said I could stay a wee while.’*

(Eddie, 42)

Because Eddie wasn’t ‘playing the game’ he had no ‘options’ left within the system. He had had to move in with a friend, and his marginality and insecurity continued. It may appear that irrational individual actions such as his drug use caused this, however the motivation for the edgework Eddie engaged in (his ongoing drug use that appeared to lead to this divestment passage) can be understood as rational when cast within his life course. It was a form of escape from the material reality he was in, the life he had had, and how he subjectively, emotionally, experienced this. Eddie for example had recently began counselling for sexual abuse he had experienced in childhood. Below he describes how his drug use acted as a ‘shield’ to these experiences and how losing this ‘shield’ through the process of being in supported accommodation and abiding by the rules there, such as ‘staying clean’, was intensely difficult:



*'See when I get off all the drugs and I'm just naked, I'm going to break right down, (...) because the drugs are like a shield, a wall,...there was a period there where I went four or five months, when I got a right buzz out of being there [in supported accommodation], not using nothing. I was getting there...I was progressing, maybe that frightened me, I don't know.'* (Eddie, 42)

The rationale of irrational behaviour, first outlined in chapter three, can be used here as way of understanding the rationale behind the actions that led to some of the participants ongoing divestment passages. These passages occurred when they were evicted from accommodation and barred from other forms of accommodation due to actions such as drug or alcohol use or conflict with other residents. However moving into new forms of accommodation and having to change their actions brought intense difficulty, and new risks and challenges to negotiate with. Their ongoing edgework whilst accommodated in supported accommodation (such as substance use, violent behaviour, breakdowns) may be understood as a form of escape from the confines and regulation of this situation. It was also something motivated and generated within the structural conditions they operated within, the intense trauma, marginality, low social status, and lack of resources to remedy, this they faced. At the same time as the participants were being trained to make responsible choices they had responsibility, choice, and agency taken away from them. Their only form of either escape from this, or of reasserting their agency in the face of this, may have been to go back 'over the edge' again, through the use of substances, or surrendering emotionally to their psychosis or temper, for example.

So the subjective emotional experience of being targeted to address the problems they had, and assist them integrate could itself be the trigger for some of these participants' ongoing divestment passages. Some had periods where they were banned from accessing some or all forms of accommodation for the homeless. These bans were due to their repeated evictions and behavioural problems. Therefore for those who remained homeless over the course of the research, their individual actions were often what *appeared* to have led to their exclusion from the very institutional structures that may have provided them with the material resources to resolve their homelessness. However if the edgework thesis is used as a rationale for what may appear irrational behaviour on a micro-level, then these actions can be understood

differently. They were perhaps the only means they had to escape from the intensely traumatic circumstances they had experienced; the highly regulated situation they were currently experiencing; and low social status and lack of resources they had to negotiate with this in any other way. In this way however they went over the edge again into a continuing spiral of divestment passages. And in doing so a vicious circle was created whereby the actions they engaged in to ontologically 'cope' with their existence within the structures of late modern society, further excluded them from the structural institutions that could provide access to resources to resolve these problems. They remained over the edge of society. But each time they attempted to resolve this, the conditions they entered could be what created the context that triggered this ongoing divestment - so how could they escape from this? Many of the participants did move into their own tenancy from supported accommodation however, and so appeared to take more integrative courses. How the experience of living in supported accommodation may have impacted on this, is explored below.

### *Supported Accommodation and Integration*

The participants who did obtain a tenancy *could* be viewed as those who had been 'successfully' targeted and their homelessness resolved. They appeared to have developed integrative passages through homelessness (although when their qualitative experience of this was analysed this occurred more as a flip-flop between integration and divestment). The following quote from Claire, whose homelessness was explored in the previous chapter, illustrates again that the very process of making a transition brings new risks that then have to be negotiated with. Often the participants felt intense pressure, 'overwhelmed', in the face of having to 'take control' over their individual actions and choices as they made these transitions. Claire was living in supported accommodation when she made this comment:

*'Don't get me wrong, the overall situation, like where I'm staying [in supported accommodation], is better than it ever has been but at the same time it's now all the practical problems. Now I'm moving on I'm more worried, I've never had to worry about these things before, like in the hostel you were pure just 'there'. I've got too much control now. I have to think "oh well I have to make this appointment, I've got to do this, I've got to do that", and sometimes it can be overwhelming'* (Claire, 26)

In Claire's case she had relapsed, moved to a rehab, and then into her own tenancy. Many of the participants who obtained their own tenancy after being in supported accommodation also continued to have acute problems with mental illness or substance abuse, for example. They did not necessarily make clearly integrative transitions out of homelessness, despite the positive objective outcome of gaining their own tenancy. Rather (as was highlighted in chapter four) a flip-flopping effect was evident and at each integrative phase - such as moving into supported accommodation - they faced new pressures, risks, and issues that could potentially act to trigger another divestment passages if not 'successfully' negotiated with.

### *Supported Accommodation and Transitions through Homelessness*

So to summarise this section, many of the participants spoke of how living in supported accommodation was part of an integrative process they went through, where they were trained to become active citizens and live independently after 'losing' this ability. Their homelessness could be taken as evidence that they had lost the ability to manage the risks they faced – the risk of homelessness, had become reality; the risk of becoming an addict through drug use, had become a reality. They had had to access accommodation through the social welfare system as a 'homeless person' and the same mechanisms that could assist them, then also targeted and defined them as someone who required to be targeted in this way to resolve their individual problems. As they made more integrative passages through their homelessness and accessed supported accommodation they were being trained to be responsible agents again, in adherence to this neo-liberal ideology. However at the same time, their actions, choices, and circumstances were controlled by the institutions, rules and staff of these supported accommodation units. Meanwhile their structural socio-economic position, their low social status, and the history of trauma they had experienced in their life, remained. This structural underpinning may provide the motivation for the edgework that had appeared to have caused their homelessness. However as these actions became individualised this structural underpinning becomes increasingly obscured. This sums up the stressed theory of homelessness and causation developed in this thesis, which has now been further



asserted in this analysis of how the services the participants accessed influenced their transitions and circumstances.

It must also be emphasised however that the experience of being in supported accommodation led to positive outcomes for many of the participants. These supported accommodation units often provided them with reasonable accommodation, and advice and support, whilst they obtained, and prepared to move into, their own tenancy. However as was also highlighted in chapter three, the actual material environment and interactions that people engage in in these settings have a crucial affect on how living there was experienced. The conditions and management of supported accommodation projects must continue to develop in flexible ways through the implementation of policy and funding sources, and the dehumanising effect of large-scale institutionalisation in hostels negated or ended, for positive outcomes such as those experienced by some of the participants here to be maximised through this system. Social policy may be criticised for the increasing reflexivity and governance of behaviour that is occurring (Furedi, 2006, for example), however the tension that exists is that for some people this system does lead to positive outcomes, at least relative to the alternative they may have faced, such as remaining in a hostel. For some this system does work on a micro-level.

Another key source of targeting the participants were provided with to resolve their homelessness, was housing, resettlement, or tenancy sustainment workers. These housing support specialists work with people on a one-to-one basis, encapsulating the 'person centred' approach currently promoted. They are increasingly being used to support and advise people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness through the social welfare provision in place. The role this service had on influencing the participants' transitions is explored in the next section.

### **5.3 Specialist Housing, Resettlement and Tenancy Sustainment Workers**

The majority of the participants had extensive contact with specialist housing workers as they made their transition through homelessness. This is another key service that is actively aimed at assisting people manage the risks they face, and act in ways that will lead to positive outcomes for them, within neo-liberal discourse.

These specialist workers assist people to obtain a tenancy, or once they have a tenancy, to move in, and ‘resettle’. They do this by assisting them to fill in forms; visiting tenancies with them; ensuring they pay their bills on time; that repairs they require are completed; that disputes with neighbours are resolved; for example. Some work with people on a long-term basis even once they are no longer homeless, or they may be allocated to work with them before their risk of homelessness has actually become a reality.

This particular service has been greatly expanded and developed in recent years by the funding provision in place through the social welfare system. The impact this intervention may have had on the participants’ transition and circumstances are analysed in this section. Three specific phases could be identified that interacted with this form of ‘targeting’. These are:

1. Avoiding homelessness
2. Resolving homelessness - obtaining a tenancy
3. Managing their ongoing risk of homelessness – maintaining a tenancy

Each of these are explored below.

#### *Avoiding Homelessness – Risk and Prevention*

Two of the participants, Jane and Allan, did not lose their tenancies. They had faced the risk of becoming homeless after being served eviction notices. They had then been referred to housing support workers by the officer that managed their rented housing for the local authority. Clearly that they had not lost their tenancies and become homeless was a ‘positive’ outcome, and this was something they attributed to the advice and assistance they gained from their housing support workers. On an objective level this intervention ‘worked’ for them. The following quote from Jane highlights the sort of support they received:

*‘Well, [Tenancy Sustainment Worker] first of all came to the housing [office] with me and made an arrangement for me to pay so much, and went to the Gas and Electricity*

*[company] and cut that down on to what I could afford, you know. I've been trying to get on Incapacity [benefit] and they've been quite good to come and represent me at appeals and all that. I think what they gave was a bit of clarity, when I met them it was sort of like "are you dealing with this?" they gave me a kick up the arse to get things sorted, to go and deal with it, instead of putting things like gas bills to the side, they would be straight up "have you done your phone bill, have you done this?"*

(Jane, 29)

Jane had been served an eviction notice for non-payment of rent prior to being allocated a housing support worker. She had stopped paying her bills after her alcohol use increased. This happened shortly after her abusive partner left. She had then had a nervous breakdown and given up her employment.

The same individual mechanisms identified as the 'cause' of homelessness among the participants who had previously lost their tenancies, were operating in Jane's life and could have led to her becoming homeless. This could have triggered ongoing divestment passages in the spiralling effect identified in chapter four. In her case, becoming homeless appeared to have been avoided. However, what was also clear was that her fundamental situation had not actually changed, nor the risk of homelessness she faced. She was being case managed to avoid this risk, but still experiencing the same fundamental problems, identified as increasing her risk of homelessness, at the end of the research. Allan had had similar experiences. Both Allan and Jane had poor physical health, alcoholism, and were reliant on the state to access resources and social support at the end of the research. Their circumstances also again illustrate, that even if people have avoided or negated the risk of homelessness they may still be close to 'the edge' of society, flip-flopping between different transitional phases. The same factors that may have led to their risk of homelessness in the first instance will not necessarily be resolved because they still had their tenancy. The quote from Jane, below, highlights this:

*'Well you can't force things on anybody, you can't say "right stop drinking, get a job", that's it, eventually, hopefully I will one day but there is no way in the world I could work just now, being an alcoholic you hit a bad day sometimes, and see the thoughts that come into your head at night, you can see crazy things.'* (Jane, 29)



Jane's quote also highlights that, despite this targeting, underpinned by liberal discourses of individual responsibility, the participants were reflexively aware that they may act in other ways – 'you can't force things on anybody'. So the participants may have been able to access material resources and be assisted to manage the risk of them becoming homeless through contact with the services of the social welfare system. However their motivation for, or experiences of, edgework, and the material position they were in, had not changed just because they were no longer at risk of homelessness or because they were in contact with services of the social welfare system designed to prevent homelessness. The services and resources they accessed assisted them on a micro-level but what requires more theoretical consideration in the future in research such as this, is an examination of how these structural conditions generate the individual problems focussed on by these services. What underpins and leads to the problems such as alcoholism Allan and Jane had? What caused the individual problems they experienced (isolation, domestic violence, for example) that led to them being at risk of homelessness when for others they would not? Using the stressed theory developed here it is asserted that this was due to the lack of resources they had, they lacked different levels of social, human, economic and cultural capital that may have assisted them to buffer or manage this. Addressing and understanding how these forms of edgework occur and may be negated may be a key development to move forward in addressing these problems. The emotional, as well as the material structural aspects, that may trigger this both have to be addressed and understood to do so.

On a material level however Jane and Allan did avoid homelessness. Over the course of the research nine participants obtained their own tenancy, also positive outcomes. Eight of these participants (all apart from Francesca who had obtained her own private let by the third interview) had housing support workers that assisted them with this. This is explored below.

### *Obtaining a Tenancy*

Perhaps a key outcome of contact with specialist housing and resettlement workers that the participants who obtained a tenancy cited, was the 'expert' advice they

received on how to obtain a tenancy through the social welfare system. Another key outcome the participants cited that their workers facilitated was finding out how to access practical, material, resources once they moved into their tenancies, such as furniture, or setting up utility bill payments.

For example, the participants' resettlement workers would advise them about areas to apply for housing in; on how to complete the housing application forms; they would contact Housing Associations for them to find out about their application; they would attend interviews with them and advocate on their behalf for them; and would visit tenancies they had been offered and tell them if they were 'suitable' for them. They then also assisted them to obtain furniture; to set up regular bill payments; register the tenancy in their name; visited them in their tenancy once they moved in; and were a point of contact for ongoing advice or assistance. The following quote from Ian, illustrates how the participants described this process. Ian was living in supported accommodation at this point, and had just been offered a tenancy:

*'My [resettlement worker], he deals with a lot of stuff as well, like he gets you starter packs, pots and pans. Kind of wee bits of furniture. He knows where he can dig you up furniture, so basically I'm moving into an empty flat and I'm on £85 a week. He's going to actually see what he can help me with. He's coming to pick me up on Tuesday at nine o'clock to view the flat. He'll be able to give me a bit more advice on that kind of thing then.'* (Ian, 33)

These practical material resources were clearly important for the participants to be able to move into, and settle in, their own tenancy. It is asserted here that the participants' resettlement workers assisted them to *navigate* access to their own tenancy, in a reflexive process. This process developed in partnership with the other professionals that were working with the participants and illustrated this case management system at work. These other professionals included the participants' drugs workers, social workers, and agencies that oversaw the housing supply that is available, such as Housing Associations. This process whereby the resettlement workers advocated for the participants and assisted them obtain housing deemed 'appropriate' for them meant they were also part of a reflexive process of negotiation, between the different agencies that provide housing. In this way they 'filtered' the

distribution of the finite resource of socially rented housing that was available and shaped where and how the participants should live.

Being able to obtain their own tenancy and access the material resources required to move in and live there was clearly important to facilitate the participants' transitions through homelessness. In this way, their homelessness could be viewed as having been resolved through this reflexive negotiation between them, their individually allocated worker, and the other institutions and services in place to resolve homelessness and housing problems. However there were still problems that could be identified. Three of these problems are discussed below.

### *Limitations of the Reflexive System*

Firstly, there were cases where this contact with resettlement workers did not 'work'. For example there were cases when the participants did not feel they had been assisted, where due to housing workers leaving employment or being ill for example, the participants did not feel that they had any consistent contact with their worker or had been helped by them. As services developed to assist people resolve their homelessness and target them as individuals in a professionalised way, proliferate and increase within this reflexive system, these services may also have to be increasingly managed through a rationalised process. However this rationalisation of services may not always work effectively. Professionals may have problems in their lives too, and this system will not work when they have to be off, and if there is no one available to replace them, for example. Systems sometimes fail.

Secondly, the fact that the participants were allocated these housing and resettlement workers (often whilst in supported accommodation), to assist them make this transition through homelessness, when some people who apply for housing under the homeless legislation will not be, again highlights that the participants here were perceived (consciously or otherwise) to be people currently unable to manage the risks they faced, or unable to take the 'right' actions as individuals. In a reflexive process they were case managed so that the 'best' option for them (such as where was appropriate for them to live) could be negotiated within this system and the risk of them making the 'wrong' choices, managed. Then, with the assistance of an 'expert'



within the regime of the social, the responsibility for managing their tenancy, could be ‘folded back’ onto them. They were advised of where they could obtain furniture, assisted to get grants to decorate their housing, were provided with packages of the basic equipment that they required to move into their own tenancy. In this way they were provided with the resources perceived to be required through the social welfare system to resolve their homelessness – and then within this neo-liberal reflexive model, the responsibility to manage these resources was theirs. This continued to individualise their situation, and did nothing to fundamentally address the structural conditions that continued to generate the problems they faced and lack of resources they had.

Thirdly, and related to the previous point, their workers navigated *where* they could access housing, which related to the supply of social housing available. This meant the participants usually moved into housing stock in locations and areas that marked it out as that provided for people who rely on the state to access housing. These are often areas with concentrated material and social deprivation (Gibb & MacLennan, 2006). Put another way these are areas with a high concentration of people experiencing the same lack of resources, and problems such as drug use, as the participants. In this way the line of stratification between those who have to rely on the state to access resources and those who do not (identified earlier as a potentially widening cleavage of stratification in late modernity) may be maintained, geographically. As was also discussed earlier, people have to engage in interactions with others. If there is a high concentration of certain problems or actions occurring in one area or amongst one group of people, a rationale for edgework may develop or be exacerbated. The participants often described the social problems in the areas they obtained a tenancy in. The following quote from David, illustrates this. The potential effect this environment may have on the embodied, lived reality of the participants is clearly an important consideration in the findings presented here:

*‘Well in [my area] there is a stabbing every Friday, Saturday, Sunday night and there are more cameras there than anywhere, so they don’t work for starters. It’s just constant hassle. Drugs have torn apart all the communities, definitely, definitely, I wouldn’t bring a child up here, if I had any kids, I would try and get away into*

*whatever area I could, but I suppose every area I could go to is the same and all, most places.'*  
(David, 38)

David had been homeless and addicted to heroin for over ten years before moving into his tenancy. He was settled there but did say he felt very isolated, and repeatedly relapsed. His situation appeared to have improved, relative to being homeless, but he still faced many risks and problems and these related to both his individual and structural, social situation.

### *Benefits of the Reflexive System*

However it is also important to highlight that some of the participants did describe their homelessness as something she had 'left behind', such as Bess quoted below, who had gained her own tenancy over the course of the research and ceased to have contact with her specialist housing support workers by the third interview:

*'I feel now that that is all in the past [homelessness], It's getting in the past now. It's a different time that I'm finished with'*  
(Bess, 25)

Ultimately obtaining a tenancy was a positive material outcome for the participants as they made transitions through homelessness. The service they received from their housing support workers often assisted in facilitating this. However what is clear from the findings of this thesis is that the ability the participants had to move far from 'the edge' when they structurally had few resources of social, economic, human, or physical capital, was often limited. Many of the participants who had lived in their own tenancy for long periods were still in close contact with different services (such as drugs workers, counsellors, housing support workers). This contact was generated by this reflexive welfare system, and they had few other sources of support. This ongoing contact with their housing workers is explored below.

### *Managing Homelessness – Maintaining a Tenancy or Managing Risky Populations?*

Some of the participants felt that once they were living in their own tenancy they actually required more intensive support and ongoing targeting from support workers

if they were to be able to live ‘independently’ and integrate with the community, as the following quote from Tommy, illustrates. Tommy had become homeless due to mental illness. After he left his wife due to this he had attempted suicide and was admitted to hospital. He then moved into hostels, before obtaining his own tenancy, with the assistance of specialist housing support workers. He was living in his own tenancy throughout the three interviews of the research. Below he describes how he experienced moving into his own tenancy:

*‘When I moved into my house, for a while I used to say to people, I was homeless, probably for about a year. So that was quite a long time for me to start feeling settled. I think, the support, people need support to stay in their tenancy, for me anyway, for a long time after I went into my house, I needed support to sort things out. I think that’s more the problem, people in their tenancy, and getting help there, getting used to being part of the community again.’* (Tommy, 33)

Tommy’s quote also highlights how people continued to feel homeless, subjectively, once they had their own housing. They felt that they required long-term ‘support’ to manage their tenancy, and life, and to reintegrate into the community as ‘responsible’ active individuals. But why and how did they feel they had lost this ability?

