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"Staying Alive" While "Living the Life":
Conceptualizations of Risk Among Homeless Youth

by

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Abstract

The goal of this dissertation is to understand conceptualizations of risk among homeless youth. In particular, it strived to examine an identified "at-risk" group's understanding of risk. Risk in this study encompassed all notions of risk, and was not limited to a narrow definition of perceived harm, but also embraced references of opportunities or chances taken. In this light, this study employed an ethnographic approach to better understand the worlds of homeless youth, relying on participant observation and informal interviewing methods. This ontological approach hoped to capture how youth conceptualize their personal power in estimating, managing, and avoiding or embracing risk. Coupling social constructionism with symbolic interactionism, this study explored participant's understandings of risk in the contexts in which they found and understood themselves. Participant's evolving identities greatly impacted their perceptions of risk and subsequently, their management strategies. Utilizing a longitudinal perspective (one to two years) and building relationships with participants allowed for an unfolding of their unique frames of reference and their local knowledges.

One of the goals of this study was to disembody grand socio-cultural theories of risk, such as: the risk society, cultural/symbolic, and governmentality approaches, to uncover their cogency for an identified "at-risk" group. Exploring the phenomenological meanings of participant's individual experiences of risk in an identified risk-laden group revealed the heterogeneity of their experiences and understandings. Indeed, this dissertation argues that a sociology of risk has largely subsumed a sociology of victimization and deviance in regards to homeless youth. A sociology of risk has supplanted these earlier underpinnings and rests on this binary of victimization and deviancy to push for intervention and regulation (i.e. normalization) and endorses a "safety at all cost" approach, ignoring the wide array of youth's experiences. However, the insidious risk discourses that are so pervasive in the literature on homeless youth are not deconstructed for the meanings that are imbued, and are presented in a de-contextualized, rational, apolitical fashion; presented in a manner that seems indisputable, as they are nestled in expert logic. This study attempted to re-contextualize conceptualizations of risk by deconstructing such meanings and giving voice to the complexity of youth's experiences that are too frequently portrayed as homogenously victimizing or deviant.

Keywords: homeless youth, street youth, risk, at-risk, victimization, deviance, identity.

Résumé

Le but de cette thèse est de comprendre les représentations du risque chez les jeunes de la rue. Plus précisément, elle s'intéresse à appréhender les constructions du risque que font les jeunes de la rue eux-mêmes, d'autant plus que ces jeunes sont définis comme un groupe à risque. Si le risque est plus souvent défini de manière stricte comme le mal éventuel, dans cette étude, il est défini plus largement intégrant l'idée des opportunités et prises de risque. Ancrée dans une perspective double du constructionnisme social et de l'interactionnisme symbolique, cette recherche a exploré les savoirs des jeunes sur les risques qu'ils vivaient dans les contextes observés et la manière dont ils les appréhendaient.

Pour y parvenir, cette recherche s'inscrit dans une approche ethnographique pour mieux comprendre le monde des jeunes de la rue, utilisant des méthodes d'observation participante et dévoilée et des entrevues informelles variées. Cette approche globale permet de saisir comment les jeunes définissent leur capacité à estimer, gérer, éviter ou prendre des risques. L'utilisation d'une perspective longitudinale (de un à deux ans) et les relations de confiance bâties avec ces jeunes, ont permis de suivre comment la construction identitaire des jeunes observés a influencé leurs perception du risque et leurs pratiques de débrouillardise. En outre, les liens établis ont permis de révéler les points de vue singuliers des jeunes mais aussi leurs savoirs expérientiels relatifs aux risques.

Il s'agit dans cette étude de montrer à partir des théories générales qui définissent nos sociétés comme des sociétés du risque, comment des individus, identifiés comme appartenant à un groupe à risque, définissent et gèrent leurs risques à partir de leur propre expérience et point de vue afin de révéler la diversité et la complexité des expériences et savoirs des jeunes de la rue à l'endroit du risque. En effet, cette thèse montre qu'un ancrage dans une sociologie du risque permet de sortir de l'image de victime ou de déviance associée généralement aux jeunes de la rue mais qu'elle demeure marquée par la promotion de la sécurité légitimant intervention et régulation de la situation des jeunes de la rue tout en ignorant l'expérience même des jeunes. Les discours sur les risques associés à la rue sont alors inscrits dans une logique d'expertise. Cette étude vise à sortir de ces préconceptions des risques pris par les jeunes de la rue pour au contraire s'attarder à comprendre comment se définit le risque à partir du sens que les jeunes accordent et les expériences qu'ils en ont.

Mots clés: jeunes itinérants, jeunes de la rue, le risque, à risque, victimisation, déviance, identité.

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Introduction

The image of homeless youth living on the streets engenders a deluge of emotions and imaginations related to risk. All kinds of fear related to risk surface when talking about this population, whether they are related to their past histories of victimization or delinquency, their current trajectories, or future potentialities of harm. These anxieties about their past, their present, and their future brew a "perfect storm" of conditions for risk to thrive in, to forecast the potentialities of future harm, and also for remedies to be prescribed. This maelstrom of risk is epitomized by the entire population being labelled "at-risk." A risk zeitgeist has emerged in late modern society and is emblematic of society's preoccupation with safety and security (Furedi, 2006). This culture of fear in regards to risk impacts how homeless youth are viewed, depicted, and is only further reinforced by notions of vulnerability and fragility due to their young age and their marginalized social status. Connoting this population as "at-risk", coupled with the view that the streets are "risky" and dangerous and promote engagement in "high-risk" activities implies that these youth should not be in the streets, that they are different or deficient, and require intervention, either through protection or surveillance (Bellot, 2001). Homeless youth's heightened vulnerability to victimization due to their young age and their childhood histories, the potential for exposure and engagement in deviant and illegal activities, underpinned by the risk factors that led them to the streets, demonstrates that the proliferation of risk is pervasive in discourses encompassing this population. However, the essence of risk is not that something bad has happened but that it *may* happen. It is not known how youth define risk, in a supposedly, risk-laden world. This study examined risk perception among homeless youth. It revealed as

many realities as it did generate more questions. It asked: **how do homeless youth conceptualize risk, by examining their perceptions and responses to risk.**

This dissertation provides a starting point for an exploration into how homeless youth conceptualize risk. Utilizing direct quotes for the title: "Staying Alive" while "Living the Life," serves to illustrate from the very outset the wide spectrum of homeless youth's conceptualizations of risk, from the extremely risk-averse to the unbridled risk-taker. This research topic arose out of my experience and passion for working with homeless and street-involved youth for the past ten years. As a social worker providing mental health and addictions services, the constant barrage of framing youth either as victims or as deviants, by the literature and in the field propelled me to consider these constructions which ultimately led me to risk. The preponderance in the field of talking about youth in terms of risk is pervasive and insidious, yet reflecting on what risk means and how youth negotiate, manage and respond to risk is absent from the discourse and from front-line practice, and yet risk has become an organizing feature of modern society and social work theory and practice. According to Webb,

> the concept of risk is one of the most significant in modern times. We live in a world saturated with and preoccupied by risk. Despite unparalleled degrees of social stability and affluence, we are living through a period of acute personal insecurity, anxiety and change (2006: 23).

This research is born out of my work experience over the last decade as a social worker working with homeless youth, and the passion I have for combating injustice. One of the injustices I feel strongly about is the silence of marginalized voices, and the underlying assumptions that frame research but are too infrequently revealed, resulting in a double form of oppression. The

stereotypes that are so predominant in the literature, resulting from an oversimplification of people's experiences, are framed, presented and digested by those not living the experiences being studied. Categorizing and reducing youth's experiences based on aetiology or epidemiology is devoid of context but has resulted in paternalistic prescriptions for interventions based on expert knowledges. My experience, based on my observations and interactions with youth, as well as my academic training and knowledge of homelessness literature, propelled me to study and present the experiences of homeless youth. Two of the most common stereotypes that predominate, when discussing issues related to homeless youth, are the notions of them as passive victims who have little power but instead are acted upon, or as aggressive deviants (Bellot, 2001). The assumptions and subsequent judgements that are made when dissecting their experiences carry strong moral overtones but are rarely examined. Similarly, notions of risk, such as, equating risk with danger, and the privatization of risk, are imbued with political, social, and economic interests but are rarely deconstructed for their political motivations. Risk constructs have pervaded every arena of life, and risk has been used in a common sense way, devoid of context and history, to denote activities that are bad or dangerous, but these risk constructs are shaped by social, political, cultural and economic forces and motivations.

Homelessness has become a major social issue that has spawned a huge industry of services and programs designed to alleviate pressing and rising needs of the population. Over the last decade, research into homelessness has exploded and symbolizes one facet of this industry, but most studies to date have been grounded in a positivist, quantitative approach. Homeless youth comprise the most understudied subgroup among the current homeless population (Bradley, 1997), though they represent one-third of the population (Laird, 2007). To address these

knowledge gaps, this research intentionally targeted sixteen and seventeen year-olds using an ethnographic approach. This age group was chosen, because they represent a less known about contingent of the population that also face numerous socio-economic obstacles pertinent to them alone. These challenges may increase their chances of engaging in risk-taking activities and further amplify their marginalization. Once youth turn sixteen in Ontario, whether they live with family, or are in child protection services, they are given more freedom legally to make their own life choices, but without the requisite adult resources. It has been argued that this cohort represents the most vulnerable homeless sub-population as they do not have equal access to resources and may turn to illegal activities for survival (Gaetz, 2004). Furthermore, it may be argued that due to the formative age of this group they may be more vulnerable to new threats (Hall, 1904).

There is a dearth of knowledge, in particular, longitudinal knowledge about the subjective experiences of homeless youth (Aubry et al., 2008; Aubry et al., 2007; Benoit et al., 2007; Tyler, 2007; Kidd, 2006, Whitbeck et al., 1999). What is well documented, though, is the incidence and degree of different forms of victimization during childhood (Gaetz, 2004; Karabanow et al., 2005; Karabanow, 2004; Baron, 2003; Cauce et al., 2000) and on the streets (Boivin et al., 2005; Gaetz, 2004; Hwang, 2000; Hoyt et al., Cauce et al., 1999; Roy et al., 1996). Similarly, their family histories are characterized by: poor parenting practices, negative and unsupportive child-parent relationships devoid of warmth (Gilbert, 2004; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; DiPaolo, 1999; Janus et al., 1995; Kurtz et al., 1991; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990; Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987), and parental substance dependence and anti-social traits that provide perfect "training grounds" for delinquency and victimization (Baron et al. 2007; Whitbeck et al., 1997).

However, the relevance of this study is that while the rates of victimization and criminalization continue to grow, the knowledge produced is external to the population and is not having the desired impact on reducing incidence. Nor is it capturing the complexity or dynamism of how risk decisions are made, or how youth understand these experiences. This study examined such conceptualizations of risk among homeless youth.

Youth homelessness is characterized in the literature as significantly different than other sub-groups of the population. While homeless youth make up a third of the population (Laird, 2007) they are considered difficult to study because of their extensive use of informal social networks. Their lack of reliance on emergency services (i.e. shelters, drop-in centres), which happen to be the settings for most research, mean that they remain a largely understudied group (Kraus et al., 2001; Bradley, 1997). Many youth also begin their trajectories at young ages (i.e. average 15 years old) (CBC Fifth Estate), and are thus considered "vulnerable" and requiring protection and/or surveillance. Equally important, the streets are inherently linked to feelings of fear and danger, and are viewed as venues ripe for victimization. The streets are characterized in the literature in such a way that statistics of victimization, violence, and a general sense of lawlessness (Baron et al., 2007; Gaetz, 2004; Karabanow, 2004; Baron, 2003a) pervades, and gives credence to the singular notion of the streets as a place where youth should not be.

Depicting youth as somehow deficient by virtue of their young age and their disenfranchised social status (i.e. deviating from social norms of living with family, attending school), coupled with the notions that the streets are a socially deviant place to be, has a double-barrelled effect of

viewing youth as different. This stigmatized view of them as the Other (Douglas, 1986) is a catalyst for action and spurs the desire to bring them into line with the norm. There is also an element of fear that is created by conceptualizing these youth as contaminating, that they may "pollute" others and force them to transgress social norms. These assumptions and social constructs serve to reduce youth's experiences to ones of potential victims or deviants, leaving little room for youth's understanding of their own lived reality, or for alternative conceptualizations save for a few studies. For example, Parazelli (1996, 2002) notes that there is an assumption that processes of socialization are arrested once youth hit the streets. In his work he demonstrates that youth continue to form important relationships with others in the context of a "marginalized socialization."

Homeless youth have been deemed "at-risk" but we rarely reveal what this term implies and if the youth being studied consider themselves to be so. Moreover, while we agree that structural obstacles (as examined in Chapter Four) do push youth into an arena of constrained choices, assumptions in the literature push authors to make comments like: "high risk youth are particularly vulnerable in this market. With the lack of affordable shelter, they are forced into situations that are unsafe and unsuitable" (Totten & Perley, 2002: 5), with little room for youth viewpoints. Indeed, these determinations are made by the researchers and not those living those experiences, little is known about how this identified "at-risk" group manages risk.

The term "at-risk" is also emblematic of the times we live in. The sense of heightened anxiety around fear and our preoccupation with safety and security has founded a politics of prevention

through moral regulation (Furedi, 2006). In so doing, developmentally appropriate risk-taking behaviours of adolescence (Turz, 1993) have become demonized. One of the central thrusts of this study is that deeming this population "at-risk" (which will be elaborated on in the following chapters), has meant that youth's experiences have been reduced to ones of victimization or delinquency, and have bypassed alternative explanations, such as, experimentation and self-discovery. By applying a risk analysis to this population in a broad stroke way, a rationale is established for intervention, promoting protection or surveillance (Bellot, 2001), in a sense, in an effort to colonize the future and prevent future harm from occurring (Giddens, 1991). Moreover, some have argued, that the current zeitgeist of safety and security has further reinforced the notion that risk-taking is immoral and irresponsible (Colombo, 2008; Furedi, 2006; Parazelli, 1999). Embracing a "safety at all cost" approach denies one of the quintessential dimensions of adolescence - that is a heightened penchant for risk-taking (Turz, 1993; Hall, 1904). In so doing, some have argued that we are preventing adolescence from occurring (Parazelli, 1999), denying the developmentally appropriate milestones of this stage (Turz, 1993; Hall, 1904).

The literature surrounding homeless youth has now supplanted a sociology of deviance (Bessant, 2001), and we argue, of victimization, to one of risk. A sociology of risk, rests on the pillars of the victimization and deviancy literature, and describes youth's childhood histories, their current behaviours, epidemiology, and aetiology, with the aim of providing rationales for intervention and moral regulation in an effort to bring them into line with social norms, and in so doing, to "minimize risk". However, the underpinnings of the literature rest on the notion that risk, founded on concepts of victimization and deviancy, are universally understood and applied in a uniform manner. Concepts of victimization, deviancy and risk are based on the researcher's

understanding and are not deconstructed for the assumptions that are implicit in their social, political and culturally constructed characters. They are not based on the viewpoints of homeless youth, and they do not capture the complexity of experiences that are not encompassed within this binary. It is not known whether youth believe themselves to be "at-risk" and whether they consider homeless experiences as ones of victimization or deviancy. In fact, this study found that many youth characterized their experiences as ones of survival, creativity, adaptability, experimentation, self-discovery and self-reliance.

The paucity of research on the lived experience and knowledge of homeless youth provided the impetus for this research. In particular, it aimed to shed light on how youth perceive risks that according to the literature are insidious and overwhelming. It sought to uncover what risks they considered worth taking and avoiding. It sought to explore their understanding of their own agency in navigating, managing, and avoiding risk. This study hoped to bring their experiences and voices forward. It also hoped to unearth the links between their risk perception and their conceptualizations of agency, identity, and responsibility, especially as they relate to grand social theories of risk.

This study sought to shed light on these questions, by unravelling how youth perceive and respond to risk. The study's objectives were to:

1. Unearth youth's lived reality as they related to choices they made concerning risk (conceived as danger and opportunity), framed in their voices and understanding as experiences unfolded over a period of time (one to two years).

2. Uncover the context and meaning participants assign to their experiences, and to restrict as much as possible a superimposing of the researcher's preconceptions in relation to risk, victimization, and deviancy.

3. Understand how participants perceive, negotiate and respond (strategies employed) to risks, and how conceptualizations of risk and practices/strategies change over time.

4. Uncover participant's personal constructions of risk as they relate to the construction of their evolving identities, and how these relate to how they are perceived by others.

5. Expose participant's understanding of risk as it relates to responsibilization, self-regulation and their interactions and responses to expert systems and normative institutions.

To realize these objectives an ethnographic approach was employed to ground the data in the youth's point of view. The study used participant observation, open-ended observation and

informal interviewing techniques to gather relevant data by engaging in relationship and trust building with a small group (eighteen in total) of purposively sampled homeless youth.

To date, research has assumed that risks are universally understood, internalized and responded to in a uniform manner. However, these assumptions are framed in the researcher's perceptions of risks and not framed by those living that experience. The theoretical framework of this research assumes the position that risks are social constructions and are perceived, valued, interpreted and responded to differently. Risk perception, and constructs of victimization and deviancy, are also interactionally constituted, and are embedded in dynamic processes that are conceptualized differently based on one's social standpoint and individual interpretation, and based on their interactions with their environment, themselves, and others over time. This study sought to combine theories of social constructionism and symbolic interactionism to highlight the dynamic and context-specific nature of youth's perceptions of risk, especially as they evolve over time. Moreover, this study uncovered that conceptualizations of risk were very much tied to the construction of youth's identities which changed over the course of the study. Risk and identity were intimately connected and this study will reveal the interactional dynamic process embedded in their actions and narratives.

Furthermore, this study aimed to apply three grand social theories of risk to participants' conceptualizations of risk. By examining and deconstructing Beck's risk society thesis, Douglas's cultural/symbolic approach, and Foucault's governmentality stance, in relation to a small sample of homeless youth, this study sought to bridge the gap between theory and empirical inquiry, and uncover what relevance these approaches had in relation to this "at-risk"

group. Moreover, the finding that identity construction had a huge impact on youth's perception of risk is largely absent in the literature.

The major contribution of this study was to capture homeless youth's viewpoints in relation to risk. Utilizing an ethnographic approach to better understand the context in which they were living offered an original point of departure meant to shift the nature of knowledge production, particularly in stark contrast to previous positivist research. Employing a unique and innovative research design meant that youth were engaged social actors in the production of knowledge describing the context of their experiences and the constrained choices they made. This epistemological standpoint reflects a void that is largely absent in the literature, namely the ability for youth to have their voices and actions heard especially as they occurred in interaction with the construction of their identities.

The study used an ethnographic approach to explore the lived experiences of sixteen and seventeen year-old homeless youth by building relationships with them over a one to two year period. In particular, the goal was to uncover how homeless youth conceptualize risk in the face of the realities, constraints, and dualities of living in a street-involved world over an extended period of time. Participant observation and informal interviewing were the primary methods of gathering data, whereby gaining the youth's trust, confidence, and hence, access to their worlds' was employed to gain their understanding of risk. This in-depth research hoped to capture the complexities and diversities present among homeless youth in an effort to combat common stereotypes and the homogeneity often reflected in studies of the homeless. In addition, an

anticipated outcome was that by capturing how youth perceive risks and their realities of living on the streets, interventions, both social work and other relevant disciplines, will be grounded in the youth's understanding of constrained choices and it is hoped have a more significant impact.

Synopsis of Chapters

Chapter One will examine the current literature on homeless youth, which will serve to frame the question under study. Chapter Two will outline the theoretical framework in relation to the social construction of risk, and the study's conceptual framework twinning social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. It will argue that a sociology of risk is founded upon this polarity of constructing youth as deviants or victims. Due to the tendency of past research to dichotomize homeless youth's experiences into ones of victimization or deviancy, this study's approach was founded on a fresh re-conceptualization, namely, twinning social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. This fresh take provided the launch pad for a deeper investigation into how youth conceptualize risk based on their unique frames of reference.

Chapter Three will present the study's methodology, and it's challenges, limitations, ethical dilemmas, and implications. Chapters Four, Five, and Six will present the findings of the study, and each will offer a critique of current socio-cultural theories of risk in relation to the context of the results.

Chapter Four will explore participant's understanding of street culture in relation to risk. It will provide an overview of participant's perceptions and responses to risk on the streets as they unfold, which are embedded in their earlier histories and affect their tolerance of risk. It will also uncover strategies youth employ to reduce or increase risk. The findings in Chapter Four stand in stark contrast to Beck's risk society theories that endorse more realist conceptualizations of risk and concomitant universal responses of fear and anxiety.

Chapter Five will investigate participant's conceptualizations around their own identities and how this affects their risk perception and subsequent decisions. It examines risk perception and practices as they relate to evolving identities, particularly in adolescence. It unearths the impact of family contexts on identity construction and how they relate to risk assessments and practices, it also examines the tension between group and individual identity and their impact on risk frameworks. In particular, it examines the relevance and inconsistencies in Douglas's Self and Other theories, as they pertain to the participant's double marginalization, being young and homeless.

Chapter Six will examine youth's ideas around responsibilization and risk. It will explore participant's conceptualizations of responsibilization and self-regulation in relation to risk. By exploring youth's practices of self-monitoring and understanding of responsibilization the findings proffer a critique of Foucault's governmentality thesis, and to a lesser extent Douglas's blame thesis.

These three chapters combine to form a comprehensive micro-level critique of the three grand socio-cultural theories of risk and shed new insights about how risk frameworks are conceptualized by an "at-risk" group. Lastly, the conclusion will be presented in Chapter Seven and will offer concluding remarks, suggestions for future research, recommendations and implications for policy and practice.

Limitations

There were several limitations of this study. Obviously, the size of this study was quite small, with only eighteen youth participating. Both the size of the study, and the sampling and data collection methods do not allow for any form of quantitative analysis. Thus, the findings of this study are not generalizable.

Secondly, the realities of street life, issues of transiency and lost contact for periods of time, combined with the constraints on my own personal life did not allow for the insertion with youth that I would have liked. While every effort was made to uncover youth's points of view, my interpretation of their individual and dynamic frames of references were still filtered through my knowledge, values, and assumptions. What I chose to report, highlight and display is still a subjective choice based on the researcher's analysis and hierarchy of importance. I tried to ensure accuracy with youth by verifying the content of previous contacts with them but in some cases this was not always possible due to our spotty contact.

Another limitation of the study was its obvious appeal to those participants that are open to sharing their experiences with others. Engagement cannot happen with those who are unwilling. Only those participants who truly found some benefit to participation remained interested and allowed me to follow them. In addition, this study attracted significantly more female participants than male (12 females to 6 males). Thus, experiences emanating from the study are more explicative of young women's experiences than men's.

One of the most significant drawbacks of the study was who it excluded. One criteria of exclusion were the severely emotionally distressed (as determined by myself to be at imminent risk of harm to self or others). This was due to the nature of my role as a social worker providing mental health services to homeless youth. I needed to continue to provide service to those youth that required such interventions. Thus, this study intentionally excluded perhaps a very fragile group that may have significantly different viewpoints.

Another possibility of exclusion was the four agencies I utilized for the bulk of recruitment. While every effort was made to reach out to service/shelter-avoiders, it remained heavily founded on contact with agencies. Thus, the study may not have highlighted the most marginalized youth among the homeless population who do not access these services.

This study aimed to provide a deeper analysis of homeless youth's experiences by engaging in relationship-building over a significant period of time (one to two years) to capture their unique frames of reference regarding their conceptualizations of risk.

Chapter One:

Youth "At-Risk":

The Binary of Victims and Deviants

This chapter examines the current literature on homeless youth. Providing an overview of the current literature serves to frame the question under investigation: how do homeless youth conceptualize risk? Showcasing the relevant literature allows for an examination of its foundations and uncovers its flaws and political underpinnings. One common critique is that several methodological challenges in defining the population exist and subsequently affect the nature of the data collected and the knowledge that is produced (Bradley, 1997). This will be explained more fully in the opening section.

One goal of this chapter is to present a snapshot of research on homeless youth where this study took place, in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, with the aim of contextualizing the findings and to demonstrate the dearth of subjective knowledge in the locale where the research took place. Secondly, an overview of the structural and individual explanations for youth homelessness will highlight relevant issues and constraints, as well as, shed light on the orientation and perspectives of recent research. One of the arguments of this chapter is that much of the literature pertinent to homeless youth has been grounded in epidemiological research either situating youth as victims or delinquents. It is important to highlight these works to demonstrate how youth have been characterized to uncover the assumptions that are implicit in the research, and to make a case for a different kind of knowledge production. The epistemological position of much of the homeless youth literature paints these youth as different, and requiring interventions to normalize their behaviours and reduce the threat of harm, and certainly rarely considers their point of view.

While there has been some research looking at the identity construction and socialization processes of youth on the streets, found mostly in the French literature, most studies do not capture the viewpoints of those living the experiences being described and there is a tendency to conceptualize youth as acted upon rather than actors of their own lives. Youth tend to be characterized as "different," or "deficient," thus requiring some kind of intervention. One of the points of this chapter is to highlight, de-construct, and better understand the reasons for ascribing common descriptors and "risk" factors to constructs of homeless youth as they relate to risk, victimization and deviance. While there is a tendency in the literature to describe homeless youth as "at-risk," the meanings of this label are not explained nor uncovered for what they represent. Using the term "at-risk" becomes a moral justification for intervention and a way of categorizing youth as different or lesser than, and reinforces the streets as places of danger and risk. Examining the literature for the purpose of deconstructing its meanings supports the rationale for this study, justifying its relevance.

This chapter will examine the definitional and methodological challenges of studying youth homelessness, and will reveal the causes, complexities, and consequences as characterized in the literature. It will also highlight knowledge gaps, underscoring methodological, epistemological, and ontological problems that justify this study's approach. It will critique the relevant literature, which we argue, is embedded in a sociology of risk, which has at its roots a binary of victimization and deviancy. As will be drawn from the literature review, this binary serves to characterize youth as either victims or delinquents, leaving little room for their own viewpoints. We argue that a different form of knowledge production is needed with the collaboration of homeless youth to examine their conceptualizations of risk.

Part 1: Who Are These Youth?

The world-wide population of street youth is not known, but it has been estimated to be between thirty to one hundred and seventy million (children and youth) (Farrell et al., 2000; Kurtz et al., 1991). The Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) in its report: *Street Youth in Canada: Findings from Enhanced Surveillance of Canadian Street Youth, 1999-2003*, estimated that every day, one hundred and fifty-thousand youth are living on the streets in Canada. While youth homelessness is not a new phenomenon, it has become more severe in Canada over the past two decades (Hulchanski, 2009; Hulchanski et al., 2009; Kraus et al., 2001). There are roughly a quarter of a million absolutely homeless in Canada (Murphy, 2000; CBC 5th estate), and estimates range that youth make up over 25% (Karabanow, 2004; Cauce et al., 2000; CBC 5th estate) to one-third of Canada's homeless population (Laird, 2007). According to Hulchanski et al. (2009: 10), youth outnumber any other homeless group in Canada. On any given night, this means roughly 33,000 Canadians are 'absolutely' homeless[1], of which about 8,333 to 11,000 are youth (CBC Fifth Estate).

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[1] According to the UN definition of homelessness there are two streams within the population: the **absolutely** homeless and the **relatively** homeless. People who are absolutely homeless include people who are living outdoors (e.g. in parks, alleyways, in the streets), in abandoned buildings, and those who use emergency shelters or hostels. While some cities, such as Ottawa, have improved data-gathering software in emergency shelters (the HIFIS system was introduced in 2007) and are better able to track and identify individuals who use more than one shelter over the year (Alliance to End Homelessness 4th report card), the numbers of people sleeping outside and in abandoned spaces is much more complex to capture. And while there has been some attempt to do this in Ottawa (Farrell et al., 2000), it is by no means exhaustive. In sum, no method has been developed to accurately count how many people are absolutely homeless.

1.1 Defining the Population

Two problems surface when trying to define who is captured in the homeless youth population. One, there is no consensus about who make up the homeless, as no single definition exists, in fact, this is one of the criticisms of the UN that the Government of Canada has not adopted a definition in order to estimate. Second, there is no consensus about what ages youth comprises, studies have differing age categories from which they examine issues related to homeless youth (Kraus et al., 2001; Bradley, 1997). While it may be possible to count all the individuals who use emergency youth shelters, the numbers would not include youth who: use adult shelters, sleep "rough" (e.g. sleeps outside, for instance, in parks, cemeteries, on the street, in alleys), sleep/stay in places not specifically designed for human habitation (e.g. apartment/businesses

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To further complicate quantification, people who are relatively homeless include those who are living in unsafe, inadequate or insecure housing, or who are paying too much of their income on rent, and are at imminent risk of losing their housing. For the purposes of this research, this broader definition of homelessness was included. This invisible form of homelessness remains largely unstudied because of a decreased dependence on emergency services, such as, emergency shelters, rendering it more difficult to capture their experiences. However, the delineation of the absolutely homeless from the relatively homeless is somewhat arbitrary and futile because homeless youth exist and transition between both groups. Secondly, people do not consciously choose whether they are relatively or absolutely homeless. Homeless youth are in a constant state of transition, one night sleeping outside, another night coming into the shelter, securing precarious housing for maybe a short time, often being evicted for overcrowding or non-payment of rent, the variables and experiences are endless. Safely said, the only continuity living a homeless life is its' incontinuity and mutability. Life as an absolutely or relatively homeless youth is defined by constant transition and adaptation. All the while making this population a very difficult one to study and quantify.

entrances), squat (i.e. occupy an unoccupied or abandoned space or building that the individual does not own, rent, or otherwise have permission to use) (Koeller et al., Background Report), "couch-surf" (staying temporarily at friend's/family's/acquaintances place), or live in overcrowded or unsuitable and unaffordable housing. Researchers agree that "the majority of homeless youth are not visible on the street, but are couch surfing or living in overcrowded conditions, unsuitable housing, or housing that they cannot afford" (Kraus et al., 2001: 3).

Secondly, the youth population is difficult to define precisely because research and agencies have differing age categories. In the literature, ages range from twelve to twenty-five years old (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Karabanow, 2004; Roy et al., 2003; Library of Parliament, 1999). "The definition of youth is somewhat problematic because of the different mandates of agencies that serve youth and because of different eligibility criteria for programs across the country" (Kraus et al., 2001: 2). The term street youth was defined in *Street Youth in Canada: Findings from Enhanced Surveillance of Canadian Street Youth, 1999-2003* (2006) to be anyone between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, who was not living at home for three consecutive days or more in the last six months, was not under the consistent supervision of an adult guardian, and was without a stable place to live. According to Karabanow et al.'s (2005) work, *Getting off the Streets*, the street youth population is "diverse, complex and heterogeneous" (39). They state further that the generic term "street youth" is

> Made up of a number of subcultures (by no means mutually exclusive) including hard-core street entrenched young people, squatters, group home kids, child welfare kids, soft-core 'twinkies', "in-and-outers", punks, runaways, throwaways, refugees and immigrants, young single mothers, and those who are homeless because their entire family is homeless. Within these makeshift 'categories' are numerous descriptors that tend to signal street activities such as gang bangers,

prostitutes, drug dealers, drug users, panhandlers, and squeegeers (Karabanow et al., 2005: 39).

In this study, both the terms homeless youth and street youth will be employed interchangeably. The term street youth implies a more street-entrenched lifestyle, where one's basic and social needs are met "in the street" – it implies a detachment from mainstream life. While the term homeless youth, implies a youth who has no fixed abode or whose housing is precarious and transient. According to Parazelli (1997), street youth can be differentiated from homeless youth by their increased social disengagement, their social desires and their cultural tastes. Gilbert (2004) who conducted research with homeless youth in Montreal, argues that street youth tend to be younger (aged 14 to 25 years old) whereas homeless youth tend to comprise ages anywhere from 18 to 30-35 years old, and runaways tend to be under 18 years old. Due to the differing legal rights for minors in Quebec, as compared to Ontario (at age 16 one is considered legally emancipated if they choose to leave home), this probably accounts for some of the differences in categorizations of street youth versus homeless youth.

Nevertheless, this study's purpose was to study the experiences of sixteen and seventeen year-olds in Ottawa, Ontario, who were living on their own (legally emancipated) and who could fall into either the street youth (more street entrenched lifestyle) or homeless youth category (or both, as these are not mutually exclusive terms). Thus, this study chose participants based on their age (16 and 17 years old) and their lack of residential stability, determined as having no stable place to live of their own. This study adopted Karabanow's (2004) definition as

any young person… who does not have a permanent place to call home, and who instead spends a significant amount of time on the street, which to say, in alleyways, parks, storefronts, and dumpsters, among many other places; in squats (located usually in abandoned buildings); at youth shelters and centers; and/or with friends (typically referred to as "couch surfers") (3).

Similarly, utilizing O'Grady and Gaetz's (2009), and Gaetz and O'Grady's (2002) definition, it is the instability of their housing situation that characterizes their status as homeless or street youth, and the absence of supervision of a parent or guardian.

The purpose of this study was to include all forms of youth homelessness[2]. At one end of the spectrum there were participants whose lives were completely entrenched in street life, at the other end, there were those who lived in transitional housing, who rarely socialized downtown, who went to school or had part-time jobs, who formed the less socially disenfranchised group. For the purposes of this research, sixteen and seventeen year-olds living in Ottawa, Canada, were

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[2] For a discussion on the differences between homeless and homelessness see Hulchanski (2009) and Hulchanski et al. (2009). According to them,

> To be homeless, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), is to have "no home or permanent abode". Adding the suffix – ness however, "makes the simple and clear word homeless into an abstract concept… It tosses all sorts of problems into one handy term. We thus have the ongoing problem of defining what homeless-ness is and isn't. There is no single correct definition, given the different mix of problems that goes into the hodgepodge of issues, and depending on who is using the term… Starting in the 1980s it was clear that homelessness referred to a poverty that includes being unhoused. It is a poverty that means being without required social supports. And it is poverty so deep that even poor-quality housing is not affordable (2009: 5).

According to Hulchanski (2009), being homeless is not having a permanent residence whereas homelessness refers to a plethora of problems related to being homeless.

purposively sampled due to specific barriers this age group faces (which will be elaborated on further in the chapter) and because they remain a largely understudied group.

1.2 Trends in Homeless Research

Researchers have been completing studies about homelessness for over a hundred years (Piliavin et al., 1996). Until recently, research has focused on individual characteristics, conceptualized as deficits or weaknesses (e.g. substance use, mental health problems) (Shinn, 1992), and most recently re-conceptualized as "risk factors" that researchers believe make some people more vulnerable to becoming homeless. In an effort to understand what makes some youth more susceptible to becoming homeless or street-involved there has been a desire to uncover the "pre-existing risk factors" as a way to develop programs and policies that will arrest this process from occurring. During the last two decades, there has been more research into the etiological reasons for youth homelessness, with a significant emphasis on theories about "running away" from families because of sexual and/or physical abuse, neglect, abandonment and family dysfunction (Karabanow, 2004: 2). For instance, Kurtz et al. (1991) argue that youth "run to" the streets and/or away from their "homes" (whether these are their family homes, foster homes, group homes, or detention facilities) because of family abuse, neglect, or abandonment, and characterize these youth as "runaways," "throwaways" (i.e. ejected from their "home"), and "system kids" (leaving child welfare placements).

More recently, researchers have tried to capture and characterize what happens to youth once they hit the streets, providing evidence of: high rates of victimization (physical and sexual assault, robbery); involvement in deviant activities (criminal involvement, substance use); and increased incidence and frequency of poor health (e.g. high rates of unplanned pregnancy (Novac et al., 2006, 2009b; Greene & Ringwalt, 1998), mental health problems (Cauce et al., 2000), and physical health problems (Haldenby et al., 2007; Boivin et al., 2005; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Ensign, 1998).

Karabanow (2004) points to recent distinctions in the street youth literature based on the quality and length of time spent on the street, and the categorizations used to differentiate different segments of the population into subgroups, such as "in and outers," "runners," and "hard-core" (Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987); to places that street youth inhabit; to an emphasis on street youth's deviant practices (i.e. panhandling, squeegee, sex work, criminal activity) (Baron, 2003a) that produce a labelling effect, such as "squeegee kids", "prostitutes", "druggies", and "gang-bangers" (Karabanow, 2004: 3).

Another recent dimension of understanding that has been added to our understanding of street youth has been described in the French sociological literature. Presenting an alternative vision of the streets as a place of identity formation and marginalized socialization (Parazelli, 1997), several authors (Colombo, 2008; Gilbert, 2004; Bellot, 2001; Parazelli, 2002; Lucchini, 1996; Poirier, 1996a) highlight the processes of street involvement, social exclusion, identity construction, and cultural and structural transformations, and how they impact street youth. This will be examined more fully at the end of this chapter.

This study examined the experiences of a small number of homeless youth in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. To give the results more meaning it is essential to underscore what is known about the population in the locale where the research took place, this will be presented in the following section.

1.3 The Ottawa Context

In Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, where this study took place, the Alliance to End Homelessness (ATEH) is the umbrella organization that is responsible for "advocacy and service-delivery activities to combat homelessness by Ottawa-based non-profit organizations and university researchers," and has been working in partnership with the City since 1996 (Greenberg et al., 2006: 133). ATEH has been tracking three main indicators of the population since 2004 and publish these results in an annual Report Card on Homelessness. These are (1) the number of people using shelters, (2) the number of people on the waiting lists for social or supportive housing and (3) the income levels of the poorest members in the community. In a submission they made as a delegation to the City on budget directions on January 10, 2007, they stated that in 2005, 1% of the population stayed in a shelter at least once, and that 9,914 households were on the waiting list for social housing.

Twenty percent of Ottawa residents earn less than $10,000 per year, and an additional 17% earn between $10,000 and $20,000, that is, 37% of Ottawa residents earned less than $20,000. According to national standards, households should be able to meet their housing needs on 30 percent of their income (Shapcott, 2008). Yet ATEH reported that in 2005 more than 65,000 families spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing and thus live at risk of becoming homeless (Greenberg et al., 2006: 134). ATEH members argue that access to affordable housing is the single most effective way to reduce homelessness in Ottawa.

In ATEH's 2009 report, 2008 showed a dramatic increase in the use of shelter beds (up 13%), and the average length of shelter stay for youth increased the most (a 70% increase from 2007), and the number of youth using shelter increased by 27% (365 in 2007, 464 in 2008). This means that youth were experiencing longer episodes of homelessness in the shelter system and not able to access public or private rental markets. Of course, these figures represent only the homeless that were counted using emergency youth shelters and not the other forms of absolutely and relatively homeless[3] which account for a greater proportion of the population. According to ATEH, homelessness is on the rise in Ottawa because of: discrimination by landlords, low incomes that make it difficult to access and maintain housing, low vacancy rates (1.4% in 2008), loss of employment, domestic violence, and physical health and mental health problems (Bellot et al., 2008). Andrews (2001) cited in Bellot et al. (2008), argued that homelessness in Ottawa is due to the shortage of affordable housing and the relative poverty of the population. According to her, the Tenant Protection Act that was ushered in by the provincial government in1998 did away with rent controls and resulted in landlords having the power to determine the payment of

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[3] see footnote 1

rent for new renters. The incentive to drive old renters out to drive up the price of rent created a shortage of affordable housing in the private market. In 1999, more than 40% of renters spent more than 30% of income on rent, and 20% spent more than 50%. Therefore, there is a correlation between household income, the cost of housing and the risk of homelessness. The greater the percentage of income spent on housing the greater the risk of becoming homeless (Bellot et al., 2008: 12).

In 1999, a snapshot study looking at homelessness in Ottawa entitled, *Describing the Homeless Population of Ottawa-Carleton* (Farrell et al., 2000), took place. The objectives of the study were to provide a profile of the characteristics of the different subgroups of homeless persons in the region; to examine the experience of homelessness from a stress and coping perspective; and to determine the health status of persons who were homeless (Farrell et al., 2000). On average, male youth reported being homeless for 65 days, and experienced an average of 4 episodes of homelessness. Key reasons given for being homeless included: 18% eviction, 23% reported "transient lifestyle", 11% parental abuse, 7% kicked out by parent, 7% relationship problems. 48% reported that their method of income was social assistance, 23% stated they received financial support from family, 5% had no income, 59% had occasional employment, and 18% use income to support others. In terms of education 90% had not finished high school (8% were currently enrolled), 14% had completed grade 8 or less. 36% reported they had problems due to current or past alcohol use, and 57% revealed they had problems due to current or past drug use. Female youth reported similar results, with the most divergent responses being reported in the income category and variance in percentages for reasons for being homeless. The average length of time homeless was 54 days, and the average number of times homeless was four. Key reasons

given by female youth for being homeless included: 14% eviction, 11% "transient lifestyle", 25% parental abuse, 13% new to the city, 7% from psychiatric treatment. In terms of income, 36% reported receiving social assistance, 3% money from family, 44% no income, 11% occasional employment income, 8 % use income to support others. Eighty-six percent of young women had not graduated from high school (14% were currently enrolled), 11% had completed grade 8 or less. 31% revealed they had problems due to current of past alcohol use, and 47% experienced problems due to current or past drug use. According to this study, 44% of female youth reported they had no source of income, and only a little over a third collected welfare, they also reported less financial support from family than their male counterparts, they also attributed a greater percentage of abuse for being homeless. While this study offered a snapshot picture of the characteristics of the homeless in Ottawa based on sub-groups of the population, it lacked a longitudinal and deeper understanding of homeless experiences.

More recently, the *Panel Study on Persons Who Are Homeless in Ottawa* (Aubry et al., 2007), offers a longitudinal approach to homelessness in Ottawa in contrast to the descriptive snapshot study highlighted above. The purpose of the *Panel Study* was to

> examine longitudinally the housing trajectories of persons who are homeless. The primary objective of the study was to identify factors that affect homeless persons' ability to exit homelessness and achieve housing stability. A secondary objective was to assess the relationship between housing status and health functioning (Aubry et al., 2007: 6).

Of the over 400 respondents that participated in the study, 160 were youth. An initial sample of 412 individuals was interviewed in the first phase of the study, and in the second phase a total of

255 participants (62%) were re-interviewed. This study adopted the City of Ottawa's definition of homelessness (which encompasses the absolutely homeless), defined as, "a situation in which an individual or an adult living with at least one child under 16 has no housing at all, or is staying in a temporary form of shelter" (Region of Ottawa-Carleton, 1999: 2). While the study again looked at the entire absolutely homeless population, results were grouped into sub-groupings by age. Of the over 400 participants, female and male youth were found to be the most transient, averaging almost five moves over the study period (Aubry et al., 2007: 7). Interestingly, gender was also found to be a significant predictor of accessing and maintaining housing, with women being housed a higher percentage of the time between interviews than men (Aubry et al., 2007: 8). A higher level of education, a greater proportion of time working since age 16, and a higher level of perceived social support predicted a greater proportion of time housed between interviews (Aubry et al., 2007: 8).

A set of variables representing risk factors were also established to examine whether there was a link between these risk factors and housing status. These risk factors (that were pre-established by the researchers) included an individual's health functioning (physical and mental) and substance use (alcohol or drugs). Interestingly, "the set of variables representing risk factors were not significant. An individual's health functioning (physical or mental) and substance use (alcohol or drugs) were not associated wit their housing status at follow-up" (Aubry et al., 2007: 29). Also, female youth had the highest percentage (90%) of being housed at follow-up, as many female youth reported that they returned to live with family members or had accessed subsidized housing (Aubry et al., 2007: 49). Further, contrary to the belief that transiency equals housing instability, respondents who reported several housing moves were more likely to be housed than

others (Aubry et al., 2007: 51). Lastly, while female youth had a better chance of being housed, male youth did not fare as well, they were housed 62% of the time between interviews (Aubry et al., 2007: 48). Moreover, even with more successful housing rates than predicted for some sub-groups the report cautions that

> single adults and youth remain at high risk of further episodes of homelessness even after successfully obtaining housing. A host of issues contribute to this tendency to housing instability, including living in inadequate housing, lacking the financial resources to gain housing stability, and lacking the necessary formal and informal supports to cope with personal crises and/or health problems and to become re-integrated into the community (Aubry et al., 2007: 48).

The key finding of the report highlights that housing problems in Ottawa are closely related to poverty, as the gap between what respondents could afford and the cost of available rental units were untenable. These gaps were particularly pronounced for those individuals who were receiving welfare or working in low wage jobs (Aubry et al., 2007: 8). "Study findings highlight the important role of subsidized housing in assisting people to exit homelessness. In particular, study participants who accessed subsidized housing between interviews were more likely to be housed at follow-up" (Aubry et al., 2007: 10). Many youth who could not afford market rents and were forced to share accommodation were particularly vulnerable to losing housing because of conflicts with roommates (Aubry et al., 2007: 8). Some respondents revealed that their drug use created a barrier to achieving stable housing, and drug use by roommates and the presence of drugs in neighbourhoods contributed to housing problems (Aubry et al., 2007: 8). "Housing quality appears to be more important in our findings than housing status. The stress of living in unsafe, poorly maintained, or crowded conditions may negate any benefits associated with being housed" (Aubry et al., 2007: 53). In sum, economic factors and not individual-level risk factors

emerged as predictors of housing status in the Ottawa homeless population, and also reveal the degree of structural constraints that youth face.

Supporting this economic analysis of the homeless situation in Ottawa are recent statistics from the *Where's Home* report (2009) which highlight housing trends in Ontario. The vacancy rate in Ottawa, has remained consistently low, 2.3% in 2006 and 2007, but declined even more sharply in 2008 to 1.4%, the lowest rate since 2001, perhaps providing some of the rationale for longer shelter stays. Rents in the province as a whole are rising faster than incomes, and rental units are being lost to demolition and conversion faster than new rental production. According to the authors, "the combination of low supply of purpose-built rental housing coupled with growing youth employment and increased international immigration contributed to the tightening market. The CMHC predicts a 1% vacancy rate in 2009" (Where's Home, 2009: 18). Further, as will be explained more fully in the chapter, the widening gap between rich and poor finds that Ontario has the largest gap among OECD countries, with the exception of Germany.

More recently, a research study looking at the health needs of street-involved youth was undertaken by the major provider of youth services in Ottawa, the *Youth Services Bureau* (YSB), to make a business case for opening a health clinic (Bourns & Meredith, 2008). This facility reports serving roughly 900 clients per year, but the estimates of the street-involved youth population in Ottawa are roughly thought to be around 1200 (Bourns & Meredith, 2008). The vast majority of respondents were between the ages of 16 and 21, with the median age of the sample being 18. According to the study, approximately 75% of Ottawa's street-involved youth

are of legal adult age. Women represented 57% of the entire sample, and 1% (two individuals) identified as trans-sexual. When compared to the national rates of male to female ratio of approximately two to one, the percentage of female respondents for this study is relatively high. Nearly two-thirds of respondents indicate that they lived within the urban core, one-quarter reported that they lived in a suburban community, a small number in a rural area, and a few lived outside of the city (Bourns & Meredith, 2008: 9-10). Housing status was diverse among the population. Half revealed they were homeless, living in an emergency shelter, transitional housing, a squat, or on the street, of these half again stated they were in an emergency shelter. Nearly 40% of the sample lived in their own accommodation, which included private and public housing. 29% reported that they lived with a friend (possibly couch-surfing) and another 19% still lived at home with their parents. Less than 10% lived in detention centres or were under the care of the Children's Aid Society.

As the rationale of the *YSB* study was to provide evidence for the need to open a health clinic to serve at-risk youth, information pertaining to health status was collected. According to the report, 83% of respondents reported having some form of health issue, of which 61% were not currently seeing a medical professional for these issues. Of the 25% who were seeing a medical professional they admitted to not following their professional advice. Consistent with findings in the *Panel Study* regarding the high prevalence of mental health problems, depression (67% females; 29% males) and anxiety (69% females; 28% males), were the two most common health issues reported by street-involved youth in this study (Bourns & Meredith, 2007: 14). Issues related to addictions, dental health, and chronic pain, were also significant, with approximately a third of the sample reporting each (Bourns & Meredith, 2007: 12). Again in tandem with the

results from the *Panel Study* described above, female youth reported more mental and physical health problems than male youth (Bourns & Meredith, 2007: 14). Echoing the results from the *Panel Study* and the *Public Health Agency of Canada* study, youth reported a higher prevalence of chronic physical health conditions, than their housed counterparts (Bourns & Meredith, 2007: 11). According to the research, there was evidence of a

> feminization of health problems: the female youth sub-group reported the poorest mental health, the second poorest physical health, and the highest incidence of unmet health needs of all sub-groups studies… Not surprisingly, all of these results were significantly worse than the normative comparators (Bourns & Meredith, 2007: 12).

As will be elaborated on below, this finding is consistent with other research that shows that young women suffer from greater victimization and generally fare worse than their male counterparts.

Youth homelessness is significantly different than other sub-groups of the homeless population for several reasons which will be examined in-depth after the discussion of structural and individual explanations. Without taking away from the heterogeneity of the youth population it is fair to state this group is specifically and markedly characterized by certain problems in the literature, ranging from common experiences of childhood victimization, to being more vulnerable to victimization on the streets (e.g. physical and mental health problems, violence, addictions), to structural transformations (e.g. precarious and changing labour and housing markets, disinvestment of the State, unstable family structures), that culminate in affecting their ability to carve out a future.

This is the group most affected by social policies of the "workfare" type, by cuts to certain assistance programs, and by the absence of housing measures. Furthermore, they are particularly vulnerable to problems related to drug use, such as HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis. Finally, those young people who have been subjected to family transformations and different types of institution management have suffered serious consequences in terms of their construction of self and identity (Hurtubise et al., 2003: 399).

In sum, it appears that there are two streams of thought regarding the causes of homelessness. The liberal paradigm has focussed on individual causes, while structuralists argue that homelessness is a function of the way society organizes and distributes its resources (Baumohl, 1996). The focus on individual responsibility has been criticized for diverting attention away from the contribution of macro level variables such as the lack of affordable, stable housing, concomitant cuts in public assistance, and the lack of employment opportunities at a wage above the poverty level for individuals with limited education or work skills (Morrell-Bellai et al., 2000; Murphy, 2000; Breakey, 1997; Snow & Anderson, 1993; Cohen & Thompson, 1992; Rosenberg et al., 1991). Numerous structural reasons account for the increase in homeless youth. According to Karabanow (2004), the last two decades have

witnessed a greater understanding of the structural elements which place youth at risk. With the issues of despair, systemic poverty, abuse, and alienation now at the forefront, a new perception of homelessness has surfaced; characterized as "running away from something" rather than "running toward the streets" (27-8).