Once again there is a tension inherent in this point. The intervention of housing support workers may be an important source of support that facilitated gaining a tenancy. However a key problem that may also arise is that of ‘dependency’ on this support, or the participants perceived inability (by themselves and others) to manage their lives. If this case management is attempting to create active citizens that can manage the risk they face individually and independently, at what point is this targeting deemed ‘successful’ and this management no longer required? At what point is the individual being targeted deemed able to manage their ‘selves’, and who decides this? This may be a key question to consider in a critical analysis of this reflexive system of governance, and the unintended consequences it may have. Where and why should this ‘support’ end? Do the means recreate the ends, in an ongoing cycle?



Many of the participants spoke of being scared that their support workers would cease contact with them, and that they would not be able to cope when they did. It is argued here that this reflexive ‘dependency’ may be a key problem (or perhaps unintended outcome) of this reflexive system of governance through the case management of risky populations. This perceived need for these services then goes on to construct ever increasing new methods and services to target people. Some of the participants spoke of feeling ‘abandoned’ when they ceased to have contact with the professionals they were in contact with – they could manage to live in their tenancies, but had few other opportunities to develop further integration passages beyond this situation, and few social networks outside of this welfare system.

### *Constructed Dependency?*

So some of the participants, having experienced homelessness before, felt that they required *more support* from welfare services once they were housed, to continue avoiding the risks they faced, and the risk of repeated homelessness. They continued to be assisted to manage these risks, but in doing so also continued to be targeted by these services. They felt unable to exercise their agency responsibly, and remained within this system, perhaps due to them internalising their own need to be ‘targeted’. Furthermore even those participants who did move on from having explicit contact with the services of the social welfare system, did not necessarily move far from the ‘edges’ of material insecurity. They remained reliant on this system to provide them with housing and social support, and continued to engage in forms of edgework. This edgework may have provided them with emotional escape or resistance from their marginal position. However it also then just recreated the same structural reality that underpinned these actions – they continued to flip-flop, caught at the edge, in this way.

Some of the participants had long-term contact with housing (or tenancy sustainment) workers, that was ongoing at the end of the research. The positive outcome of this may have been that that they continued to be supported, to live in their tenancies, and avoid the trauma and marginality of repeated homelessness. But there is a tension inherent in this – why did they become reliant on this support in the first place? Did the very process that appeared to resolve their homelessness also ‘trap’ them into

being an ‘ex-homeless’ person? Perhaps another consequence of targeting by the regimes of the social is the ontological effect it may have on people, meaning that when they cease to have contact with the very system that has both constructed them as unable to manage their own lives, and assisted them to do so through a case management system, they feel unable to manage these risks themselves. This emotional aspect then acts to further exacerbate their marginal position. As they attempt to escape or assert their individuality within this, forms of edgework may take them ‘over the edge’ again, feeding them reflexively back into the system of case management once more. In this way they may have been becoming ‘trapped’ in a vicious circle. The very services that assist them to become active citizens, also imbued in them the ideology that they are not, and that they require the assistance of professionals to manage their lives.

As has been highlighted, the transitions that the participants were making often flip-flopped between integration and divestment, rather than developing further integrative passages. Each new integrative phase brought new risks that had to be negotiated with. By the end of the research the majority of the participants, even once they obtained a tenancy, continued to rely on the social welfare system to access material resources and sometimes for social and emotional support. Some attended training courses, or ‘life skills’ classes for people who had been homeless. Some were involved as service users in forums, consultations, and peer education, feeding back into the services that had assisted them, in a reflexive process. None of the participants were in the situation of having no contact with some specialist services of the social welfare system by the end of the research<sup>10</sup>. In the next three sections, key issues that have been identified from this finding are discussed. In this way, the role the social welfare system had on their transitions through homeless, on a micro-level, is critically assessed. These three key issues that relate to how this system operates and impacted on their circumstances, are:

1. Being constructed by the social welfare system
2. Ever increasing circles - Constructing the social welfare system
3. Recreation through rejection of the social welfare system

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<sup>10</sup> Such as addiction workers; homeless agencies and drop ins; counsellors.

Each is discussed in turn before examining explicitly the positive outcomes this system also generated, and summarising the findings of this chapter.

#### **5.4 Being Constructed by the Social Welfare System**

In the previous two sections, the effect of two key homeless services the participants interacted with as they made their transitions through homelessness, have been outlined. The next three sections return to points made in these previous sections, to critically assess the role these services of the social welfare system had on the transitions through homelessness the participants made and their circumstances. The first issue explored is how the participants were constructed, as people requiring to be targeted, by the social welfare system.

Many of the participants continued accessing training courses and day centres for people who had experienced homelessness or drug addiction once they were living in their own tenancy. They felt this was an important service for them. They often described the reason they attended these courses as a way to ‘fill in their time’ as ‘something to do’ in the face of few other options, with this often the only way to occupy their time they had. The case of David and Keith are used to illustrate how in this way they were being constructed by the system, in an ongoing reflexive cycle.

##### *David's Story*

David, a thirty-eight year old man was living in his own tenancy throughout the research. He had moved there prior to the first interview, after spending twenty years in a cycle of homelessness, moving between prison, hostels, staying with friends, and sleeping rough. He had been addicted to heroin. He was still in regular contact with the housing support worker that had assisted him gain and move into his tenancy. He had moved there from a hostel. In the quote below, he described his life and how he spent his time now he had his own tenancy. He went to the chemist to obtain methadone to manage his drug addiction every day; he went on courses he has already completed, he still was seeing his specialist housing worked. He had few



other sources of social contact or support, or could see any opportunities to have in the future:

*'I know that without [going to life skills and employment courses] I'd just be sitting about [the house] demented, probably getting depressed. Probably end up back into drugs again. My day is just waking up in the morning, going to a class, whatever, and going back up the road again. And everything revolves around a chemist [to get methadone]. I've actually done all the courses and that now, you know. (David, 38)*

So David felt if he did not continue to go on these courses and go to the chemist every day to take his methadone, he would probably spiral back over the edge, and use drugs once more. But in this way he also couldn't develop further integration. This sentiment was repeated by many of the participants. Keith's case, for example, also illustrates this.

### *Keith's Story*

Keith, a thirty-four year old man, also had his own tenancy throughout the research. He had experienced many years of repeated homelessness before he had moved into this tenancy. He had had his own tenancies previously and had lost them. He had spent over ten years in a cycle of homeless, moving between rehabs, hostels, sleeping rough, and his own tenancies. He became homeless initially due to drug addiction, and mental illness, which had caused him to split up with his partner, and leave his work. As his quote illustrates, homelessness, the edgework, and the trauma, some of the participants in this research had experienced, may create in people an identity that they find difficult to consolidate within themselves ontologically once they have been targeted to become active citizens. They must face the trauma of their past, of their past actions:

*'It is a very traumatising thing to do, to be homeless, to be rough sleeping, to go through all the violence, the begging, and robbing people. There's a lot to think about and once you get your house and look back on it, it can be frightening. You do have a lot of guilt and a lot of remorse for what you've done'. (Keith, 34)*

Keith identified a way of ‘coping’ with his life, and the material and emotional reality he was in, as being involved in courses, and going to drop ins, even once he was no longer homeless. He also discussed how he felt that if he did not access these resources, that were provided through the social welfare system, his own actions may have led to his homelessness recurring:

*‘I couldn’t see myself being in a house twenty-four hours a day, I have to get out of the house [and go to drop ins and training courses for ex-drug users and people who have been homeless] for my own good really, because my mental health, my state of mind, I would go crazy really if I was stuck in the house constantly. I might risk losing it again. I would probably turn back to drugs again, if I was stuck in the house constantly, just with my own thoughts, my own memories, regrets, guilt and stuff like that.’*

(Keith, 34)

The only other alternative he could see, the only escape from this day-to-day existence, would have been actions that sent him over the edge again, such as drug use. The only future that Keith saw was as an ex-homeless person, and as an ex-addict, and he therefore felt he had to keep accessing support services for people who had been homeless and addicts, to cope with this. He was caught in this system. Again, just as in the case of being case managed due to living in supported accommodation, neo-liberal discourses were also apparent in the narrative that Keith presented. He remained in the system for ‘his own good’, as a responsible ‘choice’, to avoid engaging in other activities that may have led to him risking becoming homeless again, due to his own actions.

### *The Circularity of Welfare Reliance*

Although they continued living in their tenancies, and discussed the ways of coping they had, both Keith and David did repeatedly relapse over the course of the research. Both spoke of how their mental health was continuing to deteriorate and both were admitted to hospital by their specialist housing workers due to this. Their material situation remained one of marginality, with few other means to experientially escape this, to gain more ‘meaning’, status, or identity, than through their edgework. Once again their fundamental situation had not changed. In fact now they were ‘settled’

back into mainstream society, they spoke of their addiction and mental illness being the main problems in their lives, and getting worse. Whatever generated these problems had not changed and continued to affect their lives in profound ways.

Furthermore they both remained targeted by many regimes of the social to assist them to 'manage' risk and remained entirely reliant on the welfare system. There is a tension inherent in this. The following quote, also from Keith, illustrates this. On the one hand the positive outcome of this targeting was that they did maintain their housing, access material resources and support through the social welfare system, and avoid the risk of homelessness. But on the other hand this meant that they continued to require more, rather than less, targeting. The system had to keep extending out, and developing more services, long-term support workers, courses, forums, that they could be involved in, as people who were, 'at risk' of problems such as addiction, homelessness, mental illness, criminality. Yet, the structural underpinning to, or cause of these problems, appeared to remain. The focus of how to control and manage these problems went onto the control of the individual. What had led to these individual problems and how they could be prevented or alleviated, structurally, remained underemphasised. Below, for example, Keith discussed some of the services he was still in contact with. He was regularly tested to make sure he was not taking drugs (although he did at times continue to do so):

*'I'm still in the same tenancy, I've still got the same house. I joined a place for group work and stuff like that. I've got a key worker, we do a lot of different things like art, activities and stuff like that as well. I've got a CPN now who comes out to see me every week, every Monday and takes samples from me in case I'm taking any illicit drugs or anything like that, and that's okay. I see a psychiatrist every fortnight as well'*

(Keith, 34)

Therefore, just as Dean (1999) argues, this extending reflexive welfare provision may include increasingly 'illiberal' policies being adopted to manage the risky populations that this liberal ideology and the ensuing system of case management has created - testing them to see if they are taking illegal drugs, for example. The role of the social welfare system to the participants' transitions through homelessness was to case manage them, to manage the 'choices' this system provided for them



responsibly. For many of the participants this did assist them to resolve their homelessness and access resources. However this case management, by constructing them as unable to manage the risks they face, also created a population that required to be targeted. In doing so it continued, in a loop, to feed them back into this same system, creating an ongoing need for the development of this case management system, in ever increasing reflexive cycles. The participants' structural situation had not fundamentally changed however, so the mechanisms that triggered the actions and problems that led to their homelessness were unlikely to have either. They remained 'trapped', flip-flopping in this space between integration and divestment. And the focus of their problems remains on them, as individuals. A part of this focus included involving them as service users, feeding into how these services developed, or assessing what their 'needs' were. In this way there was a reflexive cycle of the participants being constructed by, and then constructing, the very mechanisms that labelled them as unable to 'control' their own lives. This is explored below.

### **5.5 Ever Increasing Circles - Constructing the Social Welfare System**

The following case of Tommy is used to illustrate this vicious circle.

#### *Tommy's Case Continues*

Tommy had become homeless due to mental illness, and attempting suicide. He had lived in hostels, and then his own tenancy. He had accessed many different services to assist him as he made his transition through homelessness and was settled, living in his own tenancy, throughout the research. Below he illustrates that some of the participants were aware of the vicious circle outlined above - that people are caught in this system:

*'I think what [policy makers] maybe really need to look at is the whole process of people going from one project onto another, from one course, onto another. They then get maybe caught up in something that's not helpful. Over-dependent. So that when a course comes to an end for example or support comes to an end they're right back where they started.'*

(Tommy, 33)

Tommy was involved in volunteering as a service user with different agencies, to give advice on how services for people who are homeless should be managed. He had lived in his tenancy for almost two years by the end of the research, and below describes his apprehension about moving outside of this system, and the material reality he was involved in:

*'I'm looking at moving on [from volunteering] so there's a bit of apprehension at the future. Cause if I move on I know I'll have to leave a lot behind, and there will be a lot of changes. You've been through a horrible experience like homelessness, and you're involved in volunteering in the homelessness scene, and everything is geared towards it. But there is a time when you're not homeless anymore, you need to leave that behind and move on'*

(Tommy, 33)

So as Tommy found the role he began to have within this system was of an 'ex-homeless' person. He was consulted on, and implicit in, the very recreation of this system, in this way. However he was also aware that he was 'no longer homeless' although he was involved in the system still through long-term support, service user involvement, and training courses. If he could no longer identify himself as a homeless person, after being constructed as such by the system and internalising this, what, or who could he be? This is explored further in chapter six, on homelessness and identity.

What is important to highlight in this chapter is that the long-term targeting, support, involvement, consultation, etc, of service users both continued to involve them in the system, and made them mechanisms that generated the ongoing construction of this system also. They were trapped by their reliance on the state, to remain reliant on it. Even as 'ex-service users', they could remain separate from those who were not, or had not, ever been explicitly reliant on the state as a targeted category. As these specialist services continue to develop to target certain groups, alongside a 'pulling back' of mainstream welfare services, this distinction may be an increasingly key cleavage of stratification in late modern society. Those who can afford it for example, may increasingly be accessing resources once provided through the welfare state, such as health care, privately.

### *Identifying Positive and Negative Outcomes*

This targeting by the state did assist some of the participants develop positive material outcomes and stabilise their life. However it still represented an increasingly rationalised and reflexive way to manage social problems and problem groups that individualised their problems and could act to symbolically stigmatise those that suffer from these problems.

How this system operates may also create negative outcomes on a micro-level. Some of the participants, such as William, cited the pressures and difficulty the sheer number of options they now had within this system could bring:

*'There are so many people involved with it, so many agencies, you have to go and see this worker, and then you have to go and see that worker, it is just a load of nonsense (..) that's when they start to get annoyed, that's when they want to get full of it, drink away their days. It just depends how proactive the person [professional contact you have] you are dealing with is.'* (William, 29)

This quote illustrates once more a rationale for what may appear irrational actions. This was the only way to 'take control' of their situation, or deal with the pressure of so many options and choices some of the participants had - to 'opt out' of it, to reject it - altogether. And this may be understood as a response to the increasingly rationalised, reflexive, and individualised way that this system is being organised. In acting in this way however they were recreating not only their own problematic situation, but also the need to draw people who act in such ways further into the regimes of the social that exist, or to adopt illiberal policies to 'control' them. In this way, even trying to reject this targeting by the welfare system, only drew people further into it, without actually improving their situation. This point is illustrated below.

### **5.6 Recreation through Rejection of the Social Welfare System**

A key trigger for some of the participants remaining homeless was being evicted from temporary accommodation. Often this appeared to occur due to the participants'



own actions, such as continuing to use alcohol, or not accessing the services they were provided with, as they should. As was identified in chapter four, once they were evicted from supported accommodation they often entered a spiral of divestment, in an ongoing cycle of homelessness staying with friends, sleeping rough, or sometimes in hostels or Bed & Breakfasts. In this way the participants who continued to be homeless remained in particularly vulnerable, marginal social situations, lacking the resources to access their own accommodation through any other means than the social welfare system, but rejected by this system also. They appeared also to reject it, by refusing to adhere to the constraints that it placed upon their behaviour.

However it is suggested here that these actions (such as ongoing substance use; violence) could also be understood as one of the only ways to assert some agency or resist the reality they had experienced over their life within the system they were in. Lorna's case is used to illustrate this.

### *Lorna's Story*

Lorna, a thirty-four year old woman, remained homeless throughout the research. She had been homeless at this point for over ten years and had chronic alcohol, health, and behavioural problems. She moved between sleeping rough, staying with friends, and being in institution such as prison and hospital during the research.

Lorna was in contact with street outreach workers and was first interviewed in prison. She had just lost a tenancy when she was in prison and had no-where to go when she was released. She was barred from most of the accommodation available for people experiencing homelessness due to her behavioural problems. At the third interview she was sleeping rough and sometimes staying with people she knew. In the following quote, taken from this third interview, she described being both embedded in this case management system but also 'outside' of it. She was unable to access the actual resources that could assist her due to the very problems she required support to address. Her actions were used to justify her rejection by the system, but she also continued to be controlled by it. She had few other opportunities to provide herself with more security or resources, from the intensely marginalised structural situation she was in:

*'I can't go to the housing office myself, I could go and they turn around and say you're still on the waiting list, there is no houses. I mean I've been everywhere, [rehab], hostels, B & B's and they all just say, "there is no beds, we've got a ban on you, we're not putting you there", they just think if they give me a decent B & B I'll get drunk and cause trouble. I had a caseworker, and they said "we're not taking you on" at the [centralised office to apply for housing] and I have a social worker but they are off ill. The [street outreach team] are trying to get me an appointment with a duty social worker.'*

(Lorna, 42)

Street outreach workers had contact with Lorna to try to advocate for her, to obtain some form of accommodation, in a reflexive relationship with the other services that exist. The outcome of this advocacy could be positive in some cases – allowing particularly destitute people such as Lorna to access some form of accommodation, food, and emergency health care, when they may have otherwise have faced illness or even death. However she seemed to be trapped over the edge of society. The services of this reflexive system required Lorna to act in certain ways if she was to access them. However she was unable to act in these ways, she was someone over the edge of society, with a history of intense marginality, abuse, and trauma. What options did she have then? For those who appear to continue to evidence their inability to exercise their agency 'responsibly' – continuing to drink alcohol for example, there may be few options available to them to actually resolve their homelessness or exercise their agency outside the confines of an ever increasing reflexive system of governance and the flip-flop of diverging integration they were experiencing. This highly entrenched group of homeless people continues to exist, and their situation continues to be a difficult issue to address and resolve. They cannot be abandoned, but the complexity of their lives and the problems they have to deal with to make any transition 'back' into society, given the level of marginality they have experienced, has to be acknowledged.

In this research some of the participants remained both materially and emotionally over the edge of society, sleeping rough, with many physical and mental health problems. And in the context of how far over the edge of normative behaviour some of the participants had gone over their life course - the intense trauma and

marginality they experienced - their 'going over the edge' in the edgework they engaged in, was all they could do to escape or resist this on a micro-level. Despite the changes in homeless policy that have been introduced recently, and the evident improvements they have brought to how people who are homeless may be assisted to resolve it, there remains people in situations like Lorna. There are people at the edge of society that this reflexive system has not 'worked' for, and their experiences, and changing circumstances have to continue to be explored. For these are the archetypal reviled 'outsiders' of late modern society, who may go on adding to those who sleep rough in the future. They still require radical understanding and new approaches to continue to try to address and alleviate the suffering their situation can bring - for many of the participants this included their attempt to destroy themselves, through suicide. This aspect, of suicide, is discussed below.

### *Rejection of Society – Rejection of Self: Suicide and Homelessness*

It is suggested here that for the some of the participants, exercising their agency, as liberal individuals, to reject the options provided for them through the social welfare system, only acted to reduce the options they had to escape from the situation they were in, and exacerbated the marginality, trauma, and problems they experienced. Suicide was sometimes felt to be one of the only remaining options they had, as the following quote from Connor about his experience of sleeping rough, illustrates:

*'I preferred it out on the street [rather than in supported accommodation], in the cold. It was safer for me. But I was getting dirty and you know, people look at you, I lay behind a building with an old carpet. I got mugged once. It's horrible. You go like that "Do you want to kill yourself, do you want to live?" There's no easy way out. How do you do it without all the pain?'* (Connor, 47)

Is suicide in this context the ultimate act of agency – of escape and resistance to the conditions of late modernity? Or the ultimate act of losing control over the self, leading to its destruction? During the interviews, a number of the participants (eleven), discussed how they had recently attempted suicide. This aspect of edgework – suicide as the ultimate act of both losing and taking control over their individuality – may be something for further research and analysis in the future.



Clearly for those who remained homeless throughout the research and rejected or were rejected by, the services currently available to them, the reflexive model of governance did not 'work' to resolve their homelessness. Yet they had few other resources they could use to resolve their homelessness or gain any more social security outside this system, due to the structural conditions they operated in.

It may be that the only form of ontological escape many of the participants had from this, underpinned by their lack of status, and lack of resources within this social structure, was to go over the edge of normative behaviour. In the most extreme cases this meant attempting suicide; addiction; mental breakdown; as a response to both the structural confines, and increasing ideology of individualisation and liberalisation, they faced in late modern society.

In this chapter how the interactions with the services of the social welfare system impacted on the transitions through homelessness the participants took have been outlined. More broadly, how this system, characterised by a reflexive process of case management, may create and be created by the targeted populations and problems it aims to target, has been outlined. In the final section, these findings are summarised.

## **5.7 Conclusion: Transitions through Homelessness and the Reflexive System of Governance**

The participants in this research all had contact with a range of different regimes of the social – services, professionals, institutions, forums – as they made their transitions through homelessness. Two key services identified that impacted on this, was being accommodated in supported accommodation; and being allocated a resettlement, housing and tenancy sustainment worker.

Being accommodated in supported accommodation was a positive experience for many of the participants, who described it as 'training', as a time they could develop the skills to 'reintegrate' into society after the spiral of divestment passages 'out' of society they had experienced. Housing, resettlement and tenancy sustainment workers are also increasingly being used to assist people to manage the risk of

homelessness they face, or resolve their homelessness, whilst remaining in the community. This form of support was viewed by many of the participants as positive – due to this they said they were assisted to access the material resources they required to access housing; to manage their tenancies long-term; or for some, to avoid the risk of homelessness becoming a reality.

Some of the participants who obtained and maintained tenancies did describe how they had ‘left homelessness behind’. For these participants’ the social welfare system had assisted them to access resources that had improved their material housing situation, and objectively to resolve their homelessness, within this reflexive model.

These services have been developed within a reflexive process through research, consultation and partnership with people who are experiencing these problems, and other agencies. This indicates that through this reflexive process a ‘fit’ may be being found between the macro-level policy developments and micro-level situation of individual homelessness, and policy responses to it. In this way the reflexive model of governance may go some way to provide a framework of social policy and a distribution of resources that does provide positive options and outcomes for people experiencing problematic situations such as homelessness. There may be positive outcomes from the process of reflexive governance for those who *actively engage in the options and possibility* for self-governance it provides. But it has also been identified that this system can go on recreating the reliance on it that the participants had. And without addressing the fundamental structural and social problems that led to it in the first place this reliance will continue to go on.

By focussing on their individual actions, ‘responsibility’ for the ongoing need to develop these services could be ‘folded back’ onto those that access them. Their reliance on the services of the social welfare system to access housing; other forms of social support; and to occupy their time, was due to their own lack of resources. However their level of resources is due, in part, to how these resources are distributed within the current social structure. This structural underpinning may be becoming increasingly obscured through this reflexive process that promotes the role of the individual and their choices and actions as being key to how they negotiate the risks they face over their life course. The participants may have been provided with

options and resources through this system, and then the responsibility to engage with these options correctly is placed on them. If they do not, it could be perceived to be their fault.

So to summarise, in this chapter it is identified that the recent changes to homelessness policy has created a system that *did assist some people to gain positive outcomes* in their transitions through homelessness, and access the resources they require to obtain their own tenancies, through the welfare system. This system has been galvanised and developed within this reflexive system of governance. In this way the explicitly ‘intended’ outcome of this targeting (as part of a ‘utopianistic goal’ to improve society through reform and to resolve problems such as homelessness) may appear to be being achieved.

However this ‘goal’ remains underpinned by liberal ideology suggesting that individual actions lead to the outcomes people experience. In particular it has been argued that this system not only may play a part in constructing the needs of the population it is targeting, it then in an ever-increasing reflexive process, continues to be constructed by them, and construct their ongoing reliance on it. The extent to which the participants’ ongoing reliance on the social welfare system is due to structural factors becomes obscured. Instead emphasis is placed on their individual actions and choices to explain their transitions through homelessness. However their homelessness was actually due to their marginal social position within a structural and emotional reality in part created, and constituted, by this welfare system. The only form of escape or resistance they may have from this reality they were in provided the rationale for the edgework they engaged in or experienced - a ‘rationale of irrational behaviour’. However this edgework only then continued to draw them further into this system and the need for it to exist and to target them, in an ongoing vicious circle of structuration.

Some of the participants in this research may have been manifestations of what can happen to people when they do not, or cannot, manage the risks and resources they face ‘responsibly’ within the conditions of late modernity – the threat or risk of what may happen to people if they do not operate responsibly, what may befall them. The participants had had very real experiences of intense social, material, and physical



deprivation, of inequality, marginality, poverty, vulnerability, and intensely traumatic incidents in their lives, and had to consolidate this with their life course and identity on a micro-level. Their lives and actions did represent 'real' social problems. But they were also people with 'real' identities and emotions, and this also had to be taken into account if their actions are to be fully understood. The identity that someone has will influence how they exercise their agency, tied to the sense of ontological security or the need to maintain it, they have. The final aim of this analysis of transitions through homelessness in a risk society is to explore how the participants identity and ontological security may have affected or been affected by their transitions through homelessness. This is done in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER SIX: HOMELESSNESS, IDENTITY AND ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the identity and the sense of ontological security or social role that the participants had as they made their transitions through homelessness is explored. It has been highlighted throughout this thesis that as people make transitions over the life course the social status and identity they have changes. When transitions lead to outcomes or identities perceived to be negative, a divestment passage has occurred. Ezzy (2001) argues that this leads to a separation from status, however it is argued here that this also leads to the individual having to negotiate with a new status as they undertake their day-to-day interactions within whichever social context that divestment passage has led to. The environment they are in, and the interactions they engage in within this environment also changes. This is likely to affect their sense of identity and ontological security in profound ways – because this is embedded in embodied, material reality. For this reason, how the participants qualitatively described their lives, and the interactions they engaged in as they made their transitions through homelessness have been analysed. From this, how homelessness affected their identity and ontological security is discussed.

In the next section of this chapter, section two, how the participants described their lives and who they were, before becoming homeless is briefly outlined. The times they described as ‘most settled’ in their lives, are presented. In section three the participants’ qualitative subjective experiences of becoming a ‘homeless person’ are analysed. The stigma of homelessness is discussed, and it is argued that, within the context of late modernity becoming homeless signified becoming a ‘failed individual’. In section four the participants’ experiences of being homeless are examined. It is argued that, for some of the participants, homelessness became ‘normal’ life. To make a transition out of this could therefore involve an ‘ontological crisis’, as their day-to-day routine, and who they spent time with within that routine, was ruptured and changed. To examine this further, the experiences of the nineteen participants who were living in their own tenancies at the end of the research are explored in the final two sections. How these participants experienced life ‘beyond’

homelessness, and the day-to-day routines and sense of identity they now had, is discussed. In section five this is done by examining the integration or divestment that may have continued to occur, and in particular how their social networks affected this. In section six, it is argued that even after making a transition through homelessness, some of the participants were becoming trapped in a cycle of structuration. They were trapped within the conditions of late modernity, and the material and emotional reality these conditions generated for them.

Through the process of individualisation that has occurred in late modernity, the identity that people have is increasingly viewed as a product of their actions, choices, and lifestyle. This has fed into how people are governed, and live their lives. It also means *'people are invited to constitute themselves as individuals: to plan, understand, design themselves as individuals and, should they fail, to blame themselves'* (Beck, 1999: 9). Yet, as has been asserted here, the ability people have to 'design' themselves is still tied to resources they have. Their sense of ontological security will also be tied to this – their ability to maintain some sense of narrative cohesion, and with this, ontological security.

Before going on to explore how homelessness affected the participants' sense of identity and day-to-day lives how they described their lives prior to becoming homeless is briefly discussed.

## **6.2 Before Homelessness**

As was discussed in chapter three, some of the participants' entire lives had been imbued with trauma, marginalisation, and institutionalisation. Others had had more 'settled' integrated lives prior to becoming homeless. What they all shared was a relative lack of resources, and that at some time, traumatic incidents and experiences of edgework, had come to prevail in their lives. These factors combined, and their life had reached the point they had become homeless, or faced the risk of homelessness.

At the first interview, after discussing their life histories in detail, the participants were all asked when they had been 'most settled' in their lives. This question could be used as a marker to identify periods of relative ontological security in their lives –



times they recalled as positive and 'settled'. Fifteen described being most settled as times they were living with partners, and their children if they had any. A further three said it was in their childhood, living with their family, as they 'didn't have anything to worry about then'. Eight said that 'now', the situation they were in at the point of the first interview, was their most settled time. Five of these were living in temporary accommodation at that point. So their answers usually fell into one of two categories – being most settled 'now', in their current situation; or being settled being related to living with family or partners.

When the qualitative experiences they described were analysed alongside the objective situation they were in at this time of 'being settled', these times when they had a degree of ontological security in their lives, were not necessarily situations everyone would equate with a 'settled' life, however as the quote from Henry illustrates. Henry had spent most of his life in and out of prison often due to violent offences. He had moved all over the UK and had never had his own tenancy prior to the first interview:

*'[I was most settled] probably the time I was staying with my ex-girlfriend when my son was born. About sixteen years ago. But saying that, I was settled but I wasn't too...into it – it became a time in my life where it was either kill, or be killed, or get away, you know, one of them.'* (Henry, 48)

The case of Elizabeth and Keith can be used to further develop this recognition of the complexity of identifying ontological security.

#### *Elizabeth's (Ontological) Security*

Elizabeth's experience of becoming homeless was outlined in chapter three. After many years of living in her own tenancy, or with her mother, she had started to use heroin with a partner when she was in her thirties. She became homeless and started rough sleeping. In the quote below she describes how she felt about this and her life prior to becoming homeless:

*'In the space of a year I lost everything, my children, my house, everything had just went and here I was an addict at six stone and ...I still see, it's like drugs, it wasn't anything about us, it was always like film stars or rock singers or pop groups. I didn't associate hard drugs with anybody that was just, a wee normal woman with two children and a crap life, and I ended up injecting when I was 35 years of age.'*

Elizabeth thought of her life as 'normal' up to this point, she was just a 'wee woman' with a 'crap' life. Then it had been ruptured by her drug use and homelessness. However she had also experienced intense trauma and difficulty prior to this. She had experienced repeated abusive relationships and a mental breakdown. When she was asked when she had been most settled, she said 'now', living in supported accommodation. Below, she describes why this was:

*'[I am most settled] here. Because all my adult life, between one thing and another, even before the drugs, I've never, ever been safe. Just going to your bed - every time I used to shut my eyes and sort of, is he going to batter me? What's going to happen? It's the safest.... I'm 41 this year... this's the safest I've felt. Ever.'*

Her sense of ontological security was tied to her sense of being secure in the material environment she was living in. She could now control the voluntary and involuntary edgework she had experienced and through this felt settled. She was not worried about being assaulted by her partner; she was controlling her drug use; her mental well-being was improving due to this sense of security she had. She moved into a tenancy over the course of the research, and then had to continue negotiating her identity and ontological security there. This next stage in Elizabeth's life is discussed in section five.

### *Keith's Normality*

Keith's case can also be used to explore how the participants described their lives before they became homeless. Keith became homeless after he separated from his girlfriend, who he had been living with. He had become addicted to drugs, suffered from mental illness at this point, and had assaulted his partner before he left. In the quote below he describes how his life was prior to these events occurring:

*'When I left my girlfriend [my homelessness started]. Before that, I had it all. I had a job and holidays abroad. I was a normal run of the mill person, an ordinary person. And it was just after that things started to go downhill.'* (Keith, 34)

So, like many of the participants Keith described the life he had before he was homeless as 'normal', he had been a 'normal' person. In relative terms he had been integrated into the normal day-to-day activities of the society he lived in. But like most of the participants he also identified that he had been negotiating with difficulty and edgework throughout. It was the exacerbation of this that ruptured the ontological security he had, and led to his material existence changing – he became a homeless person. When he was asked when he had been most settled, he described it as when he was living with his girlfriend. However he also recognised that the edgework and problems that went on to rupture his security, were also apparent then:

*'Really when I was with my girlfriend, [I was most settled], I still had an underlying depression problem through. I always suffered from depression from an early age.'*

### *Identifying Markers of Ontological Security*

Identifying and analysing ontological security and the sense of identity that someone has can not be done in a prescriptive way. However three clear issues could be identified from examining how the participants' described their lives prior to becoming homeless, and from how settled they were or had been here that related to the sense of ontological security and integration they had. Firstly, the importance of social networks and interactions, was once again highlighted. These were the markers used by most of the participants to define and recall times when they had been settled in their lives, and when they had been sure of 'who they were'. It could also be that security, away from the threat others posed to them, was tied to this sense of control over their 'selves' that they felt they had.

Secondly, most described their lives, and their 'selves', as 'normal'. They had just been a 'normal' person prior to becoming homeless. As will be explored in the next section, it appeared that many felt they had ceased to be seen as 'normal' once they



were homeless. Obtaining this ‘normality’, a ‘normal’ day-to-day existence once more, was also what the majority said they aspired to in the future.

Thirdly, most of the participants did recognise that even when their life had been ‘normal’ and settled, they had still experienced serious problems and issues during these times. As they recalled their life and how they felt about it, it was when they identified themselves becoming homeless and when their edgework went ‘over the edge’ into addiction and homelessness, that they felt their security had been ruptured. They lost their ‘selves’ as this process occurred and as they became homeless. In the next section the ontological process of becoming homeless is explored in more detail.

### **6.3 Becoming a ‘Homeless Person’**

Whatever internal sense of identity the participants’ had, stretched over time as they negotiated their life course, their external narratable identities were profoundly affected by them becoming homeless. This is explored in this section by first examining the stigma of homelessness. Linked to this stigma, the effect this stigmatising identity may have had on the participants’ social role, ontological security, and social interactions, is then discussed.

#### *Homelessness, Stigma, and Discourse*

It was identified in chapter three that the participants applying for accommodation through the homeless legislation, and entering the homeless system, was a pivotal point in their transitions into homelessness. At this point they became recognised as ‘homeless’ by the state, and also had to explicitly identify themselves as a ‘homeless person’.

This identity of ‘being homeless’, and the social role that it brought, was then associated with the discourses about homelessness that exist. As was outlined in chapter one, discourses on homelessness have historically been negative. The homeless person has come to encapsulate someone ‘outside’ of the norms of society, with a negative social role. Homelessness has become synonymous with beggars; dossers; deviance; criminality; danger; or ‘weakness’; victims to be ‘pitied’ - in all

cases someone who cannot or will not manage their own life course responsibility and that are 'outside' of society. As the following quote from Tommy highlights, the participants were acutely aware of the stigmatising discourses of homeless people that exist:

*'I think people still see homeless people as just addicts, or people with bits of string round their middle. And other people see it as you don't need to be on the street, there's places you can go, you don't need to be there because you can get benefits.'*

(Tommy, 33)

As the participants had to identify themselves as 'homeless people' or were categorised as such by agencies, these discourses had to become a part of their external narratable identity, whether they identified themselves in this way or not. Some of the participants were addicts, some had slept rough, had begged. What is important to highlight from this is not whether these discourses stem from any 'reality' or not, but that the participants were reflexively aware of the stigma attached to homeless people. They felt an acute sense of stigma by being defined as homeless. Many of the participants indicated that they felt this stigma was not only tied to perceptions about homeless people as deviant or 'other' to mainstream society, but also to a resentment of their reliance on the state that exists. Tommy's quote above noted, for example, that because they could get benefits it was perceived to be their fault they were homeless – they felt that other people would think they were 'choosing' to be in that situation. Keith's quote below, further illustrates the participants' reflexive awareness of this stigma. It also shows how they felt this stigma intensely when they engaged in interactions with the institutions of the welfare system, interactions where their social role was that of a 'homeless person':

*'I think, you still feel that stigma really when you're homeless. It's very hard when you go to the DHSS to get money, and stuff like that, you are stigmatised and really you are a second-class citizen. You are labelled.'*

(Keith, 34)

This was the stigmatised social identity that the participants had to negotiate with once they became visibly homeless. They were acutely, reflexively, aware of the

stigma of their homelessness. It is argued here that this stigmatised identity, and their awareness of it, could have a profound effect on the participants' social role, identity, and *actions*. They were still the person they had been before they became homeless, but no longer felt they would be viewed as a 'normal' person by others in the interactions they engaged in. Who or what were they then? And how should, or could, they act? These questions are considered below.

*Becoming Homeless in Late Modernity – becoming the 'Failed Self'*

Who the participants now felt they were can be explored by returning to the classic work of Goffman (1959; 1963). Goffman argues:

*'[the stigmatised individual's] deepest feelings about what [they are] may be [their] sense of being a normal person, a human being like anyone else (...) yet [they] may perceive, (...) that whatever others profess, they do not really 'accept' [them] and are not ready to make contact with [them] on 'equal grounds'* (1963:19).

Obviously the participants here felt internally that they were 'normal' people. But they also felt that other people would stigmatise them, and were aware of how marginalised they were. In this way, the homeless person they were, was someone who had been 'cast out' of the 'paradise' of belonging (Somerville, 1992) – both materially they were without housing, and emotionally, out of the ability to interact with others on equal terms. In the context of late modernity, they may have come to encapsulate a 'failed individual', someone who had not managed their own life course successfully as a liberal individual. The following quote from Brian succinctly highlights the participants' awareness of this. Brian was living in supported accommodation when he discussed how he felt by being homeless:

*'It's normal to go to work, and it's normal to go to the bank and get your wage, buy yourself a pair a denims, go out for a pint, go up the dancing. And that's why homelessness is so depressing, you can't do that, be normal. It's really bad, seeing everybody out enjoying their selves and you're stuck in a wee box. It's hard, I'm not a bad person, doesn't make you a bad person just cause you're homeless, but they [other people] treat you like a bad person.'* (Brian 35)



So as Brian's quote illustrated, he felt he could no longer be 'normal' now that he was homeless. He equated the ability to be 'normal' and integrated, with the ability to consume and interact with other people. Bauman argues '*in a consumer society, a 'normal life' is the life of consumers*' (1998:37) and paid work is the means to have the economic resources to consume and have a normal social status. However the majority of the participants had only ever experienced insecure or informal employment. None felt that they were able to work whilst they were homeless. Often this was because they would lose the funding for the services they were accessing, or the rent where they were living was more than they could afford to pay themselves. Brian's quote also highlighted how the participants actually experienced this situation. Without a role - without the ability to produce or consume - the participants *felt* increasingly isolated and stigmatised ontologically, unable to interact with others as 'normal' members of society, although they of course perceived themselves to be normal people.