During the late twentieth century, a considerable body of literature concerning the homeless emerged, and the focus of research continued to change. Early research focussed on the characteristics of the population in order to identify at-risk groups. Wagner (1997) suggests that social attitudes toward the homeless during this time can be summed up by three views. The

first, being the "crude pathological" view, that the homeless "are misfits, do not want to work, and deserve their fate" (56). Marcuse (1988) argues that this conservative reaction is aimed at neutralizing its implications, so that governments are not held accountable. He claims that this process occurs by denying the problem, blaming the victim, specializing the causes, and concealing the consequences. The second, the "expert pathological" view, subdivided the homeless into categories (e.g. mentally ill, substance abusers, criminals…), focussing on diagnostics rather than the causes creating and sustaining homelessness. This can be evidenced by the research of the 1980s that took stock of the numbers who were homeless and described their characteristics (as noted above in the Ottawa context). The third group postulated that the homeless are victims of macro-economic policies, portraying them as passive, dependent, and isolated (Wagner, 1997; Hoch & Slayton, 1989). The last decade has seen an emergence of the recognition of the growing diversity of the population and was concerned with examining the consequences of homelessness on health and attempted to develop etiological or "pathway" models of homelessness (the *Panel Study* in Ottawa is a good example of this). The next section will illuminate the structural causes associated with youth homelessness.

1.4 Structural Explanations of Youth Homelessness

Structural causes of youth homelessness include the lack of affordable housing, changes in the labour market, family instability, and poverty. Low income households often pay more than 50% of their incomes for housing, which is often substandard (Laird, 2007; Kraus et al., 2001).

Ottawa is no exception, as ATEH found that 37% of residents earned less than $20,000 per annum. "[M]any families must often choose between paying the rent and feeding the children. In some parts of the country, parents encourage their teenage children to move out because they can no longer afford to feed them" (Kraus et al, 2001: 5). Due to poor economic prospects in many regions and changing labour markets, many youth move to larger urban centres in the hopes of finding work but often are unable to find employment due to lack of job-readiness, education or experience (Laird, 2007; Kraus et al., 2001). The majority of homeless youth have not completed high school and have little work experience (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Farrell et al., 2000; Kraus et al., 2001). According to Laird (2007), "poverty is now the leading cause of homelessness in Canada" (5).

During the post-Second World War era, social integration was maintained by "economic growth, development of the wage-earning society, quasi-full employment and improvement in workers' living conditions. The welfare state contributed significantly to this process of integration through a redistributive policy" (Bhalla & Lapeyre, 1999: 1). The past two decades have witnessed a new pattern of deindustrialization coupled with the dismantling of the welfare state. This trend is evidenced by a sharp decline in manufacturing jobs, with a steep rise in the service sector (more precarious and low-paid work), and a heightened international division of labour. The changing labour market is juxtaposed the gentrification of urban areas producing a mass migration back to cities, thus shrinking the housing supply, and straining low-income peoples' ability to afford and access housing, on top of a reduction in social assistance benefits and eligibility.

According to Hulchanski (2009),

> Postwar progress in building a middle-income inclusive society in which everyone is adequately housed was halted. Instead of re-housing processes and mechanisms, we have had, for at least two decades now, de-housing processes and mechanisms… over the past two decades, instead of continuing public policies, including appropriate regulation of the private sector where necessary for the general public good, we did the opposite. We now have a huge social service, health and mental health sector focused on de-housed people… we relied on an increasingly deregulated society in which the "genius of market forces" would meet our needs, in which the tax cuts made possible by program spending cuts that usually benefited poor and average income people, were supposed to "trickle down" to benefit those in need. The competitive economy required, we were told, wage suppression and part-time jobs with no benefits (6).

Mullaly (1994: 76) echoes these sentiments and describes how the labour market is producing a growing two-tiered society, consisting of an upper class that enjoys a dynamic, well-off sector with full-time jobs, good incomes, and work-related benefits, and everyone else, including socially disadvantaged groups, have marginal, insecure wages or unemployment. Previously, there existed certain safeguards, or 'rigidities' within the labour market in terms of labour allocation and contracts; while the technological mixes, consumption habits and power of the working-class had more direct effects on workers abilities to control and benefit from their labour (Mullaly, 1997: 4; Harvey, 1989: 124). However, over the past several decades there has been a rapid transition from a rigid form of capitalism to one with more flexibility, with a dramatic impact on the labour market. Most notably, the rise of non-standard work (part-time, short-term, temporary, casual, seasonal, self-employment), diminishing labour market opportunities for the low-skilled worker, low wages coupled with low or no job-related benefits,

due to a shift from manufacturing to service employment, and the restructuring of internal labour markets (Street, 1998; Mullaly, 1997; Muszynski, 1994) have not increased inclusion, but have been detrimental to it.

People now move in and out of employment and unemployment more rapidly, the nature of work has become more precarious, short-term, contract – oriented. Whereas, welfare used to have some measure of socially integrative features, it is now under attack and is being replaced with workfare ideology. This is reinforcing the hegemony of paid-work, echoing the division between deserving and undeserving poor which is laden with strong moral undertones. There has been in fact an explosion of the 'working poor' (Geddes, 2000). Homelessness, here in Canada is not simply a question of the demand for rental housing outweighing the supply; it is a problem of affordability, of inadequate income (whether from social assistance or paid work) to cover housing costs (Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, 2005). While the nature of labour has changed, rendering it more precarious and difficult to earn a 'living wage,' the housing squeeze (dwindling supply, coupled with the lack of rent control and hence, rising rents) has left many out in the cold. Some studies have shown that many living in homeless shelters do work (Salvation Army, 2009), but the labour and housing markets have changed so drastically that they are unable to access adequate housing. And when they do, recent changes made to weaken tenant rights and the insecurity of work has made it more difficult to maintain it (Bellot, 2008).

Media reports highlight the "growing gap" between rich and poor: "The gap between rich and poor has reached a three-decade high, a prosperity gap usually associated with underdeveloped nations" (David Olive, Toronto Star, Oct. 20, 2007). While the low end of the housing market continues to shrink, there are more poor Canadians than ever (17% of our total population now lives below the poverty line), and income disparity is widening (Where's Home, 2009; Shapcott, 2008; Murphy, 2000: 78). Furthermore, the federal and provincial governments have abandoned public housing programs.

> As the political pendulum swung away from the interventionist state, housing programs…were cut. First to go was the federal thread, as national support for new affordable housing was phased out. Then, in most provincial legislators, the threads were sliced, too. Left alone, the threadbare municipal strands could no longer sustain the weight of the responsibility to house all Canadians. Housing production fell completely into the realm of private economic activity (Layton, 2000, xxi).

According to Laird (2007), "Canada's housing policy since 1993 has largely been a devolution of decisions, supports and housing to marketplace mechanisms…The lack of a coordinated national plan, in turn, propels government back towards short-term crisis management" (27). Since there has been no national strategy to address homelessness through a national housing strategy it has been more about managing the homeless. "That no official source has yet estimated the full cost of homelessness in Canada suggests that part of the problem is one of policy and leadership, as much as lack of new funding for housing alternatives and support programs" (Laird, 2007: 27).

The previous United Nation's previous Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing (Miloon Kothari) criticized Canada's lack of political will in addressing homelessness.

> Canada's successful social housing program, which created more than half a million homes starting in 1973, no longer exists. Canada has fallen behind most countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in its level of investment in affordable housing (Kothari a, 2007).

Specifically, he was concerned about the significant number of homeless in all parts of the country and by the fact that the Government could not provide reliable statistics on the number of homeless.

> It has been stated that the widespread and rapid growth of homelessness in Canada since the mid-1990s is unprecedented since World War II…While the issue has been under discussion for a long time, Canada still doesn't have an official definition of homelessness. The Special Rapporteur is of the view that reaching an agreed definition of homelessness that includes a deep understanding of the systemic causes of homelessness is the first step to address the issue and is of crucial importance to draw efficient and cost-effective programmes (Kothari b, Addendum: 16).

These times of low-wage temporary jobs, eroding social assistance systems, and an unaffordable housing market create special barriers for youth who lack work experience, education, training, and have limited access to the housing market. Moreover, the strict and differing eligibility criteria for social assistance for sixteen and seventeen year-olds, exacerbates youth homelessness. In Ontario, "The Ontario Works Act is provincial legislation that provides either employment or financial assistance to those 'in need'" (Government of Ontario, 2006). Although it varies slightly between municipalities, "in most regions it is mandatory for

individuals under the age of 18 to be enrolled full time in school or an alternative learning

program to be eligible" (Haldenby et al., 2007: 1235). The eligibility criteria for Ontario Works

(general welfare) require that this age group be enrolled in school or some other program.

> Eligibility for income assistance has been identified as a major concern for 16 and
> 17 year-olds across the country. This group has particular difficulty obtaining
> benefits. For example, eligibility criteria may require that youth be in school,
> which may be difficult if they have no place to live. Youth may also be deterred
> from applying for benefits if the process will involve contacting their parents and
> if they must prove that they cannot live at home (Kraus et al., 2001: 6).

Moreover, the family, guardian, group or foster home has to be deemed unsuitable (determined

by the front-line worker) in order to access these benefits.

Another systemic issue pertinent to street youth is the paucity of research on the link between

gaps in child welfare/protection services and the rise of youth homelessness (Fitzgerald, 1995),

particularly how this relates to sixteen and seventeen year-olds. According to the *Environmental*

Scan on Youth Homelessness,

> serious gaps in child welfare/protection services have been identified as a factor
> contributing to youth homelessness, especially for 16 and 17 year-olds. In
> particular, concerns have been raised in virtually all provinces where youth who
> are 16 and older are not able to access protection services. It is also noted that
> youth hare often not equipped to live independently in the community when they
> leave the child protection system (e.g. 16-18 years old) and many "graduate" to the
> street (Kraus et al., 2001: 6).

In the province of Ontario, once a youth turns sixteen they are free to leave the child protection

system and become legally emancipated from the child welfare system, and many choose to do

so. Although there is a dearth of Canadian research on the topic, evidence is beginning to mount that shows a connection between youth homelessness and child protection services. A Vancouver study of one hundred and fifty-two homeless youth found that over 40% had lived in a foster home or group home (McCarthy, 1995). Similarly, a Toronto study found that 43% had some history in a foster or group home (Kraus et al., 2001: 6). In their study of 489 Calgary street kids, Kufeldt and Nimmo (1987) found that 53% of the "runners" and 30% of the "in and outers" reported they were on the streets primarily because of encounters with child welfare agencies and, only secondarily, because of experiences with their biological parents. In Ottawa, 46% of male youth and 35% of female youth had lived in group homes prior to becoming homeless (Aubry et al., 2008: 24). In Karabanow et al.'s (2005) study, over two thirds of the participants had "some form of experience with the child welfare system, such as involvement with group homes, foster care, residential facilities and case worker supervision" (32).

However, structural reasons alone do not explain for the rise in youth homelessness. According to Karabanow (2004),

> the street youth phenomenon can best be understood not as a problem of "social misfits" but as a problem of social structure… street youth populations report not only disturbing levels of poverty and neglect, but striking levels of abuse and dysfunction with the family, and overwhelming feelings of alienation and distance from mainstream culture as well (31-32).

The next section will uncover some of these individual causes for youth homelessness as exhumed in the literature, particularly as they relate to experiences of victimization and vulnerability, and that form much of the context for the rationale of current research.

1.5 Individual Explanations of Youth Homelessness

Recently, victimization literature has provided one of the overarching explanations for youth's draw to the streets, and has helped to frame their experiences of life on the streets. The coupling of past and current histories of victimization, have provided the rationale and impetus for intervention, protection and surveillance. However, underlying the trajectories of victimization is an even longer history of a sociology of deviance that has characterized this population. The following sections will highlight the major trends in research on homeless youth to uncover the assumptions that are implicit in the individual explanations of youth homelessness. Concepts of victimization and deviancy will be fleshed out further in the following chapter.

1.5.1 Constructs of Victimization and Deviancy

The evidence of childhood victimization abounds in recent research on homeless youth (Gaetz, 2004; Karabanow, 2004; Baron, 2003; Cauce et al., 2000), and these histories of abuse, neglect, abandonment and involvement with the child welfare system are commonly cited as the catalysts pushing and pulling youth to the streets (Karabanow, 2004; Mounier & Andujo, 2003; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). Moreover, victimizing experiences have profound effects on a person's ability

to cope, and impact individuals' perceptions and beliefs about themselves and the world in which they live. "Victimization can deplete one's resources, shattering assumptions relating to beliefs of personal invulnerability, a meaningful and understandable world, and perceptions of self-efficacy" (Mounier & Andujo, 2003: 1187). Defining youth as victims is more of a recent phenomenon and tends to characterize youth as passive and deficient, providing a rationale for intervention, moral regulation, and risk minimization.

One of the earliest analyses of the causes of running away, however, was awash in Freudian symbolism and grounded in a framework of deviancy. Running away, was regarded as a "psychoneurotic" act that indicated some form of psychopathology in the runaway. "Runaways were persistently viewed as being motivated by processes stemming from resurgent oedipal conflicts which the adolescent can solve only by the act of physical separation from the parent, that is, by an act of 'self-banishment'" (Stefanidis et al., 1992: 442). Over the last several decades, the act of running away has been viewed as deviant, and in the late 1960s was included as a psychiatric diagnosis coined "runaway reaction" (Diagnostic Statistical Manual II,). The term "runaway" is a non sequitur that reflects its origin, it implies choice, that the youth chooses to leave home. However, DiPaolo (1999: 3-4) argues that "throwaway" is a more apt term, because the youth are often forced to leave "home" in order to survive. In his study, he reveals that the conditions within families are fraught with physical, sexual or psychological abuse, and that leaving home may be the only alternative (DiPaolo, 1999; Kurtz et al, 1991).

Causes of youth homelessness identify family breakdown as a major precipitator (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Poirier, 1999; Caputo, 1997; Kufeldt, 1994). Many youth report not

being able to continue living at home due to family violence, particularly physical and sexual abuse. In fact, conflict with parents and mistreatment have been cited as the principal reasons for leaving home (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Kraus et al., 2001; Library of Parliament, 1999). "Youth ran away from home primarily because of their inability to get along with their parents (conflict), a perception of being unloved (emotional abuse), being physically abused, and being thrown out of the house" (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006: 12). The Mayor's Homelessness Task Force in Toronto reported that several studies have found that more than 70% of youth on the streets leave home because of physical or sexual abuse; in Ottawa, 75% of youth stated they left home because of sexual, physical and/or emotional abuse (Library of Parliament, 1999).

When homeless youth were asked to describe their families of origin they portrayed them as dysfunctional, physically, sexually and emotionally abusive (Janus et al., 1995; Kurtz et al., 1991; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990; Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987). Histories of physical abuse ran from 30% to up to 80%, while sexual abuse accounted for 24% to up to 60% (particularly female youth involved in the sex trade). In addition, one study took a further look at the reasons runaways gave for leaving home. Roughly 60% reported conflict and "feeling unloved," and 38% indicated that they were "thrown out" (Janus et al., 1995). A consistent one-third of female youth reported forced sexual activity by an adult caretaker. Janus et al. (1995) found that female runaways appear to be at greater risk than males, reporting more abuse of a repetitive nature, initiated at a younger age, and experienced for a longer duration than the abuse reported by males.

Others agree that these youth have a history of being abused, neglected and abandoned, whether it happens in their own homes, foster homes, or group homes (Whitbeck et al., 1999; Whitbeck et al., 1997; Kurtz et al., 1991; Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987). In fact, most researchers agree that running away is not an impulsive reaction to a new problem, but rather is a way of coping from long-standing intolerable situations (DiPaolo, 1999; Stefanidis et al., 1992; Kurtz et al., 1991; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). Research conducted by Whitbeck and Simons (1990: 108) has shown that running away is not an uncommon phenomenon: "chronic runaways, almost by definition are individuals who will experience little loss and may even experience a sense of relief by cutting ties to parents" (109).

Poor parent-child relationships and parenting practices, extreme family conflict, physical and sexual abuse, feelings of alienation from their parent(s), inconsistency in supervision, and unpredictability in discipline are the primary causes of adolescents running away (DiPaolo, 1999; Whitbeck et al., 1999; Stefanidis et al., 1992; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). According to Whitbeck et al.'s (1999) study, the "parent/caretakers of runaway adolescents rated themselves lower on measures of parental monitoring and parental warmth and supportiveness and higher on measures of parental rejection relative to parents of similarly aged nonrunaway adolescents from the same geographical region in single-parent and intact two-parent families" (275). Moreover, some youth are forced to leave home due to their sexual orientation or gender identity (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz et al., 1999).

These studies uncovered that youth believed themselves to be "bad, worthless, and deserving of punishment" (Stephanidis et al., 1992). They typically internalized these beliefs and suffered

from: depression, low self-esteem, suicide attempts/threats, substance abuse/addictive behaviours, self-injury, and had a propensity to engage in high-risk activities (Whitbeck et al., 1997). Kurtz et al.'s (1991) research discovered that the problems arising from physical and sexual abuse histories were additive. Lastly, studies indicated that roughly half of the youth were not running from their home of origin but from substitute care arrangements, whether it is adopted or foster families or child welfare facilities (Aubry et al., 2008; Fitzgerald, 1995; Goodman et al., 1991; Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987). In addition, some youth reported being pushed out by a parent's new spouse (Kraus et al., 2001: 5). This evidence suggests that the youth's attachment histories may play a large role in their becoming homeless.

Some researchers have speculated that the developmental processes set in motion by abusive families/environment provide "training grounds" for anti-social behaviours (Baron et al., 2007; Whitbeck et al., 1997) and affect the youth's exposure to risk for further victimization and their participation in high-risk behaviours while on the street (Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). "Abused adolescents are more likely to report depressive symptoms, experience attachment disorders, report symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, report higher levels of substance abuse, and engage in delinquent or other high-risk behaviours than adolescents from nonabusive backgrounds" (Whitbeck et al., 1997: 376). For instance, Kurtz et al. (1991) found that youth who had experienced sexual abuse were at higher risk for later sexual victimization and exploitation, and the development of major mental illnesses, than those who had never experienced sexual abuse. And that experiencing more kinds of abuse in childhood (e.g. physical and sexual) had cumulative negative developmental effects.

Homeless youth's childhood histories and life on the streets are described by researchers either within a context of victimization or deviancy, leaving little room for other forms of explanation or youth's viewpoints. The next section will examine the descriptors that encompass this population, particularly in relation to how they are constructed as potential victims or deviants, namely as an "at-risk" group, to argue that this binary forms the foundation of a sociology of risk that has largely supplanted these earlier constructs.

Part 2: Descriptors and Risk Factors

As will be highlighted below, various descriptors have become synonymous with defining homeless youth as an "at-risk" group. Roy et al. (2004) argue that despite some heterogeneity of the population,

> these youth share many characteristics that jeopardize their development and health; they are highly entrenched in the streets and frequently engage in high-risk behaviours such as prostitution and substance abuse, including injection drug use. They are increasingly recognized as a population at risk for a wide range of physical and mental health problems (569).

This passage highlights how the past histories of risk related to childhood victimization and deviancy are intimately connected to current "risky" behaviours engaged in on the streets, and in a way how this "perfect storm" of past and present combines to create a future forecasting of

potential victims and deviants, by underscoring the risks that are inherent in their past and current behaviours and histories. By describing this population along risk fault lines and the potential for unfettered doom there is an attempt to provide a rationale for the kinds of interventions required to address the most and least risky kinds of ills these youth face. These quantifiable, rational, and moralistic suppositions have also become normative, and have a common sense like quality about them that leave little room for dispute. This will be revealed in the following section by showcasing the common descriptors that characterize this population within the context of risk that, we argue, rests on a binary of depicting them as victims or deviants.

2.1.1 Demographics

The make-up of the homeless youth population is diverse and ever changing, but a few trends can be found. According to the results of the *Street Youth in Canada: Findings from Enhanced Surveillance of Canadian Street Youth, 1999-2003* (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006), which surveyed 5000 street youth (defined as between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four years-old) across the country, these youth are overwhelmingly male, with females comprising an estimated 37% of the population, resulting in a ratio of 2:1, male to female, however, as will be addressed below the youth population in Ottawa where this study was conducted show a ratio closer to 1:1. The vast majority of youth were born in Canada, with less than 10% born outside the country. Ethnically, 60% are Caucasian, one-third Aboriginal (Gaetz et al., 1999: 6), and

about 12% reported being of African, Asian, Middle Eastern descent or other ethnicities (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006: 8). There is also evidence to suggest that a high proportion of the population self-identify as lesbian, gay, and bisexual, with estimates ranging between 20-40% and that conflict around sexual orientation and gender identity has been cited as a reason for leaving home or being pushed out (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz et al., 1999). The mean age at which youth left home was fifteen years old, with panhandlers and those in the sex trade being the group who left home at the earliest age (13.5 years old) (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002: 443).

2.1.2 Socio-Economic Factors

In terms of socio-economic backgrounds, the Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) reported that from their findings in 2003, that more than one-quarter reported that social welfare was their main source of income (5), while in Ottawa male and female youth reported a greater reliance on social assistance, 48% and 36% respectively (Aubry et al., 2007). Typically, youth who become homeless often have a history of school problems. The Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) reported that more than 35% of street youth in their study had dropped out of school or had been expelled from school permanently (5), other studies in Ottawa and Toronto show that the vast majority of homeless youth have not completed high school (63% - 90%) (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Farrell et al., 2000; Kraus et al., 2001). It is difficult to determine whether school problems are an antecedent to becoming homeless, or a consequence of a culmination of problems including family conflict, prior to becoming homeless (Kurtz et al., 1991). Most street youth reported having some secondary education, with only a very few reporting an education

level higher than secondary school, and only 25% had completed grade twelve (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006: 9).

2.1.3 Health

While the picture of youth homelessness varies from region to region, deteriorating health is a common trend (Haldenby et al., 2007; Boivin et al., 2005; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Ensign, 1998). Moreover, the longer individuals remain homeless the worse their health becomes (Karabanow, 2004; Kraus et al., 2001). Higher incidence of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (Noell et al., 2001) (the prevalence and incidence rates of many STIs and blood-borne infections are reported to be ten to twelve times higher in street youth than in the general youth population (Haldenby et al., 2007; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006), Hepatitis B and C, tuberculosis, suicide, high prevalence of depression and other psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, poor nutrition, scabies, foot and dental problems, acute and chronic respiratory diseases, and viral infections have been found to be at increased rates among the population (Boivin et al., 2005). Despite the fact their poor health is well known, many researchers have found that "these youth are the least likely to access the available health care services" (Haldenby et al., 2007: 1233). Noell et al. (2001) found that the number of sexual partners significantly predicted the future acquisition of an STI.

Haldenby et al. (2007), Gaetz and O'Grady (2002), and Boivin et al. (2005) state that homeless youth are more likely to suffer from major mental illnesses, especially depression. In particular, Haldenby et al. (2007) point to the high rates of suicide among gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered youth. In Kidd's (2006) research on suicidality and homeless youth, he found that although there was an overall high level of history of attempts (46%, with 78% of those reporting more than one attempt), there was a decrease in overall level of suicidality among participants as they left home and came to the streets (413). However, circumstances that increased risk included "feeling trapped" (e.g., victimization, poor health), and having friends who had attempted or committed suicide. This research points to the uneven results of the status of the mental health of homeless youth. For some, detaching from their families or substitute care arrangements may improve their mental health but may render them more at risk of developing physical health problems, for others, their mental health may worsen. Others argue that being homeless is akin to being "psychologically traumatized" (Goodman & Saxe, 1991).

Lastly, there are also predictive factors at play when looking at youth who are "at- risk" of becoming homeless. According to Bearsley-Smith et al. (2008), who studied adolescents who were at risk of becoming homeless, they found that their mental health status was indeed a risk factor: "adolescents at risk of homelessness reported six times higher levels of depressive symptomatology than youths not at risk" (233).

The interplay of physical and mental health and inherent risks in street life coupled with childhood histories of victimization form a complex web of potential dangers, but there is uneven evidence about the potentiality of further victimization.

2.1.4 Addictions

Rates of alcohol and drug use among street youth populations have been found to be substantially higher than those found in the general youth population (Benoit et al., 2007; Haldenby et al., 2007; Tyler, 2007; Haldenby et al., 2007; Boivin et al., 2005; McMorris et al., 2001; Kipke et al., 1996) and similar to physical and mental health problems, form one of the central axes of risk within this population. A study of street youth in Montreal found that almost one-half (45.8%) had injected drugs, and they were found to be eleven times more likely to die of drug overdose and suicide than the general youth population (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006: 2). Several researchers have found that a history of childhood sexual abuse increases the risk of substance abuse among homeless youth (Haldenby et al., 2007), with one study citing that youth were twice as likely to become injection drug users (Roy et al., 2003). Using substances have also been cited as a method of coping, often referred to as a form of "self-medicating" with isolation, loneliness, and negative life events, in particular, early childhood abuse (Tyler, 2007; McMorris, 2001).

Baron et al. (2007) go one step further arguing that substance use may be partially responsible for increasing one's risk of being victimized, by decreasing one's vigilance to imminent attacks.

> Intoxicant use can decrease critical judgements and increase recklessness and imprudence, factors that often foster provocation. Drinking and/or drug use might also lower individuals' inhibitions and release provocative, aggressive tendencies and at the same time serve to slow important defensive reflexes. Beyond these bodily effects, these substances are often consumed in high-risk environments that create conflict situations and inflame violent actions (Baron et al., 2007: 415).

Further, in terms of substance use having predictive values, some researchers have found that the most severe forms of drug use (e.g. injection drug use), and subsequent negative health sequelae associated with this form of use (e.g. acquisition of infectious diseases) are most prevalent in survivors of childhood sexual abuse and tend to be those youth that are more street-entrenched and involved in deviant activities (e.g. sex trade, criminal activity).

2.1.5 Violence

Compared to the rest of the Canadian public, street youth experience much higher levels of victimization. According to Statistics Canada (1999) (as quoted in Gaetz, 2004), roughly a quarter of Canadians are victims of crime in any given year. In Gaetz's (2004) study, 81.9% of the street youth sampled in his Toronto study reported having been victims of crime in the past

year, while 79.4% reported two or more incidents (434), asserting that "street youth are among the most victimized populations in Canadian society" (424).

Homeless youth also suffer from an increased exposure to violence that escalates with the length of time spent on the streets (Boivin et al., 2005). A study conducted in 1998, of street youth in Montreal, found that the mortality rate was nine times higher for males and thirty-one times higher for females when compared to the general youth population of Québec (Kraus et al., 2001: 5). In other studies, street involvement was found to increase the risk of mortality by anywhere from 8 to 14 times that of the general population (Boivin et al., 2005; Hwang, 2000; Roy et al., 1996).

Homeless youth have also reported being physically and sexually assaulted, robbed, threatened with a weapon, chased, shot at, stabbed, beaten up, and exploited at rates greater than the general population (Boivin et al., 2005; Sleegers et al., 1998; Whitbeck et al., 1997; Janus et al., 1995; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). According to Gaetz (2004), homeless youth are five times as likely to be victims of assault than domiciled youth, five times more likely to be victims of theft, and ten times more likely to be robbed by force and be victims of sexual assault. There is overwhelming evidence that homeless youth live in precarious environments where the threat of victimization is ever-present as evidenced by these statistics of victimization and by the fact that youth often employ safety strategies to reduce this risk (e.g. change their routines, activities, avoid certain places, carry weapon(s) and possessions, alter their appearance) (Gaetz, 2004).

Hoyt et al. (1999) developed four exposure factors that they confirmed increase the potentiality for victimization on the streets. These include: actual amount of time living on the street without shelter; level of substance abuse; degree of involvement with gang activities; and prior personal victimization. They found that "the risks for current victimization were approximately two-and-one-half times greater if the youth had been a prior victim of a personal assault" (Hoyt et al., 1999: 387). Further, they concluded that not only is exposure strongly related to prior experiences of victimization, but also "victimization of street youths is not simply a matter of being homeless and in an unsafe environment; it is also dependent on what they are doing in this context" (Hoyt et al., 1999: 388). In essence, concluding that personal behaviours play a role and are partially responsible for causing victimization.

Similarly, Baron et al.'s (2007) research reveals that "violence often evolves from 'character contests' where each participant attempts to save face", and that "expressive acts of violence typically begin with a dispute over relatively trivial matters" (412). Moreover, they (Baron et al., 2007) affirm that "many who seek redress and justice through violence end up as the victims in the conflict" (412); and, "the more violent incidents that street youths are involved in, the more likely they are to report being victimized" (422).

Ironically, even though it can be argued that homeless youth remain one of the most victimized groups in Canada, they are the least likely seek help from authorities (Novac et al., 2009a; Gaetz, 2004; Karabanow, 2004). According to Karabanow, "most street-entrenched youth are more likely to have negative relations with police or have a perception that police treat homeless youth badly and consequently street-involved youth tend not to go to police for help in terms of their

own safety concerns" (Karabanow quoted in Koeller et al., Background Report). Novac et al. (2009a) found that criminal victimization of the homeless, more generally, was rarely reported to the police because respondents stated that: they did not trust the police to be fair or to protect them, they felt the police would be disinterested or ineffective, or that the police were the principle offenders. Moreover, the "code of the street" was cited as a reason for not contacting the police.

> street people may protect other street people (for example, by not "squealing" on a homeless person). If loyalty is not a sufficient reason to keep quite, fear of retaliation is generally effective. Violations of street culture can result in reprisal from other homeless people… (Novac et al., 2009a: 9).

Gaetz (2004) reports that street youth rarely reported incidents of criminal victimization to members of their family or to adult authority figures (e.g. teachers, social workers, or counsellors); "reflecting the estrangement of young people who are homeless, their weak guardianship, and their limited social capital" (Gaetz, 2004: 440). Karabanow (2004) goes one step further arguing that violence needs to be understood within a larger cycle of repression:

> as a means for some disenfranchised youth on the streets of gaining control, or self-empowerment… Street youth are frequently both perpetrators and victims of street violence. The streets for homeless adolescents shape a constantly changing subculture that is often animated by a dynamic of lawlessness (Karabanow, 2004: 42).

One of the incongruencies in the literature, though, finds that despite the high rates of exposure to violence, a large proportion of youth studied reported that they felt "not at all afraid" of being beaten up (60%) or sexually assaulted (54%) (Kipke et al., 1997: 366). According to these researchers, the discrepancy may be explained by the

subjective perceptions of fearlessness because they have failed to acknowledge their risk of victimization to themselves, to avoid the cognitive dissonance that would results from continuing to subject themselves or be subjected to the dangers of life on the street (Kipke et al., 1997: 366).

Thus, even though the high rates of violence and victimization are indisputable, the perceptions and reactions of youth to these phenomena remain largely unknown.

Again, this forms one of the central points in the risk/victimization/deviancy matrix that will be described in detail at the end of this section. Paralleling what is known about homeless youth's poor health status, violence and experiences of victimization are pervasive in this cohort, yet they are the least likely to reach out for official forms of help, and their viewpoints and understanding of these experiences remain largely unknown.

2.1.6 Gendered Dimensions

The literature on homeless youth often categorizes young men and women's experiences of victimization and deviancy differently, arguing that women are much more vulnerable to gender-based violence (Haldenby et al., 2007; Noell et al., 2001; Whitbeck et al., 1999). Whitbeck et al. (1999) developed a risk-amplification model of victimization and depressive symptoms among homeless youth. They postulated that male and female youth have different trajectories of victimization. These different trajectories can be explained by the different types of

victimization that male and female youth experience; young women are at an increased risk for sexual victimization and exploitation, while young men are more likely to experience physical victimization and exhibit aggressive behaviours.

Sexual victimization tends to lead to internalizing symptoms such as feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and depression in young women, while physical victimization tends to produce an externalizing aggressive reciprocal response among young men (i.e. "anti-social" traits). Whitbeck and colleagues (1999) conclude that physically and sexually abusive family environments augment victimizing experiences and set these youth on a negative developmental course that serve to pre-select involvement in environments that perpetuate negative behaviours and negative interaction styles. For example, when these youth leave an abusive home environment, this increases the likelihood of association with non-conventional peers, which, in turn, increases risk for alcohol/drug use, deviant subsistence strategies, and high-risk sexual behaviour. All of these behaviours subsequently increase the danger of further victimization once homeless.

O'Grady and Gaetz (2009) contend that the culture of the streets is male-dominated and thereby places women at greater risk for victimization. "The streets are a social and economic arena where men have more power and control than women" (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2009: 5). They also point to the fact that until very recently, research on

> public youth cultures (and, indeed, much of the research on street youth) has rendered young women practically invisible. Female involvement in such spaces, however, should not be considered as marginal to that of men; rather, it is structurally different in terms of how young women exercise independence, nurture friendships and attachments, and explore youth cultural options and economic opportunities (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2009: 5).

A central feature of this phenomenon, they argue, is that homeless young women are detached from their families and situated within a male-dominated arena. Haldenby et al. (2007: 1239) found that there was a common perception among homeless youth that young women living on the streets were more vulnerable and not as able to take care of themselves as young men were, and thus needed to adopt a more aggressive approach in order to make themselves feel safer.

Similarly, Lucchini (2001: 77) argues that due to the resource shortages prevalent on the streets (conceptualized not only as material but also symbolic and affective resources) a spirit of competition and dominance tends to predominate which pushes street youth to take on more of a masculine identity. Moreover, he argues that the stigmatized individual takes on deviant traits that are associated with the stigma of being homeless and street-involved, a process he refers to as secondary deviance, by virtue of being labelled a homeless and stigmatized person and internalizing and projecting the ascribed traits (Lucchini, 2001: 77).

2.1.7 Social Networks

Social networks are comprised of people with whom homeless youth associate and spend most of their time with (Tyler, 2007). Studies show that these young people have social networks that are comprised mainly of peers (Tyler, 2007). The evidence is uneven with respect to whether social networks encourage or discourage victimization and deviancy. While many researchers have classified these groups using negative and deviant stereotypes, in terms of being

encouraging of engagement in high-risk activities, such as coercing members to have sex or use drugs (Tyler, 2007); others have noted that these social networks provide protective functions (Haldenby et al., 2007) and that members may be less likely to engage in risky behaviours (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997).

While Tyler (2007) initially speculated that youth may be pressured or coerced by members of the group to engage in deviant behaviour (i.e. drug use), they found only a small portion of youth (14%) experienced pressure to use drugs (681). Contrary to a commonly held belief that adult female injection drug users start injecting because of a partner's habit, Roy et al. (2003) found young women did not start injecting because of the influence of a partner or lover (101).

In Haldenby et al.'s (2007) study, youth reported that while living on the streets they

> developed meaningful relationships in which they felt supported, cared for, and protected. Some youth found these relationships to be more "real," [than relationships with family and housed peers] as they could empathize with one another and talk about their situations without feeling that they were being judged negatively…Often, street culture provided the youth with the "family" that they felt they never had (1238).

Hagan and McCarthy (1997) noted similar findings, in particular, that members protected one another from out-group victimization and social support, and provided a sense of belonging (Ennett et al., 1999). Haldenby et al. (2007) and Ennett et al. (1999) reported that youth who felt this closeness to other members were less likely to have numerous sexual partners, and that this buffered against youth engaging in survival sex (which will be described in greater detail in the next section).

Not only did these networks provide closeness and a sense of belonging, Tyler (2007) noted that these social networks were marked by stability and frequent interaction. However, while these networks may not be as transient or void of support and contact as previously thought, they may still represent places of instigation or introduction to engagement in risky behaviours. Tyler (2007) states that these groups have high levels of conflict that are characterized by high levels of sexual risk taking and drug related behaviours. "Although networks of homeless youth may have more stability and support than previously thought, the culture of homelessness includes are relatively high level of "drama" and conflict, which can have deleterious effects on youth who face numerous daily adversities" (Tyler, 2007: 682).

Unravelling the social network puzzle a little deeper, Gaetz (2004) found that although street youth may emphasize the "significance of "street" friendships, often using the language of "family" to describe such relationships, they often, at the same time, are socially isolated or have weak attachments to others and do not always trust those who are close to them" (440). Some authors refer to these peer networks as "street groups" (Baron, 2003a) or "street families" (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Parazelli, 2000). Baron (2003a) argues that these groups often create group rivalries, arguing mostly over territory, which frequently culminate in acts of violence that provide opportunities for members to display their "worthiness to the rest of the group" (Baron, 2003a: 31).

Interestingly, very few studies mention the significance of family in the youth's social networks. Except for a handful of authors (Colombo, 2008; Tyler, 2007; Benoit et al., 2007; Bellot, 2001), there is an assumption by most researchers that family does not play a role in the social lives of

these youth. In Tyler's (2007) study, they report that only 2% of their sample reported a family member as part of their network, and state that this is "unfortunate given the buffering effect that family members have on homeless youth's participation in risky behaviours" (681). Lussier et al. (2002) note that homelessness among youth engenders a systematic erosion of personal and social networks with their previous lives (i.e. family and school friends), while paradoxically they search, often in vain, to resume and mend these ruptured ties.

However, this study found that youth's current relationships with their families, and their own conceptualizations of their identities were intimately connected to representations of their family that directly impacted their conceptualizations of risk.

2.1.8 Sexual Practices

Researchers have found that homeless youth engage in risky sexual practices, including low rates of condom use, have numerous sexual partners, high rates of sexually transmitted diseases (Haldenby et al., 2007; Tyler, 2007; Noell et al., 2001), and high rates of pregnancy (Haley, 2007; Novac et al., 2006, 2009b; Boivin et al., 2005;). Rates of trading sex, also referred to as "survival sex" (symbolizing trading sex for money, drugs or shelter (Haldenby et al., 2007; Greene et al., 1997), were also found to be high, ranging from 11% to 46% (Tyler, 2007: 674). In Greene et al.'s (1997) study,

> the odds of engaging in survival sex were increased for youths who had been victimized, those who had participated in criminal behaviours, those who had attempted suicide, those who had an STD, and those who had been pregnant.

> Survival sex was strongly associated with all recent substance use indicators and with lifetime injection drug use (1408).

Approximately one-quarter of street youth reported having traded sex at some point in their lives, and a high proportion of them reported not having used condoms during their most recent episode of sexual intercourse, with most reporting having had no fewer than seventeen partners in their lifetime (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006: 5). Furthermore, street youth did not seem to modify their sexual behaviours after being diagnosed with an STI (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006: 6).

Becoming pregnant is also a reality for many young homeless women, and a common occurrence (Novac et al., 2009b; Haldenby et al., 2007; Novac et al., 2006). According to a study conducted in Calgary, 48% of youth had been pregnant or had been responsible for getting someone pregnant (Worthington, University of Calgary). Similar results were found in Montreal (50%) (Haley, Montreal Public Heath Department; Boivin et al., 2005) and Toronto (Novac et al., 2006, 2009); and 5% had had more than one pregnancy (Haley, Montreal Public Health Department). In the United States results indicate that youth living on the street had the highest lifetime rates of pregnancy (48%), followed by youth residing in shelters (33%), while youth living in stable households had lifetime pregnancy rates of under 10 per cent (Greene & Ringwalt, 1998: 370). According to Novac et al. (2006),

> homeless pregnant adolescents are a vulnerable group. Both homelessness and pregnancy are risk factors for poor health among youth. Pregnancy among homeless young women is associated with earlier and more severe abuse during childhood, earlier onset of drug use, and poor mental health (1).

Moreover, young women with a history of childhood sexual abuse were more likely to report incidences of sexual victimization (Noell et al., 2001).

Lastly, Thompson et al. (2008) found that being pregnant was a risk factor for involvement in criminal activity. They found that a greater percentage of pregnant youth reported being on probation or having been charged criminally than their non-pregnant counterparts.

In sum, many researchers postulate that homeless youth whether they are in shelters or on the street are at very high risk for pregnancy because of a variety of factors.

> They engage in high risk sexual activities such as having multiple sexual partners; as a result of poverty, they are compelled to engage in 'survival' sex, trading sex for their basic subsistence needs; …they cannot afford effective contraceptives; they are vulnerable to sexual assault; and they have limited access to medical and family planning services (Greene & Ringwalt, 1998: 370).

2.1.9 The Informal Economy

Many researchers argue that youth do not have access to legitimate means of self-support, and as a result, a significant number of youth are drawn into illegal activity as a method of survival on the streets, and that this further increases their chances of victimization (Gaetz, 2004; Kraus et al., 2001; Whitbeck et al., 1997; McCarthy & Hagan, 1992; Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987). Having few legitimate means of survival they are more likely to engage in what normative dogma considers "deviant acts," such as, drug dealing, trading/selling sex and phone sex solicitation, shoplifting/theft, selling art/playing music without a permit, pan-handling and squeegee-ing.

Gaetz and O'Grady (2002) in their study on homeless youth and the informal economy, postulate that youth utilize a flexible economic strategy, that symbolizes "an adaptive response to an inherently unstable life style" (437). They found that there was a pattern to the ways in which youth made money that was intimately tied to their experiences prior to becoming street-involved, and to their current situation of homelessness. While there is a tendency to homogenize the population's ways of making money, they argue that their study uncovered separate street cultures that exist side by side and have profoundly different survival experiences and ways of making money (i.e. paid employment vs. squeegee, sex trade).

> Money-making activities of homeless youth are patterned, in varying degrees, by our selected background characteristics. It is also evident that hose youth who earn most of their income by working in the sex trade are the most disadvantaged group of youth in our sample. At the same time, those who reported earning most of their money from paid employment came from relatively less deprived families (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002: 445).

Gaetz and O'Grady (2002) argue that we need to move away from dichotomous representations of homeless youth as either 'employed' or 'unemployed,' and argue instead that the concept of work should be broadened to include the diverse economic strategies that youth employ to survive, but that unfortunately criminological theories (i.e. strain, control, sub-cultural) have relegated these activities to acts of crime.

Interestingly, they noted that the level of power and control that youth had over their work was strongly associated with risk. That is to say,

> those youth who are the most 'advantaged' tend to work in relatively socially acceptable lines of work. Conversely, those who have to contend with more negative 'baggage,' and currently find themselves in difficult circumstances, are more likely to be engaging in 'riskier' money-making activities that occur in the

context of the less reputable sectors of the homeless economy (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002: 452).

In their more recent work, O'Grady and Gaetz (2009) point to the gendered dimensions of street-related work and its impact on identity construction.

> Space, place, and identity thus are bound in a way distinct from more structured family, community, and institutional spaces under the greater control of adults… much of the informal economic work that young people engage in – begging, squeegeeing, sex work, or dealing drugs – plays a role in helping homeless youth stake out urban space not only for economic activities, but also for recreation, eating, and sleeping. Such space is also used tactically in the negotiation of gender identities (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2009: 4-5).

O'Grady and Gaetz (2009) are also one of the few authors to highlight the "cash in hand" benefits of such forms of street-related work that naturally fit the ebb and flow of street life and the immediacy of survival needs (food and shelter). They caution though that "while this form of payment means that they do not pay taxes on income, it also means that they typically are paid at rates below minimum wage, and that they are otherwise vulnerable to abuse by employers" (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2009: 9).

Moreover, some authors have noted that many youth would like to find paid employment but have difficulty doing so (i.e. constraints to getting and keeping a job – inadequate housing, higher incidence of illnesses/injuries, cannot give potential employers address or contact info), and in fact have fairly conventional attitudes about work (Karabanow, 2004; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). O'Grady and Gaetz (2009: 8) found that an overwhelming majority of their sample wanted to find paid employment (83.4 percent of men and 87.8 percent of women).

Authors taking a more criminological approach to the nature of the informal economy point to the psychology of offending behaviours. The next section will highlight the criminalization of this population.

2.1.10 Criminality

A common trend found amongst these youth is an increased degree of criminal involvement. In the study, *Street Youth in Canada: Findings from Enhanced Surveillance of Canadian Street Youth, 1999-2003,* more than one-half of the street youth reported they had been in jail, a youth detention centre, a prison or a detention facility, overnight or longer; and that they had a had a probation or parole officer (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006: 19). Similarly, Gaetz and O'Grady (2002) in their study found that 76% of male participants and 52% of female participants had been arrested on at least one occasion, and 63% of males and 36% of females had served time in a jail or detention facility (440).

Criminological research often points to the significance of background variables (the effects of prior victimization, parental roles, socio-economic status) and/or behaviour theories (i.e. frequenting dangerous places, associating with offenders) in explaining why some people are more likely to become victims and/or perpetrators. Some authors (Baron et al., 2007; Whitbeck et al., 1997) note that such behaviours greatly increase exposure to potentially dangerous and

exploitive adults and peers. "These activities also place adolescents in hazardous areas at high-risk times, such as late night, where there are decreased levels of guardianship and increased exposure to motivated offenders" (Whitbeck et al., 1997: 378).

Moreover, they argue that

> abusive families provide "basic training" for antisocial behaviours that lead to rejection by conventional peers and increase the likelihood of formation of ties with deviant peers. Association with these deviant peers provides important influence and support for the types of problem behaviours associated with deviant subsistence strategies (Whitbeck et al., 1997: 388).

According to this logic, "self-reinforcing negative chains of events unfold that amplify and solidify emerging traits and characteristics", and place these youth at greater risk of associating with deviant peers (Whitbeck et al., 1997: 378). In essence, it

> lowers the threshold for engaging in antisocial behaviours as a means of getting by when on the streets…These recurring exploitive and victimizing interrelationships provide the adolescent with further evidence regarding the nature of relationships, amplifying already existing negative expectations regarding the trustworthiness and concern of others (Whitbeck et al., 1997: 378-9).

Similarly, Baron et al. (2007) state that "certain individuals may also be part of a culture where violence becomes valued" (413). Suggesting that the backgrounds of street youth makes them more likely to view violence as an appropriate method of settling disputes (Baron et al., 2007), and need much less harm to escalate a dispute (Baron, 2003a).

> …street youths are often drawn from families where they have been the victims of violence and/or witnessed violence between family members… This coercive interaction style trains youths to be more aggressive and becomes generalized to

other settings, disrupting opportunities to gain more acceptable social skills from other sources (Baron et al., 2007: 413).

Adding to this normative view of deviancy, Baron (2003a) asserts that this culture of violence is perpetuated by peers who reward one another for their violence by reinforcing their reputations as aggressors. Youth

> engage in a "first strike" to gain the upper hand in what they perceive as unavoidable confrontations (Baron, 2003a: 30)… A person who was defeated or harmed in an altercation with another (or others), was expected to retaliate and even the score. Furthermore.. street youth wronged in illegal business dealings were expected to avenge their victimization with violence.. those who provided information to the police or other authorities were seen as targets of retribution (Baron, 2003a: 31).

Lastly, some authors have studied the structural ways in which society, the public, and mass media, have defined homeless youth as a "deviant group," and argue that this punitive reaction is on the rise (Gaetz, 2004; Bellot, 2001). An example of this can be drawn from Bellot et al's (2008) review of the criminalization of the homeless. Through an examination of the nature and frequency of tickets given out to the homeless in Ottawa and Toronto, Ontario, under the *Safe Streets Act*, they found an increased rate of criminalization every year since the adoption of the law in 2000[4]. The offences with which most homeless were charged with consisted of "sidewalk solicitation of individuals aboard stopped, immobilized, or parked vehicles (relating to squeegees) and solicitation of persons entering or exiting vehicles or in parking lots" (Bellot et al., 2008: 3), and that there has been a constant increase since the year the legislation was introduced. They conclude that "the creation of specific legislation has enabled the development

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[4] *Safe Streets Act* adopted into law at the Ontario legislature on Jan. 1, 2000.

of penal management of homelessness, which remains on the rise over the years" (Bellot et al., 2008: 3). Novac et al. (2009a) concur with this analysis, arguing that the homeless view police and the criminal justice system as agents of control not protection, accusing police officers of "attempting to control their behaviour by the overuse of tickets for offences related to their lifestyle" (2). This speaks to the stigma that is associated with those whose lives are intimately connected to the streets, and the effect of stigma and labelling will be examined further below.

2.1.11 Trauma and Instability

One common trend among homeless youth (though not universal) that can be drawn from the literature is the overwhelming evidence of childhood abuse, neglect, and/or abandonment (Haldenby et al., 2007; Gaetz, 2004; Baron, 2003a, 2003b; Noell et al., 2001), which often leads to involvement in the child welfare system (Fitzgerald, 1995). Rotheram-Borus et al. (1996) estimated that street youth are five times as likely as housed youth to report being victims of sexual abuse as children. Moreover, being the victim of one type of abuse, particularly sexual abuse, increases the chances of being the victim of another form of abuse (Baron, 2003a). There is evidence that victims of sexual abuse are at increased risk for sexual victimization and exploitation when they are older (Noell et al., 2001; Simons and Whitbeck, 1991; Janus et al., 1987).

In the *Street Youth in Canada: Findings from Enhanced Surveillance of Canadian Street Youth, 1999-2003,* 42.2% of respondents reported that they had been in foster care, and 46.7% reported that they had been in a group home (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006: 18). Similarly, in Ottawa, Aubry et al. (2008) found that 46% of male youth and 35% of female youth had lived in group homes prior to becoming homeless (24). Homeless youth were also more apt to experience significant adverse life events (Farrell et al., 2000; Sleegers et al., 1998). However, the impact of early life instability is rarely seen through the eyes of its victims, how youth conceptualize and respond to these experiences remains largely unknown.

In Jones' (1997) study on youth homelessness in Scotland, she points not only to the incidence of childhood victimization as a precipitating factor of youth homelessness, but highlights the trend of family breakdown and reconstitution.

> family breakdown and reconstitution can affect young people's behaviour and that of their parents or step-parents towards them: Young people living with step-parents tend to leave home earlier than those with both natural parents or than those living with a lone parent; they are more likely to leave home because of family rows; they are less likely to receive economic support from their parents towards setting up a home of their own; and they are over-represented in the homeless population (Jones, 1997: 107-108).