The ability to engage in society, to manage or avoid risks, and to avoid the stigma of being homeless, was still tied to the unequal distribution of material resources that exists within the structure of society. It has been asserted here that the process of individualisation is increasingly obscuring this. As the participants became homeless they became manifestations of people who had appeared to have 'failed' in their individualised project of the self (Giddens, 1991). In a reflexive process, due to their awareness of the stigma of homelessness, they acutely felt that for being homeless they could be viewed as 'bad' individuals. Now that they had made this divestment passage into homelessness, both the material reality they were in, and how they emotionally experienced this, only acted to reinforce their alienation and isolation from mainstream society. The effect that this may have had on their actions and interactions is discussed below.

### *Self-fulfilling Prophecies – the Effect of Social Isolation and Individualisation*

Once the participants were accommodated in temporary accommodation, being a 'homeless person' was often the primary social identity they had. In many of the interactions they engaged in, particularly with services of the social welfare system, this was their social role. This affected them, and how felt they were perceived by

others, in profound ways. The following quote from Tommy illustrates the participants' awareness of how their actions would be judged:

*'I think people [accessing the statutory homeless system] are always very vulnerable, so that puts them on the back foot. They're not shouting at staff or having a go at the staff because they just want to be [pulls an aggressive face] hard, they're doing it because they're just trying to protect themselves. And then the attitude is that maybe everybody [that is homeless] is like that. When in actual fact you're not, you're just sussing things out. And you're vulnerable.'* (Tommy, 33)

Tommy's quote also illustrates the emotional experience of accessing services as a homeless person. The participants felt vulnerable and scared. But any actions they engaged in to assert themselves could have had the effect of reinforcing the negative discourses of homeless people that exist. This is not to say threatening behaviour is acceptable, but how such behaviour is interpreted will be affected by perceptions about the identity someone has and the role they are playing in the interactions they engage in. For example, someone complaining that they had to wait for long periods in a shop, whose appearance adheres to 'respectable' norms, may not be viewed as threatening. A homeless person that complains because they have been waiting for a long period to try to access temporary accommodation may not be perceived in such a way, and may be defined as threatening or problematic. How that interaction then plays out will be acutely affected by the assumptions that underpin it. The person waiting for housing may then be told they are barred from accessing any due to being abusive to staff. Their sense of alienation and marginalisation will develop further. There is a need to realise that the very act of applying for housing, and of being labelled as a homeless person, was experienced emotionally as 'threatening' to the participants. Within this situation they felt powerless and had few means to regain any power, without their actions acting to further marginalise them.

The participants often spoke of *feeling* stigmatised or judged 'unfairly' by other people. They felt discriminated against due to being homeless, and the effect of this feeling could create a vicious circle whereby they remained excluded. They were aware of how stigmatising being homeless was. They had begun to lose their 'selves' as they became homeless. Some had also physiologically begun to do so due to mental illness and addiction.

Some of the participants' behaviour had been difficult, or threatening at times. As was illustrated in chapter four, spirals of divestment passages could be triggered by the participants' behaviour when they were evicted from temporary accommodation. Behaviour that may be violent, threatening or risky, has to be managed somehow. The point here is that what triggers that behaviour must be taken into account, and this often had a material as well as emotional basis. The participants had become increasingly traumatised, alienated, and marginalised as they became homeless. The rationalised bureaucratic system they then accessed to attempt to resolve this could create the conditions whereby they felt increasingly stigmatised and desperate. The consequences of this may have led to a vicious circle. They became self-fulfilling prophecies of the deviant, anti-social homeless person. But this had only occurred due to the material embodied process of becoming homeless, the stigma attached to this, and how they felt their actions were then judged or categorised. The same actions may be interpreted differently and lead to different outcomes, depending on the situation these actions occur within and the social identity someone has within that situation.

Furthermore, once the participants became homeless they had usually been accommodated in temporary accommodation for the homeless. They were not only isolated ontologically due to the stigma of homelessness, but often actually physically separated from society by the very accommodation developed to assist them. By being segregated in this way their social isolation could be exacerbated. It can be intensely difficult for people to reintegrate once they have been labelled<sup>11</sup> in such a way, although this labelling may also be an intrinsic aspect of how they could be assisted to resolve their problems, creating a vicious circle.

The following quote from David illustrates the effect this process of alienation and stigmatisation may have had. David was homeless for over ten years, living in hostels, rehabs and sleeping rough:

*'When I was in hostels I kind of lost my family, I cut myself off from them. I don't know if it's embarrassment, because you're in a hostel, I think people see beggars on*

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<sup>11</sup> This process has been recognised in similar research with other groups, such as drug users (Buchanan, 2004)



*the street and just tar everyone with the one brush sort of thing, I didn't even feel part of my family, never mind part of society.'* (David, 38)

As the participants became homeless they often became increasingly isolated, cutting themselves off from, and being cut off from, the 'normal' activities of day-to-day life. In part this was due to the stigmatising identity of homelessness they now had, an identity tied to the discourses of homelessness that exist. What is suggested in this section is that this alienation underpinned the actions that the participants engaged in, actions that could then further stigmatise and marginalise them. Bauman has noted this effect - that through the process of increased individualisation, the 'poor', the flawed consumers, have become increasingly isolated: *'flawed consumers are lonely, and when they are left lonely for a long time they tend to become loners; they do not see how society can help'* (1998:93). So the participants were not only marginalised from mainstream society due to their material homelessness. They also isolated themselves due to the stigma of homelessness that exists, a stigma they were acutely aware of. This then had profound effects on their day-to-day life and the sense of ontological security they had, tied to this. These day-to-day experiences of 'being homeless' are explored below.

#### **6.4 Being Homeless**

In this section how the participants described being homeless is explored - they had to regain a sense of ontological security once they became homeless and this initial security had been ruptured. The experiences of the participants who remained homeless throughout the research are then explicitly examined to argue that, for some of the participants, making a transition *out* of homelessness also then involved ontological crisis.

##### *'The Slow Grind' – Homelessness and day-to-day Life*

Claire's experiences have been explored throughout this thesis. In this section, her case is used to illustrate how the participants experienced being homeless and being accommodated in temporary accommodation. Claire had experienced repeated homelessness throughout her life. She had lived in many different forms of temporary

accommodation and her own tenancies. Here she describes a typical day for her in temporary accommodation:

*'I get up, go downstairs, get something to eat, go back up and watch the telly. If I'm staying in I'll stay in my room and watch the telly all day. I'm thinking about going back to [counselling] cause it gets me out of here. Time is my biggest problem actually. Too much time to sit and think, play with your mind'*

Time itself, or the boredom that accompanied it, could be a serious problem for the participants. This was life as a 'homeless person' for many of the participants when they were living in hostels or supported accommodation. They had few resources, little to do to occupy their time, or opportunity to change this. They were in a social context where the majority of the social interactions they engaged in involved people in the same situation as them. Alongside this, they were attempting to emotionally deal with and manage a range of traumatic and risky events that had occurred in their life, such as violence, addiction, and mental illness. The quote from Frank, below, highlights the effect this life could have, ontologically. They felt they were 'going nowhere', they faced the 'slow grind' of this day-to-day life. Using substances to escape this 'horrendous repetition' was one means of escape, of 'mindscaping' themselves away from this reality (Cohen & Taylor, 1992):

*'I think even if somebody went into a hostel clean [not using alcohol or drugs] and they didn't have any support base round about them, they would just be washed up in a big cloud of negativity in a hostel because it's just – nowhere in there – nobody in there going anywhere in a hurry. It's just a slow grind'* (Frank, 39)

The alternative to interacting with others in the same situation as them, was to 'hide' away from the situation they were in and isolate themselves. However with few alternative means to occupy their time available to them, this isolation could lead to intense loneliness and more difficulty in their live. As the participants became homeless, it has been asserted here that they may have lost a sense of their 'selves'. Or as Rachel described it:

*'It's as if you are a nothing, a no one. That's how homelessness makes you feel.'*

(Rachel, 46)

In the face of this the participants had to find means to cope with the day-to-day existence they now had, or face the anomie of 'nothingness', of being nothing. They had to try to regain ontological security as a homeless person, within the environment they were in. This process may have been what underpinned the actions and interactions they then engaged in, once they were homeless.

### *Homelessness, Actions and Interactions*

In the following quote from Claire, she described the tension inherent in living in temporary accommodation:

*'[In homeless accommodation] you want to shelter yourself ... hide away, "I'll just get through it, keep your head down" but then you end up, as I say, like it could be drinking or it could be taking drugs... just to escape it [the experience of homelessness]. People do turn to the streets, and the drugs, because they're meeting other people who don't care about themselves, because they've been in that situation for a long time, you're swept up with anybody and everybody'* (Claire, 26)

On the one hand Claire had wanted to 'deny' her homelessness and also avoid the risks that this environment could bring. Claire's comment also illustrates, however, that as social 'beings' the participants had to interact and engage with others in whatever material situation they were in. The main social interactions they now had and the social network they had, was with others in the same situation as them. They could get 'swept up' in what was 'normal' behaviour within this 'abnormal' social setting, with other people experiencing it with them. Once again this interplay of emotional and material factors provided a rationale for what may appear irrational behaviour - such as the participants' ongoing alcohol or drug use or sleeping rough to be with friends who had been evicted from supported accommodation. On a micro-level the participants described how these actions and interactions provided them with some means to operate on a day-to-day basis, to cope, to 'exist'.



This edgework was not only a way to escape the situation they were in, or to interact with others. It may also have been a way to take control over the situation they were in, and ontologically resist the potentially dehumanising experience of being accommodated in institutions such as hostels, rehabs, or supported accommodation. This dehumanising effect was first highlighted in chapter four, as the quote from Francesca illustrated – *‘that homeless hostel broke me....they are hell on earth...ramming all of the chickens into one building...these are people with feelings and emotions, and a lot of them may not act like it, but at the end of the day they are’*. It may be that in the face of being homeless, the participants had to develop a new day-to-day routine, and sense of identity as a ‘homeless person’ to regain ontological security. The alternative they faced was the horrific anomie of being ‘nothing’.

### *Being Homeless and Regaining Ontological Security*

Most of the participants had experienced being homeless for many years. Some had been living precariously on the edge of society all their lives. They were used to living in hostels, being in prison, and rehabs, for example. Each time they entered a new form of accommodation their environment and day-to-day life changed. The accommodation they were provided with often continued changing regularly. Often these moves did not appear to be something they had ‘control’ of. They either moved there as it was deemed more ‘appropriate’ for them by their support workers, or because they had to leave the accommodation they were in due to time constraints on how long someone could stay there, or they were evicted for not abiding by the rules. Sometimes they ‘chose’ to stay with friends for short periods, or to sleep rough.

In this way being homeless meant being in a constant state of flux and change. Their environment and the interactions they engaged in within that environment could constantly change. And this was often accompanied by the feeling they lacked ‘control’ due to being in the ‘system’. To gain a sense of control once more they had to ontologically internalise this life – of being homeless – as who they were, in their narrative identity and actions. What is important to highlight is how much a part of some of the participants’ lives ‘being homeless’ had become. This situation may have been difficult at times, but it was something they had experienced for long-periods. It had come to constitute their day-to-day reality and routine. As a means to ‘cope’ with

the lack of control they may have felt they had, within the material reality they operated within, they may have emotionally internalised the identity and lifestyle that they had, conciled it with the person they perceived themselves to be and acted accordingly. In this way they managed to maintain some ontological security.

Claire's case can be used once more as an example to illustrate this point. Below she describes how she felt she should be 'institutionalised' after the history of homelessness she had had:

*'I was in care all my life, and then I was through all the hostel systems, I should be institutionalised, and that's what I thought, that once I got a house my life would fall apart and I would be back on the streets, doing drugs and all that.'* (Claire, 26)

However negative being homeless could be, the alternative - of obtaining her own tenancy - also carried risk. This was the risk of losing it all again, going through difficult spirals of divestment once more. In this way she would be ultimately returning to what she 'knew'. In Claire's case she was living in her own tenancy at the end of the research. Transitions out of homelessness can be made when the material resources of housing and support are provided. However what this research highlights is that this could be a precarious security. Ontologically many of the participants had few other 'possible selves' (Markus & Nurius, 1986) that could fit with the narrative identity they had. They remained flip-flopping on the edge, materially and emotionally. Claire had had tenancies previously and become homeless again each time. She spoke in the interviews about how difficult integrating into 'mainstream' society was after the life of institutionalisation and homelessness she had experienced, as the following quote describes:

*'I have worked, you know, like jobs. It's a lot better when I am working you know, but then the people you're working with, they've all got their families, they've got this, they're doing that, but I've not got that, I can't put anything towards it, when they're all talking, and I find that difficult, I just don't know how to make conversations.'* (Claire, 26)

Some of the participants, such as Claire, had been in this cycle of homelessness and institutionalisation throughout their life. They had always had close contact with institutions of the state. This contact was bound up within the structural conditions the participants existed within - the conditions of late modernity. Perhaps an unintended consequence of the welfare state that has developed throughout this time, has been to create this group of 'outsiders'. Claire did not feel she could 'put anything towards' the normal lives others around her had. Being 'outside' had become normal life for her. So once the participants had become embedded in this welfare system, it could be particularly difficult for them to reintegrate once more. The effect of this is illustrated and explored in more detail below using the experiences of the participants who *remained homeless* at the end of the research.

### *Homelessness as Normal Life*

Becoming homeless had led to the participants becoming increasingly isolated and separated from 'mainstream' society. Becoming homeless may have ruptured their ontological security, but they then had had to attempt to regain some sense of ontological security, within the day-to-day lives as 'homeless people' they had. For some of the participants their homelessness was stretched over many years. It is argued here that for some, their homelessness constituted just 'being'. For some, this was their 'normal' life, as the following quote from Margaret illustrates:

*'See, you get used to it (homelessness), even though you hate it, you still get used to it, you get used to the people, to being there and the people there. It becomes normal; normal life.'*

(Margaret, 42)

The participants who remained homeless at the end of the research had all experienced long-term and repeated homelessness over their life course. For some of them their social networks consisted entirely<sup>12</sup> of people in the same situation as them. Often they shared the same lack of resources and experiences of poverty and inequality. They also often engaged in forms of edgework, such as alcohol or drug

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<sup>12</sup> Except from professionals such as police, support workers, health workers, etc.



use together. The following quote from Gary, who had spent twenty years rough sleeping and living in temporary accommodation, highlights this point:

*'When you're on your own just staring at four walls, you know, you've nobody to talk to, just listening to your watch, I mean you're just living your life away to nothing.....but the friends I've all got, they're just in the same boat as myself, alcoholics'*  
(Gary, 52)

What option did Gary face than engage in these interactions, this 'lifestyle'? He faced intense isolation and loneliness, leading to anomie, a sense of non-existence. In the previous section the isolating effect of homelessness was highlighted. The *stigma* of homelessness and of the 'lifestyle' associated with it meant that other people in the same situation as them (often for the same reasons) were the only source of social networks some of the participants could have. They had had to regain some sense of ontological security by internalising their homelessness. The material conditions they were in became the day-to-day reality and environment this security was generated through.

Interactions and social networks remained a key mechanism affecting the participants' lives when they were homeless. On a subjective level, it is entirely rational that people seek out relationships and interactions with others, yet when these people occupy the same low social status and also have few resources, this network could act to exacerbate their situation and the problems and risk they faced. In chapter three the concept of the rationale of irrational behaviour was introduced. Social networks and the interactions people engage in within these networks can generate this rationale. This is highlighted again here. To be normal, to 'fit in' in this reality of being homeless was to act in ways that could also exacerbate or maintain the negative situation that the participants were in. However for some this had become normal life, and so to change this, involved intense ontological crisis. This has to be understood, if transitions out of homelessness, and how they may not always actually lead to 'positive' outcomes for people on a subjective ontological level, is to be understood.

### *Ontological Crisis and Transitions out of Homelessness*

To 'move on' from being homeless usually required the participants rejecting contact with the people that they knew. However risky or violent these relationships had sometimes been, these were people they had developed close emotional ties with over time. So to remain embedded in the social context they knew was to remain homeless, remain marginalised and remain over the edge, with others who have also gone over. But this situation was also a way to maintain a sense of ontological security in the face of few other options other than intense isolation or loneliness. So for some of the participants homelessness was the reality they knew, moving between supported accommodation, hostels, prison, staying with friends, sleeping rough, occasionally having a tenancy of their own and moving on again. This was their identity and to change this, may have involved intense ontological crisis, a rejection of the individual they were, if they were to develop a 'new self'. This may provide a subjective emotional reason for why it did not occur.

This also illustrates how ontological security and identity could impact on the participants' actions and transitions. Eddie's quote (from chapter four) can be used once more to illustrate this – *'I was getting there...I was progressing, maybe that frightened me, I don't know'*. Eddie remained homeless throughout the research. He was evicted from hostels and supported accommodation for continuing to use drugs. However to cease using drugs and 'move on' meant facing up to the abuse he had suffered previously, something that led to an intense psychological and ontological crisis. In the face of this, it may be more rational to remain homeless, and to continue using drugs. The participants may have had to 'pull apart their past', and face the ontological crisis of doing so, before they were able to 'move on' in their transitions. And this could be intensely difficult, ontologically and emotionally, even if the material resources they required to obtain their own tenancy had been provided.

However difficult making transitions out of homeless may have been, ontologically, another key point to emphasis here however is that the participants *did* continue to attempt to make them. They continued to attempt to survive, to change their circumstances, and to integrate into a society they had often been 'outside' of for most of their lives. Nineteen of the participants had their own tenancy at the end of the research. They may still have been experiencing problems in their lives, but for many of them this was a more integrative phase in their lives. Social problems such

as homelessness exist for complex reasons and will continue to do so. However as was highlighted in chapter five the current welfare system may be providing some of the resources needed to assist some people resolve these problems on a micro-level.

In the next sections the experiences of the participants who were living in their own tenancies at the end of the research are analysed, to examine how they experienced life beyond homelessness.

## **6.5 Beyond Homelessness**

It has already been highlighted that many of the nineteen participants who had their own tenancy at the end of the research were flip-flopping between integration and divestment. They were no longer homeless but many of the factors that had led to their homelessness had not fundamentally changed. They still lacked resources, were engaging in edgework, and were operating in the same broad structural conditions that had underpinned their homelessness occurring in the first place. The majority still all relied on the state to access social and material resources – they remained targeted populations. However others did experience more positive, integrative transitions.

In this section the participants' lives beyond homelessness, and how they qualitatively experienced them, is explored. Throughout this thesis the importance of social networks has been emphasised. Social networks and the interactions that people have may be key to maintaining their ontological security in the material reality they operate within. This effect of social networks and the ontological security they underpin is explored below.

### *Integration, Interactions and Social Networks*

For some of the participants, as they made their transition out of homelessness, they had gradually made contact with relatives or old friends, sometimes through a process of mediation between them, their family, and their support workers. This could improve their social networks and increase their social capital. Due to this they were also able to reintegrate more, to *feel* ontologically like a normal person, operating within mainstream society, again. The social identity of being 'homeless' could begin to be superseded by other forms of identity they had, due to the



interactions they were now engaging in. The following cases of Elizabeth and Tommy are used to illustrate this.

### *Elizabeth's Life beyond Homelessness*

Elizabeth moved into her own tenancy from supported accommodation during the research. She had become close to her mother over the course of the research. They had lost contact when she became homeless. Below she described the effect regaining this contact had had:

*'I'm going on holiday with my mum soon, I'm looking forward to that, see when you met me a year ago who would have thought I'd be going on holiday with them, they weren't even speaking to me then, it is such a difference when you get your family back.'* (Elizabeth, 42)

Elizabeth had made contact with her mother before moving into her own tenancy, when she was living in supported accommodation. This was after she had stopped using heroin, and had been through a period in a residential rehab. They now regularly visited each other, went shopping together, and spoke on the phone. Sometimes she phoned her mother for advice on how to do things around her house.

If the participants who obtained their own tenancy were able to make contact with people they knew, such as family and old friends, they described this as an important aspect of their transition out of homelessness. They were able to develop a status as a 'normal person' once more, outside of being homeless. This 'feeling' of normality did not appear to come about just because they gained their own tenancies. The interactions they could engage in, within this material reality, were also important for them to feel they were no longer homeless. So their transitions had to be made on both material, emotional, and social levels.

Clearly social networks and the interactions the participants engaged in could be crucial to assist them continue generating integrative passages 'back' into society. Tommy's experiences can also be used to illustrate this further.

### *Tommy's Life beyond Homelessness*

Tommy had a small group of close friends he had lost contact with as he became homeless. He had made contact with them again after he moved into his tenancy. In the following quote Tommy explains how this support was important to assist him feel integrated once more, and to cope with his ongoing mental illness:

*'You've not got markers around you [when you are homeless]. I mean things like, if I'm feeling paranoid I can take out a couple of my mates and they might say "I don't think so somehow," you know, have a talk about it. I think support can come in many shapes and forms, going for a pint with your mate, talking about football'*

Obtaining a tenancy was an important material outcome that the participants required to make a transition out of homelessness. However social networks were then a key mechanism that could assist them continue to make integrative passages. These networks provided the markers they required to maintain and develop their ontological security within this new 'phase' in their lives. Interactions provided the markers from which the participants could assess who they now were. Making contact with positive social networks was sometimes facilitated and encouraged by the support workers the participants had contact with through the social welfare system. In this way the participants were able to develop a support network, and access resources, outside of the welfare system. Opportunities to allow people to develop these independent sources of support and resources are key, if transitions out of homelessness are to be made – on both the material and emotional levels they have to be.

There are also some important qualifications that have to be made about the positive effect social networks could have however, particularly when the structural context the participants operated within remained the same as it had been prior to their homelessness. These qualifications are outlined below.

### *The Problems of Integration*

Firstly, (as Tommy's and Elizabeth's quotes illustrated) acts of social integration often require financial resources. They had to consume (for example, go on holiday, have a pint). They could also involve actions that required a degree of risk negotiation, or edgework. For example, consuming alcohol was an action that for some of the participants had previously led to alcoholism. So again, risks still had to be negotiated with, throughout the process of integration the participants engaged in. If the access to resources they had had not fundamentally changed then the ability to legitimately engage in these acts to integrate, may have remained limited.

Secondly, some of the participants did not have positive social networks they could re-contact. They had few means to meet new people, or develop new social networks once they were living alone in their own tenancy. They may have been in care as a child, or had a history of abusive family relationships and friendships. The only people they knew may have been people who had been or were still homeless. They may have been trying to avoid people who had once been abusive or violent towards them. As was illustrated in the previous section, relationships can carry risk. Social networks can generate negative as well as positive effects. And for those with no sources of positive social networks, how could the positive effects of these networks be obtained?

### *Putting Homelessness in the Past*

It is important to highlight that some of the participants were beginning to move on, along more integrative emotional and material passages in their life course, beyond just moving into a tenancy. Whilst impossible to know for sure without ongoing tracking, it is likely that some of the participants continued to develop these integrative passages. Their social networks and the ability to manage the risks they faced were important aspects of this. However so too were the resources they were provided with through the social welfare system (such as housing, income, education, health care). It has already been highlighted that there is flip-flop effect. If the participants' situation remained fundamentally the same once they had their tenancy their risk of homelessness may have remained. They also remained stratified as those in a position of relying on the state, but this reliance had become individualised, as being due to their actions. However some of the participants had had relatively



settled lives prior to becoming homeless. Although the resources they had had become eroded as they became homeless by the end of the research they appeared to be moving back into a more settled life once more, and may have continued to do so. Bess can be used as an example of this.

### *Bess's Life beyond Homelessness*

Bess was living in her own tenancy in the second and third interview. She had moved there from supported accommodation. At the third interview she had recently started a relationship, and was thinking about starting a college course in the future. In the quote below she described some of these positive developments:

*'Things have been brilliant, I've started going out with a man. My confidence has gone up, I've been getting out more....getting up, cleaning, going to the shops, going into town. And that's good, I feel my time is filled up, and also now, I feel as if I can relax, whereas before I always felt I had to get up and do something. I saw [tenancy sustainment] worker for a while, and it was good, but I've stopped seeing her now. That was my decision, well to get on with my life, not put my problems onto someone else. I have the strength to do that now, I don't need other people to do it.'*

(Bess, 25)

She was reducing contact with her support workers and had increased the contact with her family she had. They had become estranged when she was homeless. However as the following quote also highlights she still worried that problems she had had in the past may recur. She felt unable to tell her family about having been homeless. She did not feel able to enter paid employment because she was still reliant on benefits, for example:

*'Sometimes I think like I'm still making the same mistakes though, like having a boyfriend again, and a year ago I was like "I hate all men!" But I know I've developed my own sense of well-being. So maybe it is different, maybe I'm not making the same mistakes. I saw my mum last week. I saw them after I spoke to you last and that was a bit scary! But everything is fine now. I haven't told them though about like being homeless and those things, I keep that quiet. (...) I have been put off*

*considering getting work because of the whole benefits thing, I mean the money, and covering everything, but I would like to eventually, it would be nice to rely on my own money.'* (Bess, 25)

As Bess story illustrated, transitions out of homelessness can be made, but this may not be without many challenges and was tied to discourses that highlighted their individual actions as the founding factor of them being able to 'manage' on their own. It also requires both material and emotional outcomes to develop, such as access to reasonable housing, and opportunities to negate the stigma of having been homeless. The opportunity to reintegrate fully into society remained limited for many of the participants. They were flip-flopping close to the edge. They lacked opportunities to develop a new social role or new social identity. This particularly related to the social interactions (or lack of) they now engaged in. This is discussed below.

### *Isolation and Stigma – Beyond Homeless*

The participants could all describe the intense difficulties that they faced once they had moved into their own tenancy. Many were scared that they would not be 'able to cope', and would 'lose everything again'. Social networks and interactions (or a lack of them) were again important to this. They were attempting to overcome the ontological crisis that making a transition out of homelessness could trigger, a crisis identified in the previous section. Overwhelmingly the participants who had gained their own tenancy cited isolation, loneliness, and boredom as key problems they were experiencing. They still 'felt' stigmatised, or 'outside' of society. Once they had moved into their own tenancy and were 'settled' they often said they had 'nothing' to occupy their time and few means to interact with others, or get to know new people. For example, many of the participants were unsure whether they would be able to tell new people that they met about their 'past', but in this way, were inhibited from developing new relationships or contacts. The following quote from Ann illustrates this:

*'Well I'm not going to tell them [neighbours] anything about my past. I just don't want them to know that I was a drug addict and that I had been through the homeless system. I just don't want them to get that impression of me.'* (Ann, 26)

It is asserted here that the stigma attached to homelessness is also a key mechanism that went on affecting the participants' lives, their transitions, and the ability to reintegrate that they had – even after they were homeless. People they met may or may not have actually judged them in negative ways due to them having been homeless. The point is that the participants subjectively did not want people to know this about them, due to the stigma of it. This could inhibit their actions and their ability to interact with others. The following comment from Keith, who was living in his own tenancy throughout the research, after a history of repeated homelessness and drug addiction, further highlights the isolating effect of the stigma of homelessness, and the edgework that interacted with it:

*'I keep myself to myself, I've got no friends at all. I don't want my friends to be ex-addicts and I don't want 'clean' friends 'cause I'm hiding the past from them, that I used to be an addict.'* (Keith, 34)

Keith's comment also illustrates the paradox of this stigma. He too wanted to avoid people who may be considered deviant or risky, due to past acts they had engaged in and the risk they posed to him – such as 'ex-addicts'. But in this way the participants were trapped, as they felt other people would not want to know them, or that they would have to lie about their past. Ontologically they felt who they had been and the identity they had had over time, could not be reconciled into a narrative identity acceptable to mainstream society. The experience of having been homeless was something that the participants had to 'fit' into their sense of narrative identity, over time. The inability to do so could act as a barrier to them being able to move on emotionally, and also then materially in the future. One way it could act as a barrier was that it went on providing the rationale for the edgework they engaged in. This edgework was the only way to escape this reality, or assert their 'selves', they had.

*Self-Actualisation, Edgework, and Isolation*



The participants often cited their intense boredom and loneliness as the reason why they relapsed. Their substance use was a form of escape from this anomie. So the stigmatised identity, attached to them due to the past of homelessness, addiction, mental illness, that they had experienced, could operate as a barrier to them developing other positive social identities and networks in the future. They may also have felt that they could only interact with people with the same stigmatised identity as them, or only knew people who had also experienced some of the same problems. William describes this effect, below. William moved into his own tenancy over the course of the research. By the last interview he was relatively settled there but was concerned because he had recently started to use heroin again, with people he knew:

*'Well staying on my own, has been problematic, I kind of miss the company [I had in supported accommodation], I've not got that now, if I'm not careful about the kind of company I keep, I'm with addicts, whatever, people to spend time with'.*

(William, 29)

The intense social isolation the participants were experiencing could trigger other forms of edgework. Social networks can have negative as well as positive effects. The interactions people have within their social network constitute an important part of their day-to-day life. The participants, even once housed, could continue to experience the tension encapsulated in the rationale of irrational behaviour identified earlier. It may appear 'irrational' to take the risk of drug use or addiction by entering a social context and interacting with people where this activity is the 'norm', the action required to 'fit' in. This may seem particularly so when these same factors had initially appeared to have led to them becoming homeless, and they had recently resolved this. However on a micro-level, the alternative - the intense boredom, loneliness, and isolation - many of the participants faced beyond their homelessness, provided the rationale for this. Through this edgework they could retain some sense of identity, of who they were, against the 'nothingness' they faced in their day-to-day life beyond being homeless. If the participants' structural conditions had not really altered, then these same conditions that triggered their edgework in the first place, were likely to go on doing so.

It is asserted here that in this way the participants were becoming trapped individuals. Elizabeth's comment below, can be used to describe this process. Despite her contact with her mother, and relative integration, she also felt isolated, bored, and could see little opportunity for her life to continue changing in the future. This sentiment was something repeatedly commented on by the participants. Once they were living in their own tenancies, had gone through being homeless, they felt they had 'nothing':

*'Once you've gone through the whole system, and you've got your wee house and then you've done all that and everything's fine, there's nothing to do. I think that's how a lot of people end up going back on drugs. There's nothing then, nothing at all. And there must be thousands like me. They've got to the point, they're clean, they have their own wee place, starting to get a wee bit pride back in themselves, starting to feel good, and there is just, nothing'.*

(Elizabeth, 42)

Once the participants were settled in their own tenancies they were all still relying on the state for income and housing. They were in 'limbo'. They often felt they had 'nothing' then not even a focus of making a transition out of homelessness and contact with support workers. They could see few opportunities for this to change. For some of the participants it did not appear that the subjective anomie of life on the edge of society in the structural conditions of late modern society had been resolved by their homelessness being resolved, although undoubtedly their material situation and security had improved. They still lacked access to resources that could allow them 'full' integration to society, materially. They lacked a new day-to-day routine from which to develop a sense of ontological security, well-being, and identity, emotionally.

In the final section, Brian and Margaret's cases are used to present this argument – that some of the participants were becoming trapped individuals.

## **6.6 Becoming Trapped Individuals**

In this section how structural factors may have operated to prevent the participants moving on as individuals to develop their sense of narrative identity beyond homelessness is outlined. It is asserted that the participants were becoming trapped

individuals, within and due to the structural conditions of late modernity. In the previous section the social networks and emotional experiences of the participants were focussed on to show this. In this section, the material outcomes they were attempting to gain to increase the level of resources they had is used.

### *Material Resources and Life beyond Homelessness*

Paid employment may be perceived to be the ‘ultimate’ route to integration that the participants could have experienced. In this way they no longer would have had to explicitly rely on the welfare state for housing and subsistence; they could be active citizens, and consumers; engaging in social interactions with the identity of ‘normal’ integrated individuals. They would not longer be the ‘failed individuals’ they felt they had become as they became homeless.

However the majority of the participants said they did not think they could access employment, or other forms of activity to occupy their time, legitimately. The reasons they cited for this was their poor health; age; lack of qualifications or experience; discrimination they faced due to having been homeless or an addict; or because they would not be able to afford to work. They were worried that the level of income their benefits generated was higher than any amount they could make through legitimate paid employment. Therefore they would be unable to afford to live in their tenancy if they worked. Many were on Incapacity Benefit (often due to addiction) and by definition, were therefore not supposed to be able to work.

Two of the participants (Brian and William) who moved into their own tenancies over the course of the research did start to work in paid employment however. Brian’s case is used below to explore this.

### *Brian’s Life beyond Homelessness*

Brian had worked before becoming homeless. He had become homeless, repeatedly, over the last seven years, due to a combination of drug addiction, being in prison, and debt. He had stayed in different forms of temporary accommodation whilst he was homeless. After going through rehab, he had moved into supported accommodation



and then into his own tenancy. A few months after moving there he started to work as a security guard. Below he described how he felt this work assisted him to 'move on' from the experience of being homeless. This was on both material (his income increased) and emotional (he felt he had control, something to occupy his time, a role) levels:

*'I mean at the beginning when I moved into my flat, I was just like sitting staring at the four walls, it took a while, I was 'happy as' straight away but it takes a few months for it all to sink in, that it was real, that I was secure. I think it was when I went back to work that I started to feel I had control over my life, because I had control over my money'* (Brian, 35)

This highlights how important employment could be to assist people to integrate into society and develop a sense of ontological security. In this way they could feel 'secure', have some control over their life and identity, beyond their reliance on the state. However Brian (and William) were working unofficially in the informal economy. They said was that they could not afford to pay their rent if they were working legitimately in the low paid sectors they could access employment in. In this way they were also committing benefit fraud however, and had not moved far from the insecure 'edges' of society. Their social status could take a divestment passage if they were convicted of fraud, perhaps leading to them becoming homeless again. However this risk of going over the edge once more was created by the very same actions they were engaging in as individuals to try to gain more security and more resources. They actually were constrained by their structural lack of resources, and their reliance on the welfare system to maintain their housing, to remain on the 'edge'. They were negotiating with what appeared to be voluntary risks such as working illegally. However these risks may also be understood as being something they engaged in to improve their situation as individuals, with few other 'rational' choices available.

They were therefore acting as individuals to try to negotiate the best outcome and situation for themselves, as liberal ideology would promote. They could develop a sense of ontological security by taking control over their lives. In doing so however they were also continuing to recreate risks that could lead to a spiral of divestment.

They also continued to potentially recreate the subjective stigma they faced from being ‘outside’ of mainstream society - either as benefits cheats, or as those who remained without any form of work - ‘poor’ with no role. The flip-flop effect identified earlier continued to operate for the participants once they made a transition out of homelessness, on material as well as emotional levels – how could they move on from this?

### *Emotional Effects and Life beyond Homelessness*

It has already been highlighted that boredom and loneliness were a key complaint of the participants once they moved into a tenancy. The lack of interactions and lack of contact with other people they had was often cited as a trigger for their ongoing substance use. This was either to cope with this isolation, or because to interact with people they knew would involve using substances. Despite their transition out of homelessness, and lack of any absolute poverty the participants had, ‘something’, as Margaret discussed below, was missing. But what was that ‘something’? To answer that, may be to provide the answer for many of societies problems.

### *Margaret’s Life beyond Homelessness*

Margaret had mental health problems and a history of chronic alcoholism. She had been in care as a child, and then spent her adult life moving between hostels, her own tenancy, staying with friends, sleeping rough, and always having intense contact with welfare services. In some ways, her transition through homelessness had this time been a ‘success’. At the final interview she her own tenancy, and had lived there for a year, she had little contact with support workers. But she also felt she had ‘nothing’, that something acute was missing in her life:

*‘You’re stuck in a house, nobody to talk to, apart from four walls, I mean you’ve got your telly, music centre, I’ve got all that, but there is something missing. Because there is nobody there. And that is why a lot of people give up their houses, you’re sitting like that, “what do I do now?”’*

(Margaret, 42)

Margaret had attempted to attend a college course once she moved into her own tenancy but had been unable to due to her health and the cost. She did not know what else she could do and remained with a low level of human, social, and economic capital. She sometimes still used alcohol heavily and spoke in the final interview of how sometimes she felt she could just leave her tenancy, and enter the 'system' she had spent most of her life being accommodated within, once more. This system may have been, to her, a more 'normal' and emotionally fulfilling life than the one she had, given the isolation, anomie, and lack of identity, she was experiencing now. Being homeless had exposed her to many risks and living in poor material conditions. However all she faced beyond that was the 'horrendous repetition' of the day-to-day life she had as an 'ex-homeless' person once she was living in her own tenancy. Many of the participants were experiencing this and appeared to have few opportunities to resolve it, for many reasons.

### *Becoming Trapped Individuals?*

Both Brian and Margaret's experience highlight, in different ways, a key finding of this thesis. This is that some of the participants appeared to be becoming trapped as individuals within the structures of late modernity. They did not appear to be making further transitions once they were no longer homeless, or see how they could. Once they had their own tenancies they appeared to become trapped between either the purgatory of day-to-day isolation and loneliness, or in engaging in activities (drug use, alcohol use, working illegally) as a way to escape or remedy this, that could then exacerbate it. These actions were also what had underpinned their initial transition into homelessness. In this way some also became trapped in a destructive cycle of going over the edge once more and becoming homeless again, repeating the cycle.

Either way, many of the participants remained reliant on the social welfare system, and had few opportunities or resources with which to develop a new routine or identity. Despite the positive outcomes some of the participants experienced, what was also apparent was the *lack of opportunities* to 'move on' beyond this situation that most of the participants faced. This lack of opportunity could be experienced both materially and emotionally. Materially they lacked opportunities to generate more resources of social, human, and (legitimate) economic capital, and emotionally,



they had few opportunities to leave behind the stigmatised identity they had, or to find a 'role', and greater ontological security in the social structure of late modernity. Some faced having few means to escape the repetition – escape the anomie and 'nothingness' - of their day-to-day life, even once their homelessness was resolved. In the face of this, their homelessness may have been a materially more marginalising situation, but emotionally had been more fulfilling, and 'real' than the situation they were now in. They were trapped on the edge of society, not going over, but not able to move any further, with their life becoming stuck in this situation, this day-to-day repetition – the space between integration and divestment, inclusion and exclusion, belonging and being 'cast out'.

It is asserted here that many of the participants, once they obtained their own tenancy, had only moved into a more secure position along a continuum whereby they were still lacking a role, on the edge of society. They were no longer perceived to pose a risk to others or themselves but were trapped in the situation they were in, with few opportunities to move on beyond this due to the broad structural conditions they operated within. The participants had clear ideas about the sort of identity they should have, the actions they should engage in to be a 'proper' 'happy' member of society – someone in employment; in a relationship; a *consumer* - as the following quote from Keith illustrates:

*'It feels as if I'm a taker, you know, a sponge. I feel other people think that as well. A lot of people look at me and say to me, "why are you not working?" and stuff like that. But I do have mental health issues, you know. But working would help, if I could, it would help. Maybe get a car again, and get another relationship, be a proper member of society. When I walk along the street, I feel as if people are staring at me, as if to say, "scumbag".'*

(Keith, 34)

But they also often felt that this was something they could not attain, and acutely felt the stigma of being 'outside' of society. Being able to negotiate these outcomes – employment, successful relationships, certain consumer possessions such as a car – was viewed as the indicators of someone who has 'successfully' negotiated a positive life course through integrative passages from the point of view of the participants. Without them though they were doomed - to remain 'failed' individuals, flawed

consumers, on the edge. Yet the lack of resources they had, meant that obtaining these outcomes may have been distant goals for them. This lack of resources was underpinned by the structural context of an increasingly globalised, late modern society, without full-employment, where resources and life chances are unequally distributed. They faced the knowledge that they may never attain this ‘normal life’ within the social context of having been labelled with the stigma of being someone who had gone over the edge. But their edgework must be understood as having occurred over a life course imbued with extreme trauma and difficulty, with mental illness, institutionalisation, addiction, and of having few resources to act as a buffer to the effect of this, due to the structural reality and institutions of the society they lived in.