In Bearsley-Smith's (2008) study, in 81% of the cases youth reported one biological parent being absent (233). Similarly, McCarthy (1990) remarked that only a small minority of his participants lived with both parents and that the majority "lived in mother-centred single parent and reconstituted family. In addition, descriptions of parent-adolescent relationships suggests that most respondents had weak bonds with their parents. In essence, parental involvement appears

to be sporadic and unsatisfying" (141).   However, several authors caution that family dynamics are more complicated than what is presented in the literature, and suggest parenting often involves a mixture of positive and negative behaviours and consequences, and many youth continue to have important relationships with members of their families (Colombo, 2008; Benoit et al., 2007; Bellot, 2001; Lucchini, 1996).

One of the complexities that has rarely been examined is sibling abuse. Haldenby et al. (2007) are one of the few to note sibling abuse in causing homelessness, stating that when youth describe experiences of sibling abuse it is often dismissed as sibling rivalry. This study found evidence of sibling abuse that not only precipitated episodes of homelessness, but also created feelings of otherness in the youth being victimized. This will be fleshed out more in the empirical findings.

Other authors point not only to family breakdown as causing instability leading to homelessness, but mention that, poverty in general, causes residential instability that engenders family breakdown and promotes a transient lifestyle (Benoit et al., 2007; Laird, 2007). Chau et al. (2009), who conducted a study of the child welfare system and homelessness in Ontario, found that in one out of five cases they studied, the family's housing situation was a factor that resulted in temporary placement of a child into care. Housing unaffordability due to exorbitant and rising housing costs is also responsible for creating a certain measure of family and residential instability.

2.1.12 Social Exclusion, Alienation, and Stigma

For some authors, the social marginalization that homelessness engenders is more definitive of the population than the lack of stable housing (Poirier, 1996a; Castel, 1994). Social exclusion, isolation, and fragile social networks constitute major barriers for this population and for their integration into society. Disengagement from the socialization processes of family life, school and work represents a double disengagement. Not only do youth become disengaged from these normative institutions of social reproduction but they become disengaged from these institutions which provide socially integrative features that indoctrinate individuals into mainstream society (Gilbert, 2004: 12). This lack of integration and social cohesion leads to further victimization and isolation. Gilbert (2004) noted that adolescents with limited relations with their families have difficulty internalizing social norms and that this process tends to further promote feelings of social isolation and alienation. Moreover, Cousineau (1994) highlights that feelings of isolation often accompany experiences of victimization. Further these processes of social exclusion and marginalization are magnified for this population that rarely access support and/or protection, even though they suffer greater victimization and poorer health than the general population (Gaetz, 2004; Karabanow, 2004).

Gaetz (2009) argues that

> one must take account of systemic factors that may profoundly limit choice and increase the risk of victimization…. the degree to which the personal histories of individuals intersect with social, political, and economic conditions that restrict people's access to spaces, institutions, and practices that reduce risk (4).

Processes of social exclusion, Gaetz (2009) contends, begin long before the descent into homelessness but are intensified by life on the streets. Homelessness typically pushes youth into "places and circumstances that impair their ability to ensure their safety and security and, consequently, increase their risk of criminal victimization" (Gaetz, 2009: 5). Moreover, by spending large amounts of their time in public places their right to utilize public spaces is frequently called into question by agents of social control (police, security guards) and their freedom of movement is often restricted (Gaetz, 2009).

Social exclusion also renders these youth easy targets for victimization because of the lack of guardianship, lack of protection, and weak social capital (Gaetz, 2009: 6).

> Street youth depend heavily on other street youth (whose social capital is likewise weak, and who may also be potential offenders) and the staff at street youth agencies to provide these resources. Unfortunately, alienation and difficulty forming attachments and trusting relations with adults … may be one consequence of victimization, which, in turn, may increase risk (Gaetz, 2009: 6).

These factors combine to form a special case of social exclusion. Kidd and Davidson (2009) emphasize that social stigma, prevalent in both public and structural levels, are insidious but under investigated and under-represented in the literature on homeless youth, and they contend, significantly heighten levels of risk and hamper intervention efforts, further marginalizing this group. Kidd (2009) attests that "the perception of discrimination based upon negative stereotypes is related to feelings of worthlessness, loneliness and social alienation, and suicidal thoughts" (3). Kidd (2009) found that youth who engaged in panhandling and sex trade work often face humiliating interactions with strangers and authorities and this is strongly related to perceptions of general social stigma.

The concept of social stigma was penned by Goffman (1963) who argued that society "established the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories" (2). When evidence of a differing attribute presents itself that makes a person different and of a less desirable kind that the others in the group, "he is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma" (Goffman, 1963: 3). Thus, stigma refers to an attribute that is deeply discrediting. Stigma, labelling and deviancy go hand in hand. When a youth is labelled as homeless they go through a process of stigmatization in which they are assigned certain attributes (deviant, lazy, non-conforming, rebellious, drug user…) and are seen as less credible. Labelling and stigmatization construct youth as "different" and/or "deficient" from the norm and serve to reinforce rigid boundaries between Self and Other. This will be fleshed out in greater detail in the following chapter.

2.1.13 The Effect of Duration

Most studies agree that the longer a youth is homeless the greater the amount of victimization experienced (Slesnick et al., 2008; Whitbeck et al., 1997; Janus et al., 1987), the more likely they are to engage in high-risk behaviours (Slesnick et al., 2008; Tyler, 2007), and the worse their physical health becomes (Boivin et al., 2005; Karabanow, 2004). However, some researchers did note a negative association between duration and depressive symptoms (Whitbeck et al., 1999) and suicidal behaviour (Kidd, 2006). Some researchers argue that the longer the time

spent on the street the more street-entrenched youth become (Slesnick et al., 2008), and the greater difficulty they have integrating or re-integrating into the formal work economy, or society in general (Hurtubise et al., 2003). The evidence is mixed, however, on duration and criminal involvement. Baron (2003b) attests that long-term homelessness increases engagement in crime, and that the longer respondents are homeless the less likely they are to perceive harm (Baron et al., 2007). While Whitbeck et al. (1999) found that young men are less likely to engage in deviant survival strategies, such as theft, the longer they are homeless.

The literature argues that homeless youth's lack of access to housing, employment, and social assistance systems, their restricted movements and use of public places, and their weak social capital further reinforces processes of social exclusion that may put them at further risk for victimization or deviancy. Many authors postulate that concomitant social ruptures due to increased individualization, privatization and competition in the labour market, weakening social structures (e.g. family instability), and increased social pressures related to performance in the areas of education and careers have placed undue stress on youth (Aubin, 2000: 93). However, homeless youth appear to not fall within these domains of hyper-competition, but instead their "lifestyle" choices symbolize a rejection of these social and cultural norms. This is evidenced by their non-conformity (i.e. living on the streets), rejecting prevalent social norms of individualism, competitiveness and performance. One of the aims of this study was to elucidate risks that are created by structural barriers that are manifestations of current socio-economic and cultural transformations. These obstacles, which are symbolic representations of pejorative views towards youth, we argue, promote a climate of risk-taking that may increase victimization and

form a vicious cycle of repression that blames them for their victimization or engagement in deviant acts and cements their stigmatized status.

Exhuming the literature on homeless youth as it relates to risk, victimization and deviancy helps to shed light on what is known about the population but also serves to unmask the meanings and rationale behind the research. Objectively-speaking, while there is no denying the prevalence of childhood victimization, poor health, violence and victimization on the streets, and engagement in "deviant" activities for survival, the conclusions that can be drawn are often uneven and inconclusive, and most importantly, devoid of context, lacking the intersection of personal histories and structural constraints that impinge upon and shape youth's lives. Most importantly, most literature lacks the youth's perspective, and paints them either as passive victims requiring protection or potential criminals that need surveillance. It is not well known what meanings youth imbue to these experiences, nor how they perceive and/or respond to risk. The following section will examine the impact of this matrix of descriptors, and will argue that this forms a sociology of risk, that serves to define this population as "at-risk" so as to justify intervention in the name of reducing harm and in so doing reinforces social norms by ruling out deviant practices.

2.2 The Matrix of Victimization, Deviancy and Risk: Predicting, Managing, and Preventing Risk

While youth homelessness has been framed in Britain in terms of an 'underclass' thesis (i.e., pathologizing the urban poor, single mothers, and welfare recipients in particular), in North America, there has been a tendency to criminalize homeless youth (Gaetz, 2004). In reviewing the literature above however, we believe a third category should be added to the list, that is, the tendency to describe youth in terms of victims and risk factors, crystallized by the common usage of labelling them as an "at-risk" group, and providing rationalizations for interventions in an attempt to normalize behaviours (Bellot, 2001).

Rates of childhood and street victimization are staggering, but they are conceptualized by the researchers and not by those living those experiences and say little about the context of the lives of homeless youth. Researchers often utilize heuristic devices to categorize youth's experiences, classifying them into sub-groups of "least" and "most" "at-risk," based on victimization rates and background variables (often related to deviant activities of the "home"). For instance, Bucher's (2008) study identified seven risk categories: abusive experiences, involvement in prostitution, involvement in criminal activities, suicidal ideation/attempt, living circumstances, alcohol/marijuana use, and the use of drugs other than alcohol and marijuana (551). These categories are based on the researcher's conceptualizations of victimization and deviancy, and are chosen for the purpose of improving intervention strategies and resource planning, again conceptualized without the input of the youth being studied, devoid of context. Bucher (2008)

affirms that: "those in all risk categories will require the most intensive intervention plan" (553). Rationalizing interventions becomes a normative tool with the projected aim of reducing further harm. Homeless youth are also classified as a somehow different "other" sub-group than housed youth, including having different emotional reactions to experiences of victimization (Mounier & Andujo, 2003: 1188).

Once risks are identified for their magnitude and frequency, interventions can be employed to reduce further victimization in the future, in a sense, "colonizing the future" (Giddens, 1990). By employing a risk analysis to these negative statistics one assumes a certain level of mastery over the future, and in turn, by individualizing these behaviours in the present, there is a tendency to try to normalize and moralize responsibility into their future practices. If a formula can be drawn up to determine who is "most at risk" then it is possible to normalize and moralize the future, by bringing those outliers more in line with the norm through the deployment of practices through intervention, based on processes of normalization and moralization. Individualizing experiences of victimization, poor health, drug use, subsistence and exploitative activities, seeks to compartmentalize and pathologize behaviours feeding into an individualized behavioural deficit model of responsibility, and subsequently blames the individual for their own victimization, without examining the larger structural changes taking place (lack of affordable housing, precarious labour market, fragile social structures) that directly impede this younger generation from eking out a living. In Jones's (1997) study of homeless youth in Scotland, she found overwhelming "willingness of young people to accept responsibility for their situations, however inappropriate it may be for them to do so" (109). Furthermore, she posits the political motivations for individualizing responsibility.

> Their needs [homeless youth] to feel responsible for themselves and become emancipated from external control make young people ideal fodder for those who prefer to deny the state's responsibilities and to consider the homeless and jobless as a self-perpetuating and deviant underclass (Jones, 1997: 111).

There is also a tendency in the literature to emphasize the intergenerational transmission of vulnerability and deviancy as inheritable traits, such as in relation to pregnancy and poor child health, to the status of homelessness itself.

> Childbearing during adolescence has been associated with a variety of negative maternal consequences; teen mothers are more likely to drop out of school, to remain unmarried, and to live in poverty. Their children are more likely to be born prematurely at low birth weight, to live in impoverished single-parent households, and to enter the child welfare system (Thompson et al., 2008: 125).

According to Novac et al. (2006), "substantial harms to children are associated not with parental age, but with lack of prenatal care, low maternal education, single-parent status, unshared responsibility for child care, and poverty" (1). Further they argue:

> Studies have found an intergenerational pattern between state care of children and homelessness. Homeless adults who themselves were in foster care are more likely to have their own children in foster care… To some extent, homelessness may be, in itself, a trigger for child protection referrals (Novac et al., 2006: 1).

Thus, risk factors are deemed as spanning the whole life cycle, from conception to adulthood, if one is labelled homeless then that individual and their descendants are deemed as "at-risk".

The recent focus on health risk behaviours, in particular drug use and sexual practices, has served to reframe our conceptualizations of homeless youth as victims and deem them an "at-risk" group requiring intervention, protection and prevention. This change in perspective from

delinquent to victim in Canada, though still contained within the individualized pathology/deficit tradition, can be traced back to the release of the Badgley Report (Badgley, 1984). This report heralded a new perspective on urban street youth who uncovered that the majority of street-involved youth had in fact been abused as children. This risk-based perspective moved away from the view that youth were delinquents and to blame for their plight, and instead saw them as victims of others' wrongdoings (abused and exploited youth) (Benoit et al., 2007). The analysis of deviance to one of risk and intervention has witnessed the blossoming of "youth at risk" categories everywhere, and have founded a politics of intervention, protection and prevention (Bessant, 2001). According to Bessant (2001),

> it has become part of the contemporary common sense that leaving school 'early', living in certain family arrangements and having a particular socio-economic or ethnic background put a young person 'at risk' of various other social ills like unemployment, crime, suicide, homelessness, substance abuse and pregnancy (31).

While there has been much study on the processes and consequences of victimization, and explicatory theories: Learned Helplessness (Noell et al., 2001), Social Learning (Bandura, 1977), Traumagenic Dynamics Model (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985) to name a few, to date, no theories regarding the aetiology of re-victimization have been empirically tested (Noell et al. 2001). Thus, to assert that causal links to future victimization exist in some pre-ordained fashion is to dismiss youth's power in creating and defining new experiences for themselves. Parazelli (1997, 2002) argues that by examining this population solely from an "at risk" viewpoint serves to undermine their experiences of socialization, even if it is what he calls a "marginalized socialization." By relegating them to the status of victims or deviants, this negates their existence as social actors in the full context of their lives.

Hurtubise et al. (2003) argue that:

> The most widespread image of life on the street depicts homelessness as the outcome of an exclusion process. This invokes a set of accumulated structural, institutional, and individual deficits and difficulties which in some sense paralyze the individual. Changes in the organization of work, training deficiencies, weak personal abilities, deficiencies (intellectual and physical), and mental health or addiction problems are so many obstacles to stable integration into the work world. Activities of everyday living are reduced to survival practices (401).

The lack of research with the collaboration of homeless youth often reinforces the stereotypical image of them that oscillates between victim or delinquent, giving little sense of their individual experiences of their trajectories into and through homelessness (Bellot, 2000, 2001).

Haldenby et al. (2007) found that while many street youth did feel constantly threatened and did describe surviving violence,

> many of the youth chose to tell stories that portrayed them as survivors. The fact that they were living on the streets and still alive was something that they were proud of. The participants told about creative strategies they used in an attempt to feel safe (1238).

Employing strategies, such as, being part of a group, carrying a weapon, and using humour to distract a potential "enemy," were ways that youth cited as promoting a sense of safety (Haldenby et al., 2007: 1238).

Moreover, Bellot (2000) argues that because these youth are stereotyped as vulnerable, thereby needing protection, workers tend to intervene with offers of assistance based on their conceptions of what would be best and not based on the conceptualizations of those living that experience. In an effort to help them there is a tendency to try to normalize their behaviour. The target points for controlling deviancy among homeless youth, who are labelled deviant just by their very

existence of being homeless, become the squeegees, the sex workers, the pan-handlers, and youth using public spaces for their own benefit. The tendency to try to control these deviant acts is done in the name of victims and perceived risks, whether the youth are seen as victims because they are being exploited and need protection, or whether society needs protection from these deviants. It is important to uncover what messages are perpetuated regarding risk to uncover the motivations behind them.

Most research to date has assumed that victim, victimization, and deviance are static concepts, couched in a normative framework, defined by experts who are not living the experiences they are studying. Traditionally, most researchers have fit homeless youth's experiences into their pre-conceived notions of what they consider victimization and deviance to mean. However, many refute this absolutist approach (Viano, 1992; Holstein & Miller, 1990), and view victimization as an interactional, dynamic concept, we argue, the same could be said of deviancy. Often the victim/offender dichotomy is an artificial one. Rather than conceiving of the victim/offender as mutually exclusive categories, the concept may alternatively fall along a spectrum of possibilities and dualities. Victimization and deviancy are more dynamic and can be seen as an interactional trajectory with interactionally constituted actors that shift and evolve over time, and are impacted by prevailing norms.

What may be considered victimizing or deviant in a normative sense by a researcher may be deemed empowering for a homeless youth (e.g. joining a gang or carnival, pan-handling, squeegee-ing). Researchers and the populations they study, particularly stigmatized groups such as homeless youth, do not live the same daily experiences, nor do they share the same social

strata. Researchers and homeless subjects do not face the same obstacles, risks, or have the same opportunities when facing threats. Both sides have access to different resources when facing challenges, therefore, their risk frameworks, both potential threats and opportunities are not comparable. Thus, an alternative form of research must take place in order to capture these differences. The work must be postulated on what these youth consider victimization, deviancy, and risk to mean. An ethnographic approach is best suited to capture this knowledge as it is embedded in their lived experience and not the lived experience of the researcher. Historically, the constructs of victimization and deviancy have been categorized as absolutes, but since the notion of victim and deviant depend upon one's social standpoint and the overarching dominant discourse, then it behooves us to critically examine how we can assume that these concepts are understood, applied and adopted globally. It begs the question of whether previous research, which has rested on the static concept, has measured concepts of victimization, deviancy, and risk falsely from the outset.

An examination of other forms of research on homeless youth will be revealed in an effort to broaden this dichotomization of the homeless youth experience.

2.3 Social Representations of Homeless Youth: Busting the Victim-Delinquency Myth

While there is a preponderance of research on homeless youth relegating them to differing states of victimhood (e.g. childhood abuse, sexual victimization, poor health) and delinquency (e.g.

perpetrators of crime, addictions problems, risky behaviours) as has been examined above, there has also been recent research on viewing youth as actors or agents of their own lives, particularly in relation to the construction of their identities and processes of socialization. While the first group subscribes to an epidemiological pathological approach that view youth as an "at-risk" group requiring protection, rehabilitation, and prevention, the latter seeks to uncover what meanings youth imbue to their experiences.

While not denying the importance of epidemiological research in highlighting important issues, the conceptualizations of danger or risk that are implicit in the research and assigned to the population under investigation represent only those views of the researcher and not those being studied. This study took a "ground-up" approach found in this latter group, in uncovering how youth understand risk, in all its senses, and how they negotiate risk and make changes to their practices based on their conceptualizations of danger and opportunity, and not those of the researcher. Moreover, this study takes the approach of these latter studies as viewing youth's identities as in a state of constant flux, transition and dynamism with the environments in which they are transitioning to and from. An examination of this latter group's knowledge is necessary to situate the current study.

Parazelli (1997, 2002) proposes an experience of street life based on Winnicott's (1971) theory of transitional spaces. He uses psychoanalysis and structural geography to examine experiences of homeless youth. He proposes that the streets constitute a place of marginalized socialization, and that utilizing the streets as transitional spaces allows youth to continuously reconstitute their identities ("recomposition identitaire"). Utilizing Winnicott's theory, he argues that the streets

act as a medium for the search for reality and the creation of personal identity. He also links the attraction to the streets with their search for identity and their experiences of family life. He argues that the streets play a central role in the construction of identity. He demonstrates how the attractiveness of urban spaces is not only utilitarian, but highly symbolic, because it allows these youth, who were recipients of incomplete parenting, to complete their socialization in this marginalized space. For Parazelli (2000), the appropriation of urban spaces in the quest for their identity is a coincidence of their interior world joining with their exterior world. He argues that in stigmatizing and pathologizing homeless youth's experiences as ones of social disengagement it implies that they have no deep desires for socialization. In fact, he refers to these youth as "de la rue" ("un fort sentiment d`appartenance au milieu de la rue" (Parazelli, 2000: 195)) and not "sur ou dans la rue", meaning that youth experience being a part of the streets, and that they are not solely from or in the streets. Not only do these street experiences enable these youth to feel like authors of their own lives and actors in society, they may also constitute symbolic rites of passage.

Similarly, Jeffrey (1995) and Sheriff (2004) utilizing an anthropological approach, examine street involvement as a rite of passage. The streets as a rite of passage for many youth has been noted by several authors. LeBreton (1995, 2003) critically examines the literature on homeless youth and the behavioural risk analyses that are made and ponders whether the streets and risk-taking are new rites of passage in their desire to tests the limits of their existence in order to feel alive. This theoretical and symbolic position of the streets as a rite of passage, and as a consequence of modernity, will be expanded upon more fully in the proceeding chapter.

Poirier et al. (1999) and Gilbert (2004) also use psychoanalysis to explain the link between intrapsychic and social processes. Gilbert (2004) using the concept of "idéal de moi" proposes an examination of youth homelessness based on their intra-psychic dynamics (desires, representations, conflicts); linking their childhood experiences and their social worlds (adopted behaviours, social relationships). This author highlights the importance of childhood history and its role in facilitating, or creating obstacles, in overcoming challenges posed by street life.

Lucchini (1993, 1996, 2001) utilizes a symbolic interactionist approach in better understanding street children in Latin America. He examines the social environment of street children and the construction of their psychosocial identities. For this author, the children are not only victims but are also actors. He argues that the streets are not only places of victimization but also have positive elements (e.g. places of adventure, sources of revenue) which makes the streets a place of ambivalence and paradox. The two poles of existence alternate between desperation and hope, subjugation and freedom (Parazelli, 2002: 43). Lucchini (1993, 1996) proposes an analysis based on a "système enfant-rue", in which he examines the social world of the child and their constant transitioning between different elements of themselves and that characterize their lives, and the different activities they partake in (e.g. relationships with family, relationships with institutions, work, street activities, self-image, spatial elements). In this context, the child is in a constant state of negotiating their relationship to the street, that evolves over time, and that may or may not result in exiting from the street.

Colombo (2008) also utilizes a symbolic interactionist approach to comprehend how individuals deal with structural constraints, personal histories and the complexity of social situations to exit

street life. In embracing a symbolic interactionist approach, she argues that it is through interactions with one's own environment and others that the subject/actor constructs their own identity that allows them to interpret their own reality. Thus, the relationship the actor has with reality is dynamic and constantly changing due to new interpretations. Colombo (2008: 38) argues that it is import to go beyond a simple behavioural analysis of homeless youth (i.e. framing them as delinquents, at-risk), and to go beyond the pathologizing view that the streets symbolize danger, but also view them as places of identification, socialization, and experimentation. In appropriating the streets, youth are also appropriating spaces and repositioning their identities that are being shaped and re-shaped by their relationships with themselves and others. This will be examined in more depth in the following chapters.

Similarly, Castel (1998) describes the exiting process of the "addict." While not specific to youth necessarily, he delves into sociological inquiries related to the social identity of the "addict," and then the separation from these trajectories. Castel (1998) argues that their relationship to substances, in terms of it being a primary organizational feature for which they have a "passion" for its consumption, this dependence, becomes a way of life rather than purely a pathology, as depicted in epidemiological, medical, and criminological literature (9). The parallels between Castel's work and this study will become evident as we examine several participant's relationships with their drug use and also how it impacts the construction of their identity. Castel states: « le toxicomane avéré est celui qui organise une part essentielle de sa vie personnelle et sociale autour de la recherche et de la consommation d'un ou plusieurs produits psychotropes » (1998 : 25). Moreover, their exit from substance dependence necessitates « la construction d'une nouvelle identité sociale » (Castel, 1998 : 81). As will be outlined in Chapter

Six, significant events greatly affected participant's conceptualizations of risk, altered the current direction of their lives, and were intertwined with their evolving identities.

Bellot (2001) utilizes a social constructionist approach to examine the social structures and manifestations of social change and how they affect individuals. She demonstrates how youth utilize the streets as a place of experimentation in the search for a sense of autonomy, but that the streets are filled with contradictions and paradox (liberty/confinement, autonomy/dependence). Using an ethnographic approach, she reveals that youth employ different strategies when placed in situations of vulnerability. Moreover, she argues that structural changes embedded in the processes of modernity promote social alienation and exclusion, and that this has an effect on the individual trajectories of the participants. She also documents the trend of police repression, the enforcement of punitive measures, and the criminalization of street life activities that overshadow participants' experiences of street life.

Haldenby et al. (2007), Tyler (2007), Gilbert (2004), Bellot (2001), and Lucchini (1993, 1996) also counter the argument set forth by many homeless researchers that youth have little to no contact with their families and that they do not play a large role in their lives. These researchers show that their relationships with their families continue to have a major significance, and Bellot (2001) notes that relationships with families can play an important role in providing some protective features when youth exit street life.

These social representations of homeless youth are meant to highlight, in a general sense, the complexity and diversity of their experiences and to argue against the reductionistic tendency in

homeless youth research to simplify and homogenize their experiences as either victims or delinquents. Viewing homeless youth as actors of their own lives and negotiating and constantly reshaping their identities allows us to think about their experiences and lives differently. Reducing their experiences to either victims or delinquents has a double-edged effect. Classifying street experiences into these pre-ordained categories serves to further marginalize youth by signifying that they are different, vulnerable requiring protection, or dangerous requiring surveillance. It assumes that the streets are only dangerous and risky, when it is clear that the streets represent much more than this deduction.

Parazelli (2000) proves the point by asking why homeless youth and the streets are characterized as such in the literature.

> Pourquoi considérer tous les jeunes de la rue comme des délinquants en puissance ou des errants désorganisés? Ce point de vue tronqué et souvent moralisateur réduit le phénomène en lui attribuant une définition négative qui n'admet pas pour ces jeunes une capacité d'acteurs sociaux pouvant attribuer eux-mêmes un sens à leur vie et orienter leurs pratiques en conséquence (194)…Être jeune de la rue implique non seulement un certain degré de décrochage social mais surtout un parcours dans le temps et dans l`espace. Ce parcours qualifie le processus d`identification sociospatiale du jeune de la rue qui désire acquérir un statut d`acteur et non plus seulement de victime (Parazelli, 2000: 195).

While there is no denying that potential harm exists on the street, youth tend to be viewed as either victims or delinquents and not actors or agents of their own lives. In this vein, it is not clear how youth conceptualize, assess and manage risk in their practices on the streets, nor how this affects their conceptualizations of themselves and their relationships with others. This study sought to shed light on these questions. The following section will argue for such an approach due to the current dearth of understanding around homeless youth's conceptualizations of risk.

2.4 Limitations of Current Research and Epistemological Gaps: Need For A Youth Point of View

Studies have shown that homeless youth generally commence their trajectories into the street around the age of fifteen (Covenant House Report; CBC Fifth Estate). However, most studies of the homeless have examined the adult population and have rarely explored these earlier experiences of, and pathways into, homelessness. One of the reasons that little is known about this younger cohort is that they are harder to find and engage over a period of time because they do not always rely on emergency services. Youth frequently survive by couch-surfing, that is, staying temporarily at a friend's home, or they may live in overcrowded and/or unsuitable housing, for instance, in abandoned buildings (squats) (Kraus et al., 2001: 4). When youth were surveyed about where they slept when they are homeless: 60% reported using emergency shelters, 25% were couch-surfing, and 15% were sleeping elsewhere/outside (squats, parks, alleys, and doorways) (CBC Fifth Estate). However, these estimates do not take into account the relatively homeless, nor members of the absolutely homeless who may have been missed due to lack of visibility and accessing emergency services.

Youth are more likely to utilize their informal networks for shelter and basic survival and because of this remain largely unstudied and difficult to research. Youth often pool their resources and collectively rent a place to live, for instance, five to ten youth may share a one-bedroom apartment and are frequently subsequently evicted, or they may sleep outside in non-

visible places. Estimates of youth homelessness in general remain under-reported and hard to capture, as the numbers gathered represent the visibly homeless, but they do not capture the numbers who are staying temporarily at a friend's place, living in overcrowded situations with friends, and/or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. Thus, they do not capture the unofficial numbers and experiences of the unaccounted for homeless.

Homeless research has typically reflected snapshot images of the demographics of the population and has not explored the context of homelessness, the diverse and complex ways people struggle to survive when they do not have stable shelter. With a few exceptions, most studies have been static in nature, collecting information on length of homelessness, antecedents to becoming homeless, and collecting information on income, employment, education, physical and mental health status, youths' perceptions of homelessness have rarely been explored (Haldenby et al., 2007: 1234). While there has also been some work done on collecting victimization rates among adult and homeless youth, most is of a quantitative, positivist nature, and tends to characterize youth as either victims or delinquents. Previous research based on conceptual victimization frameworks into the kinds of, and frequency of, victimization suffered (e.g. victim of a violent crime, physical and sexual assault, etc…) have been developed by the researcher with no opportunity of input from the subjects themselves regarding the context of the victimization, the relationship to the victimizer, or their risk perception and management strategies. Other kinds of victimization based on the conceptualizations of youth's experiences have also not been examined.

Studies to date have not examined in-depth the relationship between victimizer and victimized, nor has the context been embedded in the youth's understanding. Research has ignored how these relationships may be necessary for their very survival based on the list of constrained choices they have at that moment in time. Having few legitimate means of survival, youth are likely to engage in what normative dogma considers deviant acts, such as: selling drugs, prostitution, shoplifting, robbery, pan-handling, squeegee-ing and joining gangs for protection. But deviant according to whom, compared to what other group, has this really been defined?

The repercussions of these actions often result in a mess of negative legal consequences or lowered-health status, including higher rates of sexual transmitted infections, HIV, drug dependency, unwanted pregnancy, criminal record and probation conditions. The conditions of homelessness give rise to numerous mental and physical health challenges, but it is not known how these impact youth and how they understand these experiences and whether they consider them to be victimizing. Furthermore, one facet of risk perception is the ability to anticipate danger and potential opportunity, yet with the daunting threats summarized above it is not known how youth perceive risk, manage or avoid it and respond to experiences they consider victimizing.

There is a dearth of research on the subjective experiences of homeless youth, particularly of a longitudinal nature, especially in relation to risk frameworks (Benoit et al., 2007; Tyler, 2007; Kidd, 2006; Whitbeck et al., 1999). One of the criticisms launched at the homeless youth literature is the preponderance of stereotypes utilized to explain their experiences (Benoit et al., 2007; Bellot, 2001). In particular, the de-contextualized nature of the studies, demonstrating the

intersection of individual and structural factors impinging on youth's lives has been missed (Benoit et al., 2007). The one-dimensionality and de-contextualized nature of traditional homeless research necessitates a new approach. This research hoped to reverse the traditional homeless research paradigm. Its aim was to capture the complexities and diversities of experiences framed in youth's perceptions of risk by deploying an in-depth, longitudinal, and exploratory design. It hoped to change the monopoly over knowledge production by reversing the directionality of knowledge produced, that is, from expert to lay person, by producing knowledge from the ground up.

One of the central tenets of this research is to allow homeless youth the opportunity to define and contextualize what meanings risk has for them, particularly in relation to constructs of victimization and deviance. When victimization and deviance have been mentioned, no study to date has collaborated with youth in exploring their conceptualization of what these labels mean and what experiences they deem victimizing or deviant. Nor have researchers asked youth to delineate the relational, contextual, and historical aspects of what they consider victimization and deviance to be. This research aimed to address these gaps in knowledge by examining the dynamic and complex nature of victimization and deviance within the context of risk frameworks.

Conclusion

The limitations of current research, as it pertains to risk, show that the knowledge produced is static without context and that experiences are defined in a uniform manner with no input or interpretation from the subject. Although there is overwhelming evidence of the degree of victimization that homeless youth experience, no room has been made for a contextual, relational or historical analysis, nor for their perspective. It is not known how youth conceptualize risk, nor how they may manage and avoid what they consider to be risky in order to avert victimization. While there is ample research on the dangers that are present, traumatizing events continue to occur, and the knowledge produced is external to the youth's understanding.

We have argued that the assumptions implicit in this new sociology of risk, based on a binary of victimization and deviancy, have not been explained or uncovered and have rested on researcher's conceptualizations of these phenomena, with no input from the youth being studied, further reinforcing the streets as a place of danger and risk. Moreover, conceptualizations of risk, from the individual's understanding of risk, have rarely been examined, as risk theories, in general, have examined risk from a grand theory level. This will be fleshed out in the following chapter exploring and stating this study's theoretical standpoint and ontological position.

Perceptions of risk and responses to risk, among the homeless, particularly the young and homeless, have not been examined. This research took the approach of risk as a social construct

and as interactionally constituted, viewing the social, cultural, and relational contexts as critical to understanding how risks are understood, negotiated, and responded to. It is necessary to uncover how youth perceive risk, be it as hazards to avoid or as opportunities to embrace, and what the consequences contribute to shaping future actions. Risk consciousness is very much tied to the social location we inhabit, it is based on situated knowledge. Homeless research has rarely examined the viewpoint of those living the homeless experience, in particular the challenges of those who are young and without shelter. The negative statistics of poor health, violence, criminal involvement, and numerous obstacles are daunting – but the question remains, how do those living that experience understand risk, victimization and deviancy? This research hoped to capture these divergent and diverse viewpoints, to uncover how youth conceptualize risk in a supposedly risk-laden world. This study sought to bridge the gap between risk theory and homeless youth, by asking: how do homeless youth conceptualize risk? The next chapter will outline the relevant risk and adolescent discourses to illustrate the complexities and intricacies of risk frameworks, as well as the limitations of current analyses, especially as they pertain to marginalized groups, such as homeless youth.

Chapter Two:

Manufacturing Risk:

Risky Streets, Risky Youth, Risky Times

Discourses surrounding risk, victimization, and deviancy are inherently linked. As can be drawn from the previous chapter, much of the literature surrounding homeless youth labels them as an "at-risk" group, either by depicting them as victims or deviants. These categorizations are due to the research that collects data on the stereotypical behaviours characterizing their street involvement (e.g. illegal activities, drug use, sexual practices, etc…), coupled with the overwhelming evidence of childhood trauma and poor parental relationships and practices (i.e. deficient role modelling and transmission of normative values) that postulates that they are perfect candidates for re-victimization or delinquency. These risk fault lines are further reinforced by the notion that the streets are dangerous, places ripe for victimization and deviancy, due to their developmentally stunted nature that renders them more vulnerable to exploitation or deviant behaviours. Despite the overwhelming evidence of assumptions regarding victimization, deviance, and risk, we know very little about how youth define themselves and their experiences (i.e. are they victims? Deviants?), how they perceive and negotiate risk, and how they respond to experiences they deem victimizing. This study sought to examine how homeless youth assessed, managed and responded to risks within the contexts in which they were living and in relation to how they defined and understood themselves and the constrained choices they were making. While the evidence surrounding the processes of victim-creation is daunting, and the streets are characterized in a homogenous way as insidiously dangerous, the lack of understanding around why risks are taken or not taken, in the face of this mountain of victimization and deviancy evidence, remains elusive.

Adolescence has also been conceived as a particularly vulnerable time in the life cycle, often equated as a time of crisis, rapid transition, and risk. The combination of the dangers of the

streets, and the dangers of adolescence, particularly those with chaotic, unstable, and criminal family backgrounds, manifests into a lethal and complicated mix of potential risk, and fuels a risk imagination that seems to proliferate. Structural transformations, such as family instability and recomposition, changing labour and housing markets, and the rise of individualism and competition, and subsequent social alienation, have also been noted as increasing this group's vulnerability and added to this heightened anxiety around risk, and arguably create greater obstacles requiring professional intervention (Bellot, 2001). However, we rarely question how risks are defined, and critically examine the political motivations behind which risks are selected as critical and which ones are ignored. Even less is known about how we respond individually to risk, that is, our risk perception and practices, and why certain populations are deemed "at-risk."

This chapter hopes to shed light on theoretical constructs of adolescence, in particular, the theories that frame discourses around the construction of homeless youth as vulnerable, and embed these discourses in a greater understanding of the social construction of risk in general. Socio-cultural explanations of risk are closely tied to understandings of victimization, and help to understand how they relate to social deviance and the construction of "at-risk" groups. In an effort to expand conceptualizations of victimization, deviance, and conceptualizations of risk through the lens of risk discourses, this chapter will provide an overview of the relevant theoretical constructs of adolescence and will highlight the emergence of risk discourses. It will argue that risk, victimization, and deviancy concepts have not been constructed nor studied from the ground up, that is, by the people being studied. Rather, these concepts have been applied in a broad-based way by experts and researchers, with little input from those living the risky, and so-called victimizing and deviant experiences. This study hoped to reverse this traditional positivist

snapshot research design by allowing participants voices to frame their own understanding of experiences as they evolved over time. The conceptual framework of this study, based on the theoretical insights that will be highlighted, will be presented at the end of this chapter.

The next chapters will present findings of the study and will examine participant experiences of street life and their risk perception, as they relate to their understandings of their evolving identities and their conceptualizations of responsibility. While risk research has typically been devoid of context, this study aimed to re-contextualize participants risk frameworks by unearthing their risk knowledges which frame their risk perception utilizing a biographical perspective to uncover whether risk perception and practices shifted over time.

Part 1: Theoretical Constructs of Adolescence and Risk

There is much debate about what adolescence constitutes (Parazelli, 2002; Galland, 1993). While some argue it is a distinct phase on the path to adulthood and describe it as a time of transition that has a "unique biological, psychological, social, and cognitive developmental phase" (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2004: 2); others question its relevance as a concept and contemplate it's socially and politically constructed character (Parazelli, 2002; Galland, 1993), as the countours of age are too arbitrary to become the definers and the prolongation of the period of youth becomes stretched further and further into adulthood (in part evidenced by the fact that youth are living longer at their parents homes) and loses relevance in

the absence of defined edges (Day, 2000; Galland, 1993). Moreover, Parazelli and Boudreault (2004) question how the context and realities of adolescence can be understood within the larger structural transformations and cultural mutations taking place where individualism and competition triumph and social structures continue to weaken. Day (2000) argues that there are no longer clear boundaries between adulthood and adolescence, and rapid sociocultural changes impose existential questions that are unanswerable by adults and youth alike, creating a backdrop of uncertainty and insecurity.

Epstein (1998) notes that adolescence is the period in the lifecourse when individuals are most likely to be alienated (4). In terms of risk, this phase of life is often characterized as one of heightened conflict and tension with parents (Bellot, 2001), of experimentation and heightened sensation seeking, it's members having an unquenchable thirst for excitement and a penchant for engaging in high-risk activities (Turz, 1993; Hall, 1904). Early evidence of this characterization can be drawn from Aristotle works: "the young are in character prone to desire and ready to carry any desire they may have formed into action…They are passionate, irascible, and apt to be carried away by their impulses" (Aristotle quoted in Hall, 1904: 522). These underpinnings of the theoretical constructs of adolescence still have relevance in most psychological and sociological works today. While there is variation in discourses on adolescence, and they are too voluminous to all be presented here, a few selected highlights and more recent conceptualizations will be illuminated to draw out the links between the literature on homeless youth, the belief of the heightened propensity for victimization, and the relatively universal finding that they are an "at-risk" group. An examination of the psychological frameworks

enveloping youth literature will first be presented, followed by more recent thinking on socialization and the construction of identity as they pertain to homeless youth.

1.1 Social-Cognitive Developments

Some of the earliest contributions to the study of adolescence arise from psychology. Stanley Hall was the first psychologist to outline a theory of adolescence in 1904. In his two volumes on "Adolescence" (1904) he asserts that adolescence is inherently a time of "storm and stress," wherein emotional turmoil is necessary before one can achieve a sense of maturity and stability that is required of adulthood. The three key aspects of his work include: conflict with parents, mood disruptions, and risky behaviour. He described the upheaval experienced during adolescence as universal and inevitable. In reviewing Hall's work in a modern sense, Arnett (2006) argues that many of Hall's revelations from the past ring true today, although his assertion that every adolescent goes through a universal period of "storm and stress" needs further evidence and needs to be modified to account for cultural variations.

Several findings from Hall's (1904) work are found to have similarities in current day psychology and have relevance for this study as it pertains to risk. Hall described adolescence as a time when: there is a prevalence of depressed mood;…and high sensation seeking… (Arnett, 2006: 187). The prevalence of depressed mood can be explained by Hall's analysis that : "as the child's absorption of objects slowly gives place to consciousness of self, reflectiveness often leads to self-criticism and consciousness that may be morbid. He may become captious and

censorious of himself and others" (Hall, 1904a: 314). Secondly, the need for sensation seeking, in terms of taking risks, is largely recognized during the period of adolescence. "At no time of life is the love of excitement so strong as during the season of the accelerated development of adolescence, which craves strong feelings and new sensations, when monotony, routine, and detail are intolerable" (Hall, 1904a: 368). Moreover, Hall identified the link between sensation-seeking and risk behaviour in adolescence: "youth must have excitement, and if this be not at hand in the form of moral and intellectual enthusiasms, it is more prone…to be sought for in sex or in drink" (1904b: 74). Lastly, as it pertains to this study, Hall described the increased importance of peers and friends in adolescence and the prevalence of what he termed "relational aggression", which was used to describe the "term for aggression expressed through gossiping, spreading rumours, and excluding others from the group" (Arnett, 2006: 189). The beginning of a consciousness of self in the world and in relation to others has been one of the major contributions of psychology to theories of adolescence. These notions of individuation, of the self in a social world and as distinct from others, is a strong finding of this research and greatly impacted participant's conceptualizations of risk.

Identity formation stemming from this consciousness of self as distinct from others is a central tenet of psychology. The ability to perceive, assess, and manage risks are inherently tied to the construction of identity and are tied to the individual's notion of acceptability regarding risk-taking. The adolescent's primary task, according to Erikson (1968), is the establishment of ego identity, a sense of self in a social order. This period is marked by rapid change in all areas both intra and inter-personally. It is a time of turmoil and growth. For the adolescents who have childhood histories marked by abuse, which characterize many of the homeless youth in the

literature, authors argue that these deficits from prior developmental levels, including cognitive and affective skills, impede the formation of a coherent sense of self, and may make them more vulnerable to victimization (Herman, 1997).

Herman (1997) has found that children who have undergone abuse "psychologically adapt" themselves to the situation. They preserve their primary attachment, no matter the degree of terror, by employing numerous psychological defences, such as walling off the abuse from conscious awareness and memory, or minimizing it, rationalizing it and excusing it. The central organizing principle of personality development then becomes fragmentation, which prevents the ordinary integration of knowledge, memory, emotional states, and bodily experience. "Fragmentation in the inner representations of the self prevents the integration of identity. Fragmentation in the inner representations of others prevents the development of a reliable sense of independence within connection" (Herman, 1997: 107). In this light, one of the central tasks of adolescence, the formation of a coherent sense of self, is never completed. The survivor's relationships, according to Herman (1997: 111) are often driven by the thirst for protection and care, to assuage their fear of abandonment or exploitation. They often seek out powerful figures who have the appearance of rescuing them: "unable to develop an inner sense of safety, the abused child remains more dependent than other children on external sources of comfort and solace" (Herman, 1997: 107). In this light, homeless youth who frequently have histories of childhood trauma can be viewed as different, deficient, victims, and needing intervention to help them become whole to integrate back into society.

Poirier et al. (1999: 125) argue that not only do many street youth seem haunted by these traumatic parent-child relationships and what he terms the "initial traumas," but that they continue to overshadow their current relationships and reproduce similar interaction styles. These initial traumas appear to continue to torment them in the present day. In this vein, authors frequently expound that these youth are at increased risk for victimizing experiences (e.g. exploitation, addiction). Furthermore, it could also be argued that these childhood histories severely impact their perception of risk because they may have a higher tolerance for risky or dangerous situations or a different standpoint of risk differentiation. Winnicott's (1984) theory of deviance exemplifies this point, arguing that the basis for anti-social behaviour is founded in a childhood devoid of caregiver warmth and nurturing. Giddens (1991) picking up on Winnicott's theory, states that trust is integral to establishing ontological security and to weighing risks. "Trust established between an infant and its caretakers provides an 'inoculation' which screens off potential threats and dangers that even the most mundane activities of daily life contain…trust is directly linked to achieving an early sense of ontological security" (Giddens, 1991: 3). This study endeavoured to explore these connections between childhood histories and their experience of parental relationships and how youth understood them as impacting or not impacting their current choices and determination of risks.

Gilbert (2004) conducted research with street youth in Montreal employing a psychoanalytic approach and examining the link between their childhood relationships (employing an attachment theory approach), to their social world, and their intra-psychic experiences ("idéal de moi"). According to her, the family unit is the primary mode of relationship modelling and internalization of social norms, and has socially reproductive functions ensuring a certain amount

of social integration and cohesion. « En principe, le foyer familial devrait permettre l'introduction aux apprentissages sociaux, la famille pouvant être considérée comme un micro-système en relation avec d'autres systèmes, y compris celui constitué par l'ensemble de la société » (10). In a similar vein to trauma theorist Herman (1997) and Attachment Theorists (Winnicott, 1984; Bowlby, 1973; Winnicott, 1971), she found that:

> une enfance dans un foyer familial instable, peu chaleureux et souvent source d'abus, rend difficile l'attachement de façon stable et active à autrui, de même que la demande d'aide, a cause de problèmes au niveau de 'attachement, de la securité, du sentiment, d'appartenance, et de l'estime de soi. Aussi, les adolescents expérientant des relations limitées avec leur famille ont de la difficulté a internaliser les normes sociales, ce qui engendre l'isolement social et l'aliénation (Gilbert, 2004 : 11).

Moreover, Lucchini (1996) found that the role of the child's primary attachment to a caregiver was paramount, particularly the child's relationship to their mother, in organizing the child's relationships to others in differing domains (35).

Parazelli (1997; 2002: 272) formulated that street youth were characterized by three types of relationships with their parents which he termed: incoherent, abandonment, and domination, superficiality and detachment. Depending on the childhood experience of these parental relationships the street youth developed different styles of relating to the streets (that nevertheless are always ambivalent). These are: liberty/captivity (incoherent); dependence/independence (abandonment); self-affirmation/self-negation (domination, superficiality, detachment). He argues that because of this deficient socialization in the parental realm, youth aim to finish their socialization on the streets with peers, and explains that this is why youth are rarely alone, and often in groups or in pairs. He argues that they are in search of autonomy in an effort to construct their identities. Similarly, Gilbert (2004) highlights the

important role childhood history plays in facilitating or creating obstacles, and the desire of many youth to search for "affective compensation" (2004: 272) in their social milieus on the street. Lucchini (1996) noted that most participants did not suffer from one type or case of abandonment but generally from a series of abandonments related to family life (18). Bellot (2001) found that family recomposition happened most often in adolescence among her participants, and noted that youth in her study were often endlessly in search of significant relationships, imagining familial bonds everywhere and describing peer relationships as family-like. The group became the heart of identity, and ironically one's identity often became diluted under the identity of the group. For many youth in this study, the group played an important role, both positive and negative, in their managing and assessing risk.

The effect of significant relationships, childhood histories, and the importance of the group in perceiving and managing risks will be examined in-depth in the following chapters. These highlights are presented to build bridges between these theoretical frameworks of adolescence and the empirical literature on homeless youth. Although many of these studies uncovered the social worlds of homeless youth and their concomitant complexity there is a tendency to reinforce psychological notions that there is something "missing" from these youth and that they are somehow "different" and "deficient." Characterizing these youth as victims or deviants, evidenced by their lack of internalizing social norms and social integration, tends to create risk fault lines along their individual trajectories. In particular, the psychosocial theories whether based on Attachment, Traumagenics, or Psychoanalysis, are somewhat static and lack a dynamic comprehension of how homeless youth construct their identities in a world of constraints.

1.2 Rupture from Traditional Forms of Socialization and the Quest for Identity

The construction of the streets as an abnormal space of socialization for youth, and equating the streets as inherently dangerous and risky, where victims are created and predators lurk, has a political rationale. These youth are already socially disqualified in a number of ways (e.g. not living at home, left school, lack formal employment, without a stable place to live) that labels them dangerous just by their very nature of being non-conforming, or victimized because of their histories of trauma and the survival activities they engage in. These markers which are presented in very scientific objective ways render them even bigger targets for further victimization by defining them as a category of "at-risk" (Bessant, 2001). The construction of stigma around the streets and their practices only increases the perception that they are socially excluded or alienated. Bellot (2001) argues that the rationale for providing interventions, whether through punitive strategies (surveillance and control of public spaces, criminalization of their daily activities of homeless youth), educational strategies (rehabilitating them), or providing therapeutic services (normalizing their behaviours) is a strategy for maintaining social control. By stigmatizing the streets as an abnormal and dangerous place of socialization, serves to de-legitimize youth's efforts in creating a place for themselves in the world and in constructing their own identities.

Parazelli (2000) adopting Winnicott's approach of « transitional spaces » argues that the streets serve to shape and re-shape youth's identities within the context of a marginalized form of

socialization. He argues against viewing the streets as purely a form of a-socialization or merely

an experience as socially exclusive, and instead urges us to imagine that urban centres often draw

youth to their core as a place where they can express their full imagined potential, utilizing these

spaces symbolically to create a sense of themselves in a social world. In this sense, urban spaces

become transformative spaces of existence and experimentation. This is particularly attractive

for homeless youth who, as cited in the previous chapter, frequently feel like they don't belong

(Haldenby et al., 2007), and share a sense of anomie. Parazelli (2000) urges us to consider:

> pourquoi ne pas observer les rapports à l'espace que ces jeunes entretiennent pour
> savoir s'ils se réalisent eux-mêmes ou s'ils se désocialisent davantage? L`espace
> n'est pas neutre ou le simple reflet des structures sociales mais le foyer de toutes
> expériences possibles (215).

He states that it would be more judicious to examine the phenomena of youth homelessness in all

its complexity, and to abstain from projecting society's fears, values and hopes onto this

population, ideologies that he surmises are often really about protecting mainstream interests.

Similarly, Hurtubise et al. (2003) and Bellot (2001) view the collective appropriation of certain

places (parks, subway stations, the corridors of the underground city) by street youth as a "way

of drawing borders between an alternative social space that is theirs and an institutional social

space which belongs to others" (Hurtubise et al., 2003: 400). They argue that this appropriation

is intrinsically linked to issues of identity, and that this "quest for identity is structured around

several paradoxes: the pursuit of freedom vs. the risk of being confined to a marginal existence,

the desire for autonomy vs. dependence on drugs and alcohol, etc. (Bellot, 2001)" (Hurtubise et

al., 2003: 400). This notion rallies against the common depiction of the homeless experience as

exclusionary, which again engenders a paralyzing amount of obstacles that need to be overcome

(ex. drug addiction, mental health problems) requiring professional intervention. Examining the streets as an intentional form of appropriation (Sheriff, 1999; Jeffrey, 1995) allows us to move outside of this definition of youth based on behaviour that defines them either as victims or delinquents, and to uncover what meaning their practices have, in relation to identity discovery, experimentation, and initiating life experiences. In this sense, Colombo (2008) found that street youth are actors engaged in construction of their identities that were dynamic and paradoxical, in the urban spaces that they occupy. In appropriating the streets, this allows them to appropriate and position their identities in contrast with themselves and others (Colombo, 2008: 38).