## **6.7 Conclusion: Identity, Homelessness, and Gaining or Losing Ontological Security**

What is important to highlight from this chapter is that the subjective aspect of making transitions such as these can make them intensely difficult and act as a barrier to actually making them. This is despite the normative integrating route that the participants were attempting to take appearing to be straightforward – to be housed once more. Being homeless is a negative social status: therefore it is assumed people who are homeless will want to resolve this. What has to be understood is that to cope with whatever negative social status someone has, they may have weave this into the plot of their life to maintain a sense of ontological security. As the participants became homeless their previous lives and identity had been ruptured. They had had to take on a stigmatising social identity of a homeless person, and the slow ‘grind’ of the day-to-day life this brought. Perhaps as a means to cope with this and regain their ontological security, this day-to-day life and the interactions they engaged in, had to become their ‘normality’, they were ‘resocialized’ into this as a means to cope, over time (Giddens, 1984:63) However, after many years of this, making a transition out of homelessness may therefore have involved another intense rupturing of their lives, and the risk of ontological crisis once more.

Four key points have been developed in this chapter, bringing together these findings on how identity and ontological security may have affected the transitions the

participants made, and the actions they took. Firstly, the stigma of homelessness and how this affected the participants' ontological security, sense of identity, and how they could interact with others was a key mechanism affecting their transitions. They became increasingly isolated and stigmatised as they became homeless. They were acutely aware of this stigma and may have then isolated themselves. Increasingly the only people they could or did interact with were people in the same situation as them – homeless people.

Secondly, this identity of 'being homeless' became for some of the participants 'normal' life, and in the face of this to make a transition out of homelessness may have involved an intense phase of ontological crisis. Even once they had a tenancy, many spoke of how they couldn't 'be themselves' in this situation, 'something' was missing. They lacked a sense of self or security in mainstream society.

Thirdly, some of the participants did make more increasingly integrative transitions. By the end of the research they were settled in their tenancies and described many positive improvements in their lives. Social networks and being able to develop these outside of the contact with the services of the welfare state were important mechanisms affecting this.

Fourthly, however, the majority of the participants that were living in their own tenancies were acutely isolated. They remained close to the edge, but not over it. They were becoming 'trapped individuals', with few opportunities to 'move on' without facing risks that could trigger divestment passages in their life once more. This was in part due to their very reliance on the state, a situation that had developed within the current conditions of late (or second) modernity – the risk society.

It is asserted that a consequence of the structural conditions the participants operated within, conditions generated through the process of modernity, has been the creation of a group who have to rely on the state to access resources. The structural underpinnings that have led to this situation have become increasingly obscured by individual factors – their addiction; their mental illness – that may be taken to explain this reliance. These individual factors evidenced their inability to individually negotiate with the risks that the context of late modern neo-liberalism has brought.



This in turn may recreate the discourse of the deviance of the people experiencing these things, and need for them to be targeted, managed, set apart, and stigmatised. This segregation and stigmatisation feed into the sense of identity they had. It fed into how they emotionally experienced life. This fed into their actions and the outcome of their actions. These outcomes occur within a structure (that it then recreates) whereby the ability people have to actually negotiate their own life course - avoid risks such as homelessness, consume, integrate into society, develop their own positive identity as a 'successful individual' - is still stratified along lines of who has access to which resources, and at what level, through different institutional settings. Some of the actions the participants engaged in *were* problematic – criminal, dangerous, 'anti-social' – but what caused them to occur, why these same actions may only lead to outcomes such as homelessness, in some circumstances, for some people, needs to be further explored and better understood. The very real suffering that many of the participants had experienced and that coloured how their lives could be analysed, had also to be acknowledged.

In the final chapter the findings developed throughout this thesis are brought together to conclude this analysis. In this way this analysis of transitions through homelessness in a risk society can be developed to better understand the processes of integration, individualisation, and the transitions that are occurring within late modernity. Issues requiring further research and development are also identified.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION - TRANSITIONS THROUGH HOMELESSNESS IN A RISK SOCIETY**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This analysis of transitions through homelessness in a risk society explicitly addressed three aims. Firstly, examining the interaction and influence of agency and structure on the participants' transitions; Secondly, assessing the role services of the social welfare had on these transitions and the participants' circumstances; and, thirdly, exploring how other factors such as the participants' identity and sense of ontological security interacted with the situation they were in.

The analysis has been cast within a broad theoretical framework – that in late modern society increased individualisation and neo-liberal political discourse has led to a preoccupation with risk and risk management. This framework was underpinned by an ontological and epistemological approach encapsulating realism and structuration theory. Dean's concept of 'reflexive governance', Lyng's concept of 'edgework' and Ezzy's 'divestment and integrative passages' were explicitly used as analytical tools to assist in pulling these different units of the analysis – agency, structure, governance, welfare, identity, transitions, risk – together.

In this final chapter the findings are brought together and discussed. In the next section, the participants' transitions through homelessness, and how key influences – social networks; edgework; and resources – impacted on them, are presented. The stressed theory of homelessness and causation that has been developed here is also reasserted. In section three how services of the social welfare system and the participants' sense of identity and ontological security interacted and impacted on these transitions is discussed. Finally in section four, these elements are brought together to argue that, within the structural conditions of the late modern risk society, the participants may have been becoming 'trapped' as individuals. They struggled to be free, to assert themselves, but within the structural conditions they were operating within, they had little opportunity to do so. Trapped individuals encapsulate the 'losers' in the eternal struggle for finite resources that occurs within the (increasing globalised) system of advanced capitalism. However this thesis concludes with a

more positive interpretation of these findings. The actions we all engage in as individuals encapsulate the ongoing tension and interaction that occurs between agency and structure, over all our lives. Through these actions lies the power to potentially change or transform society. That this struggle goes on, has been illustrated in this thesis. All the participants whose lives have been studied, continued to try to make transitions and to survive on a day-to-day basis, however difficult this day-to-day life may have been, and despite their position of relative powerlessness.

## **7.2 Understanding Transitions through Homelessness – Developing a New Theoretical Perspective**

To develop this thesis, biographical case studies of twenty-eight people making a transition through homelessness were collected and analysed. At the most extreme, some of the participants had experienced intense poverty, marginalisation, abuse, trauma and exclusion from mainstream society throughout their lives. There was also some whose lives had taken fairly integrative transitional routes. They had worked, had their own housing. They had been integrated to what they considered ‘normal’ life. What they all shared however was a low level of resources, of economic, social, human and physical capital. Most had left school on or before their sixteenth birthday; the employment they had had was low paying and unskilled, or part of the informal economy; the housing they had was usually social housing, subsidised by the state. What the participants also shared was that at some point their lives had become imbued with traumatic incidents and problematic situations – such as domestic violence, addiction, mental illness. These events encapsulate forms of edgework. Edgework refers to voluntary risk taking, such as drug use; actions that involve negotiating the edges of normative behaviour - trying to manage the risk these acts involve. The concept has also been used here as a way to understand involuntary risk situations – being assaulted; mental illness; for example. These situations also require that individuals find some way to physically and emotionally manage risk, and return from the edge of normative behaviour they have come to. Both forms of edgework carry the risk of going over the edge, they involve a rupture in the day-to-day reality people operate within, and involve ‘real’ extreme risk that has to be managed and overcome. The lack of resources that the participants had, and the concentration of extreme forms of edgework in their lives, meant they were



conceptualised here as people who were on the edge of society – at some point they had all gone over the edge and explicitly became defined as homeless.

### *Transitions into Homelessness*

The participants' transitions into homelessness occurred in a complex process involving an interrelation of three key factors in their lives: their edgework; the level of resources of different forms of capital they had; and their social networks and influence they had. The participants described the cause of their homelessness as individual events, such as drug and alcohol use, relationship breakdown, and mental illness. These events and actions all encapsulated a need to negotiate the edges of normative social behaviour. But these events also occurred within a broad context of the participants having a relative low level of resources. It has been asserted here that these resources of human, social, material, and financial capital, provide a buffer to such events as homelessness. Due to a combination of traumatic events, and edgework in their life, interacting with relationship breakdown, the participants' resources had eroded until they had few options but to rely on the state for accommodation (and sometimes social support) provided for people who are 'homeless'. This is a key aspect of the analysis presented here – whatever insecurity the participants were experiencing, it was when they had to access the state for accommodation as homeless people that they became visibly homeless. In this way, they became defined as homeless, by both themselves and by the state. Another issue that has been identified from this research, but that now requires further research, is a consideration of *why* and *how* these individual problems and edgework that appeared to lead to their homelessness is generated. Is this an outcome of life in late modern society? And if so how *can it be managed* successfully through social and political means?

### *The Rationale of Irrational Behaviour*

The motivation for the edgework that the participants engaged in was generated through an interaction of the three key issues in their lives. This was their social networks and social interactions, the risks and trauma they had previously experienced, and the resources they had access to. These factors combine to create

the material and emotional reality they operated within. How this material and emotional reality may generate actions that appear irrational as a means to avoid risk, has been encapsulated here as the 'rationale of irrational behaviour'. This is that actions appearing irrational or deviant, can actually be understood as rational, when the micro-level material reality they occur within is also taken into account. These actions were often the only way the participants had to self-actualise, to feel 'alive', as individuals.

For example, social networks and the interactions that people engage in on a day-to-day basis constitute an important part of, and are embedded in, the material reality they operate within. Whilst these are often important sources of social capital and identity they can also underpin negative actions and outcomes. If the only people that some of the participants knew or had contact with (often within the housing area or accommodation they were housed in) were people who were also engaging in actions such as extreme drug or alcohol use, or criminal acts, these actions could become normalised. Not only that, they may have become the means to interact and 'fit in' with others there. These actions may also have been motivated by the desire to escape that material reality (of poverty) they were in, transcend, or take some control over the lack of agency they felt they had in their material situation.

The effect of different forms of edgework the participants had experienced – such as the psychological damage of extreme drug use or distress caused by bereavement or relationship breakdown, could go on leading to more edgework, such as mental illness, or more substance use to escape this. The participants (and indeed other people who they engaged in edgework with) were aware of some of the risks that these actions could bring to both themselves and others, but on a micro-level, given the situation they were in, these actions were also rationalisable. To not engage in these acts, in the here and now of the reality they were in, could lead to anomie, isolation, awaken their awareness of the pain and trauma they had experienced previously, or prevent them from generating material outcomes (such as income gained through prostitution) that they required in this situation to 'survive'.

The paradox of edgework is that, whilst it may be a way to feel alive, or be the outcome of living within the reality of late modernity, engaging in it further

desecrated and destroyed their lives. It could lead them to be so consumed by their need to assert their 'selves' from within the position of relative powerlessness they operated, they attempted to destroy themselves, through suicide. This became the only act they felt they could engage in as an individual, to escape or break free from the destructive cycle their lives were in.

### *Understanding Edgework*

These acts of edgework, the motivation or trigger for which can be understood through this concept of the rationale of irrational behaviour, did bring clearly negative outcomes – such as addiction, assault, imprisonment, homelessness. The participants had no buffer to return from the edges they were negotiating with – to 'hide' the actions they engaged in that appeared deviant and outside of normatively accepted social actions – therefore they also became stigmatised by this, as people who could not manage their own lives; that may pose a threat to others; and that were 'outside' of mainstream society. This was particularly exacerbated by them becoming visibly homeless. The participants increasingly went 'over the edge' (and some had a life imbued with extreme marginalisation and trauma throughout) due to the interaction of their edgework and the lack of resources they had to buffer the effect of this. They had become identified and labelled as a range of deviant characters - 'addicts', 'alcoholics', for example, eventually 'homeless person'. They had to rely on the state to access resources, or face destitution.

So as the participants became homeless, the social, human, and financial capital they had increasingly eroded. The participants faced being dually 'over the edge' for being homeless. They were 'over the edge' in a (often traumatic and difficult) material situation due to their homelessness, but also had the social identity of someone 'over the edge' of normative accepted behaviour and identity, stigmatised by the different discourses of homelessness, of being an individual who cannot 'manage' their own life in the conditions of late modernity. Yet within these conditions it has been argued here that we may all be becoming edgeworkers. Everyone may engage in acts that appear irrational as a means to manage risk. This edgework may not be so extreme as that experienced by the participants, or some people may have more resources to hide the effects of this, but we are all 'deviant' sometimes. However this may be due to



the very acts that we can adopt to try to escape or transcend the hyper-socialization and anomie that can be wrought from life in late modernity.

*Key Outcome of Analysis: Stressed - A New Theory on Homelessness and Causation*

Anyone may experience a traumatic incident, or use drugs or alcohol excessively, for example. However if this occurs whilst they retain an outward appearance of integration to mainstream normative ideas and actions, their lives remain integrated to mainstream society. These actions may be conceptualised as an attempt to transcend or escape, or as the outcome of, life in late modernity – a life increasingly rationalised, bureaucratised, disenchanted, and constrained, where inequality is widening. This constraint and inequality occurs alongside discourses of individualisation that are promoted - the individual, their actions, and achievements being celebrated, promoted, and highlighted as what defines them. But the ability that someone has to negotiate these edges of behaviour will be underpinned by the access to resources – of social, human, and financial capital that they have. Therefore, being able to avoid becoming homeless, both materially (due to the housing situation someone is in) and ontologically (labelled as a homeless person) is tied to the access to resources someone has over their life course rather than the actual actions they engage in. These actions and problems that lead to homelessness are real however, they do occur, and can occur in anyone's life. These problems and traumatic events influence people's lives, and how their actions are perceived, in profound ways. Anyone may become an addict, mentally ill, or suffer emotional trauma. Anyone may become homeless, but the *chance* of this occurring when something goes wrong in their lives (and perhaps the chance of these events occurring) is related to the different levels of resources they have. How they can then constitute themselves and are perceived by other people, will then be affected by this, and they may enter into spirals of increased alienation and isolation. Social policy and the supply of housing is important to address homelessness on a material level, but is not enough alone. Other complex factors – trauma, edgework, emotional contexts – and why these occur or can be managed, has to also be taken into account. Because these factors also underpin who is likely to become homeless and how their homelessness will be conceptualised, and responded to. This is the stressed theory of homelessness and

causation preliminary developed in this thesis through an analysis of the transitions the participants made, and the key mechanisms affecting them.

### *Transitional Phases through Homelessness*

Once the participants entered the 'homeless system', they became primarily defined as a 'homeless person'. They were now accommodated in temporary accommodation for 'the homeless', and often accessing training courses for people who had been homeless. The majority of the social interactions they could engage in were with others in the same situation as them, or professionals whose relationship with the participants was defined by the participants' need to be assisted to resolve their homelessness, or addiction, for example. They then became increasingly alienated and isolated from mainstream society and the resources of social capital their 'normal' social networks could provide, such as accommodation, financial, emotional or social support. This was due to both the subjectively experienced stigma of homelessness, and being accommodated in accommodation for 'homeless people'. In this way (being accommodated in housing for the homeless) they were also physically isolated. This was the process that occurred as the participants became homeless.

At the outset of the research, the majority of the participants were homeless, with some living in their own tenancies, having recently been homeless or at risk of homelessness. All were accessing services of the social welfare system specifically developed to assist homeless people. Over the course of the research about half that were homeless moved into their own tenancies and half remained without. One of the participants became homeless again, losing their tenancy over the course of the research. Three transitional routes were identified and developed to conceptually explore these outcomes: spirals of divestment passages; developing integration; and a flip-flop of integration diverging.

The transitional routes of those that remained homeless throughout the research particularly encapsulated spiral of divestment. Despite some short-term improvements having occurred at some points, such as moving into supported accommodation their situation and the resources they had continued to erode and

deteriorate. Some of these people represented the most marginalised and excluded individuals in late modernity, intensely isolated, stigmatised, and often engaging in real problematic behaviour, unable to interact with others, and barred from accommodation and support services due to this. In this way they were caught on the very edge of society, unable to even access services that may have assisted them – ‘cast’ out, in purgatory.

Despite spirals of divestment having occurred in all the participants’ lives as they became homeless, many did make a transition out of homelessness. The majority were living in their own tenancies at the end of the research. Half moved into their own tenancy over the course of the research (usually moving from temporary accommodation) and ten had been living in their own tenancy for over a year having recently moved into them or avoided homelessness, prior to the first interview. In this way these people had made a transition out of homelessness – it appeared they had developed integrative passages. However analysing their qualitative accounts of these transitions and taking account of other factors that were occurring in their lives simultaneously, showed that these transitions rarely occurred as simple, ongoing integration. They were characterised by a flip-flopping effect, with the participants in a constant struggle between integration and divestment passages, occurring as they attempted to make ongoing transitions over the course of the research. Having their own tenancy clearly indicated that their material situation had improved. However the majority could also cite intense difficulties as they made these transitions – many for example continued to use drugs or alcohol, and this could lead to addiction once more. Others still had physical or mental health problems, and they all still had limited access to resources. They were caught in the space on the edge of society, the space between integration and divestment.

As they made these transitions, and their day-to-day lives changed, they encountered new risks and problems that had to be overcome. Many felt isolated once they obtained their own tenancy, and only knew people negotiating with the same insecurity as them, or they were in relationships that had a history of being abusive. Therefore their situation was still precarious, and rather than taking clearly integrative passages, their lives continued to flip-flop in a constant struggle to maintain the precarious security that they currently had, as someone who had recently



been housed after an episode of, or facing the risk of, homelessness. They remained close to the edge. The fundamental structural context and conditions whereby their risk of homelessness had become a reality had not changed. Their risk of becoming homeless once more had not fundamentally changed either. And from this context they had to overcome the new problems in their lives – such as budgeting, meeting new people, and the isolation of living alone.

### *The Universality of Risk and Transitions*

These sort of ongoing risks are hard to avoid as people continue to make transitions over their life course. We all have to negotiate new outcomes. People may enter into relationships that carry the risk of breaking down; they may use drugs or alcohol; some may have the resources to engage in sky-diving - as a form of escape from the pressures of late modern society, and the process of individualisation embedded within it, as Lyng's theory initially recognised - many will not. As was highlighted in the stressed theory of homelessness and causation developed here, if people have the resources to 'negotiate' these edges, and return from the edge, they remain integrated into society, despite the *same processes* actually being played out. In this way the *difference* between people who go on to become homeless and those who never do, are *both* imagined and real. They are imagined in that people who have experienced 'homelessness' may be subjectively no different. We are all affected by the same processes of life in late modernity and may engage in actions irrational to avoid risk. The differences are real, in that the key cleavage of difference that may currently exist is the access to resources that we have, within the structural context of late modernity. These resources may or may not act as buffer to the risks that the process of increased individualisation has exposed us to. And this is a process that may keep on going in spirals, as inequality increases. Some people's lives may continue to spiral into further divestment passages once an initial divestment had occurred, or they were trapped in this space on the edge, rather than an ongoing integration developing. They may then become actually, materially and emotionally isolated and alienated – may actually become the imagined 'outsiders' they encapsulate. This is due to the material reality they have, and the subjective perceptions of this, that the 'mainstream' they are attempting to integrate to, hold. The motivation for their actions, and the outcomes they wish to achieve, were no different however.

This cleavage of difference that exists may be particularly illustrated in the stratification between those who have to explicitly rely on the state for social and material support, and those who do not. In this way some people appear able to manage the risks they face as liberal individuals, and some do not. Through this process they become targeted populations, when in fact the key difference is not individual actions, but the structurally based 'starting point' they came from and how, due to that starting point, certain identities and outcomes develop. These outcomes and identities underpin how, and with which resources, people can negotiate with risks in late modernity. For some the only way they can negotiate with risk is through accessing services of the welfare state, and becoming 'targeted' in this way. And this very system of governance that comes to target them, is also a product of the increasingly individualised, reflexive society we now operate within.

The social welfare system, and ontological security and identity were important units of analysis for understanding these transitions. These two key units are discussed below.

### **7.3 Social Welfare, Identity and Ontological Security – Individualisation and the Unintended Consequences of the Welfare State**

After the spirals of divestment the participants had experienced as they became homeless they had accessed the services of the social welfare system to assist them regain housing and resolve the other problems they were experiencing. This system is part of what is identified here as a reflexive system of governance, with services that now focus on the individual needs and risks posed by the citizens it governs, and how they can reflexively manage themselves, working in partnership with government agencies. Social problems now become the problems of individuals due to their actions, and groups experiencing these problems have become targeted populations – targeted to assist them manage or resolve these problems, as individuals, through specialist government agencies that have proliferated to address such issues as homelessness, addiction, exclusion, etc. How the participants experienced being targeted and how it affected their transitions, is summarised below.

### *The Role of the Social Welfare System*

When they first became homeless the majority of the participants had been accommodated in large-scale hostels, or other forms of temporary accommodation such as Bed & Breakfasts. This was often a negative experience, leading to further divestment passages, as the material situation they were in (and how they emotionally experienced this) continued to deteriorate. Two key sources of support were identified and analysed here. These were: supported accommodation; and specialist housing, resettlement or tenancy sustainment workers, that support people on a one-to-one individualised basis.

The participants often gained some stability and a reasonable quality of housing by being accommodated in supported accommodation. They were assisted by specialist housing workers to access material resources, and support and advice – such as how to apply for housing; how to get grants for furniture. So in this way the participants were assisted to access some of the economic and material resources they were entitled to through the social welfare system to assist them ‘rebuild’ their lives, to become increasingly integrated once more. However the majority of the participants remained ‘reliant’ on the support and resources they could access through these services of the social welfare system even once they had lived in their own tenancy for long-periods. It is asserted here that this may highlight a critical unintended consequence of this welfare system. Due to their perceived reliance on this system, it has to continue to develop, reflexively, to meet the needs of those who had been rendered reliant on it. Yet this reliance was also due to the structural reality they now operate within and how this is underpinned by the conditions of late modernity. Due to the increased individualisation of society, and social policies intended to promote the needs of individuals, these conditions may be characterised by isolation, a lack of access to family or community support, and for some, a lack of resources. Broadly this may have led to more anomie, isolation, and ‘disenchantment’ being experienced on an emotional level, for those who have to rely on the state, and these spirals of divestment were recreated through their very reliance on the welfare system that had broadly created this dependency.



In the previous section, the process whereby the participants had become stigmatised - 'outside' the normal day-to-day context of social life - as they become homeless, was outlined. As they became targeted by the services of the social welfare system (case managed to assist them resolve the problems they had; access housing; and manage the risks they may have posed) they were constructed as people that had to be targeted in this way – that were unable to manage their own lives as liberal individuals, or as active citizens who could access the resources they require, and act responsibly to avoid risk, such as drug addiction or homelessness. In this way they were constructed by the 'regimes of the social' that make up this welfare system as people requiring the support of these services. As was highlighted in the stressed theory of homelessness and causation, the ability to engage in society, to manage or avoid risks, and to avoid the stigma of being homeless, is tied to the unequal distribution of material resources that exists within the structure of society and the extent to which these resources can act as a 'buffer' against the risks people face, or the need to access resources through the welfare system they have.

Once the participants had come to rely on this system, due to the structural situation they were in, they often had to continue to rely on it. They had no other source of social support or resources with which to continue integrating. They accessed training courses, drop-in's, continued to have contact with their individual support workers (often in the face of having few other sources of positive social support) and were involved as volunteers, or in forums, consulted on as 'ex-homeless people', on how services for people who are homeless should operate and develop. In this way they did continue to have support and access to resources that assisted them to maintain some stability in their lives, and avoid becoming homeless once more but only through their contact with mechanisms of the state. However it also meant that these reflexive welfare services had to continue developing to meet the ongoing 'need' identified for them through this. As the participants continued to cite this support as something they required, or something they could not access through other sources, such as their social networks, or due to the economic or human capital they had it appeared that more of these services had to be developed. In this way, within this reflexive system of governance, those who are targeted by the regimes of the social are also implicit in the construction of these services. They remained trapped within it, constructed as people who require to be targeted, who then in a reflexive

process construct the services and perceived need for them, in an ongoing hermeneutic cycle. Their fundamental structural situation had not changed, and it was this that had led to their homelessness in the first place. Their reliance on welfare services caught them, close to the edge, but as their situation and actions become increasingly individualised in late modernity, the structural complexity that actually generated this situation became obscured.

Even for those participants who appeared to reject the influence of this targeting – that continued to use alcohol or drugs for example - also only continued recreating the need for these services to continue targeting them, due to their very rejection of it. These actions continued to show they were people who could not manage their own lives – indeed increasingly punitive illiberal policies of social control may have been adopted then, to manage the risk they posed to themselves and to others. These measures included testing them for drug use, prisons, anti-social legislation, and their forced rehabilitation.

The services of the social welfare system did work on some levels to assist the participants' resolve their homelessness. Recent policy changes that have led to the development of services and accommodation for people who are homeless, based on consultation with them and the expert review of a Task Force, may have triggered the conditions that generated these positive outcomes. These objective aspects to making a transition out of homelessness, underpinned by social policy, such as housing supply, the condition of housing, welfare entitlement, support services, and advice and information being available, remain important mechanisms to assist solve the problem of homelessness. However it is also important to highlight that the participants often remained targeted even once their homelessness had been resolved, due to other interacting factors that remained in their lives, such as mental illness and addiction and that making a transition out of homelessness is about more than objective material outcomes, and more than being provided with housing. It is about integration, social cohesion, and involves intense ontological processes. This was the case with many of the participants here, who represent people whose lives have gone 'over the edge' of society at some point on both material and emotional levels. These subjective aspects need to be acknowledged and understood, to understand the intense difficulty of making a transition out of homelessness some of the participants

found, and to begin to understand why homelessness endures in some people's lives, despite policy changes that appear to trigger mechanisms that resolve it. These subjective aspects of making a transition out of homelessness have begun to be explored in this thesis. The findings of this are summarised below.

### *Identity and Ontological Security*

The internal, psychological, emotionally experienced processes that some of the participants went through as they attempted to negotiate a route out of homelessness could act as a barrier to making this transition. The very experience of being targeted, the pressure of having to 'move on', address their past and take 'control' of their future, as liberal *individuals*, could be the trigger for some of the participant's ongoing divestment passages, and problems in their life. The example of Eddie can be used once more to illustrate this – *'the drugs are like a shield, I was getting there...I was progressing, maybe that frightened me'*. By becoming homeless, they had experienced an intensely difficult material reality, and also had the stigma of the social identity of a homeless person, of someone reliant on the state, lacking a role, a 'failed self' in late modernity, attached to them. They then had the problem of reconciling this with their sense of personal identity, and the roles they could play in the day-to-day interactions they engaged in as a 'homeless person'. They had been 'cast out', over the edge of society both objectively and subjectively, and this had become their life, their position within the social structure. They were not entirely 'outside' however, as the ongoing targeting of services of the state continued to 'feed them back' into this system – in this way they were circularly trapped in this situation.

For some, their homelessness, reliance on the state, the material reality of being accommodated within institutions through out their life, had become 'normal life' for them, perhaps through a process of resocialisation. However the material reality that created the need for this resocialisation was generated by their by access to resources of social, human, economic, and physical capital, access stratified unequally through the institutions and structural processes that underpin life in late modernity. It is asserted here that the process of individualisation may have increasingly obscured this, and as the participants became homeless they became manifestations of people



who have failed in their individualised 'project of the self' - unable to consume and to engage in social activities, due to their lack of financial resources. In a reflexive process they acutely felt that for being a homeless person they could be viewed as a 'bad' individual and felt the alienation that came with this, and stigma of their situation. By being 'over the edge' they were increasingly cut off from sources of integration, and may have isolated themselves, becoming 'outsiders' and increasingly unable to escape this, to develop a new identity, to integrate further. This situation may also have provided them with the internal process of ontological security – homelessness became their day-to-day life; being homeless their narratable identity.

So for some of the participants homelessness was the 'reality' they knew. Some had been in care as children and then had spent their entire lives moving between supported accommodation, hostels, prisons, staying with friends, sleeping rough, occasionally having a tenancy of their own, and moving on again. Their lives were immersed in 'being homeless' and by being targeted by the state – this was their identity; their 'reality'; and their 'normal' life. The interactions they engaged in within this setting constituted their social networks and social reality, and to change this, could involve intense ontological crisis. This involved a rejection of the individual they were, and the reality and people they knew, if they were to develop a 'new self' beyond being homeless. This could be intensely difficult, especially as their fundamental structural situation did not change when they moved into a tenancy. They still lacked resources, experienced extreme forms of edgework, and had much trauma and isolation to reconcile with in their lives.

What is important to highlight however is that they did continue to strive to make these transitions, despite this intense difficulty. The assertion in this thesis is that acts of agency (attempts to assert their sense of individuality) occurring within the structural context that people have to rely on the state to access resources, may operate to trap them in this situation. In this way some of the participants were trapped in a cycle of homelessness and marginality. They were still driven to assert their 'selves' but the same mechanisms that triggered their homelessness went on existing, creating the material conditions whereby they could not 'move far from the edge'. They remained here in this space on the edge, (in their own housing; in supported accommodation), perhaps rendered 'safe' through the targeting of the state,

safe, for so long as they adhered to behaving in ways that continued to indicate their 'responsibility'. However, asserting their individuality through their edgework may have been seen as manifestations of their disorder if they did engage in such acts. As is argued in this thesis, edgework is a form of resistance or escape from the structural conditions of life in late modernity, or may be generated by the pressure of these very conditions – conditions where the individual is felt to be 'responsible' for negotiating the risks they face. However it is through these same conditions that access to resources are stratified and this access to resources underpin the ability to manage risk that people have. In this way many of the participants were becoming trapped – trapped by the tension that existed in this duality of structuration – the actions they could adopt to escape their situation were the same forces that created, and exacerbated this situation, and the perceived ongoing need for them to be regulated and governed, by the structures they were attempting to escape. Added to this they faced the subjective ontological crisis of reconciling the trauma and marginality they had experienced, with their sense of self in the future, if they were to keep 'moving on' in their life course. And this emotional process was coupled with the structurally bound lack of access to resources of human, social, economic, or material capital they had.

### *Understanding Transitions through Homelessness in a Risk Society*

The welfare state as a universal provision for all may be receding, but there is also a proliferation of services for people experiencing individual social problems. Therefore, it is asserted here, society may be becoming increasingly stratified, culturally and materially, along lines of those who are, and those who are not, perceived to be able to 'manage' their lives and resources without explicit state intervention. This intervention is encapsulated in reliance on benefits, and the social support of specialist professionals, such as resettlement, addiction or social workers, that act together to case manage these individuals' lives. It has also been argued in this thesis, that the ability people have to avoid this labelling - of the social identity of a 'homeless person', or a 'junky', for example - is stratified along lines of those who have to rely on the state to obtain housing through the homeless legislation, or support for their problems through services of the state, and those who do not. This is despite the actions they have engaged in, or the motivation they have for doing so,

actually being *the same* as those who do not have to. Some people do not have to rely on the state, or will not face such extreme risks, due to the buffer they are provided with through the access to different forms and levels of capital they have.

There may be more fluidity, more choice, in this than in previous eras, and this may bring increased risk for all. People may fall '*further and faster*' (Marsh & Kennett, 1999) when things 'go wrong' in their life course, however the chance they have to negotiate with these risks will still be stratified unequally. And they are stratified through the structural institutions used to manage resources and govern the society we operate within. A key institution through which this is done is the social welfare system. However it has been asserted here that within the reflexive system that now underpins this system, this stratification (between those who rely on the state and those who do not, to access resources) may be both reproduced and increasingly obscured by the process of individualisation. How an individual's life course develops may be increasingly viewed as due to their actions, obscuring the fact that the *outcome* of these actions is still inherently tied to the structural context they operate within. Those who cannot negotiate the risks they now face, can be blamed for their situation, and then are subject to increasing control through the operation of this system. The only escape or resistance from the poverty, from the day-to-day struggle and trauma they face, is through edgework deemed illegitimate. These acts may therefore be the very mechanisms that recreate stigmatising discourses about these acts, that exacerbates their alienation and marginality. These acts are damaging, and are real, they do occur, but by not addressing or acknowledging the broad structural underpinnings that motivate and trigger them, they will continue to do so.

A concluding quote sums up this interrelation of agency and structure, and of how in this way, irrational actions - the participants edgework - may be understood as a rational response to the situation they were in. The more they attempted to struggle, to escape this structural context as individuals, the more 'stress' they had to live with, and this context was recreated all the worse:

*'The root problem [in society] could be having the class system, the rich and the poor, I think the root problem is, if you're poor, your life is a struggle, you know, if you are poor, people are not caring about what you say, people have less*



*opportunities, and the more you struggle, the more stress you have to live with,'*  
(William, 29)

As William notes, the root problem remained embedded in structural factors, and in how these structural factors affect the lived individual reality of people.

### *The Space Between Them and Us in Late Modernity*

The participants here had all come to a point in their life where they were poor, and where the struggles and risks they faced, had led to their homelessness. They then became targeted, to become responsible citizens, responsible consumers, and producers, once more, or at least to manage the risk they may pose to others. However this targeting then explicitly set them aside as 'other' to those who do not need to rely on, or be targeted by the state, despite them actually having been the same. It is argued here that this is an increasingly key cleavage of stratification in late modern society – the imagined and real 'otherness' of the unruly classes, relying on the state, and both feared and envied by those who adhere to the constraints of 'being responsible' (Young, 2006). Due to this fear and envy, the poor who engage in edgework to assert their individuality have to be rendered orderable, back under control, once more. So visible social problems such as homelessness have to be tackled, but once these groups have been rendered 'ordered', they are in left limbo, the purgatory of the 'nothingness' of their marginal situation.

To move on and to integrate may have been done only at the risk of losing it all again. This risk was particularly due to them being close to the edge and lacking resources that could act as a buffer if something went wrong in their lives or they engaged in edgework. The participants were rendered 'safe', if they adhered to the conditions of the liberal welfare state – safe to themselves, as they gained housing, and safe to others, as to maintain this housing they had to act responsibly. However they were also marginalised and trapped due to this reliance. In exchange for this security from the state they had to surrender actions they engaged in to assert their individuality. These may be actions (alcohol or drug use for example) other people with enough resources can engage in safely. If the participants did engage in edgework they risked losing this security they gained through the state - for if they

appeared to be acting in unruly, irresponsible ways they would be targeted and drawn back into the institutions of this system once more. They may lose the tenancies or support they had been provided with in this way, and have to enter rehabs, hostels, or hospital, for example. The structural conditions that actually underpinned these actions remained the same however. Individuals only have the opportunity to develop their own 'biographies' – to be the 'authors' of their lives - within the conditions of late modernity, when they have enough resources not to have to explicitly rely on the state.

To assert individuality, celebrated among those with resources to do so, becomes distorted in the lives of those who lack these resources and rely on the welfare system. They become viewed as threatening, unruly, and a drain on resources. Indeed it may be that they become so, as their lives take increasing spirals of divestment, and they become increasingly de-socialised and de-humanised by this process of institutionalisation.

Is it not just fear, but also possibly envy of the escape and freedom from the ongoing rationalisation of modern life these stigmatised groups represent, that generates this stigma in the risk society? To remain integrated is to continue constantly negotiating new options and risks - the need to constantly gain employment, maintain security as individuals, for example. Young (2006) argues that 'outsiders', the underclass, are also a source of resentment for 'respectable' responsible citizens, whose individuality and actions are constantly curtailed by their avoidance and management of risk in the conditions of late modernity:

*'[T]he bank manager could not countenance being a street beggar (...) for both real and imagined reasons, the lives of such disgraced 'Others' are impoverished and immiserised. (...) But their very existence, their moral intransigence, somehow hits all the weak spots of our character armour. Let us think for one day of the hypothetical 'included' citizen on the advantage side of the binary: the traffic jam on the way to work, the hours which have been slowly added to the working day, the crippling cost of housing and the mortgage which will never end, the need for both incomes to make up a family wage (...) the temptations and fears of the abuse of*

*alcohol as a means of enjoyment, in the time slots between the rigours of work... [The underclass] set of every trigger point of fear and desire.'* (2006:25).

This stigma, this fear of the unruly other (or perhaps resentment and pity towards them) then generates the need to contain and control them also, through the mechanisms of the state. However it may be these mechanisms of a welfare state also created the structural context that generated this situation. If this is the case how can and should systems of governance develop to move societies and individuals on from this? Are we all becoming increasingly trapped individuals within the reflexive individualised conditions of late modernity, trapped by our need to constantly negotiate new outcomes and transitions as individuals? These are central questions to end this thesis on. However a further, more positive interpretation of these findings, can also be offered

#### **7.4 The Power of the Individual in Society – Agency, Structure and Risk in Late Modernity**

In relative terms, we may be getting richer, and living potentially more enriched lives, through the opportunities, technologies, and social change that has been brought about through the process of modernity. And we *all* face potential risks and trauma over our life course. However the outcome of our negotiations with these risks, and the extent to which we may enjoy the benefits of modernity, is still affected by the resources we have. And these resources are distributed through the structural institutions and ideologies of our society.

A key institution through which such resources are distributed is the social welfare system. It has been shown here that in relation to homelessness the social welfare system can operate effectively to assist people resolve material problems in their lives. However that these problems occurred in the first place, and that people have a stigmatising social identity attached to them due to these problems, remains tied to structures and ideologies of society and also has a profound emotional impact. In this way a vicious circle of structuration exists - that the outcome of the participants' *actions*, within this context, recreated the very structural reality that generated these problems – problems such as social isolation, trauma, poverty, leading to



homelessness or addiction. For some people, through this process, life in late modernity may be a life becoming increasingly trapped. The transitions they make, the actions they engage in, only lead back to this situation once more, due to their ongoing attempts to both face up to, and manage, the risks they face. This is in the face of negotiating what is perceived to be increasingly individualised life courses, but an 'individuality' still bounded by their place in the structured reality they exist within.

*'The poor will always be with us'* (Bauman, 1998: 1), as will the question of *'how the poor are made to be poor and come to be seen as poor, and how much the way they are made and seen depends on the way we all live our daily lives and praise or deprecate the fashion in which we and others live them'*. The poor then will always be with us - must always be with us - the by-product of the struggle between different groups over finite resources within the structural 'reality' created by the conditions of global capitalism. There are always winners and losers, in this ongoing struggle for resources, with the poor encapsulating those who have lost. Yet it is also this struggle that continues to create, transform, and generate the structural and material reality, and emotional landscape, that we operate within.