Another interactionist, Lucchini (1996), conducted research with street children and youth in Latin America rallies against the reductionistic categorizations of street children as solely living "in the streets." He argues that their lives are complex and that their spheres of living straddle several different domains that he identifies as "domains of complementarity." He found that the children's passage to the streets is not so much a rupture from family life but a progressive pathway of estrangement from the family milieu. He proposes an analysis in term of a complex process of interactions, in which the child/youth is an actor interacting with their own environment and not a simple product of the environment. He prefers to employ a "child-street system" to understand the phenomena which is composed of the child being in constant motion between these different elements and fields. These are: time, opposition between the streets and family, sociability, street activities, child's motivations, self-image, and spatial elements. In this context, the child negotiates his relationship to the streets that evolves over time, and in his quest in the construction of his own identity, and in these differing domains searches for elements to

complete aspects of his identity that are missing in order to stabilize his "système identitaire sur le plan cognitive et affectif" (Lucchini, 1996: 25).

Lucchini (1996) is also one of the few to comment on the construction of street children's identities and how they change over time based on the interactions within these differing domains. For instance, he notes that the older the child becomes the less likely he is perceived socially as a victim and the more likely he becomes perceived as a delinquent. This points to the importance of the social construction of age and the ways in which youth are stigmatized and their activities labeled as such.

This study sought to capture this interaction of identity construction as it unfolded. By employing an interactionist approach and viewing the streets as neither good nor bad but as a place of socialization it sought to reveal how youth perceived risks and responded to them within the dynamic context of their lives as they understood their unfolding.

1.3 "Risky Streets" as Default Rite of Passage

Another concept that is necessary to illuminate is to view the streets as a potential rite of passage for adolescents who are living a heightened time of experimentation and discovery. In the past, and in some current traditional societies, the passage of childhood to adulthood was highly ritualized, but by the early part of the 20th century, rural identities gave way to urban ones and the modernization of societies meant that ancient rituals were forsaken (d'Allondans, 2005;

Jeffrey, 1995). Arnold van Gennep was the first to coin the term "rite of passage" in 1909, it

symbolized the passage from childhood to the adult world (d'Allondans, 2005).

> Le passage de l'enfance à l'âge adulte est une étape importante. Dans les sociétés traditionelles divisées en group d'âge, ce passage était encadré par des rites, que l'on nomme rites de passage. Les adultes faisaient subir aux jeunes des épreuves morales et physiques afin qu'ils prouvent leurs mérites. Les rites étaient conduits par des aînés qui encadraient les épreuves à franchir. Après les épreuves, lorsque les jeunes avaient montré des capacités d'endurance, des capacités de surmonter des peurs, de prendre des risques, d'aller au bout de leurs limites sans défaillir, on leur reconnaissait alors le statut d'adulte. La mise à l'épreuve les préparait à surmonter la dureté de la vie afin de ne pas succomber à la moindre difficulté (Jeffrey et al., 2005 : 12).

According to Jeffrey (2005), these rituals were always conducted and supervised by elders, and

ensured the transmission of the « rules of life », social norms, and consecrated sexual and social

roles that were enshrined in the body through tatoos, scarification, and/or adornments. At the

end of these ceremonies the initiant was celebrated and officially became part of the adult

community (Jeffrey, 2005: 45). However, these authors note that there has been an erosion of

these traditional rites of passage in modern society and mechanisms inherent in social structures

to symbolize passing from one stage of life to the next no longer exist, leaving the individual

more and more isolated (d'Allondans, 2005, Jeffrey, 2005; LeBreton, 1991, 2003).

Some argue that this dearth of symbolic, ritualizing and normalizing structures that provided the

pathway into adulthood has left a void that has been replaced by "conduites à risques" (Jeffrey,

2005; LeBreton, 1991, 2003). « Les sociologues qui travaillent auprès des jeunes savent bien

que les conduites à risques, la transgression des interdits, la recherche d'épreuves dangereuses,

en somme, la confrontation à des limites sont des pratiques courantes à cet âge de la vie »

(Jeffrey, 2005 : 11). LeBreton (1991) argues that in modern times, identities have become more

fragile and difficult to construct in the absence of traditional structures. Conduits of risk have become highly symbolic pathways in the construction of one's identity in the absence of these traditional rites of passage to adulthood (LeBreton, 2005). They allow adolescents to test themselves to prove their own existence, and do not represent acts of self-destruction but instead are quite the opposite. In going to extremes to test one's mortality and to feel one's complete existence, LeBreton (2005) argues, are highly symbolic gestures in the quest for identity.

> Les conduites à risques sont d'abord des tentatives douloureuses de se mettre au monde, de ritualiser le passage à l'âge d'homme. Elles sont une recherche de marques, de limites qui n'ont jamais été données ou insuffisamment étayées. Ce sont des formes de résistance contre la violence du sens issue d'une famille (indifférence, indisponibilité, abus sexuels, violence physiques, etc. ou, à l'inverse, surprotection) ou de la société (compétition généralisée, exclusion, etc.). Ce sont des manières de forcer le passage. La notion de résilience doit également être élargie à ces comportements qui, loin d'être fondés sur la destruction de soi, sont des recherches identitaires. Ce sont des appels à vivre et rarement une volonté de mourir. Une manière d'accoucher de soi dans la souffrance pour des jeunes qui ont perdu le choix des moyens (Le Breton, 2005 : 17).

Traditional rites of passage served many functions: to promote social cohesion and maintain social order, to ensure social reproduction and the transmission of normative values, to mark the passage from childhood to adulthood, and to make one aware of one's own mortality and dependency on the group. These authors postulate that in an era where these traditional rites of passage have been forsaken, conduits of risk, of testing, have usurped these ancient traditions. Jeffrey (1995) states that for these youth: « C'est en allant au bout de ses forces, en jouant symboliquement son existence que la vie acquiert un sens » (10). Similarly, Colombo (2008) attests that her participants risk trajectories can be viewed as a search for recognition of oneself, of identity construction. "Dans ce sens, ces lieux urbain attireraient les jeunes parce qu'ils leurs permettraient de tester de façon rituelle les limites de leur existence et ainsi, se sentir exister »

(Colombo, 2008 : 37). Gilbert (2004 : 260) offers another insight, suggesting that youth's engagement in "deviant" or "high-risk" activities (ex. drug use, stealing, prostitution) could be viewed as a subconscious "appel de limites" in the absence of parental control or involvement. In this sense, youth test their limits through active risk-taking in their unconscious desires for parents to play an authoritative role in their lives.

This paradox of risk-taking and excitation, of freedom and danger, allows youth to simulate these rites of passage and test their mortality and character in the absence of community/family systems. Turz (1993: 147) argues that adolescence in and of itself is a time of risk and that taking risks is normal at this age. She ponders whether it is indeed adults that have trouble accepting youth for who they are and have a negative view of risk-taking, and wonders whether adults project imaginary risks onto youth based on their own fears. She argues that adolescence is a time of transition, experimentation, and discovery, and that voluntarily taking risks allows for self-knowledge and experiencing one's limits. Similarly, Colombo (2008) highlights that society's obsession with security projects a negative view of risk-taking and forms an ideology of protection at all costs. Parazelli (1999) asks if we are not at the point of wanting to prevent adolescence from happening, in our desire to protect against all risks. As will be examined in the overview of risk discourses presented below, the contention of this study is not to define the risks youth take as good or bad, but to present and examine them within the context in which they are negotiated, and to understand them as socially and individually constructed.

1.4 Negotiating Identity in Adolescence in Uncertain Times

According to Bajoit (1999, 2000), identity construction is always provisional and evolving, and adolescence is a time of uncertainty (Bajoit, 2000). He developed a theory of identity construction based on three fields of identity: engaged identity, assigned identity, and desired/imagined identity. Engaged identity refers to the actual identity being constructed and perceived by the individual, assigned identity refers to experiences of one's identity through social relations, while desired identity refers to who one hopes to become (Bajoit, 1999: 77-78, 2000: 102-104). Bajoit (2000) postulates that the ultimate goal of identity construction is to reconcile these three aspects of identity through the attainment of: a feeling of personal accomplishment (combination of engaged and desired identities), a feeling of social recognition (combination of engaged and assigned identities), and a feeling of existential consonance (combination of desired and assigned identities) (104). In this sense, identity is in constant flux, evolving, and interacting with different dimensions of life, domains, and relationships with oneself and others, it is more about process than age. This is certainly the thrust of this study to show the interaction of participants' risk perceptions and management strategies in relation to their own constructions of identity that are continuously evolving, particularly with the acquisition of new experiences. Hence, adolescence, in the context of this research is more about the changing nature of one's identity as they pertain to the risks they faced, and the way they conceptualized the multiple and often duplicitous facets of their identity, based on their perceptions of their childhoods, their current relationships with families, friends, and lovers, their daily activities, their living arrangements, and their future aspirations. Bajoit's theory of identity development serves to show these different spheres of interaction: one's view of oneself in a

certain time and place, how one is perceived by others (labeling) and how this influences one's self-concept, and one's desired features/acquisitions.

Galland (1993) refers to adolescence as a period of crisis, and attests that it is being viewed more and more as a time of experimentation. Gauthier (2004), Parazelli and Boudrealt (2004) argue that adolescence must be examined within the important cultural transformations, mutations taking place in society. These authors note that the socialization functions of traditional institutions like the family, school or the church have weakened and render transmission of normative values difficult (Colombo, 2008: 14). LeBreton (2003) notes that the traditional crisis of adolescence is reflected in the tension between the youth's desire for autonomy and the possibilities that society can offer for actualization. But in a society that is becoming increasingly individualistic, the norms of social participation are not as evident and the individual becomes more responsibilized for their own self-actualizations. In this context, LeBreton (2003) argues that the role of adults and the family is more important than ever in their function as transmitting normative values and the affective development of the adolescent. However, in these times of family instability, fragility and recomposition the nuclear family is not solid enough to assume this role (LeBreton, 2003: 26), and this is certainly the case for homeless youth who are characterized by familial instability and fragility (Bellot, 2001; Lucchini, 1996).

The transmission of normative values, and particularly the perception that this has not occurred among the population of homeless youth, is a common undercurrent in the literature and serves

to shape this group as different, dangerous and prone to taking risks due to their non-conformity and their young age. The epistemological position of this research is to highlight youth's construction of their identity from their viewpoint, and to demonstrate that their conceptualizations of risk are highly contextualized, and are affected by these processes of identity construction which are dynamic and multi-faceted, and are overshadowed by processes of individuation, agency, peer influences, expert discourses, and responsibilization. This research hopes to demonstrate how youth perceive, negotiate, avoid, or embrace risk in the context of their evolving identities. However, before this is deconstructed an overview of the prevalent discourses in socio-cultural risk theories will be presented to better situate the current study.

Part 2: Emergence of Risk Discourses and Theories

Risk discourses are insidious and ubiquitous. Risk discourses frame our understandings of debates and warnings in everyday life. For example, risk frameworks and polemics are inherent in the food we consume (e.g. health risks related to pesticides, nutrition, ecological security), to the cataclysmic disasters we witness (natural or man-made – and even this is debatable – witness climate change), to political change and elections (witness last year's election hysteria and the federal Conservative party's message that Liberal leader Stéphane Dion is "Not Worth the Risk"), to the lifecycle – from conception to old age. In recent times the notion of risk has

infused our everyday life but where did the concept of risk come from? How have the meanings attributed to risk shifted, transformed and affected aspects of current thought, choices and decision-making?   This section will provide an overview of the three major socio-cultural approaches to risk, as they pertain to this study.   These are encompassed by: the risk society theorists, the cultural theorists, and the governmentality theorists.   This study examined these three approaches in relation to how homeless youth conceptualize risk.   This next section will provide a foundation for how these risk discourses inform thinking in relation to homeless youth, in particular frameworks of victimization, social deviance, identity construction, and risk perception.

Though risk discourses and theories are a relatively new field of inquiry, the impact of the sudden rise of the concept of risk has come to permeate our everyday existence. However, up until the time of the Renaissance, life was more or less governed by instinct and the drive to meet one's basic needs. People's lives were intertwined and to a large degree forecasted by nature, luck and fate, leaving little room for a sense of human control over events (Bernstein, 1996: 18). The idea of risk first appeared at the end the Middle Ages in relation to maritime insurance, and was used to "designate the perils that could compromise a successful voyage. At that time, risk designated the possibility of an objective danger, an act of God, a force majeure, a tempest or other peril of the sea that could not be imputed to wrongful conduct" (Ewald, 1993: 226). Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, this notion of risk predominated, and its meaning excluded the idea of human fault and responsibility, viewing a natural event as an objective risk.

According to Fox (1999) and Lupton (1999a, 199b), changes in the meanings and uses of risk are associated with the emergence of modernity. "Modernity refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence" (Giddens, 1990: 1). The combined processes that encompass the term modernity refer to: industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, secularization, population growth, economic growth, [and] the development of science and technology (Boyne, 2003: 82).

Before the era of modernity, risk was a neutral term, and encompassed ideas of probabilities, of losses and gains. According to Fox, "a gamble or an endeavour that was associated with high risk meant simply that there was great potential for significant loss or significant reward" (1999: 12).

The modernist concept of risk reflected a new of way of ordering the world. Unexpected outcomes were now being attributed to the consequences of human action and replaced

earlier concepts of fate (Lupton, 1999a; Giddens, 1990). During the eighteenth century, the concept of risk had begun to be problematized under the science and mathematics of probability and statistics and grew in popularity with the expansion of the insurance industry. "In modernity, risk, in its purely technical meaning, came to rely upon conditions in which the probability estimates of an event are able to be known or knowable" (Lupton, 1999a: 7). Risks were no longer attributed to nature and fate but they could be evaluated and 'managed'. They could be predicted and countered so that they could be minimized or prevented altogether. By the nineteenth century, the concept of risk was no longer understood as exclusively in nature, it

was also social, it related to human beings. Risks could be measured, calculated, estimated, and gave rise to the insurance industry which could estimate the probabilities of hazards. In this sense, risk also became 'socialized', there were no longer sharp distinctions between good and evil, evil existed side by side with good. There was no profit without losses, no progress without damages, and the burden of risk was distributed collectively and across societies through insurance mechanisms (Ewald, 1993: 226). Moreover, the notion of risk in modernity no longer implied a mix of losses and gains but became clouded by meanings of negative and undesirable outcomes (Fox, 1999).

Risk over the past century, in lay terms, has come to be almost entirely equated with "danger," symbolizing a threat, hazard, or harm, related only to negative outcomes (Fox, 1999, Lupton, 1999a; Douglas, 1992). A whole field of research and knowledge has developed around the concept of risk: risk analysis, risk assessment, risk communication and risk management, influencing the fields of medicine, public health, social work, finance, the law, business and industry (Lupton, 1999a: 9), sociology and psychology. There have been various explanations for the proliferation of the notion of risk, including developments in probability statistics, an "increasing value placed on scientific rationality as a basis for certainty", and changes in the nature of risks which have become more globalized and less manageable, therefore, more anxiety-provoking for society as a whole (Lupton, 1999a: 10). Some have argued that the obsession with risk has been due to the transformation of societies from pre-modern to modern and then to late modern.

> All of these changes are seen as contributing to a particular way of understanding the self and the world that differs dramatically from earlier eras. For the individual, it is argued, these changes are associated with an intensifying sense of

uncertainty, complexity, ambivalence and disorder, a growing distrust of social institutions and traditional authorities and an increasing awareness of the threats inherent in everyday life (Lupton, 1999: 11-12).

Discourse analyses of risk reveal the breadth of meanings that surround the concept. According to Renn (1992) there are two types of risk concepts: risk as a physical attribute, in which Risk (R) is a formula that can be estimated as some sort of product of the probability (P) of the event times the severity of the harm (H), or R = P x H (Douglas, 1985: 20); and, secondly, risk as a social construct. These two notions of risk have been moulded by two approaches: realism and social constructionism.

The realist approach is based in the cognitive science perspective and is the dominant approach in the social sciences. Exponents identify risks as dangers or hazards and seek to calculate probability and consequences (Lupton, 1999b). According to Tulloch and Lupton (2003), psychologists have been particularly interested in assessing and measuring the ways in which people respond to risk, focussing on measurable attitudes and behaviours that can be statistically analyzed. "Researchers investigating the psychology of decision-making and judgement use laboratory experiments, gaming situations and survey techniques to understand risk perception, attempting to arrive at a quantitative determination of risk acceptance" (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003: 7). Indeed, in 1969, Chauncey Starr launched his work to describe what is a general level of acceptable risk. By asking the question: "How safe is safe enough?" he developed a method for weighing technological risks against benefits. His 'revealed preference' approach

> assumed that, by trial and error, society has arrived at an 'essentially optimum' balance between the risks and benefits associated with any activity. One may

therefore use historical or current risk and benefit data to reveal patterns of 'acceptable' risk-benefit trade-offs (Slovic, 2000: 223).

He drew three conclusions by plotting the relationships between risk-information and behaviour. First, risk up to one thousand times greater than levels unacceptable elsewhere were seen as acceptable for voluntary activities. Second, the acceptability of a risk is roughly proportional to the perceived benefits. Third, the more people take a risk, the more acceptable the risk is. Starr's work provided the impetus for the study of risk through the psychometric paradigm lens (Boyne, 2003; Slovic, 2000).

On the surface, what this demonstrated was that perceived risk appears to be quantifiable and predictable, but what it omits is the richness surrounding risk knowledges. Critics argue that psychometric studies are devoid of context and of the meanings encapsulated in risk knowledges that are in fact highly contextualized, localized (Lupton 1999a, 1999b; Douglas, 1992) and individualized (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). To date, psychometric testing has involved presenting participants with a limited set of risks to respond to, and "provides no research on why some risks rather than others come to emerge as culturally relevant, or on how fear comes to be attached to some risks rather than others" (Boyne, 2003: 73). According to Lupton (1999a) and Douglas (1992) this approach constructs individuals as atomised, self-interested, rational, and calculating actors, "assuming that they all share the responses and preferences of the actor in utilitarian philosophy" (Lupton, 1999a: 22). Conversely, the social constructionist approach emphasizes what the scientific perspective has been criticized for omitting, that is, "the social and cultural contexts in which risk is understood and negotiated" (Lupton, 1999b: 24). As such,

the present study aims to move beyond the realist approach and will re-contextualize concepts of risk, by examining perceptions and understandings of risk by homeless youth based on their lived experience.

The technical concept of risk has been criticized for focusing narrowly on the "probability of events and the magnitude of specific consequences" (Kasperson et al., 1994: 112). Studies of risk perception have revealed, however, that most persons have a much more comprehensive conception of risk. "Clearly, other aspects of the risk such as voluntariness, personal ability to influence the risk, familiarity with the hazard, and the catastrophic potential shape public response" (Kasperson et al., 1994: 112). Sociology has the ability to lend risk assessment theory the social dimension that has been missing, as peoples' risk perceptions encompass not only their fears that affect the practices they employ, but also the chances they take in the pursuit of perceived benefits. The traditional practice of characterizing risk by probability and magnitude of harm has drawn fire for neglecting the positive aspects of risk-taking upon which, arguably, modern society is built, and for neglecting the multi-dimensionality of risk in relation to personality, intellect and emotion. Moreover, concepts of risk have been devoid of the overarching social, cultural, political and economic forces that underpin decisions made in relation to risk. The matrix of this intersection of individual and structural level factors has largely been absent from our understanding of risk.

Wildavsky and Dake (1994: 166-7) are one of the few to outline leading schools of thought concerning risk perception, as they relate to environmental hazards. The most widely held

theory of risk perception in their opinion is "knowledge theory", which implies that "people perceive technologies to be dangerous because they know them to be dangerous." This raises the fundamental question of how risk perception and knowledge interact. A second theory of risk perception is "personality theory". This approach is summarized by the statement that "in conversations we frequently hear personality referred to in such a way that individuals seem to be without discrimination in their risk-aversion or risk-taking propensities." The third set of explanations for public perception of risk is based on "economic theory". In essence, this school argues that the rich are more willing to "take risks stemming from technology because they benefit more and are somehow shielded from adverse consequences." In addition, political theories view the controversies over risk as struggles over interests. Lastly, cultural theories argue that individuals choose what to fear (and to what extent) in order to support their way of life.

The process that an individual uses to assess the risk posed by hazards or opportunities is complex, involving both intellect and emotion, and is shaped by political, historical, cultural, social and economic influences. Byrd et al. (1997) notes, "although it is clear from a statistical perspective that flying is much safer than driving, individuals have frequently reported feeling more at risk in an airplane than in a car" (357). Risk perception is a complex process which spans many dimensions. Fitchen (1987: 49) believes that risk perception is a dynamic process affected by perceptions of the way risks are presented and influenced by factors in the local context in which the risk is embedded. As risk perception is temporally, individually, and socially-constructed, it is liable to change over time as surrounding circumstances, influences,

and factors change. One aspect of risk perception, however, that has been mostly absent is the profound impact identity has on risk perception and responses.

More recently, socio-cultural approaches have been influenced by three major groups of theorizers (Lupton, 1999a). The first group embrace the 'cultural/symbolic' perspective and are led by anthropologist Mary Douglas. They examine the notion of risk in relation to how conceptual boundaries are established and preserved between Self and Other (in particular focussing on the human body as its subject in doing so). According to Douglas' theory, risk is a strategy used by contemporary western societies for dealing with danger and "Otherness" (Douglas, 1969). Her work seeks to explain why it is that some dangers are identified as "risks" and others are not. She argues that risk is culturally and politically constructed and is important for "social groups, organizations or societies to maintain boundaries between self and Other, [in order to] deal with social deviance and achieve social order" (Lupton, 1999a: 36). For the cultural/symbolic approach, risks are not "real," but are culturally relative and serve a political function in terms of attributing blame for danger (Douglas, 1992). Douglas argues that risk is important in contemporary western societies, because it is a tool for assigning responsibility, for blaming and marginalizing an Other, "who is positioned as posing a threat (and thus a risk) to the integrity of self" (Lupton, 1999a: 39-40).

The second approach are the 'risk society' theorists led by Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, who examine the relationship between risk, which is viewed in terms of macro-social processes in late modern societies. Beck's thesis is that industrial society is becoming a 'risk society'

through the processes of 'reflexive modernization'. Reflexive modernization "involves a questioning of the outcomes of modernity in terms of their production of risks" (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003: 3). Essentially, risk may be defined as "a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself" (Beck, 1992: 21). According to Beck, the increase in production and creation of wealth carries with it new and insurmountable and to a great extent unknowable and invisible risks. The growing capacity of technologies have become incalculable in their abilities to produce negative consequences, hence the new paradigm, 'risk society'. Thus, the insidious dilemma of production and distribution of wealth and scarcity that has dominated western society is now being replaced with the obsession of prevention and minimization of risks.

One of the central tenets of the risk society perspective is the concept of reflexivity. "Reflexive modernization" has been coined by Giddens and Beck to symbolize modernity's critical self-reflections and self-confrontation of its' own modernization practices. "In this sense the theory of risk society is a political theory of knowledge of modernity becoming self-critical. At issue is that the industrial society sees itself as risk society and how it criticizes and reforms itself" (Beck, 1996: 34). Boyne (2003) argues that 'risk society' theorists view the social production of wealth as being intimately connected to the social production of risks.

> Wealth and power are defining concepts of classical modernity, but the signature concepts of reflexive modernity are risk and uncertainty…The symptomatic risks of reflexive modernity have a new quality… accidents will outlast generations, affecting those not yet born and those long distances away. We can no longer calculate the consequences of our actions (100-101).

The process of modernity has become a project of self-examination and critique. This critical reflection is what separates the industrial society from the risk society, and has turned progress into global self-destruction.

> Alongside risk proliferation and individualization, reflexive modernity is also characterized by an extension of politics. One of the root sources of this new and higher level of political energies is this phenomenon that Beck calls 'individualization', or, as Anthony Giddens puts it, the disembedding of social institutions. Work, family, education, healthcare, for example, are no longer as rooted in taken-for-granted and local contexts as they once were (Boyne, 2003: 103).

The approach to risks, viewed in Beck's writings, demonstrate a realist approach to risk, risks are objective hazards or dangers. According to Furedi (2006: 63), Beck contrasts old and new risks in the following way:

> Anyone who set out to discover new countries and continents – like Colombus – certainly accepted 'risks'. But these were personal risks not global dangers like those that arise for all of humanity from nuclear fission or the storage of radioactive waste. In the earlier period, the word 'risk' had a note of bravery and adventure, not the threat of self-destruction of all life on Earth (Beck, 1996).

Beck (1996) attests that while there is an outward pressure of a heightened sense of anxiety about these looming, uncontrollable and invisible dangers, in his knowledge-as-risk thesis (Furedi, 2006), there is an inward pressure of responsibilization of each citizen to protect themselves from harm due to the processes of individualization and separation from traditional structures and supports such as family and secure employment. Similarly, Giddens (1991) argues that there is a close association between the sense of risk and the increase of knowledge. "The sources of danger are no longer ignorance but knowledge. In this scenario, knowledge through its application creates both new hazards and an awareness of their risk" (Furedi, 2006: 63). There is

an assumption that individuals view risks in a uniform way and are affected equally by global

risks and respond accordingly, however, little is known about individual responses to both global

and local risks.

The third group, who take the 'governmentality' approach, draw on Michel Foucault's work.

They examine risk through the lens of how populations are regulated through surveillance and

discipline. They argue that concepts of risk construct particular norms of behaviour and are

internalized, resulting in individuals becoming self-regulating according to these norms. The

importance of expert knowledges are central to the formation of certain types of subjects,

> providing the guidelines and advice by which populations are surveyed, compared against norms, trained to conform with these norms and rendered productive. Central to these technologies is normalization, or the method by which norms of behaviour or health status are identified in populations (Lupton, 1999a: 87).

In this vein, citizens are actively engaged in policing themselves, trained in the process of

normalization. This approach views risk-avoiding behaviour as "a moral enterprise relating to

issues of self-control, self-knowledge and self-improvement. It is a form of self-government"

(Lupton 1999a: 91). Governmentality theorists contend that rule and order have been maintained

in modern times through voluntary self-governance. They argue that, more recently, the rise of

neo-liberalism has meant an increasing emphasis on personal responsibility for avoiding and

managing risk. They coin this shift on individual responsibility the 'new prudentialism'. They

claim that risks were distributed and shared through social insurance mechanisms but that these

systems are gradually being eroded and replaced with an emphasis on individual responsibility through the creation of certain types of subjects (Lupton, 1999b; Dean 1999).

According to Dean (1999), this approach witnesses "an emphasis on individuals, families, households and communities taking responsibility for their own risks – physical and mental ill-health, unemployment, poverty in old age, poor educational performance, becoming victims of crime" (145). This shift in responsibility is based on the assumption that individuals are rational and calculating, and base decisions on the costs and benefits of behaving in a certain way, with the aim of minimizing negative outcomes, and in so doing, internalize and individualize blame. In this vein, if one exhibits 'risky' behaviours, defying the norm to minimize risks, it would seem unacceptable, possibly even immoral of them to do so. Those who exhibit socially deviant behaviour, who act in a 'risky' non-conformist manner, would be viewed as responsible for the negative consequences that may ensue. This process has been coined the privatization of risk. The Foucauldian approach to risk is somewhat totalitarian and universal, it does not make allowances for or examine individual differences, strategies, and responses. It assumes that populations and hence, individuals, have the same response to surveillance and internalization and become self-governing in order to be socially conforming.

While these three approaches conceptualize risk differently, they all view risk as a fundamental cultural and political concept which has come to dominate our ways of being in the world. Notions of risk have impacted how individuals, groups and institutions organize and regulate themselves. According to Lupton (1999) the three major perspectives agree that:

risk has become an increasingly pervasive concept of human existence in western societies; risk is a central aspect of human subjectivity; risk is seen as something that can be managed through human intervention; and risk is associated with notions of choice, responsibility and blame (25).

These three perspectives all operate at the level of grand theory and do not examine peoples' individual experiences in negotiating risk. This study examined these three approaches by examining how this "at-risk" group, perceive and respond to risks they face. In particular, it examined how youth perceive risks on the streets, based on their risk consciousness prior to street life, what strategies they employed to reduce risks, what basis expert knowledges had on their perception of risk, and examined their ideas around responsibilization and self-regulation. The current study argues that risk is a highly subjective concept that is loaded with interpretations and judgements concerning choice, responsibility and blame. While positivist health-related outcome measures label homeless youth an "at-risk" population, it is not known how this identified group responds to perceived risks and whether these youth internalize these labels or perceive themselves to be "at-risk". It is not known whether they 'police' themselves to avoid risks and what if any choices are being made when faced with perceived risks. Lastly, it is not known how their formative age may affect their perceptions of risk and their responses to perceived dangers/opportunities, nor how their risk perception is impacted by the construction of their identities over time and in interaction with others. This study sought to apply these three intertwining theories of risk to the context of a marginalized group living stigmatized and labelled risky trajectories, by unearthing the interactional and individual dimensions of risk.

Lastly, there are epistemological limitations of current homeless youth research related to risk and victimization. Significant statistics concerning homeless youth are not conceptualized, gathered and analyzed by the youth whom they are concerning, therefore, the very relevance of previous risk and victimization research on homeless youth needs to be examined and deconstructed. Potential risks that homeless youth perceive may be diverse and complex but are unknown because conceptual frameworks have not been grounded in their risk knowledges. This study sought to redress this knowledge gap by doing research from the 'ground up' by gaining the youths' understanding of risk and victimization as they unfolded.

Part 3: Coupling Symbolic Interactionism and Social Constructionism to Deconstruct Risk

This study examined risk through the lens of a social constructionism approach coupled with a symbolic interactionism approach to unearth the individual and multiple meanings youth assign to their understandings of risk as they interact with their environments, the varied contexts in which they find themselves, and themselves and others. Adding a symbolic interactionist approach to social constructionism recognizes both the ways in which risks are utilized for social, political and economic interests, but also take into account the meanings attributed to them by the population under study, as they interpret actions and meanings in their contexts. It

also implies that transactions are taking place and speaks to the ecological nature of ethnography that aims to contextualize the person under study and uncover relevant metamorphoses.

Symbolic interactionism, according to Blumer (1986) rests on three simple premises. These are: human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them; the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows; these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (2). These meanings are integral to this study. Uncovering what meanings participants assign to their experiences and choices they make as they pertain to risk is central to notions of risk perceptions and responses. The interpretations participants make of risk based on their experiences and interactions with others (as they are unfolding) and themselves (in the construction of their identities), underlies the epistemological standpoint of this research as it pertains to the social construction of risk, and uncovers relevant changes and adaptations the person makes in response to their interpretations of risk.

While social constructionism allows us to dissect the discourses surrounding risk, symbolic interactionism allows us to enter the world of the actors and try to understand the process of interpretation and self-interaction. According to Blumer (1986), this involves two distinct steps.

> First, the actor indicates to himself the things toward which he is acting; he has to
> point out to himself the things that have meaning. The making of such indications
> is an internalized social process in that the actor is interacting with himself. This

interaction with himself is something other than an interplay of psychological elements; it is an instance of the person engaging in a process of communication with himself. Second, by virtue of this process of communication with himself, interpretation becomes a matter of handling meanings. The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action (Blumer, 1986: 5).

Adding a symbolic interactionism adds another dimension to our understanding of the social construction of risk and enables a discovery of the individual dimensions of risk perception and responses. According to Lupton (1999a),

We can only ever know and experience risks through our specific location in a particular sociocultural context. This approach to risk highlights the importance of understanding the embeddedness of understandings and perceptions of risk, and emphasizes that these understandings and perceptions often differ between actors who are located in different contexts and thus bring competing logics to bear upon risk (30).

Social constructionism contends that risks are never "fully objective or knowable outside of belief systems and moral positions: what we measure, identify and manage as risks are always constituted via pre-existing knowledges and discourses" (Lupton, 1999a: 29). Moreover, understandings about risk and experiences of risk are also negotiated via membership of cultures and subcultures, and through one's personal experience.

Risk knowledges, therefore, are historical and local. What might be perceived to be 'risky' in one era at a certain locale may no longer be viewed so in a later era, or in a different place. As a result, risk knowledges are constantly contested and are subject to disputes over their nature, their control and whom is to blame for their creation (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003: 1).

Following Scott (2000), the present study proposes that the relativization of risk is contingent on one's 'social risk location'. Scott (2000) contends that there is no simple correspondence between risk perception and 'real risk', since, in his opinion, the risk-averse will take measures to avoid high risk situations. Thus, one's perception of risk are not only socially, culturally and politically embedded, but are also subject to an individual's own perception of risk coupled with their social location. In this light, it could be argued that "there is no such thing as a risk context. Since all social contexts can be seen through the lens of risk, there is no objective criterion to differentiate risk contexts from non-risk contexts" (Boyne, 2003: 75). Adam and van Loon argue that "the essence of risk is not that it is happening, but that it might be happening. Risks are manufactured" (2000: 2). Since risks are socially constructed and represent unbridled fear, there is no end to their imagined proliferation, and there is no objective method of comparison or analysis.

Risk society theorists offer an alternative viewpoint. They argue that modern risks are qualitatively different from earlier risks because, hitherto to late modernity, risks tended to be visible, tangible, and localized in nature and the wealthy could insulate themselves from these misfortunes. In the 'risk society', risks are everywhere, globalized, intangible (what Beck refers to as 'glocal'), and affect people equally. Beck's theory of the risk society can be summed up in his statement: "poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic" (1992: 36). In his opinion, no one is safe from risks and they affect citizens more or less equally because they are no longer contained events. Wealth, which had served to protect the upper echelons from previous risks, is no longer sufficient protection because the risks have become so insurmountable and universal, i.e. a

nuclear threat or environmental disaster is a disaster for everyone no matter one's financial security.

Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) propose that in fact there are no greater risks in contemporary societies only the perception that risks have increased due to the influence of powerful social actors which have claimed that the dangers have increased. Giddens (1991) concurs, with the exception of the potential for global disasters in modern times that hitherto did not exist. He attests that expert knowledges have been instrumental in fuelling the concept of society as a risk society and in mediating discourses on risk.

> modernity is a risk culture…I do not mean by this that social life is inherently more risky than it used to be; for most people in the developed societies that is not the case. Rather, the concept of risk becomes fundamental to the way both lay actors and technical specialists organize the social world (Giddens, 1991: 3).

According to this perspective and the arguments contained herein, risk consciousness informs risk perception and is largely affected by the powerful social actors and expert apparatuses that shape our world and our anxieties about risk. But the point of this chapter is not to argue that there are 'objective' risks that can be known, but that risks are experienced and perceived and responded to differently, and that to a large degree, they are manufactured for political ends. There exists a tension between the "objective" dangers which are promoted as pervasive and needing to brought under control through the genesis of creating good subjects who take appropriate preventative measures to regulate and guard against danger; and the undercurrent and underreported "subjective" experiences and understandings of risk, danger, and opportunity

which are based on intuition, culture, context, and personal history, and in particular, are related to identity construction and evolution. Combining a social constructionist approach with a symbolic interactionist one allows for a fuller, more dialogical understanding of risk, that is rooted in the notion of multiple selves and evolving identity.

If 'social risk location' and an individual's assessment of risk shapes risk perception then how one perceives risk cannot be viewed as 'democratic', as risk-consciousness is very much tied to one's social location. Someone with financial security and resources is more likely to be well tuned to the global risks prevalent in modern society; while the less knowledgeable, more transient, and less-resourced are likely to be less risk-conscious in a global sense (especially if they are busy trying to meet their basic needs) but may be more attuned to more direct opportunities or threats affecting their basic survival. Risk perception is enveloped by one's risk consciousness, and is based on situated knowledge. Moreover, the risks or fears of victimization are likely significantly divergent for these two groups, they are not faced with the same threats and opportunities and cannot mobilize resources to protect themselves in the same manner. Scott (2000) speculates that those in relatively secure positions are most risk conscious, proposing that there may be an inverse relationship between risk consciousness, hence perception, and 'social risk location.'

Correspondingly, the same could be said of the concept of victimization and deviancy. Victims and deviants also go through a process of becoming named, created, and manufactured. Who decides when a person 'becomes' a victim or a perpetrator? Victimization and deviancy are

matters of perception and are socially and interactionally created (Viano, 1992; Holstein & Miller, 1990), and are products of risk. Victimhood, becoming a victim, is contingent not only upon one's social location but one's individual perceptions and understanding of what it means to be a victim, the same could be said of deviancy. Whether one can protect oneself from being "at-risk" or of becoming a victim reflects one's risk consciousness and one's ability to insulate oneself from these risks, perception is highly dependent on the political, social and cultural construction and awareness of labels of 'victim'. The various meanings that shape the notions of risk, victimization and deviancy are socially and dynamically constructed, negotiated over time, and are interpreted differently based on differing social locations and the actors involved. Notions of risk, victimization, and deviancy have come to shape our everyday experiences. The proliferation of risk discourses, and the subsequent constitution of "at-risk" populations, has created victims and culprits (Bessant, 2001). And these notions have, to a large degree, been inculcated into a business language of accountability and transparency that have come to infuse our everyday. There is an assumption that these underpinnings are innocuous, or somehow relatively neutral, but in fact they are highly subjective concepts that are loaded with interpretations and judgements concerning choice, responsibility (i.e. conformity) and blame (i.e. morality) (Bessant, 2001). In the same way that risks are not static, objective phenomena, so too are the concepts of victims and deviants and the processes involved.

Indeed, by dismissing the notion that there are 'objective risks' that can be known and understood universally, this study admonishes the cognitive science realist approach, and focuses on the social constructionist and symbolic interactionist approaches to risk in better understanding victimization and deviancy. The arguments proposed hereafter situate

victimization, deviancy and risk perception in a social, cultural and political context because how one determines who is a victim and a deviant are embedded in the very understandings and perceptions of how one becomes a victim or a perpetrator. This in turn is shaped by where one is socially situated as well as by one's own personal beliefs, experiences, and perceptions of risk as they evolve in interactions with others and themselves. Moreover, manufacturing risks and creating victims often serve political ends of maintaining social order and control, and absolve society of responsibility when harm occurs. The next section will outline how the privatization of risk in the pursuit of neo-liberal values, have served to blame so-called victims and deviants for their own risk-taking behaviours.

3.1 The Construction of "At-Risk" Populations: The Binary of Victimization and Deviance

The concepts and meanings surrounding victimization and social deviance are socially constructed and fluid, they are dynamic, they happen in a certain time, are influenced by a time in history, by membership in a certain culture, sub-culture and one's own personal beliefs. They also delineate who is included and who is excluded, they shape whether one is a victim or a victimizer, who is "at-risk" and describe who is socially deviant and who is not. These constructs tend to define themselves in relation to an Other and may serve many purposes in terms of maintaining order, justice, and morality. One of the contentions of this study is that

concepts of risk are mediated through constructions of victimization and deviance, which form

the binary of what constitutes "at-risk" populations.

According to Bessant (2001),

> The discovery and the promotion of the 'at risk' category especially in relation to young people has largely supplanted older categories such as 'delinquency' and 'maladjustment' that were foundational to the sociology of deviance. Yet the methodologies, epistemological assumptions and politics of governance inherent in the older projects remain the same. While the older sociology of deviance presumed the existence of a stable social order as its point of departure, the risk categories point to the prevalence of assumptions that are equally normalising about the predominance of restructuring, change and threat. Change and threat have now been tamed as Beck (1992) suggests, by the presumption that a globalising, restructuring social formation needs to manage the multiplicity of risks it now confronts. As part of that process, 'sociology of risk' has become a new way to frame old problems and preserve old projects (32).

Bessant (2001: 32) goes one step further, arguing that the sociology of risk has one distinctive

feature from the sociology of deviance that involves "dividing practices that distinguish between

those who are at risk from certain 'problems' and those who are not," embracing Foucaultian

ideals of forecasting for the purpose of justifying interventions in an effort to normalize

behaviours. Bessant (2001: 32) argues that moving from a sociology of deviance to one of risk

has meant a growth in who it encompasses. This is evidenced by a generalized anxiety towards

youth based on categorizations of: youth unemployment, youth homelessness, youth suicides,

delinquency, and drug addiction (Bessant, 2001: 32).

According to Furedi (2006), fear has become a free-floating phenomenon that has pervaded the

cultural fabric of western society. Fear of risks seems to attach itself to every action and thought

in everyday life, creating categories of safe and unsafe behaviours, and defining categories of

"at-risk" populations.

> Anxieties about being 'at risk' or feeling 'stressed' or 'traumatized' or 'vulnerable'
> indicate that we have internalized an individualized psychological   vocabulary
> that influences our sensibility of fear. One of the distinguishing features of fear
> today is that it appears to have an independent existence (Furedi, 2006: 1).

Further, Furedi (2006) adds that that every conceivable threat has been transformed into a risk to

be managed.

> The anticipation of victimization is refracted through one of the most distinctive
> idioms of contemporary culture, which is that of being *at risk*. Anyone labelled as
> at risk is by definition a potential victim. The emergence of the 'at risk' concept
> ruptures the traditional relationships between individual action and the probability
> of some hazard. To be at risk is no longer only about what you do, or the
> probability of some hazard impacting on your life – it is also about who you are. It
> becomes a fixed attribute of the individual…(Furedi, 2006: 5).

This culture of fear where avoidance of risks is paramount not only creates victims but describes

deviants too. Social deviance is the violation of cultural norms. It describes behaviours that are

considered bad, dangerous, and/or unacceptable by the larger society.

One of the theoretical standpoints of this research is that concepts of risk are mediated through

and by constructs of victimization and deviancy, which are constituted in populations defined as

"at-risk." By defining populations as "at-risk" and describing behaviours and places that are

assumed to put them in danger of either becoming victims or deviants, they frame behaviours

and places as dangerous and immoral, by virtue of their blatant disregard for safety and security,

such as eking out an existence on the streets.

One way of rooting out any form of deviance, and defining "at-risk" populations, with the aim of maintaining social order and conformity, has been well developed by the Foucaultian approach. Foucault's concept of governmentality is based on the linkage between the government of others and self-governance. Foucault's early work was focussed on the role of big institutions, such as the prisons, workhouses, asylums and hospitals whose frameworks were based on practices of discipline which acted on individuals through training and repetition to yield what he called "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1977). Foucault uncovered an important historical shift in relation to governing that occurred during the 18th century which he termed "biopolitics", which is

> focussed on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision having been effected through the entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population* (Foucault, 1978: 139; emphasis in original).

These new practices of governing were less focussed on individuals but more focussed on populations, aggregates of similar characteristics, and the creation of certain types of subjects. Power was not invested in one person, one government, but involved a complex web of power relations and strategies, less focussed on who was governing as opposed to strategies employed to maintain social control and order through the regulation and repetition of practices (mostly of the body) (Foucault, 1978). The body became the subject and access point for regulation: the promotion of hygiene from the eighteenth century onward was the strategy in which interventions were targeted to achieve a healthy, productive population and longevity, and methods of self-regulation became inculcated (Foucault, 1980).

Regulation, according to Foucault (1978), is a strategy of normalization and should be understood within a complex web of power relations that result in processes of domination and subjugation. This has particular relevance for the intertwining of constructs of risk and homeless youth, who are identified as either victims or deviants. The risk factors and characteristics demonstrated in the research (as portrayed in Chapter One) describe these youth in pathological terms with concomitant health implications due to their "reckless" behaviours (e.g. substance use, unprotected sex...) and their assumed disregard for their own health. It provides a rationale for risk calculation, and a political rationale for intervention (e.g. health promotion - condoms, personal hygiene, abstinence) and hoped for normalization, thus providing a vehicle for reintegration into mainstream society. It has the effect of casting blame onto youth for their own victimization through their disregard of self-regulating practices (e.g. not using condoms and contracting STIs or becoming pregnant), thus rendering them culpable for their own health and well-being and completely ignoring any structural causes that may be responsible.

Several Foucaultian writers point to changes in the health and epidemiological fields which are responsible for promoting self-regulation which is reinforced by the normalization of the majority, to root out any deviance and achieve 'sameness' or conformity. In health care and epidemiological settings, risk calculations are becoming more and more relied upon to detect and eliminate any pathologies, and to provide early surveillance and treatment (Dean, 1999; Castel, 1991). Castel contends that early 'screening' of populations promotes a 'new mode of surveillance', termed 'systematic pre-detection'. "This is a form of surveillance, in the sense that the intended objective is that of anticipating and preventing the emergence of some undesirable event: illness, abnormality, deviant behaviour, etc..." (Dean, 1999: 288). In this light,

"epidemiological risk therefore has a preventive, rather than restitutive ethos" (Dean, 1999: 143),
referring to efforts to "colonize the future" (Giddens, 1990) in the quest for minimizing harm as
defined by social norms.

Further, Castel (1991) argues that there has been a shift in psychiatry (what he terms 'mental
medicine') over the last hundred years from an emphasis on 'dangerousness' of the individual to
a focus on 'risk'. 'Risk' offers more room for intervention as it only points to the potential for
violence and unpredictable action and is based on the calculation of a combination of abstract
factors that make the occurrence of undesirable modes of behaviour more probable, whereas
dangerousness required a certain burden of proof that could only be provided after the action
occurred. This allowed for a widening of the spectre of intervention and surveillance.
Moreover, this practice has tended to focus on 'at risk' populations, which were located, not
coincidentally, at the bottom of the social ladder (Castel, 1990: 284).

Lastly, Castel (1991: 294) proposes that these differential modes of treatment of populations,
"which aim to maximize the returns on doing what is profitable and to marginalize the
unprofitable", engenders a 'dual' society.

> Instead of segregating and eliminating undesirable elements from the social body,
> or reintegrating them more or less forcibly through corrective or therapeutic
> interventions, the emerging tendency is to assign different social destinies to
> individuals in line with their varying capacity to live up to the requirements of
> competitiveness and profitability (Castel, 1991: 294).

What is created from this differential treatment is a 'dual' society in which "the coexistence of hyper-competitive sectors obedient to the harshest requirements of economic rationality, and marginal activities that provide a refuge (or a dump) for those unable to take part in the circuits of intensive exchange" (Castel, 1991: 294). Those who do not fit into this economic rationale of competition and profitability due to their socially-deviant characteristics (e.g. those who are: mentally/physically ill, unemployed, have addictions problems, homeless, etc…) are continually kept at the margins, with no hope for reintegration, thus maintaining the borders of Self and Other. According to Ewald, once the notion of risk appears it has a tendency to proliferate and take on catastrophic proportions. Once a population is designated "at-risk", it tends to permeate every niche. Assumed to be everywhere it "founds a politics of prevention…The assumption that if prevention is necessary it is because danger exists" (Ewald, 1993: 221-2). To be designated as "at-risk", therefore, is "to be positioned within a network of factors drawn from the observations of others. The implication of this rationalized discourse again is that risk is ultimately controllable, as long as expert knowledge can be properly brought to bear upon it" (Lupton, 1999b: 5). Being "at-risk" is thus not defined by the population it describes but by more powerful others who construct strategies for prevention or surveillance, which is founded on the presumption of labels and stereotypes that dichotomize experiences either as victimizing or deviant and requiring intervention.

Threats of victimization (i.e. bad risks) can never be completely knowable and are constructed differently by different actors. Even what constitutes being "victimized" is laden with strong cultural and moral undertones. It is subjectively constructed and defined by the powerful Self (i.e. mainstream society, institutions) that judge what experiences are considered victimizing.

"Objective" concepts of risk and victimization do not take into account cultural and political frameworks, the symbolic meanings that these constructs represent. Historically, the constructs of victim and victimization have been categorized as absolutes (Viano, 1992; Holstein & Miller, 1990), but since the notions of victim and deviant depends upon where one is standing in the social structure, and even varies within sub-structures and individual beliefs, these assumptions must be examined critically. As risks, victimization and deviancy are matters of perception, an "expert's" analysis is likely to contrast greatly with a lay person's experience. Research to date has assumed that victimization and deviance are static concepts, couched in a normative framework, defined by "experts" who are not living the experiences they are studying. What may be considered victimizing or deviant for a person in a certain social location may be deemed empowering (i.e. pan-handling, squeegee-ing) for another.

Ewald argues that "nothing is a risk in itself; there is no risk in reality. But on the other hand, anything can be a risk; it all depends on how one analyzes the danger, considers the event" (1991: 199). Perceptions of risk, parallel with perceptions of victimization and deviancy, these risks or threats can never be completely knowable or calculable, there is only a perception of risk which is socially, politically, culturally and morally constructed. Similarly, Douglas argues that risk in and of itself is hypothetical: "risk is not a thing, it is away of thinking, and a highly artificial contrivance at that" (1992: 46).

This study aimed to examine youth's understanding of risk by intentionally abstaining from superimposing preconceptions of risk, victimization, and deviancy to the population under study.

However, it is important to acknowledge the ontology of risk that is pervasive in modern society and the impact expert knowledges have in sustaining heightened anxiety around risk and creating "at-risk" populations, and the political rationales behind them. Moreover, this study sought to examine the impact expert knowledges have in defining risk for a marginalized group such as homeless youth.

3.2 Expert Knowledge vs. Lay Knowledge

The intangibility of risks and victimization mean that all knowledge is contestable and dependent upon interpretation. According to Adam and van Loon (2000), the ontology of risk does not favour one form of knowledge over another. In practice, however, expert knowledge concerning risks has dominated public perceptions, but how this translates into influencing lay perceptions of risk is not well understood. As the exponents of the governmentality approach emphasize, since the sixteenth century, there has been a birthing of a huge network of expert knowledges, "accompanied by apparatuses and institutions build around the construction, reproduction, dissemination and practice of these knowledges" (Lupton, 1999b: 4). Foucault's theory of biopower, as highlighted above, is based on harnessing expert knowledge, such as medical expertise, to construct discourses around risk, prevention and management. The rise of neo-liberalism has inculcated a shift in self-regulation based on these authoritative expert discourses.

Picking up on Foucault's thesis, Blais (2006) argues that intuitive local knowledge has become irrelevant, relegated to a lesser status as the promotion of expert knowledge has become the authority.

> Chez Foucault, les savoirs profanes, ordinaires, sont des "savoirs locaux" qui ont été "ensablés", "ensevelis"; cela de deux façons. Ensablés parce que ce sont, d'une part, des savoirs assujettis, disqualifiés par la hiérarchie des connaissances et des sciences: "toute une série de savoirs qui se trouvaient disqualifiés comme savoirs non conceptuels, comme savoirs insuffisamment élaborés: savoir naifs, savoirs hiérarchiquement inférieurs, savoirs en dessous du niveau de la connaissance ou de la scientificité requise" (Foucault 1997 in Blais, 2006: 156).

The supremacy of expert knowledge and the subjugation of lay knowledge have become hallmarks of the modern society. According to Boyne (2003), "experts are recognized for their specialized knowledge and skills, and the ability to apply them in establishing processes or in solving problems within them" (82), and are intimately tied to the processes of modernity. Giddens (1991) argues

> expert systems bracket time and space through deploying modes of technical knowledge which have validity independent of the practitioners and clients who make use of them. Such systems penetrate virtually all aspects of social life in conditions of modernity – in respect of the food we eat, the medicines we take, the buildings we inhabit, the forms of transport we use and a multiplicity of other phenomena. Expert systems are not confined to areas of technological expertise. They extend to social relations themselves and to the intimacies of the self. The doctor, counsellor and therapist are as central to the expert systems of modernity, as the scientist, technician or engineer (18).

Connell and Hunt (2009) attest that

one of the most important, but least recognized implications of Foucault's discussion of biopolitics is that it involves the radical claim that the desire to ground truth in rational forms of knowledge (law, medicine, social science, etc.) results in extending the normative power of knowledge in such a way as to produce the paradox that each step towards advancing the health of populations at the same time empowers and expands the institutional mechanisms of control (3).

Thus, the supremacy of expert knowledge is upheld and reinforced because of this assumption that the knowledge is value-free, thus indisputable. However, expert opinions are not neutral, apolitical, nor only rationally-based devoid of context or moral underpinnings. Some have argued that expert discourses are heavily based on moral regulation.

Moral regulation... takes the following general form that employs discourses which have a common structure. Moral discourses link a moralized subject with some moralized object or practice in such a way as to impute some wider socially harmful consequences unless both subject and practices are subjected to appropriate regulation. Moral regulation involves 'moralization' rather than 'morality,' and this is relational (whether to others or to the self) in asserting some generalized sense of the wrongness of some conduct, habit or disposition (Hunt, 1999: 280).

Risk epistemologies are inevitably mediated through social, cultural, and political frameworks of understanding and motivations as are lay risk knowledges. However, by framing risk discourses in a seemingly neutral and apolitical manner it gives the illusion of fact-based evidence that cannot be countered, and the "expert knows best" approach is maintained. Tulloch and Lupton (2003) argue that all risk epistemologies are socially constructed, including those of 'experts':

Rather than drawing a distinction between 'rational' and 'irrational' (or 'accurate' and 'biased') risk assessments, we prefer to concentrate on the meanings that are imputed to risk and how these meanings operate as part of people's notions of subjectivity and their social relations (12).

Risk society theorists content that as nature becomes industrialized and traditions become less sacred and optional, new types of uncertainties - manufactured uncertainties – arise (Beck, 2000). These 'manufactured uncertainties' "presume a threefold participation of scientific experts, in the roles as producers, analysts and profiteers from risk definitions" (Beck, 2000: 216). Lupton (1999a) argues that it is rarely lay people who play a major role in the construction of risk objects at the level of public debate.

> Rather, 'expert' knowledges – particularly those emerging from science, medicine, the 'psy' disciplines (psychology, psychiatry, counselling), social work, the law and economics – are embedded   within organizational contexts and often mediated through the mass media, are central to the construction and publicizing of risk (Lupton, 1999a: 32).

Similarly, research on victimization and deviancy has been founded on the observations, categorizations, and findings of 'experts'. Moreover, Wynne (1996) argues that the 'experts' from the risk society theorists have typically not acknowledged the situated and localized nature of their risk assessment and analyses, instead they have portrayed their results as objective universal truths devoid of any social or cultural context. As Lupton (1999a) so neatly sums up:

> If a 'risk' is understood as a product of perception and cultural   understanding, then to draw a distinction between 'real' risks (as   measured and identified by 'experts') and 'false' risks (as   perceived by members of the public) is irrelevant. Both perspectives are ways in which these understandings are constructed and acted upon that is considered important, not the extent to which one perspective may be considered to be more 'accurate' or less 'biased' than the other, for this distinction is also considered to be irrelevant (33).

Similar to ideas expounded in the risk society of the apocalyptical nature of risk, Joffe (1999)

argues that precisely because so many contemporary dangers cannot be seen, smelt, tasted, or

touched, there is a heightened level of anxiety. In this sense, because people cannot rely on

sensory information to detect them, risks may lurk everywhere and can only truly be identified

by experts.

> Only the experts can recognize them…The combination of a high level of
> awareness of risk, and a lack of trust in the experts who might be relied upon for
> protection, creates an era of uncertainty and unease… One of the ways in which
> contemporary societies have tried to seize control over these circumstances is by
> making every attempt to calculate and to regulate dangers. Risks are represented
> as if they are systematically caused, statistically describable and, consequently,
> somewhat predictable (Joffe, 1999: 3).

By relying on expert knowledge to try and assess, regulate and minimize risks, through insurance

and surveillance systems, an attempt is made to 'colonize the future' (Giddens, 1991). "Under

conditions of modernity, the future is continually drawn into the present by means of the

reflexive organization of knowledge environments" (Giddens, 1991: 3). However, this assertion

may not be as evident for a disenfranchised group as homeless youth who, in their marginalized

existences, may not be as inundated by expert agendas and knowledges as mainstream society. It

is well documented that homeless youth do not typically reach out for help (Novac et al., 2009a;

Gaetz, 2004; Karabanow, 2004; Kurtz et al., 2000) and frequently do not heed professional

advice (Haldenby et al., 2007).

By examining lay people's understanding of risk in their everyday lives we can begin to detach

from these expert agendas, and witness the organic richness of context, individuality, history,

locality, and the dynamic nature of risk knowledges. Lay people generate their own ideas and do not only respond to expert agendas, and this is particularly true for homeless youth who rely on peer support and informal networks and are not as engaged in mainstream society (conceptualized for our purposes here as the Self). In this light, it could be hypothesized that they are not as governed by Foucault's totalitarian ideology of self-regulation, as they are not in line with the norm. Acknowledging a more diminutive view of the influence of expert systems Furedi (2006) attests that "peer pressure is a far more powerful influence on individual behaviour than the workings of formal institutions" (7). However, peer influences are rarely discussed in these social theories of risk. There is an assumption that expert knowledges are paramount to individual's understandings of risk. The idea that there is a plurality of risk knowledges and that there is not one monolithic public reaction to risk manufacturing necessitates further investigation. One of the major contributions of this study is that it examined the plurality of risk knowledges and uncovered that individual responses to risk shifted over time, were often based on intuition and experience, and were not significantly impacted by expert apparatuses as risk theorists have pontificated. One of the cultural transformations that is engendered by the construction of these expert apparatuses is the manifestation of an emphasis on the individualization or privatization of risk. With the increase of individualism in Western society there has been a prominence of personal accountability in managing risk. Again, another rationale for this study was to examine how a disenfranchised group such as homeless youth, who tend to live more collectively, respond to these notions of individualism and competition, by examining their responses to risk and responsibilization.

3.3 The Privatization of Risk

The privatization or individualization of risk is very much embedded in late modern society. One of the hallmarks of this society is the prevalence of expert knowledges, particularly, in constructing and mediating discourses on risk and responsibility (Foucault, 1991; Giddens, 1991). According to this perspective, this is a result of the emergence of modern systems of government that have been built upon ideas of rule and order and voluntary self-governance as opposed to maintaining order through violent means (Foucault, 1991). Utilizing expert knowledges to frame acceptable and unacceptable behaviours leads to self-regulation and the individualization of responsibility, thus making individuals hyper-responsible for the taking of risks.

> The increasing prominence of risk analysis has generated an expansion and intensification of the moralization of everyday life. In turn this moralization leads to a proliferation of both bureaucratic regulation in the everyday world and an expansion of the responsibilities which impact on citizens in a way that reinforces and even multiplies the regulatory impact of projects that aim to stimulate the obligation to adopt a self-responsibilizing attitude. The outcome of this interconnection between moral discourse and risk discourse constitutes an instance of hybridity, the combination of two types of discourse in such a way as to merge their characteristics into a distinctively new form (Hunt, 2003 in Connell & Hunt, 2009: 4).

While the privatization of risk has become the norm in individualist Western societies, it is not known how this zeitgeist impacts more collectivist and/or lesser known marginalized groups which find themselves outside of this norm just by their very culture of existence and their lack of engagement with normative institutions. While the reported behaviours of homeless youth fall

into a risk analysis catchment of prevention and management it is not well understood how they conceptualize their responsibilities in relation to those behaviours (i.e. whether they internalize or externalize responsibility). There is an assumption that citizens self-regulate and self-govern in a more or less uniform manner, with little room for plurality or diversity of experiences.

Another aspect that lends credence to the notion of the privatization of risk has been expounded by the risk society theorists. They contend that shifts in the labour market, a rise in flexible, insecure and decentralized work has led to greater uncertainty and new social problems. According to Beck (1992), "new types of flexible, pluralized underemployment" become managed through "the risk biographies of individualization" (129-130). Many of the traditional organizing and identity-giving features of industrial modernity – "the family, the factory (promoting class visibility and consciousness), and permanent employment (as career narrative) – begin to disintegrate in late modernity" (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003: 63). People in turn become more dependent on the labour market in constructing their identities and risk biographies due to the dismantling of traditional relationships and obligations; however, they are also at the mercy of the markets and often seen as the handmaidens of their own misfortunes. Beck (1992) argues that there has been a "social surge of individualization" (87), wherein crises are understood as individual defects rather than socially caused. Moreover, this signature characteristic of globalization, the privatization of risk, is premised on the assumption that the individual is responsible for their own undoing and is not following expert advice.

As can be surmised from the literature review and theoretical constructs of adolescence, many homeless youth are disengaged from these normative institutions of society (i.e. formal labour market, family) and their socialization takes place outside (mostly) of these structures. Moreover, youth tend to gravitate towards one another in groups or dyads, often living as a collective (Parazelli, 2002). Thus, it is difficult to determine whether they internalize these social norms around responsibility and hold themselves accountable for negative experiences that ensue, as risk society and governmentality theorists would have us assume. Foucault does launch a discursive thesis in relation to power in modern society. He notes that "where there is power there is resistance - there is a relational and reflexive character of power relationships. Resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power and there is a plurality of resistances distributed in an irregular fashion" (Connell, 2008: 9). This speaks to the nuances of power and resistance and the slippery boundaries between Self and Other. Homeless youth have been characterized in the literature as neatly falling into categories of "at-risk", powerlessness, and the Other. However, it is not known whether youth accept or reject these notions or have alternative conceptualizations.

This study sought to examine these nuances from youth's viewpoint by: gathering their unique frames of reference regarding their individual notions of responsibility in relation to risk; investigating whether youth blame themselves for their own victimization; and unearthing how and if they are impacted by expert systems in relation to their risk perceptions and practices. While governmentality and risk society theorists argue that the push for the individualization of risk is well underway, this study demonstrated that this analysis is not necessarily the experience of the lay person in a marginalized group, who find themselves outside of the norm. This study

demonstrated that participants' analyses were complex and that conceptualizations of blame were plural and non-linear, and covered a wide range of possibilities. However, it cannot be denied that the current zeitgeist of the individualization of risk is a political tool that serves to blame the victim, absolve society of responsibility for continued victimization and marginalization, and neutralize those at the margins.

3.4 Blaming the Victim/Deviant

The emphasis on the individualization of risk leads to greater self-management and increasing privatization of risk, and subsequently blames the victim or deviant for their own victimization, should they behave in a socially deviant or "risky" way. There are also generational or social reproductive features in designating certain groups as "at-risk," this will be expanded upon later in this section. Amster (2003) claims that while the homeless as a group lack societal power they are constructed as a threat to the larger society by their very nature of transgressing social norms.

Becker (1963) believed that adolescence, in particular, posed certain problems with regards to social rules and norms.

> adolescents find themselves surrounded by rules about these matters which have been made by older and more settled people. It is considered legitimate to do this, for youngsters are considered neither wise enough nor responsible enough to make proper rules for themselves (Becker, 1963: 17).

In this light, adolescents by virtue of their young age are already casted as different or deficient from the rest of society (i.e. half-child/half-adult), not fully able to make decisions for themselves and requiring protection or surveillance.

According to Kidd (2009), the family histories of most homeless youth as explored in Chapter One, are understood to be different or deviate from the ideals of the "social norm." Being labelled by such experiences has the effect of placing the individual outside of these norms, we argue, conceptualizing them as either victims or deviants.

> Having such abusive and disruptive childhoods initiates a process of stigmatization in which children are identified and labelled as different, and as their opportunities, social and otherwise, narrow due to the beliefs and actions of others. For many homeless youth, having these types of early experiences likely leaves them more vulnerable to negative experiences associated with social stigma on the streets, given research showing that stigmatization has a greater impact upon the self-esteem of persons who have been abused in childhood (Kidd, 2009: 2).

According to Douglas (1985), blaming the victim also serves to absolve social systems of any responsibility they have and further reinforces the privatization of risk. This same argument may easily be applied to conceptualizations of victim and victimization particularly with the retraction of the welfare state. Often individuals whose roles are less socially-conforming (i.e. the homeless, drug users, etc…) are held responsible for their own victimization, and may not even be considered victims in the same way that someone with the same experience would be.

One of the products of risk is the creation of victims and culprits. There is a tendency, or a conditioned response, in risk societies, or what Lash (2000) prefers to call "risk cultures," to focus on culpability once the damage is done. The focus on this "who to blame" becomes more paramount than the risk itself.

> Thus, the danger can be understood in terms of this 'who to blame'. Studying risk and responsibility, therefore, implies that rather than looking for responsibility following from the real existence of risk, one must look first at whom risk cultures blame. Thus hierarchical-institutional cultures blame the outsiders, the criminals the foreigners. Key here is the phenomenon of trust (Lash, 2000: 51).

Trust is essential in determining who is an insider and who is an outsider, and in determining what is tolerable and what is not. According to Giddens (1991), based on echoings of Winnicott and Erikson's theories, "trust in the existential anchorings of reality in an emotional, and to some degree in a cognitive, sense rests on confidence in the reliability of persons, acquired in the early experiences of the infant" (38). Trust forms a

> sort of emotional inoculation against existential anxieties – a protection against future threats and dangers which allows the individual to sustain hope and courage in the face of whatever debilitating circumstances she or he might later confront. Basic trust is a screening-off device in relation to risks and dangers in the surrounding settings of action and interaction. It is the main emotional support of a defensive carapace or *protective cocoon* which all normal individuals carry around with them as the means whereby they are able to get on with the affairs of day-to-day life (Giddens, 1991, 39-40).

However, while trust is an essential ingredient in maintaining social order and shapes perceptions and responses to risk it also serves to delineate who can be trusted and who cannot. Trust is an essential feature of victim-blaming and is often a political tool used to keep the marginalized at

the margins. The question of blame is often a political manoeuvre to serve the powerful Self's ends, to maintain order and control over the socially deviant and the rest socially conforming to their rule. Carter (1995) argues that failure for the socially-deviant to abide by societal norms leads to victim-blaming. He contends that

> Those groups facing danger which can be defined as 'other' often face controls which work in the interests of the powerful 'same'. Thus a range of social practices exist, connected with risk assessment, which historically have often targeted specific groups…the effect is to push the group into a space of danger – the place of the 'other. Here they become a useful repository for our cultural ideas of danger. As long as we are 'good'… then danger is elsewhere (1995: 142-3).

If it is possible to blame the victim/deviant than the greater society does not have to take responsibility for the damage done in the first place, and the boundaries between Self and Other are maintained and reinforced (Douglas, 1985). Further, if blame can be assigned, as it is typically to the socially deviant or the victim, then social norms and order will be preserved and strengthened. For instance, the homeless community are often blamed for their own misfortunes even though there is a serious national affordable housing crisis, even though many work but do not make a 'living wage' and hence cannot afford the rents. However, the homeless are often individually blamed for rapid changes in the housing and labour markets and their inability to earn a living wage and find non-existent affordable housing. Blaming and labelling the homeless, by focussing on individual character flaws (e.g. drug/alcohol dependence), serves to absolve society of any responsibility to solve the housing crisis or the changing nature of the labour market, while reinforcing the covert neo-liberal agenda of increased competition and privatization. For Douglas, "blaming the victim is a strategy that works in one kind of context,

and blaming the outside enemy, a strategy that works in another. Victim blaming facilitates social control; outsider blaming enhances loyalty" (1985: 59).

There is also a social reproductive function to victim/deviant blaming and the creation of "at-risk" subjects. Ewald (1993) contends that manufacturing victims and deviants through a risk lens implies a generational effect. This is evident in the literature on victimization and social deviance. If one is labelled a "victim", then the potential for further victimizing events is present, and one is "at-risk" for transmitting these to one's descendants or with whom one associates. One social deviant's drug use, sex work, STI, capacity for violence, teenage pregnancy, homosexuality, has the potential for creating future victims by transmitting these characteristics to their offspring and/or acquaintances, or creating risk fault lines along the trajectories of their offspring (ie. teenage pregnancy = children in welfare systems = future homeless adults). Simultaneously, the original victim is also blamed for his/her socially deviant behaviour.

Furthermore, what this distinction implies for homeless youth, in terms of the social construction of victimization and deviancy and risk, is that for researchers and front-line workers who work with and study victimization among this population, the concepts of victim and victimization are likely to be assessed, constructed and analysed very differently. What for one may be a question of life choices and survival (e.g. sex work, squeegee) may be considered a victimizing or socially-deviant practice for another. These concepts are constructed and identified differently by different actors, embedded in a particular political, social and cultural context, but also

contingent upon one's social location, situated knowledge, and individual history. Moreover, constructions of victim blaming serve to delineate boundaries between a less powerful Other (marginalized groups) and a more powerful Self (society, institutions, expert systems). This phenomenon will be elaborated upon below.

3.5 Importance of Self and Other Boundaries

The relevance of Douglas' Self and Other boundaries are clearly of use in terms of grounding a framework for victim blaming and further marginalizing those already at the margins, such as homeless youth. She argues that it is precisely those at the margins, those that are socially deviant, that pose a threat to maintaining this social order. She contends that risk has been used in contemporary western society for blaming and marginalizing an Other "who is positioned as posing a threat (and thus a risk) to the integrity of self" (Lupton 1999a: 40). Indeed, Amster (2003) claims that while the homeless hold virtually no power in society they are often constructed as posing a threat to the dominant culture. He points to studies of deviance to make his point.

> a society's response to "deviant" elements is rarely linked in a direct way to any actual or credible threat. The threat is more one of perception than reality, more of a societal pre-emptive strike against an as-yet-unborn threat that often originates within the dominant culture itself, but finds concrete expression in some abject, powerless element of society. As such, depictions of "deviant subcultures" in the mainstream media are likely to feed into stereotypes of danger, disorder, disease, and criminality, helping to construct "the other" as inferior, inhuman,

unsympathetic, deserving of their fate, and perhaps even requiring punitive measures (Amster, 2003: 1-2).

Disorder, according to Douglas (1969), is contained through rituals of purity and impurity, and support and reinforce social ties, increasing social cohesion in cultural settings. In this context, disorder could be equated with risk or danger, and those who transgress cultural boundaries could be viewed as deviant and contaminating. "A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone" (Douglas, 1969: 44). Thus, the socially deviant are viewed as disobeying cultural norms, and as blatantly disregarding and transgressing norms while placing others at risk. Not only do they pose a threat to transgressing and changing the margins they are dangerous to others as well.

As Massumi so neatly states: "the individual is defined more by the boundaries it crosses than the limits it observes" (1993: 27). As the very notion of social deviance is a context-dependent phenomenon the only universal underpinning is that it can be described by the boundaries or margins of what social deviance transgresses. Social deviance, much as the existence of self and Other, is a process of crossing boundaries. Massumi believes that boundaries may be present everywhere, potentially. "Boundaries are set and specified in the act of passage. The crossing actualizes the boundary-rather than the boundary defining something inside by its inability to cross" (1993: 27). Similarly, Bauman's reflections of community are very much based in this notion of self and Other. "Community means sameness, while 'sameness' means the absence of the Other, especially a stubbornly different other capable of a nasty surprise and mischief

precisely by reason of their difference" (2001: 115). Correspondingly, social order and conformity is maintained by its 'sameness', by the absence of any form of deviation. Clearly if these borders are not rigidly enforced, then the polarity of victimized from victimizer becomes blurred, between Self and Other becomes murky, irrevocably eliminating the clear dichotomy and upsetting the social order.

Moreover, Douglas emphasizes that margins, in and of themselves are dangerous, since margins represent vulnerability and frailty and are prone to cultural shifts that continuously upset the social order that has been established. Margins, which delineate concepts of self and Other, of socially deviant and conforming, serve to reinforce roles and social order. If the socially deviant pull too much at the margins, by playing roles that cross over into order and conformity, or the socially conforming cross over into socially deviant behaviours, the margins become slippery and the order may be upset. The clarity and tension between deviance and order may become impacted, making the divisions less clear, and decreasing the amount of social cohesion or order. No longer will it be understood who is safe or dangerous (risky), who is a victim or a perpetrator, who is "at-risk," and who is a risk-taker and who is not. The social order will be upset, chaos will ensue, the socially deviant will no longer bear the brunt of society's misfortunes. Thus, the socially deviant, those at the margins, constitute a threat to the integrity of the rest of society, of the self, and must be rendered dangerous and different.

Goffman (1963) argues for a more nuanced version of Self and Other boundaries related to stigma. He expounds that stigma has a pronounced effect on creating boundaries between Self and Other, but that it is

> not so much a set of concrete individuals who can be separated into two piles, the stigmatized and the normal, as a pervasive two-role social process in which every individual participates in both roles, at least in some connections and in some phases of life. The normal and the stigmatized are not persons but rather perspectives (Goffman, 1963: 137-138).

This study found this more nuanced version of Self and Other boundaries to be particularly relevant, as most youth's roles oscillated between accepting and identifying within certain social norms and more deviant ones.

The anxiety over risk and threats of victimization lie in our need to exert control over the unknown (Palmlund, 1992: 199). This is highly symbolic of the need to control and maintain the boundaries between social norms and deviance, as deviance represents that which cannot be controlled and brought into line with the norm. Attributes assigned to homeless youth symbolize this view of deviance, that which is non-conforming. In this vein, they are also seen as dangerous to associate with, risky. Not only are they more likely to take risks, acting in socially deviant ways (e.g. drug use, illegal activities), these labels serve to reinforce them as different and dangerous because they are seen as uncontrollable and wild, and further reinforces this notion of Self and Other. However, it is not known how they internalize or externalize reactions to dangerousness, stigma and labelling, and whether there is a sense of themselves as "different".

Homeless youth represent the Other, they live on the 'margins' and are marginalized by institutional structures, bureaucracies, mass media, and mainstream public perceptions. Even the very research that is intended to help understand and mitigate homelessness is guilty of oversimplifying their experiences and lumping them into a monolithic group. Evidence of legislative changes to govern and regulate public spaces, such as the *Safe Street Acts* (in Ontario) that disallows the use of public space to earn money in informal ways (e.g. squeegeeing, panhandling, selling art without a permit), serves to keep the already marginalized from "polluting taxpayers spaces". Moreover, sixteen and seventeen year-old homeless youth, who are the focus of this study, are faced with a double-barrelled form of marginalization by the very nature of their being young and homeless. These youth are often further marginalized within the larger homeless body because they do not have the same access to services and benefits (strict and differing welfare eligibility criteria and fewer shelter spots for under eighteen year-olds), nor do they have the same access to labour and housing markets (as exemplified in Chapter 1) as their older counterparts. There are numerous barriers to eke out a living in socially-legitimate ways and in this struggle they are more likely to be drawn into more marginalized and perhaps 'riskier' experiences for their survival, further reinforcing their image as an Other.

But there is another dimension that needs to be expanded upon as it relates to homeless youth and their labelled socially marginal activities that are not just about survival. As was fleshed out in earlier sections, related to the socialization of street youth and risk, the streets are not only places of risk, but are places of excitement and experimentation, particularly as they relate to the construction of identity. This study examined this phenomenon of how the construction of identity related to risks, conceptualized as potential threats but also opportunities, in the context

of a labelled "risky" environment. It sought to uncover how youth utilized aspects of their identities through the roles they played in managing risk, especially as they relate to Self and Other boundaries. These boundaries were not always so rigidly defined and experienced as they have been conceptualized by theorists but were frequently transgressed and formed "domains of complementarity" (Lucchini, 1996). As has been argued by some authors (Saillant, 2004), in some instances, it is beneficial for marginalized populations to be viewed as vulnerable and at other times this vulnerability is the cause of exclusion. This study hoped to capture these varying and complex dimensions of stigma and identity as they pertain to risk.

3.6 The Individual Risk-Taker: Experiencing to Exist

One aspect of risk that has not been examined in-depth by the three risk approaches (ie. the risk society, governmentality, or cultural/symbolic theorists) is voluntary risk-taking (Boyne, 2003; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Voluntary risk-taking, can be described as an "activity in which individuals engage is perceived by them to be in some sense risky, but is undertaken deliberately and from choice" (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003: 11). Boyne (2003) asks: "What happens when risks are taken consciously?" To date, only psychology has made some attempt to understand this phenomenon but it has examined it under the rubric of risk and rational action, studying voluntary risk-takers under the lens of decision-making behaviours. It is not well understood why some voluntary 'high-risk' activities are glorified, while others are not tolerated. An

examination of the psychology of excitement offers some rationale for voluntary risk-taking but is by no means exhaustive.

Apter's (1992) work on the psychology of excitement views risk as not necessarily good or bad but as exciting and stimulating. Situations in which people voluntarily engage in 'high-risk' activities and what he refers to as the 'dangerous edge'. In his book, *The Dangerous Edge,* he examines the nature of arousal, both the physiological and psychological reactions that occur when people either feel excitement or anxiety brought on by voluntary risk-taking. But there is little empirical research on the meanings that people ascribe to voluntary risk-taking (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Tulloch and Lupton (2003) found that while there was a dominant tendency by participants in their study to categorize risk as negative, there was also evidence of positive meanings, including: "adventure, the emotions of excitement, elation and enjoyment, the opportunity to engage in self-actualization and self-improvement" (19).

> These accounts suggest that participating in activities that are coded as dangerous or 'risky' can bring an adrenalin rush that allows aficionados to escape the bounds of the rational mind and controlled body, to allow the body's sensations and emotions to overcome them for a time. There is a sense of heightened living, of being closer to nature than culture, of breaking the 'rules' that we see society as imposing upon us. Here again selfhood is important. The emotions produced by risk-taking are seen to give access to authenticity of self hood by confronting the barriers of convention or social expectation (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003: 35).

Edgework is a concept that was put forward by Lyng (1990) to describe a social psychological account of voluntary risk-taking in an effort to address the psychological reductionism of previous risk analyses. Lyng (1990) states that there is "a dominance of a psychological model

of risk taking that views anticipated rewards as the primary motivation for risk-taking behaviour", however, "…some people place a higher value on the experience of risk taking than they do on achieving the final ends of the risky undertaking" (852). The central feature of edgework involves activities that pose "a clearly observable threat to one's physical or mental well-being or one's sense of an ordered existence" (Lyng, 1990: 857). Lyng (1990) emphasizes that edgeworkers seek to "negotiate the boundaries between life and death, consciousness and unconsciousness, and sanity and insanity" (855). He posits that there is a skills-base development to edgework. Edgeworkers regard these voluntary life-threatening experiences (e.g. skydiving, rock climbing, etc…) as opportunities for the development and enhancement of their skills, this represents the most valuable aspect of the experience for them. These experiences produce certain euphoric and hyper-reality sensations. Lyng's thrill-seekers differentiate themselves from others in the sense that he portrays his edgeworkers as placing themselves in challenges where they can exercise their skills and still retain some amount of control, they are not interested in gambles of fate. Self-actualization is key and not dangerousness.

However, for homeless youth the paradox of danger and excitement is often a strong pull to the streets. Bellot (2001) and Lucchini (1996) describe how varying degrees of boredom often lure youth to the streets, or how various experiences are presented in the streets and used to generate "excitement" and to feel alive. The paradox of danger breeding excitement is a common element among homeless youth and evidence of this phenomenon was certainly found in this study. Moreover, viewing the streets as a place of excitement, adventure and discovery, and as a substitution for traditional rites of passage, as explained above, also adds credence to the utility

of voluntary risk-taking and changes the stereotypical image of danger and deviance. Taking risks, even within the context of constrained choices (Bellot, 2001), serves many functions. It allows youth to test themselves in the absence of social structures and parental control, and to play with the edges of their identities that are in constant flux with the environment. This iterative process is constantly constructing and de-constructing their identities with the testing of risks.

Coupling social constructionism with symbolic interactionism approach allows us to deconstruct these observations and to see that individuals can be objects of their own action, that they have the ability to see themselves from the outside, and that they are constantly taking on new roles (Blumer, 1986: 12-13). This form of self-interaction is social, a form of communication with oneself (Blumer, 1986: 13), and as it pertains to the youth in this study, experimental. Taking risks is part of the project of constructing one's identity, testing one's limits and one's tolerance and comfort with new experiences and new roles in the evolution of discovering and re-inventing oneself.

Homeless youth often describe 'chances' they will take to experiment with jumping into new relationships, trying on new roles/identities, and gaining new experiences. If we conceive of adolescence as a time of rapid change and transition, we can see that it is a ripe time of experimentation and exploration, and potentially its member have a higher tolerance for embracing risk and a diminished ability to sense hazards. In Winnicott's (1971) work on the "Search for the Self" he claims that "it is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative

that the individual discovers the self" (54). In this vein, trying on new roles, experimenting with new activities and relationships, in essence, taking risks, is a developmentally appropriate expectation of adolescence.   Alternatively becoming homeless and emancipated from parental/guardian control, during such a critical time, and some could argue, vulnerable time of identity formation, sets the stage for many risk-taking opportunities, some of which they may have little control or choice over. However, whether one has a choice over the kind of risks that are taken or not, the experiences derived from risk-taking culminate in a manifestation of change and transformation of the self. Risk-taking in this sense may be a form of self-actualization. One hypothesis may be that separating from family or substitute care arrangements at such a vulnerable time serves as a springboard for taking further risks in an effort to foster authentic experiences in the construction of the self.   The phenomenon of the impact of identity construction on participants' perceptions of risk will be elucidated further in Chapter Five.

3.7 The Paradoxical Positions of this Study

This study is located at the heart of several paradoxes in contemporary western society. One of the paradoxes relates to the moral premium that has been placed on avoiding risk, which has been equated with negative outcomes, by embracing a culture of safety.   The rise of individualization has also led to an internalization of responsibility when it comes to protecting oneself from risks, resulting in a cultural phenomenon that is always looking for a "who to blame." A zeitgeist of risk has come to be equated with a culture of safety, and provides a moral

compass in regulating behaviours that are deemed "risky," "dangerous," and "polluting". Paradoxically, adolescence has been framed as a time of heightened risk-taking and experimentation and stands in stark contrast to prevailing norms of "safety at all costs". Moreover, expert discourses have labelled the streets as dangerous and risky and a place that is not safe for youth to congregate, symbolized in the risk trajectories that frame homeless youth discourses. However, the streets are also highly symbolic as a paradox of danger and excitement (Colombo, 2008; Parazelli, 2002; Bellot, 2001). This alternative conceptualization of the streets as a place of experimentation and self-discovery because of the risks that they represent has been commented on by others, and moves beyond the binary of victimization and deviancy. Equally so, homeless youth have been deemed as an "at-risk" group, however, they are the least likely to reach out for help but there is a moral imperative for intervention. However, all of these labels are defined by expert others not living the experiences under investigation. This study hoped to shed light on some of these paradoxes by allowing youth's viewpoints to emerge.

3.8 Research Objectives and Hypotheses

Employing a social constructionist approach coupled with a symbolic interactionist one forms the basis of this study's theoretical framework. The aim is to deconstruct experiences of risk as they pertain to homeless youth and to deconstruct the socio-cultural discourses on risk as they relate to these findings as presented above. Deploying such an approach is to warrant against assigning and labelling homeless youth's experiences into pre-destined categories, and adding an interactional analysis serves to probe more deeply the dynamic nature of risk constructs. Most

prior research has rested on categories founded on a binary of victimization and deviancy with little room for subjective conceptualizations and the diversity of youth experiences and meanings they attach to these experiences to be elucidated. This study hoped to provide the platform for those meanings and understandings to be uncovered.

The underlying hypothesis of this effort was to capture youth's conceptualizations regarding their experiences and to demonstrate that they are richer and more complex than this binary suggests. Another governing hypothesis of this study was to disembody some of the major elements of these grand macro socio-cultural theories of risk and illustrate the relevance of these approaches for a small marginalized group, by exposing nuances, inconsistencies, and discontinuities of the theoretical approaches.

The objectives of the study were to:

1.   Unearth youth's lived reality as they related to choices they made concerning risk (conceived as danger and opportunity), framed in their voices and understanding   as experiences unfolded over a period of time (one to two years).

2.   Uncover the context and meaning participants assign to their experiences, and to   restrict as much as possible a superimposing of the researcher's preconceptions in relation to risk, victimization, and deviancy.

3.   Understand how participants perceive, negotiate and respond (strategies

employed) to risks, and how conceptualizations of risk and practices/strategies

change over time.

4.   Uncover participant's personal constructions of risk as they relate to the

construction of their evolving identities, and how these relate to how they are

perceived by others.

5.   Expose participant's understanding of risk as it relates to responsibilization, self-

regulation and their interactions and responses to expert systems and normative

institutions.

To realize these objectives an ethnographic approach was employed to frame experiences in the

youth's point of view.

Part 4: Conceptual Framework

One of the premise's of this study is that there is a dimension to the social construction of risk that has been missing to date, that is, an interactional approach needs to be added to ground our understanding of individual experiences of risk. This study took such an approach, and applied a symbolic interactionism approach to theoretical underpinnings of social constructionism in examining risk perception. By adding an interactional approach, it was discovered that perceptions of risk were embedded in a certain place and in a certain time, and that they changed over time within individuals. Risk perception was highly malleable and dynamic and this was due to contexts being in flux (e.g. residential/work instability, changing relationships, street activities) coupled with participants evolving identities.

The study also examined the longitudinal aspect of participants risk frameworks by following subjects over the course of the study (from one to two years) to uncover whether risk perception shifted over time, in response to life changes, opportunities and their evolving identities. The main contribution of this research was the epistemological standpoint, which allowed the youth's viewpoints to emerge. Pre-conceived conceptualizations of risk, victimization, and deviancy were not applied to the results of this study, as is so prevalent in previous literature. The need to hear from the youth themselves about their conceptualizations of risk, why some risks are taken and others not, was the basis of this research design and the rationale for the study. These implications for the study's methodology will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

Lastly, aspects of the three socio-cultural theories of risk encompassed by: the risk society, governmentality theorists, and the cultural/symbolic approach, were deconstructed and applied to the findings of the study. As one of the main critiques is that there is little understanding of how these notions of risk impact individuals differently, one of the goals of this research was to examine how these theories applied to a much maligned group deemed "at-risk."

4.1 Overview of Key Terms

4.1.1 Risk

The word *risk* is rather elusive to description. Its meaning has changed over time and it has become almost synonymous with danger, but its early meaning was less definitive and more provocative, it included taking chances or gambles. According to Bernstein (1996), the word risk originally derived from the "early Italian *risicare*, which means 'to dare'. In this sense, risk is a choice rather than a fate. The actions we dare to take, which depend on how free we are to make choices" (Bernstein, 1996: 8). However, the more recent definition of risk has come to mean the "estimation of the probability of an adverse future event and the estimation of the magnitude of the foreseeable consequences should it happen" (Boyne, 2003: 109). This more technical concept of risk, which has come to predominate, has become too narrow and synonymous with danger. Many argue that a more comprehensive theory of risk is needed "to integrate the technical analysis of risk and the cultural, social and individual response structures that shape the public experience of risk" (Kasperson et al., 2000: 234).

4.1.2 Risk Perception

This study examined youth's *risk perception and responses*. According to Slovic (2000: 220), risk perceptions are "intuitive risk judgements" that people make. Risk perceptions are subjective judgements that people make about the characteristics and severity of a risk. While the rise of the concept of risk and its application to any threat has reached apocalyptic proportions, there still remain very few published accounts of how "people view risk as a general concept and experience, and which risks they see as affecting them over their full range of their quotidian activities. We know very little about how people define risk" (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003: 16). This fact alone provides the ontological and epistemological rationale for the study. Perceptions in general, consist of a mélange of competing interests, individual intuition coupled with cultural norms, imbued with political, social, and economic concerns and values. They are malleable, dynamic, and may shift over time, and yet we know very little about them and how they affect decisions people make.

It is important to differentiate risk consciousness and risk knowledges from risk perception. Risk perception is one facet of risk consciousness, which encompasses people's socially, historically and politically situated knowledge and determines one's tolerance of risks. Whereas risk knowledges, refer to the apparatuses (expert vs. lay) or risk frameworks that inform risk

consciousness and affect one's risk perception. All of these notions of risk, risk perception, risk consciousness, and risk knowledges are social, political, cultural and historical constructions that are transformed over time with the acquisition of new experiences, insights, and political motivations. *Risk responses* refer to the *risk management strategies* employed when risk is perceived.

4.1.3 "At-Risk"

The connotation of "at-risk" refers to the group under study, in the sense that they have been identified as such in the literature. There is a prevailing view in research on homeless youth that they are "at-risk" and are labeled as such due to a multitude of pre-disposing factors: childhood histories (abandonment, abuse and neglect), parental histories (e.g. drug abuse, criminal involvement, socio-economic factors), dropping out of school, leaving home/or being pushed out, their involvement in the child welfare system, and their young age. And these factors of "vulnerability" that characterize them put them at greater risk on the streets (it is argued) for: increased likelihood of poor health (e.g., STIs, teenage pregnancy, mental and physical health), involvement in criminal/deviant activities, substance use, association with deviants, increased victimization (defined by expert systems), and increased alienation from mainstream society. Lastly, there are cultural, social and economic factors that also (it has been argued) place them at greater risk. These involve changing and precarious labour and housing markets that make it difficult for these youth to eke out a living and find a stable, affordable place to live, and family

instability and recomposition. The rise of individualism and the lack of social and normative institutions (work, school, stable family) that have inherently socially integrative features, pushes youth, particularly marginalized youth, further into an alienated existence. In the literature, the culmination of these pre-disposing factors, their young age, combined with the impact of street life and social exclusionary processes serves to frame homeless youth as an "at-risk" group. However, it is not known how youth respond to this identification and whether they consider themselves to be "at-risk". Thus, it is important to acknowledge that this, identified group, have generally not been the definers of their experiences and it is not known if, given the opportunity, whether they would define themselves in such a way. This study took up this epistemological challenge by allowing youth the opportunity to define themselves and their experiences as they relate to risk and ideas of victimization and deviancy.

4.1.4 Victimization

Victimization is one of the products of risk, and is defined as the negative processes and outcomes that occur when danger is present. The brunt of victimization research is guilty of deciding who and under what circumstances someone becomes a victim. The thrust of this research was to examine these concepts of risk and victimization within the context of how they unfolded in an identified "at-risk" group and in which they were understood by their members.

Victimization represents the negative processes and outcomes that occur when danger is present. According to Fattah (1991), while the concept of victimization is rather complex and has not been adequately defined (23), a victim, in a normative sense, "is one who suffers from the injurious actions of other people, things, or events" (89). According to Gaetz (2004) who conducted research with homeless youth and the level of criminal victimization they experience, "victimization can have a profound impact on a person's mental and physical health, feelings of safety and security, and self-esteem. The damage done to victims of crime can be long-lasting" (424). This last point refers to the future orientation and victim reproduction processes of victimization literature, this phenomenon, and in particular how it relates to risk and the creation of "at-risk" groups, will be explored in greater detail in this and the next chapter.

4.1.5 Deviancy

Deviancy, as defined by Becker (1963) in his work *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, is a form of labelling in which established norms are transgressed and the individuals go through a process of being labelled as such. According to Becker (1963), there is no such thing as a deviant, as an act only becomes deviant when others perceive it to be deviant, in a sense, it is interactionally constituted.

> Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and

sanctions to an "offender". The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label (Becker, 1963: 9).

Moreover, he argues, the deviant person being negatively labelled, internalizes the label and acts according to the label. In this sense, the labelled deviant individual takes on the role of the attributes ascribed to the label and conforms to the social expectations of the label.

4.1.6 Identity

Another key element that evolved from the study was the impact of identity. The changing nature of participant's identities were found to significantly impact conceptualizations of risk. Picking up on Colombo's (2008: 70) thesis on identity, identity in this study refers to the way in which individuals perceive themselves, and the way in which they understand themselves to be perceived by others. This perception is based on a foundation of previous experiences (i.e. in particular childhood experiences and relationships with families) and conceptualizations of oneself, and is also constantly transforming and integrating new experiences of one's identity. While Colombo (2008) posits how "identity repositioning" aids in the exiting of street life, here the term identity construction will be employed to denote the dynamic nature of identity shaping and re-shaping influences, and to demonstrate its provisional and constantly evolving nature.

Bajoit's (2000) concept of identity construction and re-construction is particularly helpful in this study in drawing out dissonances between an individual's perceived sense of self, their feeling of how they are perceived by others, and their desires for themselves/their identity. Following Bellot's (2001: 79) assertion that identities are plural and under perpetual construction, this study undertook this same approach by examining the dynamic nature of identity and how it affected youth's perceptions of risk and responses to them. It did not seek to apply a theoretical construct of identity to participants' understandings but instead allowed youth to draw their own conclusions about the choices they made in response to risk as they unfolded, in relation to how they understood themselves, how they understood themselves to be perceived by others, and who they wished to become. This study acknowledges that identity construction is intimately linked to conceptualizations of risk, and informed which risks were worth taking and which were not.

Lastly, homeless youth and street youth were terms that were described in the first chapter to denote the youth captured in this study. In particular, sixteen and seventeen year old youth who had no stable place of residence were explicitly sampled. *The streets* refer to the "range of public and semi-public spaces that homeless people frequent" (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2009: 2), and are frequently referred to as the spaces youth occupy, utilize, and experiment in, throughout this study. As was outlined in Chapter One, this group was chosen because of the numerous social, cultural, and economic obstacles they face and because they are an identified "at-risk" group.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that risk is a social construct that has come to permeate our ways of being in the world. Equally, victimization and deviancy are manufactured concepts dependent on another's observations, social location, and situated knowledge. The anxiety over risk and threats of victimization lie in our need to exert control over the unknown and the uncontrolled. This is highly symbolic of the need to control and maintain the boundaries between social norms and deviance, as deviance represents that which cannot be controlled and brought into line with the norm. Blaming victims for their own marginalization is one strategy that serves to reinforce these rigid boundaries between self and Other. The privatization of risk, which is part of the neo-liberal agenda, blames the creation of victims on their socially deviant or immoral behaviour. This new prudentialism approach absolves society and its institutions of their responsibility in creating and caring for victims. And while these socio-cultural approaches to risk have merit it is not known how they apply to an identified "at-risk" group, such as homeless youth.

This chapter has argued that, of late, a sociology of risk has largely supplanted a sociology of deviance and victimization, and has been largely unscathed by a sound critique of the underlying assumptions about what a risk logic implies. This chapter sought to unwrap this risk package that constructs discourses surrounding homeless youth. This study sought to apply three grand social theories of risk: risk society, governmentality, and cultural/symbolic approaches, to a small group of homeless youth to investigate what relevance these theories had in their daily

lives and their understanding of themselves. Identity construction was another dimension that evolved and impacted conceptualizations of risk, yet this is largely ignored in the research. The epistemological standpoint taken was to allow youth to, as much as possible, define their own experiences and understandings of risk and victimization as they unfolded. This necessitated the addition of an interactional approach, drawn from symbolic interactionism, to capture this dynamic nature of risk perception as it shifted in tandem with notions of their identity, which were evolving and under perpetual construction.

This chapter has argued that socio-cultural explanations of risk are closely tied to understandings of victimization, and help to understand how they relate to social deviance and the construction of "at-risk" groups. Theoretical constructs of adolescence were also unveiled in an effort to tie processes of modernity to psychological concepts, which form the basis of most research on homeless youth and which will assist in linking the empirical results to these conceptualizations. In an effort to expand conceptualizations of victimization, deviancy, and risk perception, through the lens of risk discourses, this chapter has provided an overview of the emergence of risk discourses and theories, and argued that these concepts have not been constructed nor studied from the ground up, that is, by the people being studied. Rather, these concepts have been applied in a broad-based way by experts and researchers, with little input from those living the "risky" experiences.

This study hoped to reverse this traditional positivist snapshot research design by allowing participants voices to frame their own understanding of experiences as they evolved over time.

While risk research has typically been devoid of context, this study aimed to re-contextualize participants risk frameworks by unearthing their risk knowledges utilizing a biographical perspective. The study also examined the longitudinal aspect of participants risk frameworks by following subjects over the course of the study (from one to two years) to uncover whether their risk perceptions and practices shifted over time.

Coupling social constructionism with symbolic interactionism allowed for a deeper understanding of homeless youth's experiences of risk. While these youth are defined as "at-risk" by being labelled either victims or deviants this study aimed to probe more deeply their individualized positions as they pertain to risk. By exposing their perceptions of risk and their strategies in managing risk, this study sought to illustrate the powerful connections between risk and identity. Thus risk provides the pretext and window into the tensions that form the boundaries between Self and Others, particularly as it relates to identity construction within a marginalized group. The risk platform offers a particularly salient examination into the world of homeless youth that is highly stigmatized and characterized as deviant by virtue of their risk-taking behaviours. On the one hand, youth are constructed as deviant, disorganized, collectivists, and embracing risk and dangerous behaviours, bucking social norms. On the other hand, little is known about their risk practices, knowledges, and conceptualizations of risk. This study hoped to tease out these unknown and complex dimensions of risk.

The next chapter, Chapter Three, will unveil the methodological foundations and implications of the research. Chapter Four will provide an overview of participant's perceptions and responses

to risk on the streets as they unfold, which are embedded in their earlier histories and that affect their tolerance of risk (from risk-takers to risk-avoiders). It also uncovered strategies youth employ to reduce or increase risk. The findings in Chapter Four stand in stark contrast to risk society theorists who endorse more realist conceptualizations of risk and concomitant universal responses of fear and anxiety. Chapter Five examines risk perception and practices as they relate to evolving identities, particularly in adolescence. It unearths the impact of family contexts on identity construction and how they relate to risk assessments and practices, it also examines the tension between group and individual identity and their impact on risk frameworks. In particular, it examines the relevance and inconsistencies in Douglas's (1969, 1985, 1992) Self and Other Boundaries as they pertain to the participant's double marginalization, being young and homeless. Lastly, Chapter Six examines participant's conceptualizations of responsibilization and self-regulation in relation to risk. By exploring youth's practices of self-monitoring and understanding of blame for current circumstances the findings proffer a critique of Foucault's governmentality thesis, and to a lesser extent Douglas's blame thesis. Participant's responses to self-regulation and hypothesized internalized blame were not universal, nor was the reverse true; youth both accepted and rejected blame and responsibility, and some appeared to practice resistance. Participants were thoughtful about bifurcations in their lives that led them to make changes in their pathways, blame had many avenues. These three chapters combine to form a comprehensive micro-level critique of the three grand socio-cultural theories of risk and shed new insights about how risk frameworks are conceptualized by an "at-risk" group.

Chapter Three:

Methodological Approach

The impetus for this research is the paucity of knowledge on how homeless youth interpret their world and in particular perceive risks that according to the exhumation of the literature in Chapter Two are insidious and staggering. The uniqueness of this research design is the ethnographic approach used to infiltrate their world and to ground the production of knowledge in their experiences. The relevance of this study is that while the rates of victimization continue to grow, the knowledge produced is external to the population and is not having the desired impact on reducing rates of victimization or criminalization. Researchers studying the homeless have often imposed their conceptualizations of what victimization, deviancy, and "at-risk" means, according to their own social standpoints, which are reproduced in dominant discourses that are often removed from the realities of those studied, as explored in the previous chapters. There is a disconnect between the knowledge that is produced and the manifestation of poor health, victimization, and criminalization.

This study aims to uncover how youth perceive these risks, expose what choices they have in responding to them, and also, unearth risks that youth identify that have been largely hitherto absent from the literature because conceptualizations of risk have not been grounded in their social standpoint. In addition, one of the study's aims is to examine risk from an "at-risk" group in an effort to ground and add to our understanding of macro-level theories of risk. Adding a symbolic interaction approach to the social construction of risk serves to re-contextualize our understanding of the concept and deconstruct the hegemony of risk discourses outlined in Chapter Two. It is hoped that evidence from this study will broaden our theoretical understanding of risk. The results hope to have a tri-fold effect: to expand theoretical and epistemological models of risk, to better understand homeless youth's experiences of risk,

victimization, and deviance, and to impact policies and practices directly affecting homeless youth.

1. Epistemological Standpoint

Homeless youth are considered the most understudied subgroup among the current homeless population (Bradley, 1997; Whitbeck et al., 1997). A review of the current literature suggests that homelessness among youth is a complex phenomenon that has not been fully comprehended. The literature on homeless youth also has major limitations due to methodological biases. These include gathering information from program records and from service providers rather than directly from youth themselves (Bradley, 1997). For the most part, the epidemiological research on homeless youth have focussed on one of two themes, either descriptively categorizing the youth's "characteristics" and "differences" from the general youth population and/or exhuming their pre-homeless history of why they became and have remained homeless (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992). In fact, what is considered "risky" has not been sufficiently examined, nor has consensus been reached on what "at-risk" means (Furedi, 2006). There has been an assumption that homeless youth are more prone to engaging in "high risk" activities because of their "pathological" backgrounds, and that the streets are synonymous with danger. This study is positioned within this paradox, arguing against this reductionistic and homogenizing view. It is unfair to assume that these youth are more at risk, and the streets are dangerous and necessarily

lead to victimization, without unearthing the viewpoints of those that are affected by this stigmatization. This study hoped to reverse this paradigm.