And herein lies another more positive interpretation of the findings developed in this thesis. *Despite* the poverty, trauma, stigma, and intense difficulty many of the participants had experienced, they all continued to strive to assert themselves, to survive, to find some meaning, pleasure and escape in their lives. They all continued to resist becoming trapped – despite the hardship they experienced. As the opening quote of this thesis conveyed, we all continue to negotiate outcomes as individuals – 'the dance on the periphery' may not be leading anywhere, but what it does celebrate is a 'refusal to sleep, a resistance to arrest'. The participants all refused to sleep. And in this refusal, in the continued assertion of agency and of individuality, lies power. This is the power of every individual in society. We all must continue to negotiate new outcomes as individuals within the conditions of late modernity. For those on the periphery, for many of us, this dance may not be leading anywhere, but it does illustrate power, and an ongoing mode of motion. And it is this motion that continues to generate ongoing transitions, actions, knowledge, and society. People continue to try to escape, resist, or transcend the structural reality they are in, and in doing so

sometimes may transform structures, may become more trapped within them, but always are celebrating the power that exists, of the individual, within society – and are illustrating the role we all play in constituting and recreating this society.

So despite the pessimistic view of trapped individuals and flip-flopping transitions presented here, it is also important to highlight that each of these individuals were survivors. And in their ability to survive and to go on, lay their power. Through this, transformation and change can be galvanised on both individual and structural levels - leading to a different material reality and a different social context coming into being. We may be the products of our society, but we also produce it. Our material reality, the structures we operate within, exist independently of any one individual. However it is through the power inherent in each individual, to survive, to act, to gain some meaning, and to go on, that this reality is collectively generated. The future is in all our hands - we all have some power.

One final similarity that all the participants shared can be identified here then, and this was their refusal to sleep, each one a survivor, continuing to strive to engage with others, and with society, however difficult this may have been. Some were coming back over the edge, were beginning to integrate once more and their lives and well-being had tangibly improved. The stigma and alienation that accompanies the problems they had faced must continue to be acknowledged, critically assessed, and challenged. Because stigma and discrimination are mechanisms that act to prevent integration and generate isolation. Furthermore, how and why individual problems (such as addiction, isolation, violence, mental illness) that can cause such damage and suffering, occur and *can be alleviated* must also continue to be explored, in radical new ways.

This is the role of research such as this - to continue assessing how these social processes are played out; how key mechanisms within them operate; and how within the double hermeneutic that exists, new policies and interventions can be developed. These interventions should intend to alleviate the human suffering that continues to be generated within the conditions of late modernity, by addressing both structural and individual factors. Whatever risks society may face, however uncertain about our future we may be, one thing we can be sure of – for now, life goes on, societies

continue to be recreated and transformed, transitions are being made, people suffer - and so too must our efforts to control and understand this, to bridge all these spaces in between.



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**APPENDIX ONE**

**Interview Schedules One, Two and Three**

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

**Explain interview process, research purpose, and provide information leaflet.**

Consent form and contact details completed.

Ask how they are, and begin interview. (Recording on).

## **LIFE HISTORY**

1. Would you mind if we start right at the beginning and briefly go through all the places you have stayed since childhood, how they were, what you were doing with your life then, and who you were with?

2. Where did you live during your childhood and how was it?

3. How did you get on at school? When did you leave?

4. How was your relationship with your family? Were you ever in care?

5. When did you leave home for good?

6. So where did you live when you left home/care? And how was that?

7. What income did you have? Were you working?

8. And where did you live after that?

9. Ongoing questions about each subsequent move they have made; employment; lifestyle; relationships; any problems that occurred at this time in their life.

10. Continue questioning until reaching move to current accommodation.

**11. So when would you say you first started having housing problems?**

12. Why? What happened? When would you say you were **first homeless**, if you feel you have been? How did it feel?

13. Have you applied to a local council as homeless? And what happened?

14. **CONFIRM:** Have you slept rough/ in hostels/ been in prison/ in hospital for a long period/ stayed with friends/partners/ had a council tenancy/ private tenancy/ own home/ supported accommodation? How has that been?

15. And over these periods what had your income been from?

16. And did people you were spending time with affect your life a lot?



17. How have you found obtaining housing in general over your life?

**18. What services have you ever used to help you with your housing?** List each one, prompt from information already given. Ask to describe each one and how they made contact with them.

19. What other services have you accessed? (Use prompts from previous problems – any counselling; any services in prison; addiction workers; health services etc.)

20. Where were you living when they accessed them?

21. And have these services helped you? How have you found accessing them?

**22. So when would you say were you most settled in your life?**

23. What has been ‘home’ for you ever?

### **INTERVIEW ONE: CURRENT SITUATION**

1. So can I just go over all the details of how things are now? You live in \_\_\_\_\_ and you moved here from \_\_\_\_\_? Is that right?

2. How is it where you currently live?

3. What income do you have just now? (Benefits and any employment here, also any unofficial ‘work’ or sources of income)

4. What services are you using just now? And how are they?

5. Is there any training or education you are accessing? Any volunteering?

6. What is the most important thing in your life just now?

7. And what kind of issues or problems do you think are having an effect on your life just now?

9. How would you describe how you feel about how things are in your life just now?

### **RELATIONSHIPS**

Use previous information gathered as prompts or to confirm:

10. Do you have any children? If yes - How is that? Do they see them? Get on well?

11. Do you see your parents? – How do you get on with them? Have they helped you?

12. Do you see siblings/other relatives? Do you see them? How are they?

13. Partner? – If yes – how do you get on? How is that? Housing situation – any problems?
14. Ascertain any previous violence or problems in this or other relationships if possible.
15. Workers from services they access –What role do they play in your life? What different workers do you have? How do you get on with them?
16. Are they more than just a ‘worker’ to you?
17. Do you find your workers help in making or attending appointments? Does it help more if they do it for you do you think? Or are you ok?
18. Friends – Do you have good friends? Do you see them much? Is it sometimes difficult when you’re homeless?
19. Has it been easier to have contact with people experiencing the same things as you, such as homelessness, or not?
20. How important have the people in your life been in helping you with your housing problems?
21. Do you feel comfortable/confident with new people/ able to talk to them?
22. Would you like to see people you don’t see now? Would it make a big difference to your life? Why? Is it difficult for you to get on with people do you find? Why is that?
23. Do you think there is any way services could help you with the relationships you have?

## **OCCUPATION OF TIME**

24. So what is a typical day like for you? How do you spend your time?  
Is this meaningful and important to you? How do you feel about this just now?
25. Any training/education/ volunteering/ services they access/ participation in residential housing – house meetings etc.
26. Would they like to do any of these things if they don’t? Why can’t they?
27. Do you spend time with your friends/family/children a lot? What do you do with them?

## **Current income**

28. Are you in employment just now?
29. So what is your main source of income just now?

30. How much time is spent gaining your income/benefits? Are they all alright?
31. What do you buy with that money? Is income a problem? Enough for what you need?
32. What else would you like to be able to get?
33. Would you like to work? In the past if you did how was that? Do you think in the future you'd like to work? What would you like to do?
34. How important is working or getting training to you? And would it make a big difference to your life if you could? In what way?
35. Do you think working matters to other people a lot?

## **HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

36. Do you have any health problems? (including mental health) What are they? How do you feel your health is?
37. Are you able to access the health care you need?
38. Which ones? (If appropriate: Do you have any health issues arising from drug or alcohol use?)
39. What about your diet – are you able to get decent food? Do you have any worries about your diet?
40. What about washing facilities, or the cost of getting cleaning and personal hygiene issues - are you able to look after yourself as much as you'd like?
41. Does it matter a lot to you, your personal appearance?
42. How are you feeling in general just now? Do you feel ok just now? Or do you have any issues that are making you unhappy?
43. (Discuss any issues with depression, general well-being, self-harming etc, that may arise).
44. And what sort of services could help you with this? Do you get enough help?

## **CONTROL OVER LIFE**

45. Do you feel you have much control over your life just now?
46. Do the services you access help you feel you have more control or not?
47. Do you feel you could say no to housing that was unsuitable, or ask for what you really want?



48. Do you feel comfortable arranging or attending meetings? Is that all ok, or sometimes quite difficult?
49. If you can't attend a meeting are you able to call and cancel it?
50. Are you comfortable finding out about, or using new services? And if not, what might help you feel more comfortable?
51. And what about the (agency recruited through) helped you get control over your situation?
52. Could we go over the service you are accessing in some detail?
53. Which services have you used?
54. And how are they? Have they worked for you? Do you feel you have made progress? Why? How?
55. And has it been clear what they provide for you? How have you found accessing their services? Do they work together?
56. Do you feel you identify as a 'service user' who should be able to shape the organisation? Does it make you feel more comfortable to use certain agencies? If so which one and why?
57. Would you like to access other services? If so which? Why are you not? Do you think you'll be able to?
58. Out of any service, and any organisation you've ever had contact with, which ones have you felt were most useful, and have you been most impressed with? Why?
59. What do you think would work for you, if any sort of service at all could be set up?

## **FUTURE AND REFLECTIONS**

60. What would your ideal situation be in the future?
62. Confirm: In housing/ family relationships/ training or employment/ support/ health/ occupation of time/ income.
63. And over the next few months what would you like to happen? Do you have any clear plans?
64. And do you think the service you are using will be able to help with that?
65. What else could help?
66. If you could sum up your experiences of homelessness how would you describe it?

67. What would you say to other people who may get in the same situation?
68. And how do you feel about the services and provisions that there is? Do they work?
69. Is there anything else you would like to add or talk about?

**End of Interview - switch off tape.**

Discuss meeting again in six months. Have another break and a general chat.

Ensure they are able to get back home/have transport to next place they need to be.

Ensure all documents are completed and filed. Label tape and seal in envelope.

Write up interview notes when possible.

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE – IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW 2**

Much of this will depend on the data from the first interview, although certain key questions will be asked to each respondent. Review previous interview prior to this.

Consent form and contact details completed. Explain interview.

Ask how they are, and begin interview. Start tape.

### **LAST SIX MONTHS**

1. You were living in \_\_\_\_\_ when I last spoke to you, what has happened over the last six months? Are you still there?
2. Where have you lived?
3. (Why have you moved? Have they had to reapply as homeless? If so, how has that been?                      What                      was                      the                      outcome?)
4. WHAT SERVICES have you been accessing?
5. Have you had any problems with income? How has that been?
6. Have you been working/volunteering?
7. Have you been seeing your (family/friends/children) much?
8. How is it where you currently are?
9. Do you feel SETTLED? (more or less than previous answer?)
10. What is the MOST IMPORTANT thing in your life just now?

### **RELATIONSHIPS**

11. Briefly go over each relationship mentioned in interview one.  
Family/ children/ friends/ anyone significant they mentioned.
12. How do you feel with NEW PEOPLE?
13. Have you been spending time with any new people? How have you met them?  
How has that been?
14. Have you had any new workers over the last six months?



15. How are you getting on with them? Do they MAKE APPOINTMENTS etc. for you?

## **OCCUPATION OF TIME**

16. So what is a TYPICAL DAY like for you? How do you spend your time just now?

17. Have you been doing anything you particularly enjoyed over the last six months? Do you feel your time has been well spent? (Explore any negatives)

18. Have you been doing/interested in any training, volunteering or employment? How has that been?

19. (Explore 'WORK' plans depending on last interview). Are they working? Would they like to be?

## **HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

20. How has your HEALTH been over the last six months?

21. (Discuss any health issues they have from the previous interview – are they worse, better, the same? Include physical and mental health.

22. Are you on any medication just now?

22. Has accessing health care been ok?

24. How are you FEELING IN GENERAL about things just now? (Explore well-being)

## **CONTROL OVER LIFE**

25. Do you feel you have MUCH CONTROL over your life just now?

26. More control than six months ago? Less control than six months ago? Why?

27. Do you feel in control of your housing – would you turn down UNSUITABLE ACCOMMODATION?

28. How are you finding MAKING AND ATTENDING APPOINTMENTS?

29. Is there anything particularly worrying to you just now? If so, what? Why?

## **SERVICES AND SUPPORT**

30. (If they no longer are in contact with services from previous interview discuss: Why that is?

How they feel about that?

Their reflections on the services they used?

Whether they would refer back to them if they needed to?

31. Which services are you using then?

32. How have they been? (Go through EACH ONE – expectations, access, outcomes)

33. What do you think has been particularly GOOD about the service you have received?

34. What has been BAD/ could be improved?

35. Do you think there is anything MISSING, they could have been offered and would have helped you more?

36. Do the services work well together or do you think they are separate?

37. What sort of accommodation should be used when people become homeless?

38. What sort of thing would you say would prevent homelessness happening?

39. Do you feel that homeless services are changing at the moment? Have you been told anything about any changes?

40. Have you noticed any changes in how the services operate recently, from your perspective?

## **FUTURE AND REFLECTIONS**

41. What would you like to happen in the future? Your IDEAL?

42. What would you like to happen in the next FEW MONTHS?

43. What do you think this will happen? If not, what do you see happening?

44. Looking back over the last SIX MONTHS, how do you feel about it?

45. Have you made 'progress' do you feel? In what way?

46. Has anything happened that you wish hadn't? Did that affect your situation?

47. Do you think the support you have had has been good, or not?

48. What/who has been the most useful support you have had over the last six months?

**End of interview. Switch of tape.**

Have a general chat. Discuss meeting in six month. File all records as previous.



## **INTERVIEW GUIDE – IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW 3**

Much of this will depend on the data from previous two interviews, although key questions must be covered. Revisit previous transcripts prior to the interview. Note any clarification required.

Consent form and contact details completed. Explain interview.

Ask how they are, and begin interview. Switch on tape.

### **LAST SIX MONTHS**

1. You were living in \_\_\_\_\_ when I last spoke to you, what has happened over the last six months? Are you still there?
2. Where have you lived? How has it been? (Go through detail of any changes)
3. WHAT SERVICES have you been accessing?
4. Have you had any problems with income? How has that been?
5. Have you been working/volunteering?
6. Have you been seeing your (family/friends/children) much?
7. Do you feel SETTLED? (more or less than before?)
8. What is the MOST IMPORTANT thing in your life just now?

### **RELATIONSHIPS**

9. Briefly go over each relationship mentioned in interview two.

Family/ children/ friends/ anyone significant they mentioned.

11. How do you feel with NEW PEOPLE?

12. Have you been spending time with any new people? How have you met them?  
How has that been?

13. Have you had any new workers over the last six months?

14. How are you getting on with them? Do they MAKE APPOINTMENTS etc. for you?

## **OCCUPATION OF TIME**

15. So what is a TYPICAL DAY like for you? How do you spend your time just now?

16. Have you been doing anything you particularly enjoyed over the last six months?

17. Have you been doing anything you particularly enjoyed over the last six months?

Do you feel your time has been well spent? (Explore any negatives)

18. Have you been doing/interested in any training, volunteering or employment?

How has that been?

19. (Explore 'WORK' plans depending on last interview). Are they working? Would they like to be? How has this changed from first interview? What would they like to do?

## **HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

20 How has your HEALTH been over the last six months?

(Discuss any health issues brought up in previous interviews)

21. Would you say your health is better or worse than when we first met?

22. What medication are you on?

23. How is accessing health care just now?

24. How are you FEELING IN GENERAL about things just now?

## **CONTROL OVER LIFE**

25. Do you feel you have MUCH CONTROL over your life just now?

26. More control than six months ago? Less control than six months ago? Why?

27. Do you feel in control of your housing – would you turn down UNSUITABLE ACCOMMODATION?

28. How are you finding MAKING AND ATTENDING APPOINTMENTS?

## **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

29. What did/does being HOMELESS mean to you?

30. Looking back over your EXPERIENCES WHY do you think you became homeless?
31. Looking back over your experience of ACCESSING SUPPORT to help you, how would you describe what they have done for you? Or helped you to achieve?
32. Do you FEEL homeless now? Why?
33. Explore different phases or changes they have gone through over the year, and how they feel about what has happened.
34. What does COMMUNITY mean to you?
35. Do you FEEL part of this, of a community? Why?
36. What sort of thing would you say would prevent homelessness happening?
37. Do you feel that homeless services are changing at the moment? Have you been told anything about any changes?
38. What sort of SERVICES would you LIKE to have been able to access?
39. What has been the best help for you? (Yourself, services, family?)

## **SERVICES AND SUPPORT**

40. Explore GENERAL PERCEPTIONS of welfare services.
41. Go over EACH PROJECT they have accessed at any time, explore their perceptions of them.
42. What do you think has been particularly GOOD about the service you have received?
43. What has been BAD/ could be improved?
44. Do you think there is anything MISSING, they could have been offered and would have helped you more?

## **FUTURE AND REFLECTIONS**

45. What would you like to happen in the future? Your IDEAL?
46. What would you like to happen in the next FEW MONTHS?
47. Looking back over the last SIX MONTHS, how do you feel about it?
48. What do you think this will happen in the future?
45. Have has your life changed since I met you?



46. Has anything happened that you wish hadn't?
47. Do you think the support you have had has been good, or not?
48. What/who has been the most useful support you have had over the last six months?
49. Is there anything else you would like weasel to say?
50. How would you describe being homeless?
51. What would you say to other people who might be at risk of becoming homeless like you did?

**End of Interview. Switch off tape.**

Have a general chat. Explain once more that this was the last interview. Confirm what will happen with the information they have given you, how it will be stored and used. Explain that everything will be anonymised and their contact detail destroyed. No names will be used in the research.

Have another general chat about their future plans to de-brief.

File all documents. Place tape in sealed envelope.

## APPENDIX TWO

**Characteristics of Research Sample at First Interview (N:28)**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Current accommodation situation</b>	<b>Previously Slept rough</b>	<b>Experienced repeated homelessness</b>
Average 38.6 Range 25 - 60	13 female 15 male	Own tenancy 11 Supported accom. 15 Other homeless 2	17	18

**Detailed Characteristics of Research Sample at First Interview**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Current housing situation</b>	<b>Slept rough previously</b>	<b>Repeatedly experienced homelessness</b>
Ann	26	Female	Supported accommodation	No	Yes
Bess	25	Female	Supported accommodation	No	No
Claire	26	Female	Supported accommodation	Yes	Yes
Dee	26	Female	Supported accommodation	No	No
Elizabeth	41	Female	Supported accommodation	Yes	No
Francesca	28	Female	Supported accommodation	Yes	Yes
Gary	52	Male	Bed & Breakfast	Yes	Yes
Henry	48	Male	Supported accommodation	No	No
Ian	33	Male	Supported	No	No



			accommodation		
Jane	29	Female	Tenancy (never homeless)	No	No
Keith	34	Male	Tenancy	Yes	Yes
Lorna	42	Female	Prison	Yes	Yes
Margaret	43	Female	Tenancy	Yes	Yes
Ollie	60	Male	Supported accommodation	No	Yes
Pat	47	Female	Tenancy	Yes	Yes
Quinn	52	Male	Tenancy	No	No
Rachel	46	Female	Tenancy	No	Yes
Steven	51	Male	Supported accommodation	Yes	Yes
Tommy	33	Male	Tenancy	Yes	No
Allan	58	Male	Tenancy (never homeless)	No	No
Val	59	Female	Tenancy	No	No
William	29	Male	Supported accommodation	Yes	Yes
Brian	35	Male	Supported accommodation	Yes	Yes
Connor	47	Male	Supported accommodation.	Yes	Yes
David	38	Male	Tenancy	Yes	Yes
Eddie	42	Male	Supported accommodation.	Yes	Yes
Frank	39	Male	Supported accommodation.	No	Yes
Helen	35	Female	Tenancy	Yes	Yes