To date, most research has assumed that risks are universally understood and internalized and externalized in a uniform manner. However, these assumptions are often framed in the researcher's perceptions of risks and victimizing events and not framed by those living that experience. The theoretical framework of this research assumes the position that risks are social constructions and are perceived, valued, interpreted and responded to differently. Risk perception and practices, victimization and deviancy symbolize interactional and dynamic processes that are conceptualized differently based on one's social standpoint and individual interpretation, and based on their interactions with their environment and others over time.

This difference in perspective relates to one's risk perception. Risk perception is highly contingent on one's social location and individual experiences. Research into risks, victimization, and deviancy, among the homeless, have been mostly framed by expert knowledges that represent the dominant discourses and have traditionally had a monopoly over knowledge production. This expert social standpoint deviates greatly from the realities lived by the marginalized and oppressed. While such a positivist approach has some value in giving a sense of the *objective* dangers that may be present, it assumes that people weigh and view risks equally and negatively. The aim of this study is to offer a different interpretation and dimension on risks and risk perception. The aim of adding a symbolic interactionist approach to the social construction of risk, by examining youth's understandings and experiences of risk as they unfold

in interactions with their environment, with others, and in relation to their evolving identities, was to close this knowledge gap.

This study employed a qualitative approach, collecting information through participant observation and informal interviewing. This ontological approach hoped to capture how youth conceptualize their personal power in estimating, managing, and avoiding or embracing risk. This epistemological approach aimed to create knowledge by collaborating with homeless youth whereby the subjects also become the experts of their own stories in relation to victimization, deviancy and risk. This study, then, is constructivist and interactionist in nature, and values above all the youth's interpretation and subjective understanding of their own lived experiences.

The study recognizes that realities are constructed and interpreted differently depending on the individuals involved. The project aims to interpret these understandings utilizing a more collaborative research approach with each participant in the natural environment. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 13), "the constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and subject create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures." This constructivist paradigm is based on the willingness and collaboration of each youth studied. Participants were given ample opportunity to offer feedback and clarify concepts and experiences. This 'constructed' reality, based on each youth's lived experience and understanding, aimed to give voice to those living at the margins whose opinions have often been ignored by traditional research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994),

> qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational

constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning (4).

Qualitative methods do not seek to reveal cause and effect relationships but rather to unearth the phenomena of human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). We hoped to make a unique contribution to homeless research by working collaboratively with youth so that the knowledge produced stemmed from their narratives and their experiences as they were being understood. The aim was to give voice to individuals who traditionally have been silenced by positivist-oriented research and to combat common stereotypes by uncovering the complexity and diversity of the homeless youth population.

2. Need for an Ethnographic Approach

Ethnography is a "scientific approach to discovering and investigating social and cultural patterns and meaning in communities, institutions, and other social settings" (Schensul et al., 1999: 1). Ethnographers discover what people do and why before they assign meaning to behaviours and beliefs. Ethnography, as a method of investigation, differs from other research techniques because it depends on the researcher as the primary tool of data collection (Schensul et al., 1999: 1).

> The ethnographer seeks a deeper immersion in others' worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important. With immersion, the field researcher sees from the inside how people lead their lives, how they carry out

their daily rounds of activities, what they find meaningful, and how they do so. In this way immersion gives the fieldworker access to the fluidity of others' lives and enhances his sensitivity to interaction and process (Emerson et al., 1995: 2).

According to Goffman (1989: 125), field research involves

subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation, or their ethnic situation.

Immersion in ethnographic research is then twofold. Firstly, it means being with the people under study to see how they respond to events as they experience them and secondly, experiencing these same events as they happen and experiencing them for oneself. According to Emerson et al. (1995: 3), the "task of the ethnographer is not to determine 'the truth' but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others' lives."

An ethnographic approach forces the researcher to participate and engage in the milieu that is under investigation.

In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 1).

This naturalistic approach was chosen because this study takes the position that the social world cannot be understood in terms of simple causal relationships but instead view phenomena as social constructions. "[H]uman actions are based upon, or infused by, social meanings: that is, by intentions, motives, beliefs, rules, and values" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 7).

> Naturalism proposes that, as far as possible, the social world should be studied in its 'natural' state, undisturbed by the researcher. Hence, 'natural' not 'artificial' settings, like experiments or formal interviews, should be the primary source of data. Furthermore, the research must be carried out in ways that are sensitive to the nature of the setting. The primary aim should be to describe what happens in the setting, how the people involved see their own actions and those of others, and the contexts in which the action takes place (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 6).

Ethnography also represents the only approach that can access in-depth knowledge of those living a more marginalized, disenfranchised existence, in which one has to participate in order to truly understand a subculture's functions, processes, relationships and complexities. Formal interviews were not ideal for capturing these organic processes, nor for understanding the dialogical and dynamic nature of risk perception and management that unfolds in various kinds of situations and may be difficult to reclaim in a narrative re-telling. Moreover, the purpose of the research was to offer a longitudinal perspective on how youth perceive, manage and respond to risks and victimization. These understandings, that are constructed, de-constructed and re-constructed over time cannot be captured in an interview setting and would deny their interactional and dynamic nature. Moreover, rapport and trust had to be established in order to gain access to this form of knowledge.

To fulfill an ethnographic approach, participant observation and informal interviewing were the methods employed. Participant observers hope to learn the culture or the subculture of the people they are studying and to interpret the world in the same way as they do, this form of understanding social phenomena has been coined "verstehen" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 8). In this instance, ethnography using participant observation methods was the best way to facilitate verstehen, so that the researcher's preconceptions of risk were minimized to the extent possible. To best meet these research ends, the palpable methodological choice was the

ethnographic approach. To facilitate the ethnographic approach, data gathering took place for one to two years to allow for longitudinal data to be collected on the context and processes of risk perception and practices. This longitudinal data was a purposeful attempt to capture the essence of experiences as they were unfolding, and to replace traditional research methods that have relied upon a static snapshot based on single point in time data, such as, one-time surveys or focus groups.

3. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Unearth youth's lived reality as they related to choices they made concerning risk (conceived as danger and opportunity), framed in their voices and understanding as experiences unfolded over a period of time (one to two years).

2. Uncover the context and meaning participants assign to their experiences, and to restrict as much as possible a superimposing of the researcher's preconceptions in relation to risk, victimization, and deviancy.

3. Understand how participants perceive, negotiate and respond (strategies employed) to risks, and how conceptualizations of risk and practices/strategies change over time.

4. Uncover participant's personal constructions of risk as they relate to the construction of their evolving identities, and how these relate to how they are perceived by others.

5. Expose participant's understanding of risk as it relates to responsibilization, self-regulation and their interactions and responses to expert systems and normative institutions.

To realize these objectives an ethnographic approach was employed to frame experiences in the youth's point of view.

4. Research Techniques

The study used participant observation, open-ended observation, and informal interviewing techniques to gather relevant data by engaging in relationship and trust building with purposively sampled youth. The aim was to 'follow' fifteen homeless youth, aged sixteen and seventeen years old, over the course of one to two years. The inclusion criteria for the project were:

participants were sixteen and seventeen years old at the beginning of the study; were emancipated (legally independent and not requiring parental consent to partake in the study); were homeless (staying in shelters, 'couch-surfing', sleeping 'rough', marginally housed); willing to allow the researcher to observe, speak and remain in contact with them over the research period; and were English and/or French speaking. Although the study was based on a few broad themes and questions (see Appendix One), the day to day experiences and challenges the youth faced took precedence. The rich narratives they provided, both in terms of the historical accounts of their lives coupled with their daily experiences in and out of street life, accounted for the data collected. From these in-depth informal contacts and observations I extracted themes in relation to risk, victimization, and deviancy based on the youth's experiences and understanding.

4.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation was the primary tool used for the ethnographic method of investigation. Participant observation refers to a process in which the researcher is intimately a part of the field setting by being involved in the routine activities of participants in the research setting. Participant observation represents the starting point in ethnographic research for many reasons (Schensul et al., 1999: 91-92). It provides an informal, engaging way of entering the field as an observer and knowledge-seeker, while identifying and building relationships with key informants that may be hidden from the public. Moreover, it allows the researcher to develop an insider's

intuitive and a practical understanding of the sub-culture's norms, procedures and rules of legitimation.

Once trust was gained and access was granted, informal interviewing and observational techniques provided the best way to capture events as they unfolded and were experienced. According to Bellot (2001) who conducts research with street youth in Montreal, the salient approach to accessing this milieu is to explicitly play the part of researcher. In the role of researcher, one becomes a part of the field by participating and playing the part of knowledge-seeker, not pretending to be a youth, nor a service provider, but also not exterior to the world under study and not neutral either. First, participation allows the researcher to engage in an unfamiliar, not understood world, and second, it allows the researcher to "produce written accounts of that world by drawing upon such participation" (Emerson et al., 1995: 1). Participant observation represents these two interconnected activities that comprise the core of ethnographic research.

Participant observation and unstructured interview methods are informal and also require one to be flexible and sensitive to participant's needs. The purpose was to observe youth in their interactions with other youth and their interactions in the community at large, and provide accounts of individual interviews. In particular, once trust was gained, it was hoped that participant observation occurred outside of agency settings (where so many studies have been done) and hence, participants could be observed in their natural environment.

4.2 Recruitment

Data collection began in December 2006 and continued until the middle of 2009, with the most intensive period being from February 2007 to December 2007. Recruitment and data collection were impacted by the relationship-building ethos of the research, and by the researcher's personal life experiences (pregnancy and maternity leave), and is discussed in further detail below. Access to participants and initial recruitment occurred in four agencies that serve homeless youth in Ottawa: the young men's and young women's emergency shelters, and two drop-in centres. Executive Directors of the organizations were initially contacted to request permission to recruit participants. After the purpose of the research was explained and conditions were satisfied, the researcher received invitations to attend staff meetings to explain the nature of the research goals and to respond to any concerns. Agency responses to the study were overwhelmingly positive, including workers offering support in reaching out to participants and providing space where more intimate interviewing could occur. As the researcher had been providing these agencies with mental health services to their clients for over eight years, it is assumed that this generated a certain amount of goodwill and interest in the project which made access possible.

Beginning in December 2006, I went out with a street outreach team in the evening to meet youth outside of the homeless agencies that I already frequented on a daily basis, with the goal of meeting more marginalized youth. However, very few youth were seen at this time and no participants were recruited. Based on previous studies and with the encouragement of the staff, I placed posters in all the agencies notifying potential participants of the study and my contact

information (see Appendix Two). I then developed information sheets regarding the expectations of involvement, the rationale for the research and remuneration, so that interested youth could have more information and contact me if I was unavailable (see Appendix Three). Due to initial recruitment taking place in four sites simultaneously, and not being able to be in all four places at the same time five days a week, certain agencies offered to hand out the information sheets to clients that approached them about the poster. In other agencies, the potential participant would take the initiative and phone me directly and we would schedule a time to meet and determine interest and eligibility. In this vein, organizational culture impacted the recruitment process (within the agencies), and was different in every agency. Most of the recruitment took place within agency walls, but several youth were also recruited using the snowball method. The snowball method was particularly useful in the start-up period when most of the recruitment took place and when there had been a certain amount of 'buzz' created in the community from the posters notifying potential participants of the study. Many participants were quick to inform their friends of the study and a few would actually bring their friends to meet me.

Ultimately, my role as an outreach social worker brought me into the field five days per week roughly six hours a day, as it had for the previous six years. As a psychiatric social worker assessing and linking homeless youth to mental health and addictions services, I spend most of my days in six different agencies. While this is a professional role it is also an informal one. It requires me to be flexible and spend a lot of time 'hanging out' in drop-in centres, shelters, transitional housing sites, with the aim of establishing a reputation of trust with a population that is difficult to engage. Being known as a social worker and having this dual role as student-

researcher posed its own challenges which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, it did allow me the opportunity to access pre-existing relationships and to draw on intrinsic knowledge of the community. Pragmatically, it also meant that I was in the community most of the time and had access to potential participants that would have been hard to meet otherwise. I worked hard to be flexible; to meet youth when I could; to follow-up when I had time; to have some knowledge of their habits, their friendship circle, their group dynamics as well as how to stay in contact with them, and when to respect their privacy. I practiced participant observation whenever I could between my work commitments and managing my own young family at home.

Table I: Profiles of Participants

Participant	Sex	Entry into homelessness from	Engagement with street life (High - Low)	Risk - Taking (High - Low)	Risk change over course of study
Tyler	Male	Single-parent female-headed Detention centre	High	High	No change (until custody)
Claire	Female	Adoptive family	High	High	No change
Chris	Male	Detention centre	High	High	No change
Ingrid	Female	Family home (parental union)	High	High	Fluctuated - ended High
Lucy	Female	Single-parent female-headed	High	High/Med.	No change
Francis	Male	Adoptive family	High	High/Med.	No change
Luke	Male	Single-parent female-headed	High	High/Med.	Little change
Laura	Female	Family home (parental union)	High	High/Med →Low	Change
Olivia	Female	Group Home	High	High → Low	Change
Michelle	Female	Grandparents Father and step-mother	High	High/Med. → Low	Change
Annie	Female	Mother and step-father	High	Med → Low	Change
Shane	Male	Single-parent female-headed	High	High/Med → Low	Change
Daniel	Male	Single-parent male-headed	Med.	Med. → Low	Change

Participant	Sex	Entry into homelessness from	Engagement with street life (High - Low)	Risk - Taking (High - Low)	Risk change over course of study
Casey	Female	Group home	Med.	Med./Low	No change
Marie	Female	Foster home	Med.	Low	Change
Tanya	Female	Single-parent female-headed	Low	Med./Low	No change
Angela	Female	Family home (parental union)	Low	Low	No change
Sadie	Female	Single-parent female-headed	Low	Low	Unknown

** (At the time of recruitment, participants were all sixteen and seventeen years-old). **

4.3 Table II: Youth Portraits

This next section provides a brief vignette of each participant to help contextualize their experiences within their individual narratives during the course of the study.

4.3.1 Tyler

Tyler was sixteen years-old at the beginning of the study and was very entrenched in street life. He admitted that he smoked crack every day. Tyler's early upbringing had always revolved

around street life, he claimed his mother was a drug addict and that she had introduced him to drugs at an early age. Tyler cycled in and out of detention centres and the streets. He described his childhood as financially and geographically unstable and he admitted he rarely attended school but that child welfare authorities were frequently evaded because they were uprooted so frequently. Tyler strongly identified with two roles of his identity. His primary role was as a drug addict, and the second was necessary to satisfy the first, as a hustler. As a self-identified hustler, he admitted to committing criminal acts that included theft and drug dealing to obtain his drugs. He was eventually court-ordered to attend an addictions treatment centre and thus disengaged from the streets for a year.

4.3.2 Claire

Claire was seventeen years-old at the beginning of the study and cycled in and out of shelters, couch-surfed and slept on the streets. She was adopted by age three into a family, she has no siblings. During the course of the study she became highly victimized and targeted by a female group who restricted her movements and access to services. They also accused her of criminal acts and contacted police, which wound up being false. She ended up leaving Ottawa to escape their persecution.

4.3.3 Chris

Chris was seventeen years-old at the beginning of the study and had recently been released from a youth detention centre. He had been barred from the youth shelter and couch-surfed and slept outside frequently. He was frequently in trouble with the law and accessed adult shelters and services when needed. He had some contact with his father who he described as a "good for nothing 'crackhead'," but had no contact with his mother. He was heavily engaged in street life.

4.3.4 Ingrid

Ingrid was seventeen years-old at the beginning of the study and was originally from a francophone community just outside of Ottawa. Beginning at age twelve, she would come downtown on the weekends, sleep under bridges and in parks with groups of older friends she made. Eventually, through these contacts, she began to sell crack and coke, and then started to use drugs. After one to two years of this transient lifestyle she made the full-time move to the streets but never stayed in shelters. Over the course of the study Ingrid did move out of the city and return to live with her parents, she weaned herself of morphine and secured a full-time service job, but this did not last. Eventually, she admitted she missed "the life" and the using that went with it. She returned to the streets and injecting, she secured housing on and off with friends. She remained heavily street-involved.

4.3.5 Lucy

Lucy was sixteen years-old at the beginning of the study and was living on the streets and couch-surfing with friends. She identified herself as an injection drug user and started using drugs when she was thirteen years old. Her parents separated at around this time and she characterized her father as abusive and CAS having to intervene. She lived with her mother for awhile but then they both became homeless. She still has contact with her mother but conceals her addiction.

4.3.6 Francis

Francis was sixteen years-old at the beginning of the study and was living at the shelter. He was heavily street-involved and identified with Goth culture. Both his parents were academics. He claimed that he left home because he found his parents too controlling, including deciding who he could and could not date. He decided to leave and hitchhike for awhile, but ended up at staying at a shelter in Ottawa for a time and then left for Toronto for an extended period of time.

4.3.7 Luke

Luke was seventeen years-old when I first met him at a drop-in centre downtown. He stated that his mother locked him out of the house four months earlier because she caught him looking at pornography on the computer and because he liked to wear women's clothing which she could not tolerate. He described his parents' relationship as very abusive. His father was a well-to-do professional, and his mother was on a disability pension. His father left their home when he was a baby, re-married and started another family. He has had no contact with his family since leaving home. Luke struggled with an addiction to heroin and remained heavily engaged in street life. He did obtain housing several times throughout the study.

4.3.8 Laura

Laura was seventeen years-old at the beginning of the study. She was originally from a rural area just outside of Ottawa and she had three sisters. Laura had a close relationship with her parents and sisters, including sleeping over at their house from time to time. Laura was one of the few participants who did not leave home because of abuse or conflict. Her impetus for leaving home and being drawn to street life was that she fell in love with a "homeless boy". After spending a year and a half on the streets with him she also became addicted to morphine.

Laura sought treatment for the morphine addiction and obtained housing thereafter. She continued to remain socially involved in street life.

4.3.9 Olivia

Olivia had been homeless for roughly two years at the beginning of the study when she was seventeen years-old. Her parents were separated but lived in the same apartment building in a small town outside of Ottawa. Olivia lived in various places throughout the study. In the beginning, she resided most frequently at a shelter, but she grew tired of the constraints of shelter living. She opted for living on the streets with her friends and visited her family frequently. She then couch-surfed for an extended period of time, traveled out West for several months, and near the end of the study returned to sleeping on the streets. Her father also passed away during the course of the study. Once she became pregnant, she returned to living at the shelter to be prioritized for a subsidized apartment for her and her baby (by the end of the study). Olivia's life changed radically over the course of the study. She had stable housing but continued to socialize with homeless youth and the places that provide them services.

4.3.10 Michelle

Michelle was seventeen years-old at the beginning of the study and was from Ottawa. She always felt that she did not "fit in" at school. After being sent to live with her grandparents for a year she eventually just stopped going to school and her father told her she had to return to school or leave their home. She hit the streets. Michelle travelled from time to time with friends, couch-surfed, but eventually obtained housing and a part-time job. She remained socially involved with other homeless youth and requisite services.

4.3.11 Annie

Annie was seventeen years-old at the beginning of the study. She was from a small town outside of Ottawa. The vignette of Annie illustrates a young woman who feels she was abandoned by her mother because she chose the relationship with her partner over her daughter's, and the relationship between Annie and her step-father was conflictual and emotionally-charged. Annie's tumultuous relationship with her stepfather, coupled with her mother's addiction to alcohol, were the reasons she cited for leaving home. Annie described the conscious choice she made leaving her family home in a small town to find "freedom." Annie was very street-involved over the course of the study, sleeping outside, using substances, and travelling with friends from coast to coast. Eventually she left street life because she became pregnant and

wanted to settle down, but she continued to remain socially involved with her street friends and use homeless youth services.

4.3.12 Shane

Shane was sixteen years-old at the beginning of the study. Originally from Sault Ste Marie he described how the draw of street life was liberating by "hopping" trains and travelling from coast to coast. He claimed that he left his mother's home because he was tired of her boyfriends, chaotic lifestyle, and wanted to leave "the Sault." He lived on the streets during the first half of the study, hitchhiked out West, and then returned to Ottawa and obtained housing and began labouring full-time. He remained street-involved through his social contacts and frequently utilized youth services.

4.3.13 Daniel

Daniel was seventeen years-old at the beginning of the study. He was originally from a small town outside of Ottawa where he lived with his mother, but eventually was sent to live with his father in the city because he was skipping too much school. He explained that after he moved to the city, he moved beyond simple experimentation with drugs (marijuana, ecstasy) and began to

use more lethal drugs with more regularity (daily crack use). He was ejected from his father's home and moved into a rooming house. He soon found himself on the streets because his substance use absorbed his money for rent. After a short period of time he stopped using all substances, secured a job, rented an apartment with his girlfriend, and completely disengaged from street life.

4.3.14 Casey

Casey was sixteen years-old at the beginning of the study when we met at the shelter. She was originally from Toronto and had been in the child welfare system since the age of thirteen, having been removed from her mother's care. She had been removed from the foster home system when she was thirteen years-old and was placed in group homes near Ottawa until she turned sixteen, then she left the group home and came into the shelter. Casey actively looked for housing, was eager to leave the shelter, and was not heavily street-involved.

4.3.15 Marie

Marie was forced out of her home by her father when she was fifteen years old and lived with a foster family on a military base. When Marie was evicted from the foster family for fighting at school and truancy, her father refused to let her return home. During the study, Marie's

circumstances changed radically. Initially, she had been suspended from her school and was working on her diploma through correspondence and living at a shelter. She became pregnant and decided to move in with the father of her child but they separated soon after the baby's arrival. She obtained her own housing and returned to school. She remained connected socially to other street-involved youth and the requisite services but maintained her housing and was a single parent to her baby.

4.3.16 Tanya

Tanya was seventeen years old at the beginning of the study and was living in a shelter. She was adopted as a baby into her current single-parent family headed by her mother. She described being forced to leave her home because of the emotional and physical abuse she suffered from her mother, brother, and sister (who were not adopted). She attempted to move home a few times but it always ended in conflict. Despite her residential instability, Tanya remained in high school, planned on going to college, maintained a good academic record, and held down a part-time job. She eventually left the shelter and moved in with her boyfriend.

4.3.17 Angela

Angela was sixteen years-old when I first met her at a shelter. She was not street-involved, had recently quit school, left her parents home due to abuse, and held down a part-time job. She found it difficult living at the shelter as she felt very frightened most of the time, did not feel comfortable being downtown, and eventually moved to a cousin's home in the suburbs.

4.3.18 Sadie

Sadie was a seventeen-year old college student who was residing at a shelter at the beginning of the study and who was searching for an apartment for her and her two year-old son. She was involved in a custody battle with the father of her son, who she described as abusive. She came to the shelter from her mother's home. Her family was originally from the Caribbean. She did not stay at the shelter very long and was not street-involved.

In the end, eighteen youth participated in the study. The majority of participants were female (12), while only a third were male (6). The eighteen youth seen over the two and a half year period were mostly from the Ottawa area or surrounding regions, and were all sixteen or seventeen years-old at the time of recruitment. Ten participants were from the Ottawa area, four were from neighbouring rural communities, one was from Toronto, one was from Northern

Ontario, one was from Southern U.S.A., and one was a newcomer to Canada, originally from Central Africa. Most interviews were conducted in English and only three participants were francophones, with whom communication was in French. Twelve of the youth were Caucasian or had second generation European backgrounds (Czechoslovakian, Bulgarian, Italian), while three identified Caribbean ancestry (one first generation), one identified mixed race (father was Black, mother Caucasian), one identified as South East Asian (second generation), and one identified as a newcomer from Central Africa (had been in the country two years). All of the youth identified with having some relationship or contact with their family of origin, but many of the youth spent time in substitute care arrangements. Roughly half of the participants had been raised in group homes or foster families, or were raised by extended family, with most cycling through a mélange of substitute care arrangements. Ten youth entered street life directly from their families of origin and were not leaving a substitute care arrangement. However, all of these youth experienced staying temporarily with family, friends, neighbours before hitting the streets. The youth experienced varying levels of street involvement from complete entrenchment beginning at around age 13 to cycling between emergency shelters and their family homes and rarely having contact with street life.

All participants experienced housing instability, with a large proportion living on the streets or in emergency shelters. Some youth were seen regularly, on at least a weekly basis, if not several times a week, while others were seen only a couple of times over the study's period. Interactions ranged from one to two hours of observation, listening and asking questions (one on one), to two minute chats on the streets in groups about where they were going, what they were doing, who they were 'hanging out' with. Eight youth were followed intensively over this period, and five

have been followed into the second year with telephone conversations, email correspondence and by visits in the community.

An important goal of this study was to also reach out to 'shelter avoiders', that is youth who are 'sleeping rough' (outside), 'squatting' and 'couch surfing' and choose not to access emergency shelters. This population is more difficult to study precisely because they do not rely on emergency services (e.g. shelters). There are many reasons why youth choose not to access shelters including: lifestyle cannot be accommodated (shelters do not allow pets or couples), loss of autonomy/freedom, feeling threatened by others, and lack of appeal. It should also be noted that, due to the fluid nature of youth homelessness, the participants' housing actually varied significantly throughout the study, transitioning between shelter life, 'couch-surfing', living in overcrowded apartments and sleeping on the streets (particularly in the summer months). In fact, as much as this was one of the goals of the study – to purposively sample youth based on their living situations to highlight the diversity of housing experiences and concomitant risks, all the youth transitioned through most of these living experiences and this purposive attempt was not needed, it was already ingrained in the population.

4.4 Instruments

4.4.1 Fieldnotes and Expanded Notes

Fieldnotes were the primary method of data collection and were written immediately after leaving the field. Fieldnotes represent the researcher's observations and descriptions of experiences while in the field setting (Emerson et al., 1995). They are not however, direct accounts of what has been observed as no two people view events similarly. Rather, they are descriptions that are clouded by perception and interpretation. Indeed, Emerson et al. (1995) highlight the key implications of writing fieldnotes in relation to ethnographic research:

> What is observed and ultimately treated as 'data' or 'findings' is inseparable from the observational process; in writing fieldnotes, the field researcher should give special attention to the indigenous meanings and concerns of the people studied; contemporaneously written fieldnotes are an essential grounding and resource for writing broader, more coherent accounts of others' lives and concerns; such fieldnotes should detail the social and interactional processes that make up people's everyday lives and activities (11).

Some ethnographic researchers believe the separation between fieldnote data and personal reactions (usually kept in a reflective journal) is an artificial separation that can be deeply misleading.

> Such a separation distorts the processes of inquiry and the meaning of field 'data' in several significant ways. First, this separation treats data as 'objective information' that has a fixed meaning independent of how that information was elicited or established and by whom (Emerson et al., 1995: 11-12).

To honour the richness of the ethnographic data collected, I made every effort to be aware of my interpretive stance as I was capturing the data, and tried to remember specific phrases youth evoked and wrote them as soon as I left the field. Writing fieldnotes fresh after experiences in

the field allowed me to reconstruct the setting and imbue the meaning youth assigned to their

experiences as I understood and interpreted their narratives. In accordance with Emerson et al.

(1995), I also tried to detail the social and interactional processes that occurred amongst youth.

This is an example of a fieldnote that was taken about a male youth, Tyler (pseudonym), that I

interacted with and had interviewed several times over the last couple of months, observing and

interacting with him inside and outside a drop-in centre one day (Feb. 27, 2007):

- *Tyler in different clothes than last time I had seen him (different ball cap, oversized winter coat, dirty pants and shirt), usual jovial self, joking, laughing, engaging me and other people around him. Some youth laughing at him a bit as he wanders around drop-in asking for smokes or potentially other things (i.e. next score).. Appears as if he is trying to sell something. Appears especially high, stoned today, swaying a bit and slurring speech at times. (my observation before interaction).*

- Approaches me and asks me if I have any money to give him today.. Explains that he was in "jail" yesterday because he stole cereal boxes to get the movie passes on the box, not because he was hungry, but not upset about it, says cops weren't rough with him, he just feels "shitty" that he got caught for such a "stupid move". Stated that cops let him go because he is already facing court on March 13th for other charges (he can't remember them all now). Just saw his lawyer last week and "got disclosure" for the other charges. Says he's feeling pretty relaxed about all of it because he is a youth offender so charges won't be that severe, "harsh". Proceeds to go outside with girlfriend and throw up on sidewalk three times. Ask if he's ok, if he needs anything, says he's just sick from doing too much "e" (ecstasy). They continue on down the sidewalk shouting that they have to meet someone and they'll catch up with me later.

These initial fieldnotes provided the foundation for larger observations, reconstructions,

reflections and questions for further investigation that were comprised in the writings of

expanded notes. Expanded notes helped to draw out the general themes that were emerging and

were a springboard for writing meta notes encouraging analysis of the data. Youth portraits and

vignettes (to be presented in the chapters of findings) describing each participant were also

developed and pertinent data was added to individual memos.   During the period of

investigation, data was also collected regarding participants homeless trajectories and was recorded in these individual memos. The knowledge produced in these memos served to re-contextualize the data.

4.4.2 Reflective Journal

My training as a social worker was invaluable to this investigation. It allowed me to sit through uncomfortable and unpleasant experiences youth disclosed and to empathically understand and interpret their narratives. The choice to employ ethnographic research, with fieldnotes as my main instrument, was a natural fit for my training as a social worker. Indeed, I am used to being in many different milieus, playing different roles, and working under different ideologies and organizational contexts (from the very bureaucratic to the more laissez-faire). I am trained to write more elaborate notes once I have left the field (in client's clinical charts), and have a good memory for remembering specific phrases clients use (relating to their mental health status). Of course, no data is bias or judgement free, and whatever is presented in a fieldnote or a chart is a decision and a value judgement made by the one who is reconstructing the participants (clients) experiences. Moreover, "the quality and importance of the facts that an ethnographer observes and records depend on the observational, documentation, and interpretation skills of the observer and the opportunities he or she has for observing" (Schensul et al., 1999: 95). It is essential to underscore that observations produced from participation in the research milieu are always filtered through the researcher's interpretive frames.

A reflective journal was also kept to record my impressions, reflections, and personal reactions regarding the interactions with youth and time spent in the field. General themes were developed from these materials. Though the separation between fieldnote and personal reactions may be somewhat artificial, the log afforded me a place to record any doubts, emotions, uncertainties, and insecurities related to the area of focus. Lastly, it served as an additional research tool that allowed me to explore any ideas that were indirectly related to study but not pertinent at that time.

The reflective journal also provided a secondary analysis of the interpretative observations and cannot be separated from the analysis. This secondary instrument served as a reminder to be mindful, honest and critical of my interpretive stance. Themes and patterns also emerged from this second tier data and further enriched the knowledge produced. Over the course of the last thirty years, there has been a trend in qualitative research to expose this "intimate relationship between the research process and the findings it produces" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 486). This reflexive process was an ingrained part of the research endeavour. It forced me to be cognizant of the choices I was making in terms of what I was choosing to present as knowledge. The nature of reflexivity requires us to be mindful of the presuppositions we make and by doing so increases the credibility of the results. It allows readers to evaluate the situated knowledge we produce.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Consent forms for participation were also developed. Written consent for participation was sought (see Appendix Four). This was in accordance with the Université de Montréal's Comité D'éthique de la Recherche de la Faculté des Arts et des Sciences (ethics committee). The ethical certificate needed for this study proved difficult to obtain because of my strong desire to study sixteen and seventeen year olds in Ottawa, Ontario. In the province of Québec (where the university ethics committee exists), research without parental or guardian consent cannot take place with this age group. For example, child welfare authorities can intervene with children aged 16 and 17 under Québec legislation but in Ontario they cannot. However, in Ontario there are no legislative provisions that allow for a court order for emancipation, so emancipation is really a legal de facto status (the simple act of a 16 or 17 year old leaving 'home' ultimately determines their emancipation). This represents a significant equality rights issue. At one end, these youth are not required to submit to parental control, at the other, they have not reached the age of majority and are subsequently denied legislated 'adult' benefits. There is a refusal to view these young people as living independently and autonomously. This was one of the primary reasons this population was chosen, to highlight the degree of challenges that are pertinent to them alone and how this impacts relevant choices.

Participants were told that their participation was voluntary and anonymous, and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants were informed that their feedback would be solicited throughout the data collection and analysis periods and that the final work could be made available to them if they wish. In addition, within the agencies where most recruitment

took place, workers were informed of the rules concerning consent and engagement and that the results would be disseminated to the community. Similarly, potential and active participants were informed that participation or non-participation in the study would not impede their access to agency services and that information provided was confidential and anonymous. They were informed that their privacy was guaranteed and would only be broken if they posed an imminent danger to themselves or others.

As was anticipated, informal interviews probed sensitive areas that had several effects. The retelling of painful experiences was re-traumatizing for some but in the same instance was described as therapeutic (by some), and further enhanced the trust-building ethos of the research. In those instances, where I felt I was drifting into more of a mental health assessment (in terms of there being imminent suicidal or homicidal risk, or they lacked the capacity to care for themselves) I had to decline their participation and refer them to appropriate services. This represents one of the significant distortions to the study as it relates to risk.

While every aim was to incorporate different and diverse youth viewpoints as they relate to risk, I did not feel it was ethical to conduct research with participants that I felt were severely emotionally distressed and required immediate mental health interventions and could benefit from my services in my professional role in the community (and in which I am the only recognized mental health service provider serving these agencies where participants were being recruited). Nor do I feel it is ethical to be conducting research with clients that are requiring the mental health services I am offering, especially as one of the objectives of the research is to build a trusting relationship to gain access to their worlds. Nor is it my place to deny services when

they are needed. The study could not usurp the immediate needs of the individuals being recruited. However, it should be noted that only one potential participant was re-directed to mental health services because of an imminent threat (i.e. suicidal ideation).

Another distortion of this study is that it attracted youth who were comfortable talking about their experiences, that were "raconteurs", and that were relatively easy to establish rapport with and were comfortable with allowing me infiltrate their social spaces. It appealed to youth that were more extroverted and had the ability to talk about their experiences. More often than not, it was the youth that approached me about the study based on the posters they saw (and the money signs attached to them) and whether their friends were partaking in the study. A few participants were more introverted, quiet and private, and gaining access and collecting data did prove more difficult in these instances.

In an effort to foster participation and guard against attrition, participants were remunerated $10.00 for the first meeting, and were given $10.00 every two months until the end of the research period. Remuneration involved more than just providing money at intervals but necessitated that I take participants for coffee, buy them lunch, transport them places, walk with them, and, in essence, be flexible to do whatever needed doing so that I could 'run' into them and keep them engaged. The remuneration system I had initially planned had to be abandoned early on into the study because of attrition and the difficulties I had with keeping youth engaged in the study (this will be expanded upon later).

The fieldnotes were coded with pseudonyms so that no identifying information to the participants can be traced. A master list of the pseudonyms/codes for the fieldnotes was kept in a secure confidential location that only I had access to. All research materials, including transcripts, logs, reflections and floppy discs were kept in a secure location. I explained to participants that pseudonyms would be used and their identities disguised throughout all written materials to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Moreover, I explained that only I had access to the records and data analysis. Due to the marginalization this group faces, I emphasized with participants my respect for their space and privacy, that they were the gatekeepers. I had to relinquish any ideas of control and recognize that participation was fluid, contingent upon a youth's desire to participate or not, which could wax and wane from one moment to the next.

4.6 Data Analysis

Over the course of the data-gathering period, participants were followed and informally interviewed and observed to capture the dynamics of risks while homeless. Once trust had been established, sensitive areas were probed more deeply which allowed for a deeper understanding of events and experiences. Initial concepts and themes began to emerge and could be categorized in a multitude of ways.

4.6.1 Coding and the Emergence of Themes

Initial data analysis was formulated based on the theoretical frameworks underpinning the risk literature. Initially, I conceptualized the data as falling neatly into three broad categories: risk perception, risk management, and risk actualization (outcomes). After data collection took place, I reviewed the fieldnotes and expanded notes and began coding the data according to these three categories, keeping as much of the verbatim phrasing and intended meaning of the narratives and interactions as possible. Fieldnotes, coupled with my expanded notes on my observations and interactions, as well as my journal, were carefully read through and dismantled according to these categories. However, the themes that emerged could not be grouped accordingly into these preconceived groupings and encompassed very broad notions of risk, seen here as danger/threats and opportunities/chances as outlined in the previous chapter. In this study, risk was not defined by expert systems and applied to another's experiences. In this sense, youth were allowed to describe risk in it's broadest understanding and in it's most neutral light. Not viewed merely as hazards to avoid but as weighing the costs and benefits of certain actions.

Risk was viewed in its broadest sense, as dangers but also as taking chances, gambles, trying new things, and determining what the consequences of those actions were and what impact they had on their lives and their identities. What evolved were different patterns than I had originally postulated. After coding the data, the themes which predominated in relation to risk included: addictions, health, sex, family, street lifestyle, violence, criminality, housing, and making money. Within these categories represented all the risks they would contemplate: what were the consequences of certain actions? What choices they were weighing (however constrained)?

How did these decisions relate to who they perceived themselves to be, how they wanted to be perceived by others, and what their friends or family would think? These topics represent conditions of their lives in which a million questions pertaining to risks arose. These categories were then re-examined and re-categorized into three broader topics: culture, relationships, and health. The findings were applied to the three approaches to risk outlined in the previous chapter.

Underlying these topics were three themes that were recurring in participants stories, interactions and constructed identities. The culture of street life, and whether it was something to be feared or embraced was a concept that had diverse and divergent meanings for participants and will be examined in the next chapter. An examination of the risks (i.e. dangers and/or opportunities), according to participants, of street life, are presented in the next chapter and are largely a response to the risk society theorists who argue that there are objective risks, or a heightened anxiety about risks, and that expert systems seriously impact lay conceptions of risk. Chapter Five reveals participants past and current relationships and their impact on their constructed identities and role transformations in relation to risk perception, particularly as they relate to cultural/symbolic approaches to risk. While Chapter Six elucidates youth's understanding of the responsibilization of risk, in response to all three critiques, and whether self-regulation occurs, particularly in relation to health. In order to maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data were combed through repeatedly at each stage of the analysis and were kept as close as possible to the content of the fieldnotes by using direct quotes and phrases that participants evoked. Within these three categories, participants described the kinds of risks that existed and the degree of control they had over them and how this impacted their decisions.

Qualitative data analysis is an iterative process. The data was sifted through, re-organized and re-categorized several times, and the fieldnotes were combed through at each point of the analysis to exhaust the richness of their meaning. Within each broad theme of culture, identity, and responsibility, the data was re-examined and further delineated into sub-groupings of risk perception, risk management, and risk actualization. Risk perception data, the substantive research focus, was further deconstructed into two streams. Risk perception data was broken down into passive risks (risks participants described as having little control over) and active risks (risks they perceived as actively taking and having more control over). These notions of passive risks versus active risks were constructions that the researcher imposed that seemed to capture this dialectic. Youth that were exhilarated about a new opportunity, such as working for the carnival or hitchhiking across the country, in which they "chose" to take a risk, these experiences were captured as taking active risks. Decisions taken in relation to risk, such as doing drugs because youth saw this as a biological imperative because their parents did, were relayed as foregone conclusions. These passive risks that they seemed to have no control over were explained in such a fashion than they seemed powerless to deny or oppose even though they admitted that harmful risks were inherent in their using (e.g. health risks due to method of administration, risk of violence (emotional and physical) due to acquisition and maintenance of certain social networks). Not all experiences, events and understandings described fell neatly into mutually exclusive categories but could be placed across a spectrum of both the larger categories of culture, relationships, and health, and the sub-groupings within these. In an effort to remain true to the principles of ethnography, every attempt was made to present and protect the data from being de-contextualized by using phrases participants evoked and describing their

constructed identities and experiences as they explained them. Data collection and analysis was complete once a saturation point had been reached within the sample.

4.6.2 Individual Memos - Vignettes

The individual memos that were kept on individual participants were constructed as vignettes. Participant vignettes and their trajectories through homelessness added a richer layer to the data collected and subsequent analysis and were constructed and utilized to re-contextualize the data, and to confirm the analytical themes that were emerging. The beginning of each research relationship was often characterized by a period of 'getting to know one another'. During this time, latitude was given to youth to choose starting points of conversation. Most would begin sequentially by describing their lives before becoming homeless, where they were originally from, the context of their family backgrounds, institutional histories (foster homes, detention centres…), and their experiences into and out of street life. Over the course of the study, information was added to each participant's biography to track significant events (e.g. job, housing, relationship histories) as I bore witness to their trajectories through homelessness. The data provided from these unstructured biographies proved to be invaluable to better understanding their risk frameworks and will be presented in subsequent chapters. The ontological premise of this symbolic interactionist approach to risk constructs also requires that the subjects be situated in the data. Hence, a more comprehensive unveiling of the knowledge produced is aided through the use of vignettes and enhances the trustworthiness of the findings.

4.6.3 Triangulation

Triangulation in qualitative research requires the use of multiple methods, and "reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 2). It represents an alternative to validation found in positivist research methodologies because it assumes that there are multiple realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this vein, triangulation of the data is achieved by the bricoleur (the researcher) through the use of multiple methods. In this study, the methods employed included participant observation and unstructured interviewing methods. The data was analyzed and coded through the development of themes that emerged from observations, interactions and interviews, and was further anchored in participant's vignettes and homeless trajectories. A saturation point was reached once the data became redundant within the period of investigation. An added layer of triangulation occurred with the use of themes that emerged from the reflective journal utilized to record subsequent observations and unveil my interpretive stance.

4.6.4 Substantive Feedback

Lastly, doing research from the margins requires that all knowledge and points of view are valued equally and that those living the studied experience are the 'experts' of their proper social world. One of the tools associated with doing research from the margins is the use of substantive feedback (Kirby & McKenna, 1989: 74). One of the goals of this research was to deliberately

seek out and ask for feedback from the youth regarding the themes that emerged to clarify concepts, experiences and understandings.   Substantive feedback was used with those participants that were seen more frequently and with whom I had a deeper relationship. The use of substantive feedback was explicitly chosen to satisfy the study's subjectivist epistemology. One of the purposes of this study was that the researcher and subjects create understandings together. However, the use of substantive feedback with every participant did not occur, nor did it occur to the degree that I would have liked, due to lack of continuity in the research relationship. Nonetheless, observing and interacting with youth frequently, with some on almost a daily basis, did allow me to ask highly detailed, individualistic, and exploratory questions related to the area of focus. Moreover, when I reviewed my fieldnotes and journal entries, I developed further probing questions that could then be posed at subsequent encounters.

4.7 Social Worker as Researcher and the Importance of Reflexivity

In this study, the impetus for doing this kind of research is very much tied to my work as a mental health outreach social worker with homeless youth. This role has embedded me in the field setting for the past eight years. This position and the concomitant experiences have fervently instilled in me the importance of doing research 'from the margins'. The hierarchy of traditional research paradigms among disenfranchised groups begs those of us who are new to the research field to try and address the production of knowledge differently, particularly in relation to oppressed groups. Do we reproduce the forms of oppression and perpetuate the

dominant discourses or do we actually want to try and level the research field by incorporating subject's point of view, particularly a marginalized population's point of view, and re-contextualize the data.

Being a part of the field in my role as a social worker posed many challenges when it came to the shift to engaging in research. First, it was challenging to try to see the research setting with fresh eyes. While the goal of the research was to also describe the arena where homeless youth, live, work and play, it was easier to focus on unstructured interviews and relationship-building than describe places that I frequent as a social worker which feel familiar. The shift in consciousness from social worker, whose filter is governed by questions pertaining to a client's mental health status and quick problem-solving skills, to that of a participant-observer that, whose purpose is to sit, observe and document the milieu, was a hurdle that may not have completely been tackled.

Indeed, the issue of trust in this research process was paramount on many levels. Learning to trust my instincts as a novice student researcher was challenging, frustrating, confidence-shaking and pushed me to the brink of abandonment many times. The effort it took to build up trust in the community – both with youth and with agency staff was critical in allowing me to gain access to the research setting. And lastly and most importantly, this study is founded upon the trust that the participants bestowed upon me – the very personal and candid telling of their own lives and insights. Allowing me glimpses into their worlds for the purpose of telling others demonstrated to me a massive amount of trust and courage. I remain humbled by their openness and confidence. Learning to trust myself in a new and often uncomfortable role, with very

intimate details of people's lives, and faith from essential people in the homeless infrastructure of support and services, made this research possible.

Work and family commitments aside, I was determined to see my research proposal take flight and collect data on conceptualizations of risk among homeless youth. Once I worked through various clumsy dilemmas I began to get a little more comfortable in my role as student-researcher. My confidence grew as I began to overcome some of the study's landmines that I could not have predicted: from ethical certificate barriers (addressed earlier), to recruitment and remuneration difficulties (further expanded upon later), to work and family obligations and constraints.

One of the biggest obstacles was shifting my focus on a moment's notice to becoming a researcher. Taking off the social worker hat and filter that is focussed on problem-solving, planning interventions and constructing treatment plans necessitated a re-tooling of my mind's modus operandi. The switch from that of 'helper' (based on clinical assessments) to that of 'learner' required a fundamental shift in consciousness. Double-thinking, previously unconscious actions and assumptions, and being aware of my own biases and judgements, while simultaneously not losing sight of observations, meant that my mind was exhausted and stretched. Constant mental reminders of the purpose of the research served to ground me in the here and now, and kept me alert to any potential research opportunities. My mantra of risk, victimization and deviancy conceptualizations emanating from discussions with youth served to keep my mental health and problem-solving analysis at bay. Entries into my journal early on in

the research process tracked my frustration and lack of confidence. On February 23, 2007, my personal log read: "It's me defining again what risks they face again ... Is this the correct way to go   about it?"

Later that day, I logged:

> "How do I differentiate between my analysis and theirs – am I recreating the cycle of research that's already been done?"

Instantly I had to learn how to not react to situations and experiences as a social worker but as an observer of stories and interactions. I worked hard to remember bits of phrases that youth evoked to capture their understanding and would scribble them down as soon as I was alone. Getting grounded in the data and not jumping to analysis but sitting and stewing in the milieu, the process, and eventually the data, took some re-learning and self-monitoring but was also oddly refreshing and rewarding. Having a different viewpoint of youth's experiences (e.g. seeing homelessness and travelling as exciting and identity-forming and not victimizing) was exhilarating and also offered me a more comprehensive understanding of the multiplicity of experiences. Of course no research is judgement-free, and my work as a social worker in the community greatly impacted the study, both in terms of who I recruited but also in terms of the knowledge that I chose to include and the values imbued in these decisions. The point was to try and gain knowledge of youth's perceptions of risk and practices, in relation to how they understand their own lives and histories, all the while being cognizant that I am the final interpreter.

One of my clumsiest stumbles in my research endeavour was dealing with remuneration. I strongly believe that participants should get paid for the time they spend working with researchers and in particular the very personal parts of themselves they agree to share with us. Ideology aside, I also did not want youth to view me as an automatic banking machine. I struggled with what was the best way to approach the issue of money. Initially I agreed to remunerate participants $10 at the beginning of the study and give them $20 at the end (one year into the study), but waiting a year for a $20 payout was just not realistic for the population I was dealing with and attrition became a serious issue. I borrowed an idea from a previous study which remunerated participants on a 6-month basis, two times over the course of a year. I decided (because I wanted to have frequent contact and work on building relationships with these youth) that giving $10 at the initial meeting (when suitability and eligibility were determined and consent forms were signed) was attractive and manageable, and then I would agree to give them $10 every two months until the end of the research year (one year from when their initial recruitment took place).

I developed a business card with my name and contact information (cellular phone number and email address), and the amount and frequency of the remuneration. I would handwrite on the back the alternating months they would receive a 'pay' of $10 – for up to one year's time from the moment of contact. This was the 'carrot' I offered for involvement and the most efficient way I could guarantee some level of contact with them throughout the year. This way, if I had not seen them in two months, there was incentive for them to contact me and allow me to speak with them in order to receive the 'pay', especially with youth that seemed to 'travel' frequently and disappear. Of course with some participants that were seen regularly (daily, weekly) – in

drop-in centres, shelters, outside agencies, on the streets, in cafés, in malls, or in their homes - they received more than just money, but were taken for coffees or food or were transported places.

I hoped that participants contacted me for more than just money and I concede that $10 is not very much. I believe that some did because they would respond they felt 'guilty' for taking the money and would actually try to dissuade me from paying them, stating they enjoyed just having the opportunity to talk to someone they could trust. But I am under no illusions that the need for money was also tied to the reason youth participated and I needed the initial allure to gain access. However, I do not feel it was the only reason youth participated because after a relationship was established it rarely came up in my conversations with youth as an expectation and it would often be me reminding them that I owed them money. Dealing with money, however, with a stigmatized group that often does not have very much money, if any, was certainly an awkward, humbling, eye-opening and challenging obstacle.

Another role that impacted this research was my pregnancy. Half-way through the research period I became pregnant with my third child and obviously could not hide it from participants. Although this did impact my energy level and perhaps my ability to meet youth 'anywhere', I do not feel that it greatly negatively affected research outcomes. Because of working through my previous pregnancies in these similar settings most youth were already used to knowing me pregnant and having a young family. And in particular, with some young women who had been or were pregnant it served as a bit of an alliance that we shared, comparing aches and pains and

growing bellies. I have often wondered if it was the relationship-building expectation of the research or the fact that I was so visibly pregnant that perhaps attracted more young women to my study. But this was not a research area I explored so I am left wondering how my pregnant belly affected research opportunities. The pregnancy also did somewhat disrupt my research timeline (by the end of research year one I had my baby). However, I did stay in touch with some of the participants into the second year, by telephone, email correspondence and infrequent visits into the field. And when I returned to work in the community after maternity leave I re-connected with several of the youth that initially participated to capture relevant insights about how their lives had changed (or not).

The data collection process was more difficult than I had imagined and though I had tried to anticipate the potential landmines I do not feel I could have been more prepared for something to which I was relatively new. Recruitment took place in a variety of settings, and each agency had its own culture that I needed to respect. Purposive sampling and the snowball method, through putting my faith in posters, information sheets, staff help and participants own outreach methods for the study, meant that the recruitment process took on a life of its own. Initially, a certain amount of buzz was created in the agencies I frequent and I was swamped with interest and then in no time it fizzled, interest waxed and waned, and informants had to be found and re-contacted. Observation opportunities came easily at times and there was a deluge of data to be collected and at other times I would feel the pressure to know more, explore more and attract new participants to the study when previous ones had disappeared.

The field was in constant motion, constantly shifting and I had to shift with it. The insights I gained from this study – relating to youth in a different way in my role as knowledge-seeker - had a huge impact on my personal professional knowledge, and made me realize the limitations of my own understandings and biases. One of the biggest insights I gained was not reducing their identities to that of victim or survivor, or simply dichotomizing their experiences but understanding their experiences as falling along a spectrum of possibilities and dualities. Viewing risk-taking as exhilarating and as a form of identity experimentation gave me new insight into why certain risks were worth taking. Lastly, the connections youth made between their own histories and constructed identities and the level of risk they were familiar and comfortable with proves that youth often make much more complex risk assessments than has been assumed. This provocative finding serves to disprove previous positivist risk research founded on rational choices and simple stimulus-response methods.

4.8 Limitations

Most of the limitations of this study are also the reasons for its raison d'être. Obviously, the size of this study was quite small, with only eighteen youth participating. Both the size of the study, and the sampling and data collection methods do not allow for any form of quantitative analysis. A greater sample size could have found unique experiences that may not have been captured, and may have added unknown elements to the knowledge produced. Thus the findings of this study are not generalizable. However, this was not the point of the research. The point of the research was to do research from the margins. According to Kirby & McKenna (1989: 64), "research

from the margins is based on the commitment to advancing knowledge through research grounded in the experience of living on the margins… we want to do research in a way that creates opportunities to reclaim and re-name that experience." In this vein, I acknowledge the political dimensions of research and that choosing a method is a political choice.

As a researcher concerned about the political implications of research, it was important that the way the research was conceptualized, the way in which data was gathered, and lastly, the way in which the research evolved and how the resultant knowledge was created and shared, not take place without the collaboration of those who are being 'studied'. However, ideology is one thing, and its materialization quite another. My desire to incorporate participant feedback and have them clarify concepts to the degree that I would have liked did not entirely happen. While every effort was made to highlight youth voices, the difficulties of engaging this population and remaining in contact over the course of a year was unrealistic unless I was completely immersed. The realities of street life and the constraints on my own personal life did not allow for the insertion I would have liked. Further, my expectation that the study take on more of a political bent or a community-building exercise was unrealistic, because the goals of the project were created and established by myself and not hatched by the youth themselves.

Another limitation of the study was its obvious appeal to those participants that are open to sharing their experiences with others. Engagement cannot happen with those who are unwilling. Only those participants who truly found some benefit to participation remained interested and allowed me to follow them. In addition, this study attracted significantly more female participants than male (12 females to 6 males). Thus, experiences emanating from the study are

more explicative of young women's experiences than men's (e.g. risk of pregnancy, forms of sexual exploitation – this is not to say that young men do not experience these but that these are more commonly associated with young women). Significantly, higher participation by young women could have occurred for various reasons. The relationship-building nature of the study, the fact that I am a woman and was pregnant could have appealed more to young women than their counterparts. It is important to bear this in mind when discussing the findings of the study.

One of the most significant drawbacks of the study was who it excluded. One criteria of exclusion were the severely emotionally distressed (as determined by myself to be at imminent risk of harm to self or others). However, I realize that by intentionally excluding these youth a critical dimension of risk perception among homeless youth is lost, as it could be hypothesized that this fragile group may face greater harm due to their increased vulnerability. I do not know how this situation could have been prevented. Ethically, I did not feel they had the capacity to consent to participation, nor did I feel it was fair to ask this of them. In those instances of significant emotional distress, I needed to direct them to appropriate services. I realize that this represented a subjective choice on my part.

Another possibility of exclusion was the four agencies I utilized for the bulk of recruitment. Though the purpose of the snowball method was to reduce this limitation, the majority of recruitment did take place within agencies by youth who noticed a poster and expressed interest. Thus, the study may not have highlighted the most marginalized youth among the homeless population who do not access these services or who might have felt uncomfortable asking about the study.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the study's relevant theoretical considerations, the methodology employed and its implications, highlighted ethical challenges, and exposed its reflexive nature. While an initial data analysis had been formulated based on three categories of risk perception, risk management and risk actualization, different themes emerged. The three broad themes that surfaced were culture, relationships and health. While there are limitations to this study, related to its small and location-specific sample, the findings suggest that youth do make complex risk assessments based on their experiences, observations and constructed identities. The following chapters will report on the findings of these three larger themes: the culture of street life (Chapter Four), identity construction and role experimentation (Chapter Five), and managing risk, self-regulation and responsibilization (Chapter Six).

Chapter Four:

Culture of Fear or Freedom?

The literature review in Chapter One illustrates that homeless youth are an "at-risk" group because they have been defined as such in several ways. First, most research on homeless youth illustrates that they experience childhoods rife with abuse, neglect, and abandonment (Gaetz, 2004; Karabanow et al., 2005; Karabanow, 2004; Baron, 2003a; Cauce et al., 2000) that set them on a negative developmental course that push and pull them to the streets (Karabanow, et al., 2005; Karabanow, 2004; Mounier & Andujo, 2003; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Janus et al., 1995; Kurtz et al., 1991; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990; Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987). Moreover, poor parent-child relationships and parenting practices (DiPaolo, 1999; Whitbeck et al., 1999; Stefanidis et al., 1992; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990), family breakdown, instability and recomposition (Bearsley-Smith, 2008; Laird, 2007; Bellot, 2001; Caputo, 1997; Jones, 1997), manifest and place these youth at increased risk for homelessness and further victimization, and engagement in deviant (i.e. illegal) activities (Baron et al., 2007; Whitbeck et al., 1999). According to some authors, these early experiences of family or institutional life created perfect "training grounds" for anti-social behaviours (Baron et al., 2007; Whitbeck et al., 1997), and the streets offer the venue for these competing "character contests" (Baron et al., 2007) to play out in an effort to achieve social legitimacy and recognition. These historical factors intertwine and create a certain forecasting of future behaviours, which characterize youth in the literature as incredibly vulnerable to further victimization or deviancy (i.e. violence, exploitation, increased drug use, poor health..), magnifying their fragile status as an "at-risk" group.

A systemic issue pertinent to this population is that many arrive on the streets from the child welfare system (Aubry et al., 2008; Karabanow et al., 2005, Karabanow, 2004; Kraus et al., 2001; Fitzgerald, 1995) or are released from detention centres and have nowhere else to go

(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). At age sixteen in Ontario, an individual has the right to leave their "home," make life decisions for themselves, and many choose to do so. However, serious gaps in child welfare/protection services have been identified as a factor contributing to youth homelessness, especially for sixteen and seventeen year-olds (Kraus et al., 2001). Moreover, structural constraints abound. Social assistance and housing systems, and the changing labour market make it difficult for this age group to eke out a living in socially legitimate ways, as was exemplified in Chapter One. Moreover, virtually all of these youth are early "school leavers" (Bessant, 2001; Farrell et al., 2001) and by this simple act of non-conformity are deemed "at-risk" in the literature and in terms of policy, programs and interventions. Structural transformations and mutations have also assisted in further framing these youth as an "at-risk" group.   Leaving school early, difficulty accessing the formal labour market (most youth report no formal source of income (Farrell et al., 2001)), and the rise of free market systems which promote individualization and competition, coupled with family instability and recomposition, all combine to create conditions for a "perfect storm" of social exclusion, isolation, and alienation that characterizes these youth as "at-risk".

Adding fuel to the fire of vulnerability, the streets are also characterized as an intensely dangerous place for these already impervious youth to live. The objective dangers of street life are well documented. Rates of violence and victimization greater than the Canadian public abound (Gaetz, 2004, 2009), and victimization is likely to increase with length of time homeless (Boivin et al., 2005). Not only are the streets defined as a dangerous or "risky" places, but the activities with which youth engage appear to increase their chances of becoming victims of violence (Hoyt et al. 1999). Increased degree of criminal involvement has been noted by many

researchers, as they do not have access to legitimate means of self-support, and as a result, a significant number of youth are drawn into illegal activity as a method of survival on the streets (i.e., drug dealing, squeegeeing, robbery, prostitution…), and that this further increases their chances of victimization (Gaetz, 2004, 2009; Kraus et al., 2001; Whitbeck et al., 1997; McCarthy & Hagan, 1992; Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987). Ironically, another layer of the vulnerability piece is that these youth are the least likely to seek help (Gaetz, 2004, 2009; Karabanow, 2004).

One of the central axes in discussions of risk and homeless youth is substance use. Rates of alcohol and drug use among street youth populations have been found to be substantially higher than those found in the general youth population (Benoit et al., 2007; Haldenby et al., 2007; Tyler, 2007; Boivin et al., 2005; Kipke et al., 1993; McMorris et al., 2001). Some researchers emphasize that youth are twice as likely to become injection drug users (Roy et al., 2003), and that there is a positive relationship between childhood sexual abuse and substance abuse (Haldenby et al., 2007).

The focus on health risk behaviours, in particular injection drug use and sexual practices, has been particularly instrumental in constructing this population as "at-risk." Researchers have been proficiently documenting homeless youth's deteriorating health (Haldenby et al., 2007; Boivin et al., 2005; Karabanow, 2004; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Ensign, 1998), and have demonstrated that the longer the individual remains homeless the worse their health becomes (Karabanow, 2004; Kraus et al., 2001). Researchers have found that homeless youth engage in risky sexual practices, including low rates of condom use, have numerous sexual partners, high

rates of sexually transmitted diseases (Haldenby et al., 2007; Tyler, 2007; Noell et al., 2001), and high rates of pregnancy (Haley, 2007; Novac et al., 2006; Boivin et al., 2005).

Duration on the streets has also been found to have a positive relationship with the amount of victimization experienced (Slesnick et al., 2008; Whitbeck et al., 1997; Janus et al., 1987). The assertion that these youth are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviours the longer they are homeless (Slesnick et al., 2008; Tyler, 2007), coupled with the evidence of their worsening physical health (Boivin et al., 2005; Karabanow, 2004) demonstrates that there is a hierarchy of risks within this "at-risk" group. Those who are the most street-entrenched, alienated, excluded, suffered the greatest childhood harms, are found to be at greater risk, also because they are the least likely to reach out for help. Yet despite this astounding evidence of risk factors in childhood, and on the streets, little is known about their viewpoints and understanding of their experiences.

Adolescence has been characterized as a time of uncertainty (Bajoit, 2000) and crisis (Galland, 2003). Several authors have noted how initial traumas (Poirier et al., 1999; Herman, 1997) further the potentiality for them becoming future targets of victimization (i.e. exploitation, addiction). Some (Colombo, 2008; Gilbert, 2004; Parazelli, 1999; Poirier, 1999; Lucchini, 1996) have postulated that these early experiences of family life follow them into the streets in the creation of new relationships, and may impact their risk-taking behaviours. One of the anthropologically-based hypotheses taken up by this study, is that the streets provide a venue for risk-taking, experimentation and self-discovery, and has particular relevance in relation to risk.

The ontological position of this study argues that there are other experiences, besides victimization and deviancy that characterize this population and affect their conceptualizations of risk. The spectrum of risk perceptions and practices are vast and varied and need to be examined to unearth whether these social theories of risk, and psycho-social theories of identity construction in relation to risk, have merit as they apply to homeless youth. Risk over the past century, has come to be almost entirely equated with danger (Lupton, 1999a, 1999b) but the position of this study harks back to earlier conceptualizations of risk that encompass notions of chance or taking gambles (Bernstein, 1996), viewing risk as neither good nor bad. It also posits that risks are social constructions that are interactionally constituted, and that risks are shaped and defined by political, social, and cultural factors that serve to contextualize risk assessments and responses.

In this light, this chapter is a response to, and an admonishment of, Beck's risk society thesis (Beck, 1992, 1995, 1996). Principally, it rejects the notion that there are objective hazards, global dangers, that individuals experience locally by responding to expert systems of knowledge construction and reflexivity in a, more or less, uniform manner. This study sought to portray how participants' perceptions and responses to risk varied, changed over time, and were very much embedded in "who" they believed themselves to be. Thus, this chapter seeks to uncover how an "at-risk" group weighed and responded to risks in their individual histories and local settings and found that there was a diversity of experiences from active risk-takers to fearful risk-avoiders. The globalized dangers that Beck presents were not predominant in youth's

understandings of risk. Indeed, youth's conceptualizations of risk were highly localized, contextualized, temporal, and individualized. More often than not, their perceptions of risk and responses to these were based on their intuitions, peer influences, and were intimately connected to constructions of their identity, again denying the impact of expert systems in lay people's perceptions of risk, which forms one of the central theses of the risk society. This last point will be examined more clearly in Chapter Six on the responsibilization of risk.

Utilizing symbolic interactionism and social constructionism helped to ground this study in participant's understandings of risk perception and responses, and argues against the realist approach to risks. It postulates that risks can never be completely objective or knowable outside of belief systems and moral positions (Lupton, 1999a), and it presupposes that risks are neither good nor bad. While it is true that there is a predominant emphasis on safety and avoidance of risk in current Western society, and to a large extent risk-takers are demonized and seen as irresponsible and immoral (Furedi, 2006), the three risk approaches have not examined voluntary risk-taking in-depth (Boyne, 2003; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Turz (1993) contends that adults have a negative view of risk-taking and often project imaginary risks onto this population, or what Colombo (2008) states founds an ideology of safety at all costs. Indeed, Parazelli (1999) has questioned whether we want to prevent adolescence from happening in our effort to tease out any danger and diminish risk-taking behaviours. However, it is well established in virtually all disciplines (psychology, social work, sociology, anthropology) that one of the singular experiences of adolescence is a heightened sense of risk-taking, the need for excitement and self-discovery. This forms one of the central contributions of the findings in this chapter, the experiences of the risk-taker.

Examining participants' experiences vis-à-vis risk society proponents will assist in determining

what relevance the risk society thesis has for this "at-risk" population. Aspects of the risk

society thesis will be critiqued in this chapter as they related to participant's risk perceptions and

practices. The other two approaches will be contrasted with the findings in the next two chapters

of results. The cultural/symbolic approach to risk will be examined more in the next chapter

(Chapter 5) as it relates to identity construction and risk, and the governmentality approach, and

to a lesser degree aspects of the cultural/symbolic approach will be examined in the last chapter

of findings (Chapter 6) and how they relate to responsibilization and self-regulation.

This chapter will examine participants' perceptions and responses to risk on the streets as they

unfold. First, an examination of participants' family histories and how it relates to their

tolerance or intolerance of risk will be fleshed out. Secondly, risks, both good and bad, will be

presented as they relate to participants experiences of life on the streets. The paradox of danger,

excitement and survival and how it relates to risk perceptions and practices will be revealed. In

particular, an examination of participant's relationship to drugs and risks will highlight another

paradox (freedom/constraint). The diversity of youth's experiences from risk-avoidance to risk-

taking (paradox of excitement/boredom) will be elucidated. The second section will deal with

the strategies youth employed to manage risk, including sleeping outside, peer networks, and

threats of violence. Lastly, the hypothesis that structural constraints (i.e. social assistance,

housing and labour markets) promote a climate of risk-taking will be presented. This will be

followed by an investigation of the intersection of individual risk factors and structural risk

factors. Participant vignettes will be utilized throughout the main empirical findings to elucidate youth's risk frameworks.

1. Youth "At-Risk"

The categorization of defining this population as "at-risk" is based on their past histories, and by the rates of victimization, poor health, and engagement in deviant activities that have been framed as such in the literature. An examination of participant's understandings of their relationships with their families and their childhood histories helps to contextualize their current day risk perceptions when on the street, and arguably, forms part of their risk consciousness as they weigh certain risks.

1.1 Family Histories

All the youth comprised in this sample described some level of abuse, neglect, abandonment or extreme conflict in their settings prior to hitting the streets. Ten youth were leaving their families of origin, while the remaining eight were leaving a foster, group home or detention

centre setting. Of the eighteen youth sampled, fourteen youth revealed some level of physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse, or rejection, that led to them either being drawn or pushed to the streets, whether it occurred in their own homes, foster homes or in more institutional settings. While the impact of abuse and rejection will be discussed further in the next chapter as it relates to identity construction, it is important to note here that all the youth in this study blamed extreme conflict, including: abuse by parents, stepparents, and/or siblings; and/or family instability and recomposition; and/or drug use (theirs or their parents), as the impetus for leaving or being forced out by their parents/guardians. In three of the cases, a parent's ill health, or physical or mental disability contributed to them being pushed out of the home, due to the parent's inability to care for them or be able to support them economically due to illness. Frequently, these issues were exacerbated by other longstanding problems related to tension in the caretaker's relationship with the youth.

Youth identified that their life, and/or lifestyle "choices" (e.g. goth, transgenderism, drug use) clashed with their primary caretakers, particularly when they wanted more freedom but this was met with more constraints (e.g. curfews, limiting phonecalls/computer use and/or peer/partner associations). This tension exacerbated patterns of abuse, familial instability, and/or drug use, and created "perfect storm" conditions that youth described as symbolizing the final trigger for their departure. Examples of these constraints that created tension between themselves and their parents, or their substitute care arrangements, included: quitting or being absent from school; using drugs, partying, or spending an increasing amount of time on the streets; and/or partner or peer associations; and appearance, identification, or experimentation with certain activities/identities/associations (e.g. transgenderism, goth, drug use). Moreover, most youth

experienced a combination of these factors (e.g. abuse, truancy, drug use, tension over freedom/autonomy) and the culmination of this maelstrom resulted in them winding up on the streets.

Surprisingly, even though the "home" was often characterized as emotionally charged most youth (17 of the 18) continued to have contact with their mothers, fathers (to a lesser degree), and siblings (including in two cases, two participants' sisters winding up on the streets the second year of the study). Some participants reported that their relationships improved with their departures from the family home. Most youth continued to have sporadic or regular contact with family members, ranging from direct contact for meals or visits, to sleeping over. In three cases, female participants moved back home, at least for a time (minimum 6 months). And all the youth, but one, had some type of contact, whether by regular or sporadic telephone or email contact. Only one participant had completely disengaged from his family, including never having contacted either his mother's or father's family once he was pushed out of his mother's home. Naturally, the frequency and nature of the contacts shifted in tandem with changes in the respective relationships, and changes in the family home and the participants' lives. Even one youth who was still attached to the child welfare system had contact with her mother.

As will be elucidated below, past experiences of early life help to shape present day risk perceptions, as the modelling that Colombo (2008), Gilbert (2004), and Parazelli (2000) describe in terms of the early socialization experiences appear to impact, and shape current day

expectations of relationships and frame what is an acceptable tolerance of risk. Normalization of and desensitization to harm, shapes their expectations of acceptable levels of risk.

Annie's (pseudonym) story, which will be illuminated in the vignette below, highlights the complex relationship between youth's pre-existing risk consciousness (based on their childhood/adolescent experiences in their "home") and their current day risk perceptions. Youth's risk consciousness which informs their perceptions of risk on the streets, are embedded in past experiences but are also constantly changing and integrating new experiences that shift their perceptions of risk.

1.1.1 Vignette of Annie

The vignette of Annie illustrates a young woman who feels she was abandoned by her mother because she chose the relationship with her partner over her daughter's, and the relationship between Annie and her step-father was conflictual and emotionally-charged. Annie's tumultuous relationship with her stepfather, coupled with her mother's addiction to alcohol, were the reasons she cited for leaving home. Annie described the conscious choice she made leaving her family home in a small town to find "freedom."

Annie was seventeen years-old at the beginning of the study when I met her at a shelter in May of 2007. Her mother and stepfather live in a small rural town. She described her stepfather as having a "good government job," and her mother as a stay-at-home mom. She portrayed her mother as an alcoholic, whose main concern was to preserve the family reputation. She was the only child in the family home. She had been to the shelter for the first time the previous year and then again a few times over the current year. She also travelled (hitchhiked) frequently to Toronto, and stayed there for several weeks at a time (in shelters, on the street, couch-surfed), and was most recently there for an abortion. She described this experience as a "real wake-up call". She explained that this experience was pivotal in helping her to "change [her] life around". Annie revealed that she had been a heavy user of methamphetamines prior to becoming pregnant but stopped using once she discovered she was pregnant.

> I knew I needed to change my life around. I used to really be into drugs. When I was doing meth I was down to 107 pounds. I locked myself in my room at home for two weeks and watched Disney movies… I didn't even know I had been there two weeks and four days… I was so sick and so out of it. I have never touched it since.

Once she became pregnant, this triggered her realization that she needed to stop using drugs, because of the unsafe situations she would get herself into when she was using. She also felt that her continued methamphetamine use made her lose too much weight and that her health suffered. "I was using so much I had bones sticking out everywhere. I don't look good skinny. It doesn't suit me." After quitting abruptly and going through a very painful withdrawal period lasting three weeks, she decided to never use "hard drugs" again and admitted that she now only uses alcohol and marijuana.

Annie reflected on the stereotype of homeless youth only being from poor families. "You know how everyone thinks the kids down here come from poor homes? It's not true. My family is a rich old English family, who only care about their reputation… they've disowned me." She described her stepfather as very violent, and that she would provoke him by physically pushing and verbally insulting him. She said he knew not to hit her but was very threatening with his actions and would throw and break furniture and hurl verbal assaults when he was enraged. Eventually, when the conflict had escalated to the point where remaining in their home had become unmanageable, her mother told her she thought it would be best if she left. Annie felt that her mother abandoned her for her stepfather. Annie's reflections on leaving her home for the streets were summed up by her judgement that "being on the streets is just as violent as being at home."

As Annie's story illustrates, most youth described the dangers on the streets, or feelings of vulnerability, as being comparable to their lives before becoming homeless. The risks posed by street life were inextricably linked to risks they had survived in earlier life. Their current experiences or tolerances for risk were intimately tied to earlier experiences. Over half of the sample reported high levels of violence, and four noted that their parents' significant addictions problems fuelled conflict, while seven youth indicated that their own drug use played a major role in them leaving or getting kicked out. Not only violence and substance use, whether theirs or their parents, played a role, but the sense of abandonment youth felt and the general sense of familial instability characterized these early years. For many participants, this meant that they had a higher tolerance for risk and found the streets were no more dangerous than what they had

known, but this was not a universal experience as will be elucidated in the section entitled risk-averse.

1.2 Family Instability

Similar to other findings (Bearsley-Smith, 2008; Laird, 2007; Bellot, 2001; Jones, 1997; Hagan, 1992), two-thirds of participants (12) described their parents unions as unstable leading to separations and divorce (for some) and frequent or long-term recompositions resulting in new step-parents. Youth described high levels of violence, in which they, or their sibling, or one of their parents was a victim; and/or their parents had a substance use problem; and/or family experienced residential/geographic instability; and/or insecure job history, or reliance on social assistance systems; and/or parents' health problems; which increased their vulnerability to becoming homeless.

Seven of the participants reported being from single-parent households, six of which were female-headed. These youth described being raised almost exclusively by their mothers and when a new, in most cases, male partner came along tensions would heighten and would lead to them feeling betrayed and abandoned by their mothers, resulting in their perception that their mother's "chose" their partner over them. Participants emphasized the degree of conflict and violence between themselves and their mother's partners. Three young men in the study, Tyler,

Chris, and Shane (all pseudonyms), shared similarities and revealed that their mother's short-term and shifting relationships with male partners contributed to their leaving home. All of them described being physically assaulted by their mother's partners and attacking them in self-defence or in defending their mothers from being violated. Eventually, however, as was described by participants, the conflict became too egregious and it forced them to leave their own homes and/or their mothers to "choose" between their partners and their children. Only four of the eighteen participants described their parents as still united. Most of their parents were separated and/or divorced (10), or had never known their biological fathers (7), including two who were adopted at very young ages (as an infant and as a toddler). Five of the participants' families were reconstituted, resulting in several step and half sibling arrangements.

Indeed, abandonment was a strong and recurring theme in participant's narratives. A sense of abandonment also occurred when parents were heavily addicted. For example, Chris, who did have some contact with his biological father, described him as a "good for nothing 'crackhead'." Chris explained that he had had tried to reach out to him for help over the years but was tired of being disappointed. He had recently been to his father's apartment to see whether he could "crash on his couch." Upon visiting him, he noticed the drug paraphernalia, including crack, crackpipes, and the presence of "too many 'crackheads'" sleeping there already, he promptly decided to leave. His conclusion was that his father was too heavily addicted to be helpful to him at all: "my Dad is too busy with keeping up his habit to be of any use to me". The sentiment of abandonment was a common thread in participant's stories and will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

What is important to highlight here is the significant threshold of abuse, violence, neglect, instability and conflict these youth were exposed to and, arguably, became accustomed to prior to leaving home. Their risk perception was severely impacted by these prior experiences. For Annie, the risks posed on the street, in terms of the level of violence that may be lurking, is no more imminent than the perceived level she experienced at home, summed up by her comments: "it is really no more dangerous than what it's like at home". Her risk perception is very much tied to this risk consciousness. This may account for why in Kipke et al.'s (1997) study (as illuminated in the literature review) they report participants' cognitive dissonance between the amount of victimization experienced (which was significant) and their fearlessness with regards to future risk of victimization. Even though literature regarding homeless youth experiences points to the increase of victimization suffered once they are homeless (Gaetz, 2009; Boivin et al., 2005; Gaetz, 2004; Sleegers et al., 1998; Whitbeck et al., 1997; Janus et al., 1995; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990), Annie's prior experience heightens her threshold of her tolerance of risk. While she is not oblivious to harmful risks being present, she minimizes them by, for example, choosing to use "less dangerous" drugs. Similarly, for other participants, the impact of their parent's couple relationships and/or the impact of addictions and subsequent abandonment have forced them to be more self-reliant. Within this context, they frequently portray themselves as survivors needing to take risks, whether good or bad, in order to survive being thrust into the streets. This theme of survival formed a common thread in the narratives and will be elucidated more in the next chapter as it relates to identity construction.

As was highlighted above, violence, rejection, instability, and substance abuse (whether their own or their parents) often formed the context of their pre-street risk consciousness. The next section will examine participants' perceptions of risk on the street.

2. Risk Perception on the Street – Paradoxical Positions

Youth's descriptions and perceptions of risk varied greatly when it came to living on the streets, and many often described themselves in a way that portrayed themselves as survivors and highly adaptable. While some painted pictures of danger lurking on every corner, others described being on the streets as being safer than living in their own homes or staying at the shelters. Even though Annie stated that living on the streets was no more dangerous than living at home she did admit that "the challenge is to stay alive," hinting to this survivor analogy. Most frequently, street life risks represented paradoxes. Many participants described the surge of excitement they experienced due to the concomitant threats of danger that lurked, and this double-edged side to risk seemed to embody many of the chances they took. For instance, several participants described the rush of sleeping outside and not being tied down to one place as exciting but sometimes dangerous, due to harassment by police, or assaults and/or theft by other homeless youth or adults (homeless or not). Similarly, hitchhiking, hopping trains, in essence roaming and travelling the country, was another experience that represented this paradox of excitement and danger.

The thrill of not being constrained by a schedule, a residence, or imposition of rules (whether governed by parents, guardians, residences, or shelters) went hand in hand with the danger of going hungry, battling the elements (especially winter storms) and finding a place to sleep, and being assaulted and/or robbed. Testing one's limits and being open and impulsive to try new experiences, especially experimenting with drugs and other non-conformist aspects of street youth culture (i.e. squeegee-ing, pan-handling, sleeping outdoors as exemplified by Annie, Shane, and Olivia's experiences), for many youth, characterized their experiences of risk on the streets and fell into to this danger/excitement/freedom paradox.

The lure of the streets as a default rite of passage represents another element of this paradox. D'Allondans (2005), Jeffrey (2005), and LeBreton (1991, 2003) have noted that in the absence of traditional rites of passage to adulthood youth have had to seek other means and this has resulted in "conduites à risques." The anthropological notion that the streets, for some, are a rite of passage due to the risk-taking opportunities they proffer, allowing youth to feel the full essence of their existence has been described in Chapter Two and is somewhat supported by many youth's recanting of "living the life." For Laura, she described street life or "living the life" as "equal opportunity risk". Laura explained that she

> loves hitchhiking and it is not dangerous once you figure it out [what/who is safe and what/who is not safe]. You see, people take a chance on you but you are also taking a chance on them. That's why I think it is 'equal opportunity risk' on the streets. It is easy to become addicted to street life, the lifestyle, because it is this excitement that drives you to take chances and try new things.

For Annie, she described the "excitement of 'living the life'", stating that "travelling is like crack, once you start it's hard to stop." For many youth, especially those that were more brazen in their risk-taking, the excitement and danger of street life afforded opportunities in experimenting with who they wished to be. This will be explored further in the next chapter as it relates to identity construction.

On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind that all of the participants did not "choose" the streets in the search for excitement or freedom, some youth were highly risk-averse and felt continuously under threat and took steps to minimize perceived dangers. Risk perception ran the gamut from the risk-averse to the active risk-taker, to experiences in between. Annie's experiences fall somewhere in the middle. While she recognized inherent dangers, such as sleeping alone outside or doing hard drugs and took steps to minimize these risks, she also hitchhiked across the country several times, stayed in squats or slept outside, and experimented with different living situations. This section will illuminate this wide diversity of risk perceptions and practices.

Annie was someone who even though she described danger lurking everywhere: "I worry that a random 'crackhead' may stab me… I had my sleeping bag stolen the other day by a 'crackhead' but I wasn't hurt," she took steps to minimize those risks:

> I don't like to sleep outside alone, but sometimes I have no choice… I generally stay with the same group of people when I am outside… but a few times in Toronto I had no choice [but to sleep alone]... It's scary at first but then you get used to it... I always make sure I have a weapon [knife].

Having tools for protection was a common strategy youth employed to protect themselves from assault and/or robbery and will be discussed in greater detail later on in the chapter. This passage illustrates that Annie is genuinely invested in the excitement and adventure of street life, however, she is not naïve to the dangers. "I am living each day as I want to right now. It's exciting, you never know what's going to happen… you just keep moving on." At this moment in time, Annie is invested in these experiences of "freedom" even though at times they scare her. These paradoxes of the risks of street life equalling freedom, and excitement being generated due to the dangers that lurk, are some of the main contributions of this study. However, this vantage point of taking risks in an effort to achieve autonomy or freedom, as described by other authors (Colombo, 2008; Bellot, 2001; Parazelli, 1999), did change over time for several participants. In Annie's case, by the end of the study, her life radically changed due to ill health and becoming pregnant, which severely altered her perception of risks and her disenchantment with being homeless (as she did continue to remain engaged socially in street life). This will be described in greater detail in the next chapters in relation to identity formation and responsibilization.

Youth often described risks on the streets as being overwhelmingly negative but seemed in large measure to accept this fact as part of street life, often characterizing themselves as survivors. Many youth described being harassed, assaulted (sexually, physically), and robbed, by people they knew, authority figures, acquaintances and strangers. Several youth felt that life in the downtown core was not safe and that bigger cities in general (such as Toronto and Montreal) were even more unsafe. Chris, a sixteen year-old from Ottawa who had several charges relating

to car thefts and small robberies, described being shot at and beaten up several times while living on the streets of Toronto and that he decided to return to Ottawa where it was "safer".

> Yeah, I was living in Toronto for the past three months but I found it a lot rougher, like I got shot at for beating up the wrong guy so I had to bounce to Ottawa. I would have preferred to stay in Toronto though because there are more services for youth. Like here, I got kicked out of the only youth shelter for guys and now I have to lie [about his age] to be able to stay in the adult shelter which is really 'sketchy'.

Stating that even though Toronto was "too rough," he would have preferred to stay because there were more homeless youth services and hence more choice (as he had been recently barred from the only young men's shelter in Ottawa).

Several youth who were from more rural settings described the move to urban centres as encouraging of engaging in street life and drug use and that this increased the potential of harmful risks being present. The next vignette highlights the participant's perception that her family's move to the city was somewhat responsible for her becoming street involved and addicted to drugs. This is another paradox that emerged from the data, and that has been noted by others (Bellot, 2001), the finding that drug use provides a feeling of freedom and excitement but that the dependency that is created poses a constraint to the individual's autonomy. Several participants described the risks inherent in their substance dependence, and that their days were mostly structured around acquiring and maintaining their drug use.

2.1 Drugs and Risk – The Paradox of Freedom/Dependence

Laura's (pseudonym) story illustrates someone who is neither a complete risk-taker nor a complete risk-avoider. She is willing to take certain risks, especially in terms of acquiring her drugs and fulfilling her social needs. She does recognize, though, that the streets are a "dangerous" place and takes steps to minimize perceived harm. On the other hand, she is keenly aware of her dependency on drugs and worries intensely about getting sick if she quits, so she is very conscious of maintaining her habit even though she dreams about freeing herself from this dependency. Colombo (2008: 340) notes the relational context of drug use for many youth; postulating that their substance use constitutes a paradox of dependence/independence that characterizes their relationship to drugs.

2.1.1 Vignette of Laura

Laura was a seventeen year-old woman originally from a rural area just outside of Ottawa. She had moved to downtown Ottawa with her parents and three sisters when she was six years old. Her parents had their children when they were young (starting at age seventeen) and had been on social assistance most of their lives. Laura described them as very loving and supportive. Laura

was one of the few participants who did not leave home because of abuse or conflict. Her impetus for leaving home and being drawn to street life was that she "fell in love with a 'homeless boy'". After spending the last year and a half on the streets with him she also became addicted to morphine and developed a daily habit which she maintained because of her fear of the pain of withdrawal and she was "hooked on its effect". However, she described herself as leading a "double life" because she had never admitted her drug use to her parents (at the beginning of the study), and she did not believe they suspected this even after her relationship with her boyfriend ended and she remained on the streets.

Even though Laura was very entrenched in street life, she continued to remain in close contact with her family and her old school friends throughout the study. Laura felt that she lived "two separate lives" and had trouble reconciling these. In the first, she was very close to her parents, pretended she did not use drugs, held down a job, even attended school and had many friends connected with this world. Her other life was her street life. She used injection drugs (morphine) everyday, slept on the streets with friends and socialized mostly downtown and in the areas where other street youth congregated (squats). But she revealed that leading this double life was wearing her out and was becoming too difficult to maintain. She worried intensely about her parents and school friends finding out about her drug use, especially as she stayed on the streets after her ex-boyfriend and her broke up (which was the initial draw to the streets). Laura felt that her parents and friends would shun and disown her if they found out about her morphine dependency, as she had an older sister who had gone through a similar dependency and it had been a painful experience for her parents. She worried about being judged, about the stigma

associated with drug use, about being singled out as "different" or "tainted" (Goffman, 1963) as compared to her other siblings.

According to Laura, what kept her on the streets now was not her ex-boyfriend or her street friends (although this latter piece had become more prominent) but her addiction. While she described enjoying the effect of the drugs she was also starting to recognize that it constrained her life in a way that her days were becoming more organized around its acquisition and maintenance and her drug use was affecting her relationships with her family and old school friends negatively. Acquiring her drugs became an activity that defined and organized her days and she toyed with the idea of getting help and trying to quit.

During the initial few months of the study Laura kept up the illusion of leading this "double life" and appearing to have more control over her drug use, she attended school part-time and held down a part-time job.

> I am not the kind of person who gets into this stuff. I've never partied a lot. I am responsible, mature, always held down a job, gone to school. I warn others not to try it [morphine] because the high is so good, the endorphin release so powerful, I know they'd get hooked like me.

She admitted, though, that the guilt of leading this double life and lying to her parents and school friends about her continued dependency on morphine was too much for her to bear. She did eventually seek addiction treatment and support and revealed her dependency to her parents and friends.

Laura described feeling that the dangers on the street were ever-present. She described the dangers of sleeping outside and stated that she "got punched in the head the other day by a 'crackhead' who stole my money." She also recounted how earlier in the week she woke up to "some homeless dude [who] had snuggled up to me while I was sleeping and stole my dog's blanket." Laura was also very scared of the police and relayed how she and her friends were frequently searched by them. "I'm scared of the cops. I've never sold drugs or done anything really bad but from all the stories people have told me I'm really scared." Laura described life on the streets as "dangerous," that "there is danger everywhere. People will say it's not dangerous but it is." Laura blames the move from rural to urban life as the catalyst for her street involvement and drug use. This conviction is what has led her to conclude that when she is ready to have children, she will move to the country in order to decrease this risk.

Daniel (pseudonym) concurred with Laura's analysis that city life posed more dangers than living in rural communities. Daniel, a seventeen year-old, originally from a small town outside of Ottawa where he lived with his mother and who was sent to live with his father in the city when he was fifteen, felt that there were more opportunities to use more dangerous and addictive drugs in the city. His perception was that his move to the city perpetuated his drug use. He explained that after he moved to the city, he moved beyond simple experimentation with drugs (marijuana, ecstasy) and began to use more lethal drugs with more regularity (daily crack use). He believed that drugs were more readily available in the city and that it was easier to get to the drugs you wanted. He described the simple freedom of having public transportation in the city

and how it impacted his choices. "With a bus pass you can do more [drugs, partying] in the city than in the country, and get into more trouble." Drugs represented a risk factor that he blamed for "getting off track," from being evicted from his family home, estranged from them, and dropping out of school. By the end of the study he had removed himself from "the life" downtown (secured an apartment, full-time job, quit drugs) and vowed to "live the straight and narrow." The major threat he perceived was the availability of highly addictive drugs downtown.

Similarly, Lucy (pseudonym), a sixteen year-old from downtown Ottawa, reflected that the largest dangers she faces are due to her being a young woman and her dependency on morphine. Lucy had a unique outlook on the dangers of street life which revolved around maintaining her injection drug use. This articulate young woman described how older men often preyed on her through her drug dependency by "constantly trying to give you free dope for sex." She stated that the "two greatest risks on the street are being a young woman and being street involved and addicted to substances."

> Being a young woman, men are always after you for sex, trying to pick you up, offering you loaded needles to sleep with them, or they'll say they'll give you free drugs for a month if you sleep with them. Secondly, being a substance user means it's dangerous to get the drugs you need and use them safely. I try to go to Sheph's [large adult shelter] to buy my drugs but guys always stop us [her and her boyfriend], they threaten to beat up my boyfriend because they say 'why are you getting a young girl hooked on dope', they try to deny me access to the drugs I need.

Having a drug dependency was, according to Lucy, another element that put her at greater risk, since, "it's dangerous to get the drugs you need and use them safely." She outlined that she was dependent on her boyfriend to acquire her drugs because many of the dealers would not sell to her unless she would have sex with them. However, when her boyfriend would go to buy their opiates, these same dealers would want to "beat him up" and would accuse him of "getting her hooked on dope." Lucy was very concerned about maintaining her "$20 a day habit" and in fact stated that her "whole day is revolved around how you are going to make the money for your habit so that you don't get sick from not maintaining your use and using clean 'gear' [instruments]."

Drug use was a common theme in relation to risk perception and spanned a spectrum of choices and risk perceptions related to this binary of freedom and dependence which has been described by other authors (Bellot, 2001). While several youth described the feeling of freedom they experienced while using, the downside was the constant preoccupation with the hunt for the "next hit." The constant need to acquire and use constrained, dominated, and ruled their everyday activities, and the circle of relationships they needed to maintain for access. One-third of the participants used (or had used) daily hard drugs (often morphine) and described this push-pull phenomenon. Even those youth that were heavily invested in maintaining their drug use (e.g. Lucy, Ingrid, Tyler (pseudonyms)) described the constraints of using and alluded to this paradox of freedom/dependence and their ambivalence surrounding their continued use. Tyler who purported to be a "hard core addict" and to "using anything [drugs] he could get his hands on", also admitted that his "crack and dope use was making him sick and he was hoping to get

off crack and get into more pot [marijuana] like I used to use, because I am tired of feeling sick all the time."

These youth were also not oblivious to the potential harms implicit in their continued use (e.g. poor health, risk of STIs, criminalization, disinhibition – diminished capacity to perceive threats), and proximity to potential predators. Participants' responses to drug use and risk were diverse, varied, and weighted with ambivalence. While some, like Annie, had made changes to minimize their perception of the harmful effects of using (e.g. losing too much weight, getting sick) by choosing softer and arguably less harmful drugs (marijuana, alcohol), others chose abstinence (Daniel), and yet other participants felt a certain responsibility to maintain their drug use in the hopes of not getting sick (Laura and Lucy). There were also perceived risks around access to drugs, and ensuring drug quality and clean instruments for administration. Lastly, there was a gendered dimension to drug use and risk perception. Young women revealed that sexual victimization was often implicit in drug use and their access to substances. This is particularly relevant as young women are over-represented in the homeless youth population in Ottawa (57%) (Bourns & Meredith, 2008: 9), as compared to national studies which find a ratio of 2:1, males to females, in homeless youth populations (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). The responsibilization of risk, in particular with regard to participants drug use, was a theme that continued to emerge and will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Six. This paradox of freedom/dependence runs undercurrent all these experiences of drug use and risk.

While there were common elements to their risk perception on the streets (e.g. being robbed, assaulted) youth's worries about them varied greatly. While some youth accepted them as part of street life and appeared to downplay them, others felt generally threatened and took active steps to minimize the ones they could. While harmful risks tended to appear as events and experiences that were random and beyond their control, as exemplified by Annie's statement that she worries a "random 'crackhead' will beat me up"; positive risks were seen as opportunities to be taken by participants in which they were active agents in shaping and deciding how much risk-taking was acceptable. These opportunistic risks are sometimes what led youth to the street in the first place. The draw to the streets, for some, was described as a voluntary risk-taking action to find excitement and freedom. As such, not all experiences on the street were described as harmful. Many youth described being drawn to street life because it was "exciting, thrilling, addictive and adventurous" (Annie) and there was a sense of belonging (pseudonyms: Shane, Michelle, Olivia). For at least half the participants, they described street life as evoking feelings of freedom. Travelling across the country, by hitchhiking, hopping trains, and sleeping outside with friends, was described as an expression of that freedom. According to Annie, who like many youth liked to hitchhike around the country, "travelling is like crack, once you start it's hard to stop". The next section will focus on participants who viewed risk in a more positive light, engaged in active risk-taking, and in general did not feel threatened or particularly victimized by street life dangers.

2.2 Risk-Takers – Paradox of Excitement/Boredom

Risk-taking to feel alive, to find freedom and excitement was a common element in some youth narratives, and was elucidated earlier, has been described by some authors as a default rite of passage (Jeffrey, 2005; LeBreton, 1991, 2003) for youth in the absence of traditional rites of passage to adulthood (d'Allondans, 2005). Ingrid's (pseudonym) story reveals that the initial draw to the streets was because she found her family home in a small town too restrictive and "boring" and she wanted to "experience life". This notion fits in well with anthropological ideas of risk as rites of passage. Ingrid described feeling stuck, constrained in her childhood life and needing to feel alive and experience life. Unfortunately, this feeling persisted into adulthood once she left the streets and triggered several relapses that kept her entrenched in street life.

2.2.1 Vignette of Ingrid

Ingrid was seventeen years-old at the beginning of the study and was originally from a francophone community just outside of Ottawa. Beginning at age twelve, she was repeatedly kicked out of her family home on the weekends for not adhering to her parents rules (e.g. coming home for curfew or after school on time), jokingly calling herself a "weekend warrior."

> I started coming downtown on the weekends when I was twelve, I was a real
> "weekend warrior". My parents would kick me out for not listening to them, or for

not coming home for curfew or after school on time. I would hitch downtown on the weekends with my 'Barbie' knapsack full of crack and coke to sell. I started to use but I never got caught because I stayed outside on weekends, under the bridges and in parks with older friends I had made and who supplied me. And then during the week I went home and to school so CAS [Children's Aid Society] was never contacted. I remember hitchhiking downtown and the cops would stop me and ask me my name and my age so I would make it up and tell them a date of birth for a 16 year old and would know the right year to say, and I was tall enough that I could pass for a 16 year old even though I was only 12 or 13.

On the weekends she would come downtown and sleep under bridges and in parks with groups of older friends she made. Eventually, through these contacts, she began to sell crack and coke out of her Barbie knapsack on the weekends. During the week she would return to her parents' home to attend school so child protection authorities were never notified. She had never been caught for dealing drugs because she was not suspected of doing so at such a young age. For Ingrid, this time did not represent one of danger but of opportunity. She started to use drugs but did not feel it was because she was pressured to or because she used to sell them. After one to two years of this transient lifestyle she made the full-time move to the streets but never stayed in shelters.

Looking back on this period of her life, Ingrid reflected that she never felt threatened or at risk when she was on the streets. Her risk assessment was that her 'new friends' were there to protect her and look out for her but she admitted that she never felt any looming threats. The only worries she recalls were being caught by the police or child welfare authorities because of her age and for dealing drugs.

> When I was twelve I didn't want to follow the rules. I came downtown. People downtown would get me high but they also protected me. No one ever touched me, took advantage of me. My friends back home worried about me, told me they thought I was going to get killed. But I didn't feel unsafe.

She admitted that living this life "did not feel risky at that time" and that even though she "witnessed crazy shit" and believed she "should be dead", she responded to these realizations with the sentiment "I loved and still love being on the street." At the beginning of the study, Ingrid was renting a one bedroom apartment with her boyfriend and six other youth – a decision she took because her good friend and previous boyfriend had been murdered on the streets earlier that year. Despite this stark reality, by the mid-point of the study, she reflected on how much she missed this part of her more entrenched street life. "Even now I miss the freedom of being on the streets with my knapsack and being able to take off at a moment's notice – to Montreal or out West… Now I have an apartment and responsibilities and I need to worry about paying the rent."

A few months later Ingrid left street life entirely for a variety of reasons: she had been evicted, she was tired of her addiction ruling her life, her boyfriend had assault charges that restricted him (legally) from living in the downtown core. And a traumatic event in the previous year (i.e. the murder of her ex-boyfriend) had significantly changed her ideas of risk on the streets. Her and her new boyfriend made the big decision to move to her parents' home in the country where she had not lived for over three years. Shortly thereafter, she secured a full-time service job. Speaking on the telephone with her one night she revealed that she found her new life exceedingly boring. "It sucks. I have to be at work at 8am and I work 'til 6pm – it's so boring.

I miss 'the life.' I would give it all up to go back." After using morphine daily for several years, to the point where she would have to inject increasingly greater amounts to get high, and then deciding to quit and going through a very painful withdrawal process that she described as akin to "my insides tearing apart my skin," she admitted that "the worst thing is I just want to give up everything to go back."

Ingrid's vignette demonstrates the shifting nature of risk perception which informs her risk consciousness. Upon reflection of her younger more street entrenched life she realized some of the dangers that were lurking. Significant events in her life, such as the murder of her boyfriend under a bridge where they slept, also reinforces this risk perception and in fact was pivotal in her decision to leave street life and stop using drugs, at least for a time. By the end of the study, her longing for the freedom, excitement, and lack of responsibility (i.e. normative conceptualizations of living a "normal" life), and her urge to use drugs became too great and she returned to the streets. Boredom and the monotony of her new life, she admitted, became a real trigger for her wanting to return to street life.

> I need to get out of this small town. I do the same shit every day. I feel like I am going insane, but on the bright side I am making decent money... Life is so boring. I work from 8 am 'til 6 pm. I miss 'the life' and the freedom to just pick and up and go whenever I want to.

While her awareness of danger had grown, and her risk perceptions had changed in response to this consciousness, she was still drawn to street life and drug use. As such, perceptions of risk are not always rational ones. Choosing to live a certain lifestyle in the face of harmful

consequences (e.g. relapsing, acquiring Hepatitis C, violence, poverty) is not always rational, and the draw of liberation from the ordinary cannot be denied.

Many youth echoed these sentiments. Not being constrained by responsibilities and being able to pick up on a whim, sleep outside, hitchhike with friends, were common experiences and represented the exciting and experimental sides to street life. For example, Shane, aged seventeen at the beginning of the study, had hopped trains from Northern to Southern Ontario, and had hitchhiked from coast to coast. He felt the most dangerous element to hopping trains and hitchhiking was keeping warm and fed. He stated he liked having no responsibilities and no constraints on his movements, summed up by: "I can do what I want, when I want, where I want." He vowed never to stay in shelters because "everyone is too busy ripping everyone else off. I would rather sleep outside with people I trust." The choice to sleep outdoors with friends and travel the country represented opportunity. These youth embraced a certain kind of lifestyle which they believed was founded on freedom, excitement and the ability to experiment with different ways of living. Also, the sense of shared trust with others that Shane described was another element to this "choice" that bound youth together. In this sense, certain risks were seen as pathways to experimentation and liberation, promoting their self-actualization.

Eight of the eighteen participants revealed that one of the reasons they were drawn to life on the streets was the excitement and unpredictability, namely, the risks that street life presented. They also felt that they would have more control over their lives and ultimately power over choices. A few youth disclosed that the draw to the streets was precisely because their previous lives were

rule-bound, constraining, and often boring, and because they felt there was an expectation that they live a so-called 'normal' life in which they themselves did not feel that normal. Conversely, and surprisingly, several youth described that once they had been homeless for awhile and the initial thrill wore off, they began to find it monotonous and became tired of worrying about their daily survival (i.e. where they would eat, sleep). In this sense, boredom, both prior to becoming homeless and once homeless, was a trigger for risk-taking, especially for drug use for several participants.

Michelle's (pseudonym) experience reveals that the days on the street were long and dull. During the day she wandered the downtown core "killing time" until the shelter doors opened again. A seventeen year-old from Ottawa, she always felt that she did not "fit in" at school. "I was cutting class all the time and hiding in the bathroom. I had no friends. I would look in the mirror and think I'm ugly and boring why would anyone want to be around me?" Michelle blamed her inability to attend school on a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder and her solitude and perceived ostracization. After being sent to live with her grandparents for a year she eventually just stopped going to school and her father told her she had to return to school or leave their home. She hit the streets. Michelle complained of the unrelenting boredom on the streets. "The days are so boring and long. I leave the shelter in the morning, walk around downtown for 6 hours looking for work and go to the drop-in for lunch. All I do is hang out…" A few months later, this same boredom drew her into a crowd that partied a lot, using alcohol and ecstasy. Upon reflecting on street life and this boredom, she concluded it was the primary cause for all the "drama downtown." She felt that her street friends were always "backstabbing each other or telling one another they owe them money and what starts out as $10 turns into

owing $400… This is what is at the root of most problems downtown." She blamed boredom for her personal misfortunes of getting into a "bad crowd" and "using too many drugs," but also for encouraging harmful interpersonal dynamics that ruined friendships and promoted violence.

For many youth, the risks they perceived as most imminent and relevant, that Michelle attests to, were the risks implicit in relationships with their peers. This finding supports Tyler's (2007) research into social networks and victimization as outlined in Chapter One, but this examination of victimization stemming from peer networks is often absent in discourses on risk and homeless youth. Tyler found that while peer networks provided closeness and a sense of belonging they also introduced youth to risky behaviours, and generated high levels of conflict and "drama," which can be victimizing and put them at greater risk for future victimization (2007: 682). Observations of this study support these kinds of experiences of victimization among peer networks, and they will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter.

Similarly, Olivia had been homeless for roughly two years. Her experience on the streets mirrors these two polarities of boredom and excitement that has been characterized by others (Bellot, 2001). At times she loved the freedom of being on the streets stating: "everyone always feels so sorry for homeless youth when they see us panning but you know what, we have it really good, we are well taken care of." But by the mid-point of the study she described the monotony of street life as a "constant waiting game." For example, she described spending long days pan-handling, waiting for drop-in centres to open, and trying to find a safe place to sleep outside. Eventually, this routine propelled her to search for more excitement and freedom and she

decided to hitchhike out West. Friends she made in British Colombia encouraged her to join the carnival because she would be well-paid, well-fed, and well-traveled. She worked for the carnival for three months but was sorely disappointed: "it sounded too good to be true and it was." Olivia described exploitative work conditions: standing for 12 hours with no food, no water, and verbal abuse by her employer. The worst condition she revealed of the job was that she was only permitted to stay with the carnival and return to Ontario if she continued to have sex with her employer. "My boss said if I wanted to stay with them [the carnival] I had to sleep with him. So I did." After she returned to Ottawa and had been back on the streets for several months she again became very tired and bored of street life. She became pregnant, and began looking for a place to rent and applied to return to school. Eventually, she secured an apartment in subsidized housing and had her baby.

In this case, boredom was both a trigger for excitement (traveling with the carnival) and normalcy (wanting to get off the streets). Street life and the search for excitement also represented non-conformity, choosing a path different from the norm. However, Olivia's description of the monotony of street life, victimizing events, and her unexpected pregnancy led her to leave living on the streets and to mobilize the resources to do so. Exiting the streets also represented a break from this different and "deviant" path and led her to choose a more "normal" and conformist one for her and her baby. These experiences also affected her risk perception based on her changing desires and needs. Her pregnancy affected her risk perception with regard to her drug use. Prior drug use with friends was a great escape and brought excitement, once pregnant, she made the decision to quit using all drugs. She did not want her baby to be apprehended by child welfare authorities and stated "my only vice now is cigarettes. I want this

baby to be as healthy as he can be." This boredom/excitement paradox also affected her perceptions of risk. In her earlier experiences boredom triggered her desire to try new things, such as hitchhiking, sleeping outside, experimenting with different drugs (although there was a limit to what she would try). But some risks that were taken engendered negative consequences, such as sexual victimization and exploitation, and altered her perception of risks. Risks also had certain consequences for the future. Deciding to have and raise her baby also meant that she conform to expectations regarding raising children so that he would not be apprehended. She ensured she had housing, took parenting courses, attended her pre and postnatal appointments, adhered to medical advice (e.g. nutritional advice), to meet the expectations of both the child welfare authorities and other professionals she came into contact with who monitored her pregnancy and parenting habits.

There was a perception of street life that ranged from dangerous to exciting to boring, and these perceptions shifted over time and within individuals. These perceptions all affected the kinds of risks youth. Boredom was often a trigger for engaging in voluntary risk-taking, whether it was engaging in volatile relationships, experimenting with more harmful drugs, or joining a carnival. Several youth also revealed that street life was no more dangerous than the situations from which they left, however, the context of the dangers was quite different. While youth described violent and chaotic family situations with people they knew, dangers on the street appeared more random, less predictable. Youth worried somewhat about being randomly robbed or assaulted but also described this as somewhat an expectation of street life and shared similar stories which, to some degree, appeared to glorify street life. Participant experiences were akin to rites of passage and acceptance of the "way things are" on the streets. Some risks were seen as

opportunities to create excitement and to experiment with different ways of living, and youth often described these in terms of the autonomy they were seeking, by exerting their personal power over decisions in their identity quests, that in their previous lives felt constrained. Echoing findings of Parazelli's (1997, 1999) work, the streets for many youth constitute a place of marginalized socialization, utilizing the streets as transitional spaces that provides the forum to experiment, and continuously reconstitute their identities, what Parazelli describes as "recomposition identitaire". This phenomenon will be elaborated more clearly in the following chapter as it relates to identity construction.

Luke's (pseudonym) vignette highlights this penchant for risk-taking, "living the life," in the search for experimentation, self-discovery and the construction of his identity. Ironically, Luke highlighted that the longer he remained involved in street life the greater the risks he reported taking, although not when it came to his drug use.

2.2.2 Vignette of Luke

Luke was seventeen years-old when I first met him at a drop-in centre downtown. He was staying at a youth shelter but was actively looking for housing. He stated that his mother locked him out of the house four months earlier because she caught him looking at pornography on the computer and because he liked to wear women's clothing which she could not tolerate. He

described his mother as a "poor disability girl," because she was reliant on the provincial disability program for income assistance for as long time as he could remember. He stated that his father was an engineer and held very conservative views. He also described his parents' relationship as very abusive, and relayed that one time his father had thrown his mother down a flight of stairs that caused her to miscarry. His father left their home when he was a baby, re-married and started another family. He has not kept in contact with his mother, father, two sisters, or his other half-siblings. He stated that he does not worry about running into them because they never come downtown. During our first encounter, Luke described how he had recently stopped injecting drugs and was now only doing "chemicals and pot" because he would become suicidal when he was withdrawing from heroin.

Luke was difficult to engage and build rapport with and only offered up insights when asked direct questions. Over the course of the two years he moved in and out of different living arrangements, including private and subsidized apartments, shelters, and sleeping outside. After spending a few months in the shelters, he found an apartment to share in the private market, but then moved into his own subsidized apartment when he became eligible, however, he was evicted because of partying and noise complaints. He also continued to attend a school program part-time in a drop-in centre throughout the study. Near the end of the study, he reported that he had just been evicted from his last apartment that he shared with friends, and his girlfriend (of one and a half years) who he described as "keeping him straight" from injecting drugs had just broken up with him. He revealed that his urge to use again was strong, and he had even bought "the dope" the day before but decided against using it, fearful that he would become "hooked" again.

When asked whether his perception of risk had changed over the years of living on and off the streets, he replied that all his experiences only made him "tougher". He stated that the worst and most frightening thing that had happened to him, and what represented the greatest risk on the streets was being stabbed and robbed.

> I got stabbed last year by a bunch of Somalis who then stole my weed. I did not bother getting it [the wound] checked [medically], but I did clean it every day. I can't trust the police because they arrested me a few months ago for painting my face as part of the Juggaloes [group affiliation in Ottawa].

Ironically, he reflected on this experience and explained that the assault made him "tougher." He felt that it made him learn how to stand up for himself and he denied being concerned about its potential re-occurrence.

Luke revealed that the second biggest risk he faced was the stigma of being identified as a street youth: "all those conservative, judgemental fuckers telling you to 'get a job', that you are a 'street bum'". He stated that he was constantly confronted with conservative views about how youth like him were perceived and judged by others on the street and were often harassed on the streets. And lastly, the third biggest risk he faced was being introduced to and exposed to drugs on the street, and the subsequent dependency that is created. He revealed that even though he quit injecting two years ago he still had urges and keeps "all the rigs [instruments for injecting]" in his room just in case he relapses. He also admitted that he is a very private person and does

not discuss personal issues with any front-line workers, either the victimization, his drug use, or relationship problems.

Luke revealed that his identity is very much tied up in his identification with non-conformist and "deviant" activities. He says that at night he goes on "mayhem missions" and becomes a "little bastard," destroying public property in parks (e.g. picnic tables), hanging off of traffic lights, stealing bikes and throwing them off bridges, graffiti-ing public places. He embraces this "rebellion against authority, total anarchy." He is unequivocal in his presentation of himself as rebelling against conformity, and states that he "hates normal." He described his family as very "conservative and preppy" (exemplified by his father's profession as an engineer) and stated that he thinks of himself as a "crazy motherfucker" who likes to "freak people out," that this gives him a rush.

Indeed, Luke's story highlights both the sensational elements of high-risk activities (hanging off of street lights, deviant activities – robbing, destroying property) and it's generation of adrenalin and excitement, and his penchant for engaging in high-risk activities in order to feel that he exists, is alive and is "not normal". Luke's tag (his graffiti signature) – "not real" - is emblematic of this feeling, explaining that this tag represents that "everything in life is a joke." This symbolizes again the anthropological insights related to youth using conduits of risk in order to feel alive in the absence of traditional rites of passage (Jeffrey, 2005; LeBreton, 1991, 2003). In rebelling against societies conservative notions of "safety at all costs" (Colombo, 2008; Furedi, 2006), youth are pushing the envelope of their existence in order to feel alive

precisely because youth like Luke feel that "everything is a joke" and nothing feels real, and they want to rebel against more normative views. In order to feel alive, youth are pushing the bounds of their existence through active risk-taking which is symbolized in deviant or non-conformist acts (i.e. destroying public property, stealing, graffiti, experimenting with drugs) and rebelling against "the establishment."

When asked about how his duration on the streets affects his perception of risks he replied that the more time he spends on the streets the more risks he takes, stating:

> I used to be such a pushover when I first hit the streets, everyone pushed me around, but now I've made my place, people know not to mess with me 'cause I'll fuck them up [beat them up]. Everyone knows not to fuck with me. I'll just beat them with my long-board [skateboard] or my eight-balls [pool balls in a sock].

While Luke portrayed himself as a deviant, mischievous risk-taker by engaging in high-risk activities (e.g. stealing and destroying property, selling and using drugs, violence) and stated that he continues to take greater risks the longer he is part of the streets, what is not as evident from his presentation is that there is a limit to what risks he would take. For instance, while he embraced a certain youth lifestyle associated with non-conformity and rebellion, and "deviant" activities, he also made a conscious choice to stop injecting drugs because of its negative impact on his mental health. While he was invested in his identity and identification in street youth culture, and wanted to prove his authority and gain respect and "street credibility" so others would not "mess with him," he also dreamed about the future and thought about pursuing a career in engineering and he continued to work on his schooling throughout the study. While he

portrayed himself as a risk-taker and certainly engaged in some dangerous activities he wasn't entirely "reckless" though this was the presentation he wanted to project.

There were layers and meanings behind his perceptions of risks, which were complex and evolving, and that were also interactionally constituted. For instance, his perception that the second greatest risk on the streets was the stigma and persecution youth felt from the "public" propelled him further to engage in deviant activities in his construction of himself as "different" and in his belief that "everything in life is a joke". O'Grady and Gaetz (2009) found that urban spaces may be "colonized" by homeless youth while "nurturing and exploring individual and group identities," but that they must negotiate use of these spaces with members of the general public, and agents of social control (the police, security guards), and with other street youth (4). The use of public space in the construction of his identity and the stigma that Luke perceives being identified as a street youth describe these two phenomena of identity construction. While Luke is invested in street life for the opportunities for experimentation and non-conformity it presents, he perceives one of the greatest risks as the judgement that is attached to this image he is wanting to project. This paradox of wanting to be viewed as a mischievous non-conforming risk-taker is double-edged. While he wants to project this image of "total anarchy" he also perceives one of the greatest risks as the stigma that is associated with being identified as a street youth. While he wants to be judged differently he also, to a certain degree, buys into this stereotype by emphasizing his "mayhem missions" in characterizing himself as a "little bastard." These phenomena will be explored further in the following chapter on identity construction.

In sum, youth described a range of harmful experiences including drug addiction, assault and robbery, but most of them minimized the impact of these risks or described them as rites of passage. Many youth reflected on the lack of control they felt they had over risks and the randomness of their nature (e.g. being robbed, assaulted by a "crackhead"). They also framed these experiences within their expectations of street life. It is critical to place these experiences within a framework of risk consciousness that involved violence, neglect, and instability that pre-existed street life, for most of the participants. While some described experiences of being stabbed or beaten up for their drugs, money or possessions, others worried about this possibility particularly because youth share stories and appear to emphasize the more titillating and sensational aspects. For example, Tyler (pseudonym), who was a self-described "drug hustler," described being stabbed earlier in the week for his "weed" [marijuana] but was adamant that he did not seek medical attention or inform the police. Similarly, when Luke was attacked he emphasized that he did not seek medical help nor did he contact the police, even though he knows the attackers. A certain amount of glorification of these harmful experiences and bravado was evident in many of the youth's stories, as is evidenced by Luke's rationale that the assault made him "tougher" and that he learnt to "stand up for himself" so he was not a "pushover" anymore. These stories formed the basis of street life folklore. Violence and threats of violence, getting and using drugs, and for some, engaging in "deviant" acts, intertwined to create elements of danger and excitement that affected and sometimes encouraged youth to take risks and were often related to identities they wanted to project. Stories appeared to be shared among youth in order to minimize the very real dangers that were present, relive the adrenalin-rush that accompanied them, and provide a commonality of experiences to give one another a sense of belonging.

For the more active risk-takers in this study (just over half the sample and this changed and decreased over the course of the study), this camaraderie and social cohesion provided a venue to prove their ferocity, to highlight the kinds of risks they would take, their investment "in the life." And for some participants, like Luke, the streets represent the playground of possibilities that offer escape and a dual reality from what he hates "conservatism and normal." His "tag" symbolized by "not real" is the embodiment of this feeling. His acts of non-conformity, engaging in active risk-taking are a rejection of his past and the representations of his family (i.e. "conservative, preppy, professional"). He lives for the rush, the excitement, and the danger for what opportunities the streets can provide and these are intimately tied to the construction of his identity. However, it is important to note that he does not view these acts as risky but he does view them as "mischievous" and deviant. For him, risk perception is intimately tied to violence (though he downplays threats of violence), stigma, and drug dependency.

At the other end of the spectrum, from the active risk-takers, are the more risk-averse who view the streets as a place of danger. While roughly half the sample (eleven youth) could be viewed as more actively taking risks (e.g. characterized by heavy drug use, sleeping outside, and travelling) and were more heavily street involved at the beginning of the study, the smaller half were more cautious and were more attuned to threats and took precautions to minimize risk (even some of those that were more street-involved). Many participants also became more risk-averse over the course of the study especially in light of new responsibilities, such as parenthood, or in terms of deciding to exit street life, and/or quit using substances. There was a wide scope

of perceptions and responses to risk, and most of these changed over time. This bifurcation of active risk-taking to being risk-averse is somewhat false because participants' perceptions and responses to risk tended to fall along a spectrum, and choices made were often constrained ones (especially in light of structural constraints), and were intimately connected to their past histories and current constructions of their evolving identities. The next section will highlight stories of the more risk-averse, who found being young and homeless daunting and frightening. Indeed, some of the following examples disprove the notion that being raised in an abusive environment increases one's level of tolerance to imminent danger.

2.3 Risk-Averse

Most participants in the study were highly adaptable and needed to take certain risks, and risk perceptions often changed over time with the passage of time and the integration of new experiences particularly in relation to the construction of their identities. While most youth in the sample reported actively taking risks, such as, sleeping outdoors, using drugs, engaging in street activities – squeegee, panhandling, a few reported being quite risk-averse or that they became more so after significant events (pregnancy, sexual assault, negative experiences with drugs, and/or work, and/or relationships…). Annie's story highlighted in the beginning of this chapter shows that while she actively took risks, by hitchhiking across the country, sleeping outdoors, using drugs, her perception of risks shifts over time especially once she decides to obtain housing, suffers health problems, and gains new responsibilities.

Meeting up with Annie two and a half years after our first encounter she reveals that her life has changed drastically from when we first met, and in tandem, so has her perception of risks. After undergoing painful back surgery a year earlier, then getting pregnant, she decided to stop living on the streets (i.e. sleeping outside, hitchhiking) and using drugs, though she continues to remain connected to other street youth and the subsequent services associated with homeless youth. She and her boyfriend (the father of the baby) obtained a subsidized apartment, she decided to go back to school, her partner was working full-time, they did not consume any alcohol or drugs, and they were raising the baby together. She also reconnected with her family, her mother stopped drinking, and she revealed that she even gets along better with her step-father, stating that "even he can see that I've changed my life around" and that now "my mom is like my best friend."

According to Colombo (2008: 287), several participants in her study, particularly those that experienced family relationships based on control appear to be the most malleable to change in the relationship between parent-child. In her study, when the youth began to make "positive" changes in their life and disengage from street life the family began to include them back into theirs. In Annie's case this was also so, but the process of inclusion and acceptance was also expedited by the fact that her mother confronted her own addictions problems. It was the interaction of all of these processes, disengagement from street life, pregnancy, more stability, and especially the arresting of both substance dependencies that allowed Annie and her mother to

rekindle their relationship. All of these changes drastically affected Annie's perception and management of risks.

Annie revealed that until she got herself off the streets she was "oblivious" to the dangers around her, explaining: "like I was aware there were risks being on the street but I didn't think it applied to me." She revealed: "I can't believe I didn't get Hep C or HIV. I mean workers told me not to share needles but I didn't listen. I feel very lucky nothing bad happened." When asked about how she made the changes she replied: "I don't really know how it happened… but it just kinda did… one thing led to another. Y'a know I am almost twenty now so I had to grow up. I couldn't keep living that life."

Other participants also revealed they made significant life changes because of new responsibilities (e.g. having a baby to care for), and/or because they echoed Annie's rationale for having to "grow up." Olivia's and Marie's life changes mirror those of Annie's. Once pregnant they both left living on the streets or in shelters, obtained housing, decided to go back to school, and kept and raised their babies. For other participants who did not have the push of pregnancy some revealed that they became "tired" of street life, the hazards, the instability and the "drama" of downtown life, and the dependence on drugs, and these culminating factors led them to needing a change. These changes drastically affected their perceptions of risk. Not only in very material ways by improving their health (physical and mental), and their physical safety, but also in their associations and in their aspirations for the future. For example, Ingrid who moved to her parent's home in the country partway through the study, Daniel and Michelle obtained their

own apartments, and Laura went to a residential treatment centre to seek help for her drug addiction. All of these youth had been more active risk-takers in the beginning of the study, but when they decided to leave the streets they began to distance themselves from the context in which they had been living by removing themselves physically from the streets, and in so doing they developed a new appreciation for the risks and made changes to their practices (stopped using drugs, started working in the formal economy, found housing).

Karabanow (2004) describes this disenchantment from street life as a process of exiting that involves a multitude of factors. He found that ex-street youth emphasized "the importance of leaving the street lifestyle, particularly the physical location, in order to gain stability" (176). Moreover, he states that:

> when a young person decided to get off the street, he or she begins to imagine the processes of transitioning off the street and into a more stable environment. The most common aspect of this contemplation involved leaving the downtown core and severing ties to the street. At this point, participants conceptualized street culture as a very unhealthy (physically, emotionally, and psychologically) setting (175).

This study found that this process of disengaging and distancing, imagining one's life as different than it's current course is intimately tied to participants perceptions of risk, acceptability and tolerance. Two years later, Ingrid did return to using substances and living on the streets, and Laura and Michelle remain intimately connected with their social networks on the streets, while Daniel has completely left street life and followed the path he chose of the "straight and narrow." Other youth, such as Lucy and Ingrid, continue to engage in high-risk

behaviours (e.g. injection drug use, sleeping outside/squats) and still perceive the dangers to be as daunting but they continue down the path. Risk perception is highly individualized and temporal. Most participants risk perception changed over the course of the study in response to significant events, experiences of victimization, and new responsibilities.

Angela's (pseudonym) story deserves special mention because she was one participant who always felt "at-risk" downtown. She was sixteen years-old when we first met at a youth shelter. She was from a rural area just outside Ottawa and had only stayed at the shelter once before and prior to shelter living never came downtown. She was a high school student and had a part-time retail job, and she lived with her father, mother, and one sibling. She was not familiar with the downtown and found it quite scary and rarely accessed the services downtown where many street youth congregated. When she left the shelter after a short stay (two months) she went to stay at a cousin's place then eventually moved back home. She never came downtown thereafter. Angela echoes many of Laura, Daniel, Lucy, and Annie's sentiments regarding the dangerousness of urban life, however her degree of street involvement was minimal.

Angela left home because of conflict with her father, who she described as physically and emotionally abusive, and described feeling scared and threatened when on her own downtown. Her conclusion was that "people are not safe, especially people downtown". She also described being offered drugs by older men and a general feeling of being preyed upon by older men in the downtown core. "Yeah, an older guy the other day at the bus stop in front of the YMCA asked

me to go back to his room 'smoke weed and hang out'. I told him that anything you want to do that's involved in hanging out is illegal 'cause I'm only 16".

Eventually, Angela returned home after reconciling with her family. While Angela had experimented with drugs (marijuana, ecstasy) in her home town with school friends she did not consume drugs when she stayed downtown even though she had been offered several times. She stated that "it's just too scary taking drugs from people you don't know… You know they are going to want something in return so I just say no and walk away."   Angela reported that she never felt completely comfortable or safe in the city, even in the shelter she felt that other residents were often looking for fights. She revealed that she felt relieved to be leaving when she moved back to her small town.

Participants' responses to their perceptions of risks were varied, individual, complex, and shifted over time. While several youth at least initially downplayed the risks on the streets (Tyler, Luke, Shane, Olivia, Ingrid) most participants revealed that they engaged in active strategies to protect themselves and minimize the potential of harmful consequences. Many youth also described the "positive" risks that street life offered, for instance, identity and role experimentation, camaraderie and a sense of belonging that they felt with other youth on the streets that they had not experienced previously. The strategies youth described either to reduce perceived harm, or increase opportunities, will be discussed in the following section.

3. Strategies Employed to Reduce or Increase Risk

The participants that were more street involved revealed several practices that they engaged in to reduce the negative risks they perceived, or the strategies they employed to increase the positive risks they associated with homelessness. Sleeping outside, the importance of peer networks, and carrying a weapon and/or being vigilant about protecting oneself or others, represent the main tenets of self-protection strategies and opportunity seeking and will be discussed below.

3.1 Sleeping Outside

Over half the youth in the sample (eleven) experimented with sleeping outside during the course of the study and described this, more or less, as a positive risk that they embraced because of the amount of freedom it symbolized. Most reported that they enjoyed the freedom of sleeping outside with friends, and that they felt safer and less constrained than staying in a shelter. All the youth that slept outside complained that shelter life was more constrained, that they disliked following the rules of the shelter, that they often felt that the staff were trying to control them, and that the dynamics of this form of group living often encouraged in-fighting, and in particular, their things being stolen or being assaulted. However, youth were not oblivious to the risks of

sleeping outside, but they did downplay them or portray them as integral to the paradoxical thrill and danger of sleeping outdoors. Annie worried that "a random 'crackhead' will stab me or rob me. I had my sleeping bag stolen the other day but I wasn't hurt."

One of the methods youth employed was a "safety in numbers" approach. All of the youth who slept on the streets emphasized the importance of sleeping in a group or in pairs with people whom they trusted. Sometimes circumstances did not permit them to sleep in groups, particularly when they travelled. Female participants who described sleeping alone as "scary at first" (this generally occurred when they were in a new setting) always made sure they had a weapon to protect themselves in case they were attacked. The female participants also employed the buddy system in their hitchhiking experiences. Annie, who had hitchhiked to Alberta with a girlfriend with whom she was supposed to return to Ontario, decided to purchase a plane ticket back to Ottawa because this friend had abandoned her. A male youth teased her about not being brave enough to hitchhike back on her own but Annie was adamant that it was not safe on her own: "it's too dangerous to hitchhike back home alone. I've had bad experiences with guys always coming onto you. I always make sure I have a weapon. I had bear mace but I couldn't take it back on the plane with me."

Sleeping outside was generally described as appealing during the warmer months but not in the winter. Most youth sought refuge indoors in the colder months or would travel out West until the Spring. Annie stated that "when it starts to snow I have to look for a place to keep warm [squat]… I worry about freezing to death." The importance of knowing where to sleep outside

also predominated. Several youth complained of being hassled by police, other youth, or older homeless people when they slept outside in more visible places (e.g. under bridges). Many youth had places that they felt they had "first dibs on."   This meant that they had found the site first and it was known that this was their territory and only they could decide who slept there and who could not. Many arguments ensued over this form of territoriality, but the prevailing cultural norm was that one had to be accepted by the original member in order to be granted the right to sleep there. At the beginning of the study Olivia loved the "freedom" of sleeping outside. "Even if I had my own place I think I would still sleep outside – I like sleeping outdoors. Each day I like not knowing where I am going to end up." But she did not feel safe doing it alone, "it's too dangerous and lonely." She had been sleeping under a bridge with a friend but was evicted because another youth had claimed to have "found" the place first and had "dibs on it." She was told by her male friend she needed to respect this decision. Olivia felt she was being unfairly singled out because her friend was allowed to stay and she was not. Moreover, her perception was that she was not well liked by the rest of the group. She decided to try and get a bed at the shelter even though she did not want to. "They [shelter staff] treat us like 'adopted children,' always telling us what to do. But I would never sleep outside alone."

Over the course of the research, youth also chose different places to sleep outside, basing their decisions not only on their peer networks, but also on the harassment they experienced. Shane, Annie, and Olivia revealed that they strategically left the common areas to sleep, for example under the bridges downtown, because of police harassment and instead preferred to sleep "down at the locks." This area is National Capital Commission (NCC) land where boats pass through a lock system to move between the Rideau Canal and the Ottawa River. It is federal crown land

and the police do not have any authority over this area, thus they have no power to remove people. According to Annie, sleeping under the bridges meant that the "cops would wake us up at 3 am and threaten to throw our things in the water… Cops leave you alone at the locks because its NCC land and they have no authority."

Six of the youth also revealed that the freedom of sleeping outdoors enabled them to "party" as much as they wanted, not constrained by curfews or shelter intoxication policies. This "freedom" meant that they could use substances as much as they wanted and with people they wanted to be with. Sleeping outdoors was generally described as a strategy, that while it posed certain risks, such as increased chance of assault or theft, it also gave youth more control over their activities and experiment with different forms of group and/or pair living, even if these choices were constrained ones. The next section will highlight some of the important strategies in relation to risk with regards to peer networks.

3.2 Peer Networks

Belonging to a peer network had a huge impact on youth's perceptions of risk and their practices on the street, particularly so for the more street-involved participants. Many espoused the belief that belonging to a group was paramount to survival and made street living more enjoyable in general because of the kind of support they derived from their peers but also because of the kinds

of opportunities for experimentation that were presented. Not only was the importance of belonging to a group imperative to knowing the best and safest places to sleep, but it was commonly believed that the group rallied around its members when under threat or when one became a victim. Retribution was a common theme among youth. Shane led an entrenched street life, squeegee-ing and sleeping outside with friends, and hitchhiking out West when winter came. He described the ingrained random violence of street life:

> Yeah, it was a cheap shot. I was beaten up the other day near Major Hill's park by 2 'gangsta' guys while I was squeegee-ing. But I came back with my gang and we beat up the other 2 guys… No cops came… When one of you goes down - you all go up… If one of you get's 'jacked' [assaulted] then you all go as a group…

Belonging to a peer group was a strategy youth also employed to decrease the amount of loneliness or anomie they experienced. Olivia stated, "I miss my friends when I am staying at the shelter, that is why I decided to stay outside and sleep outdoors [with them]. Then we can do whatever and sleep wherever we want." Similar to findings from Haldenby et al. (2007) and Tyler (2007) studies, these social networks provided closeness and a sense of belonging, and often protection from potential victimizers. Many youth's previous lives, such as Michelle testified to earlier, were marked by extreme loneliness, awkwardness, and disconnection from others. Many described childhoods marked by instability and alienation from others. Having a peer network gave youth a 'home,' a sense of belonging that was rooted in their relationships with other youth, and also allowed them to experiment with different ways of living and exposed them to different kinds of activities (i.e. drug use, travelling, squeegee-ing, pandhandling). The importance of peer affiliation will be expanded upon further in the next chapter with regard to identity formation, and in particular how, paradoxically, it is linked to both survival and

victimization.   The next section will examine participants' strategies in response to their perceptions and experiences of threats of violence.

4. Threats of Violence and Risk Management: Self-Protection and Hyper-Vigilance

Most youth admitted that they carried weapons for their protection, especially those youth whose lives were more street-entrenched and who had experienced a certain amount of violence already (e.g. Luke, Tyler, Shane, Annie, Olivia). They revealed that they lived in an arena where threats were ever-present, though they would often minimize these risks by laughing them off or sensationalizing them to their friends. Most youth carried obvious weapons such as knives, but many carried multi-purpose weapons such as crowbars, chains, and long metal instruments. Tyler, a self-proclaimed "drug hustler", carried a long fire poker stick for protection which he slid down the leg of his pants and made sure to hide it from the workers in drop-in centres so he could continue to access services. Luke had several weapons that were multi-purposed, he kept eight balls (from a pool table) in a sock and handcuffs in his bag. He also mentioned threatening others with his "longboard" (a long skateboard) if he felt he was going to be robbed. Annie carried bear mace.   Youth were creative about what weapons constituted a self-protection strategy and how it was tied to their identity on the streets that they wanted to project.

While most youth carried weapons of some sort, they knew they had to hide them from workers if they wanted to access services in drop-in centres or shelters. More than half the sample revealed that they carried weapons to ward off imminent threats, and stated that these "weapons" served many purposes. For example, Olivia, a seventeen year-old who had been staying at a shelter before sleeping on the streets, was barred from the shelter (at least for a short time) because staff found a crowbar in her room. Olivia revealed that she needed the weapon to gain acceptance into a group. In order to become a member, she had to prove she would carry a weapon and she was given the challenge of breaking into a car to prove her loyalty.

Weapons were not the only self-protection strategy that youth identified. Participants also revealed that they had to be on constant alert. They endorsed a notion of needing to be hyper-vigilant. Being on guard to any potential threats was a method youth employed to protect themselves from being harmed, however, this was internalized as a norm, or an expectation of street life. While several youth admitted that the threats of violence were ever-present they also projected an image of fearlessness (e.g. Luke, Tyler, Shane, Annie), this paradox or cognitive dissonance has been noted by other authors (Kipke et al., 1997). While the weapons formed the most obvious part of this strategy, the second was more embryonic, and could be encapsulated as being constantly mentally alert to any potential dangers. Being hyper-vigilant, both physically and emotionally, is already a well developed self-defense mechanism that is ingrained in most youth with traumatic childhoods (Herman, 1997). So for many youth this was a skill that only had to be enhanced for survival on the streets. Baron et al. (2007) and Karabanow (2004) have both noted how the streets appear to be a place of lawlessness, and many youth, in seeking redress for a perceived harm (e.g. assault, theft, name-calling), often end up as victims. "Street

youth are frequently both perpetrators and victims of street violence. The streets for homeless adolescents shape a constantly changing subculture that is often animated by a dynamic of lawlessness" (Karabanow, 2004: 42).

Tyler, a sixteen year-old who had been living on the streets for the past several years, described how he was always on the alert:

> I crash with my girlfriend in the 'cave room.' There is an unlocked door to this concrete room [in stairwell attached to a parking lot] and I worry about us getting 'jacked' [robbed, assaulted]. I woke up the other morning to two jackasses laughing at me and my girlfriend… I usually wait until she falls asleep... I am a light sleeper… I always wake up if someone opens the door. But I am not worried about being beaten up... I've been beaten to near-death so many times but I am worried about my girlfriend being beaten up... No one has ever laid a finger on her… She's innocent, sweet and immature…

Tyler, in this instance wants to show that he is prepared for any threat and that his main concern with regards to safety on the streets is keeping his girlfriend safe. Part way through this interaction a young man interrupted us and asked Tyler where his girlfriend is because she is selling cigarettes and he wants to purchase some. Tyler became visibly agitated and annoyed by his presence and stated: "I am going to have to beat him… He won't stop hitting on my girlfriend… My friends have been telling me about him." Being on constant alert meant not only being vigilant about physical assaults and theft but also perceived threats to couple relationships, to the kind of "drama" Michelle described with regards to street youth culture. While much of the dangers and retribution described by youth related to violence, theft, and drug use, there was also more nebulous threats with regards to perceived threatened relationships (as in Tyler's case

above) and peer network victimization. These threats were more insidious and more elusive to description but could be observed by the dynamics that played out over time in relation to friendships that waxed and waned, couple formations, and ostracization of certain peers in relation to their peer networks. These dynamics will be described in more depth in the proceeding chapter with respect to the paradoxical position of peer groups providing both protection encouraging survival and engendering fear and victimization.

Youth's stories of street life, such as Luke and Tyler's, often highlighted the importance of being hyper-vigilant as a matter of survival and of earning others respect. The idea of being brave and of being able to withstand any threat at any time often manifested itself in the importance of assaulting others (physically and emotionally) before you became a victim, especially in relation to romantic relationships (e.g. Tyler). The notion of bravado (i.e. proving oneself) and strength was especially apparent in Luke and Tyler's perceptions of risk and identity.

Luke's vignette highlighted that he no longer wanted to be viewed as a pushover, and in fact, he was invested in projecting his identity to others as a "crazy motherfucker" that people on the street knew "not to mess with." He relayed a story of another youth attempting to steal his cell phone and his encounter with him.

> Yeah, that asshole tried to steal it [cell phone] and then pretended that it just went missing in the drop-in. The staff backed up his story but I knew it was him [who tried to steal it]… When I went outside [from the drop-in] I smashed the fuck out of a street sign because I couldn't find it but I knew it was him. I fucked up my hand really good [broke his hand in several places – now in a cast]. He saw it happen. I told him I was going to fuck him up really good with my long-board

[skateboard] if he didn't get it back to me and he just started pukin' [vomiting].
That'll show him not to mess with me. I got it [cell phone] back the next day.

Luke's story shows that he no longer wants to be perceived as a victim and that he does not perceive himself as such because he is aware of imminent threats and acts on these threats before he is victimized. The phenomenon of the victim/victimizer binary is often a false one as youth such as Luke would describe experiences and events in which they could be both a victim and a victimizer in the same instance. While Luke's perception of himself initially as a "pushover" or a victim when he first hit the streets, he now conceives of himself as more powerful, deviant, and describes himself as a person who others fear and that he has gained authority and credibility on the streets.

While Luke is invested in portraying himself as powerful and able to protect himself and his possessions by warding off threats of robbery and assaults because he is a seasoned street youth, Tyler depicts himself more as a protector of others. Tyler's story exemplifies his preoccupation with protecting people that he is close to especially who he perceives as weak and vulnerable from more powerful others who want to exploit them.   When talking about his girlfriend he illustrates that he is always on the lookout for guys who want to take advantage of her. He is more concerned about her potential victimization than his own and is willing to assault someone else in order to avert her victimization.   This also speaks to the gendered dimensions of victimization and risk that has been mentioned by other authors and is central to discourses on risk as they relate to homeless youth (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2009). O'Grady & Gaetz (2009: 5)

emphasize that the streets are a quintessential male-dominated space, and that the "streets are a social and economic arena where men have more power and control than women," thus, women are viewed as vulnerable and requiring protection. Tyler's conceptualizations of risk are intimately tied to this perception. His image of himself as a protector, and his projected complete disregard for his own safety, is intimately tied to society's normative constructs of women as vulnerable and requiring protection, especially from other men on the street, which Tyler perceives as a heightened space of male dominance and aggression.

Though youth often minimized the dangers of street life, almost all the youth, if not all of them did ensure they had weapons to protect themselves. While weapons served a multitude of purposes: protecting oneself, protecting others, belonging to a group, committing criminal acts, they also posed certain risks. If youth were caught concealing weapons by workers there was an immediate result, services were denied, or at a minimum, weapons were confiscated. So for the most part, weapons were hidden and discussed only among one another. While weapons formed the most obvious part of a self-protection strategy, the importance of being hyper-vigilant encompassed the more insidious part. Being on constant alert to physical or emotional attacks formed part of the embryonic culture of street life.

Strategies to reduce imminent harm or increase opportunities on the streets were innumerable, insidious and individualized but some common elements could be found. The practices described above: sleeping outside, peer networks, and threats of violence and self-protection,

represent some of the common threads that youth disclosed about their experiences of risk on the streets.

Risk perception is diverse. It is constantly changing and responding to different needs over time. It is also specific to the individual, who is located in a certain place and in a certain time. One aspect of risk perception that has been ignored by risk theorists is how risk perceptions change in the individual over time, particularly in response to developmental changes over the lifecycle, and in response to significant events (e.g. traumatic events, poor health) and life changes (new responsibilities such as pregnancy and parenthood). Ingrid's experience reflects this phenomenon. Looking back on her initial street life experiences, when she was selling and using drugs on the weekends and sleeping outside at twelve years of age, she is in disbelief that she did not feel more threatened at the time. Now that some threats have in fact materialized, for example the murder of her boyfriend and many years of heroin use, she has witnessed too much violence and sickness to not be aware of the dangers. However, she also exemplifies the irrationality of risk analyses. She chooses street life and accepts the dangers inherent in this decision because she has become addicted to the culture and the drug use. Most of the youth's risk perceptions did change over time with the culmination and integration of street life experiences, whether negative or positive, and often changes in tolerance of risk were due to new responsibilities, such as parenthood, or the impact of significant events, such as poor health or serious threat. For several youth, they also cited their own maturation processes as catalysts for making changes, such as getting off the streets, and this severely impacted their perceptions of risk. This developmental tracing of their perceptions of risk has rarely hitherto been examined.

Voluntary risk-taking was also a prominent theme and forms a second piece to developmental trajectories of adolescence. Examining risk perception and voluntary risk-taking from a developmental milestone perspective, the search for excitement in the face of danger, is an area that has not been examined in relation to a marginalized or "at-risk" group such as homeless youth. Risk taking through active experimentation has not been embedded in a developmental trajectory with regard to self-actualization. For instance, Olivia's boredom of street life affected her decision to join a carnival. In joining the carnival she gambled that she would be well-taken care of and her thirst for excitement and adventure would be quenched. She took this risk to experiment with trying something new, unfortunately she could not predict the exploitation and victimization that occurred. A few months later she became pregnant and this further impacted her decision to leave the streets and she became highly motivated to do so. She could not have predicted a year earlier that she would want so badly to exit the streets. Her perception of risk was severely impacted by the monotony of street life, victimizing experiences, and new unexpected responsibilities she now accepted. Her changing identity coupled with the culmination of victimizing experiences significantly affected her risk assessments and subsequent life decisions. Risk knowledges are not stagnant. They change over time based on developmental challenges and evolving needs and culmination of life experiences, and sometimes they defy rational action.

Risk society theorists expound the belief that risks are everywhere and that there is a heightened anxiety about uncontrollable and invisible dangers. However, this culture of fear, described by

Beck and others, did not appear to dominate in participants' narratives. At least not in the global rational way as it has been described. Most of the youth in this study contextualized dangers in relation to what they knew and to the settings they were leaving, and made their risk assessments using these experiences as their baseline of acceptance of future risks. While there was an awareness that life on the streets was threatening there was also a certain acceptance of these risks, summed up by Annie's expression: "it is no more dangerous or violent than being at home." However, youth were not glib about the dangers that lurked and Annie conceded that "the challenge [on the streets] is to stay alive." In this vein, they took measures to protect themselves and others and were not merely passive victims. Dangers were also localized and were not global in nature. They were conceptualized as threats that could be seen, smelt and felt. This runs counter to the insidious kinds of global risks described by Beck in his constructions of the anxious risk society. Indeed, risks were amenable to the senses.

The threats of street life meant that participants did take steps to minimize risks including being hyper-vigilant, not only in a physical sense but in an emotional way too. The drama of street life was seen by many as harmful and in some cases more worrying than the threat of physical assault. The need to belong to a group for protection from physical and emotional harm and the worry of ostracization was a strong and recurring theme and was a survival strategy youth employed. Harmful risks were seen as ones they had little control over (violence, theft) while positive ones were opportunities worth taking. In the drive to find freedom, excitement or actively experiment, risks were often taken. Thus, not only did youth describe high-risk contexts where inherent dangers lurked they also took risks they perceived as having some benefit. For many youth invested in street life the lifestyle engendered freedom as much as it did fear, this

forms one of the central paradoxes of this research, the excitement-danger and the freedom-dependency paradoxes. Risk perception was altered by processes of individuation, maturation, significant events, and new responsibilities and these were all intimately tied to the construction of their identities. These phenomena will be fleshed out in more depth in the subsequent chapters.

Lastly, there was a pattern of structural constraints that were observed by the researcher over the course of the study that significantly affected participant's perception and management of risks. The "system" and institutions in general were conceptualized by youth as being flawed and constraining, and we argue, as inadvertently promoting a climate of risk-taking. The following section will highlight some of the structural barriers that, we argue, further enhance a climate of risk-taking.

5. Structural Constraints that Promote a Climate of Risk-Taking

Structural constraints abound in the homeless youth population. One of the central hypotheses and arguments of this study is that there are even more barriers for this younger cohort, the sixteen and seventeen year-olds, that may increase their risk-taking behaviours and put them at greater risk for victimization. Ironically however, these issues are rarely examined as separate and distinct from their older counterparts. The "system" (e.g. social assistance, supportive

and/or transitional housing, shelters, child welfare authorities), pose enormous challenges for sixteen and seventeen year-old youth residing in Ontario. One of the most significant barriers for this aggregate, is the narrow eligibility criteria for accessing social assistance, known as Ontario Works (OW), this will be examined below. Thereafter, an examination of the barriers posed by housing systems (private and public) from the perception of participants will be presented.

5.1 Social Assistance

In Ontario, one of the criteria needed for an application for social assistance (in particular income assistance through Ontario Works – OW) is identification (ID), whether this is a driver's license, a health card or some other form of identification. However, many sixteen and seventeen year-olds do not have the requisite ID cards before hitting the streets, and if they do, it is often not long before they are stolen or lost. Among the homeless generally, it is a well accepted fact that IDs are stolen or lost, and this is evidenced by the growth in "ID clinics" run out of many shelters, drop-in centres and community health centres that help people apply for new ID cards. Chris, a seventeen year-old who explained that he has cycled in and out of detention centres for the past several years stated: "I can't get OW. I am not 18 and I have no ID." In the end, he revealed that he commits petty crimes and theft to support himself because he is not eligible for social assistance. The ways of making money on the streets will be further elucidated in the next chapter as it relates to risk and identity construction. The purpose of this section is to highlight the structural barriers that many participants face, however, it is important to note that other

researchers have noted that youth are less likely to be reliant on social assistance than their adult counterparts. Namely, the *Panel Study,* that conducted research in Ottawa as outlined in Chapter One, found that only 48% of male youth, and 36% of female youth were reliant on social assistance for their income (Aubry et al., 2007). However, the *Panel Study* (Aubry et al., 2007) encompassed a wider age group for their study of the youth population. This study found that only four participants were successful in obtaining social assistance when they were sixteen and seventeen years-old, and more participants became reliant on income assistance once they turned eighteen or had children to care for.

Some of the other constraints posed by OW eligibility criteria for sixteen and seventeen year-olds that participants identified included needing to prove that their previous 'home' was unsafe (determined by the OW workers themselves after consulting with the parents or guardians), and that they were enrolled in school full-time. This phenomenon has been noted by other authors. O'Grady & Gaetz (2009) state that "in Toronto, young people under the age of 18 who are not 'legally emancipated' are not eligible to receive welfare benefits unless they are enrolled in school full time and with the permission of their parents" (9). In some instances in the Ottawa system, exceptional circumstances permit a youth to be enrolled in some form of treatment (e.g. addictions or mental health counselling) as an alternative to not being enrolled in school, but it is still within the discretionary authority of the OW worker to refuse or accept this option.

According to Annie, she would not even bother applying for welfare because it was too difficult to obtain. "When you are 16 or 17 you are in limbo… It [OW] is impossible to get… How are

we supposed to manage being in school when we don't have a place to live?" Similarly, roughly half the youth in the sample revealed the same opinion. "I got tired of waiting on the phone for hours for the intake. I called back so many times that eventually I just gave up." Another revealed that when she found out they would have to contact her parents she cancelled her application. "I was really worried they [parents] would find out where I am or share my information with them. I just want to be left alone. I'll make money another way. I can always pan or sell my art" (Claire). Michelle was told that she would have to go back to her old high school but stated: "I just can't go back there. I was cutting class all the time and hiding out in the bathroom. I had no friends. I felt like I was suffocating." Like many other youth she eventually decided to try the alternative school in a drop-in centre so as to be eligible for income assistance. Many youth did not want to be forced to go back to school, or did not want to be reliant on the social assistance system and/or did not want to be told by a social assistance worker what to do, so they decided not to apply. According to O'Grady & Gaetz's (2009), only 15 percent of their sample relied on social assistance and this fact "reflects the barriers to obtaining and maintaining such benefits for people who are young, out of school and without shelter" (9). Unfortunately, youth in this study identified just as many if not more barriers in the housing system. These will be highlighted in the next section.

5.2 Housing

Supportive and affordable housing systems as well as the private market were described by youth as posing too many barriers to access or as unappealing due to constraints. Olivia had applied for a supportive housing room but she needed to prove to the housing provider and OW that she had already attended school for two weeks. For Olivia, who had been homeless for roughly two years, this was not realistic given that she had not attended secondary school since hitting the streets. Supportive housing was also perceived by several youth as posing too many constraints as evidenced by the preponderance of rules youth needed to follow, including: curfews, no overnight guests, no alcohol or drugs on the premises, and no pets.

Many youth also described their inability to access the rental market. With long waiting lists for public housing many youth searched fruitlessly in the private market. Without a prior rental history and the common mistaken belief held by landlords that they cannot rent to individuals under 18, renting a private room or an apartment was an insurmountable challenge. When they made rental inquiries they were frequently told that they needed a co-signer to rent a place. Casey, a sixteen year-old woman from Toronto, was debating leaving the child welfare system when she found out that her entitlement with OW would only be $520 per month (if she was deemed eligible). She stated: "I get $882 per month from CAS until I am 21… So why would I leave [their care] when I'd have to struggle to get on welfare and they'd be pressuring me to get a job and to get off the system?" After she had been looking for an apartment she admitted that: "no one will rent to a 16 year old. If you are 16 you are discredited. Landlords told me I need to

get a co-signer and to ask my social worker to co-sign. But my social worker told me to find someone else to co-sign… Who am I going to find?" One landlord even responded to her inquiry: "I read through the law and it's illegal to rent to 16s."

Sadie, a seventeen-year old college student who was residing at a shelter at the beginning of the study and who was searching for an apartment for her and her two year-old son, explained that she had been looking for an apartment for the past eight months. She was informed so consistently by landlords that in order to rent an apartment she had to be 18 or have a co-signer that she did not dispute it. But when she applied for subsidized housing (which she had resigned herself to and was now just waiting for an apartment to come available) she was informed that she was eligible despite her age. Moreover, Sadie was routinely denied assistance from OW because she had not secured an apartment. In this sense, she faced a double-barreled obstacle that is common to youth her age: needing a place to live but no landlords will rent to them, and not being eligible for income assistance because they do not have a place to live.

When youth did find a landlord who would rent to them the housing was often substandard and their tenancy precarious. Tyler revealed that he had recently rented an apartment in a more dangerous part of town, but the only reason the landlord rented it to him was because he gave him $1200 in cash up-front. "The landlord told me 'you look a little young' but after I flashed him the $1200 he went to get the keys." This housing situation however did not last long as Tyler ended up defaulting on his rent payment because of spending his money on crack. Many youth, like Tyler, wound up renting apartments in more dangerous parts of town with limited

rental agreements. Youth were often evicted from these situations and many were uninformed about their tenancy rights.

Informal and less secure rental arrangements are often the only means these youth have of breaking into the rental market. The down side is that their tenancy is often insecure, they are at the whim of the landlord, and they tend to be located in more dangerous areas of the city. Daniel revealed that once he moved to his father's in the city he began partying, drinking and using ecstasy. He stopped going to his classes and his father kicked him out "to teach me a lesson but then I just dropped out of school." Eventually, Daniel rented a room in a rooming house that he described as a "big set up."

> Everyone in this rooming house was doing crack. I mean the dealer lived in the building and he knew when it was cheque day [when people would receive their cheques from social assistance]. You wouldn't even see your money, it would just be handed over to the crack dealer…there was no way you were going to pay the rent…

Daniel admitted he spent all his money on crack was evicted and ended up in the shelter. He described how the most accessible places for sixteen and seventeen year-olds to rent are located in the rooming houses where, ironically, the most dangerous risks lurked. He explained that it was not only that these places served as gateways into harder and more addictive drugs, but that the level of violence and criminality (theft, prostitution, drug dealing) meant that you never felt safe as was evident by frequent police patrols.

Another obstacle for youth trying to access housing in the private market was the cost. According to ATEH and results from the *Panel Study* (Aubry et al., 2007), as outlined in Chapter One, homelessness is on the rise in Ottawa because of: discrimination by landlords, low incomes that make it difficult to access and maintain housing, and low vacancy rates (1.4% in 2008). Rents have continued to rise in Ottawa and renters wind up spending more on housing than they can afford and what is considered acceptable to maintain housing (recommended 30% of income allotted to rent). Several youth did manage to secure a place but it was beyond what they could reasonably afford and they would end up letting several friends stay with them to help pay the rent. The overcrowding often led them to be evicted. Results from the *Panel Study* indicate similar findings, that youth who could not afford market rents and were forced to share accommodation were particular vulnerable to losing housing because of conflicts with roommates (Aubry et al., 2007: 8). Ingrid revealed that a one bedroom apartment that she had rented with her boyfriend now housed eight people and that they were spending most of their money on drugs and they were being evicted at the end of the month. She stated that she and her boyfriend had stopped living there even though they had paid the rent for the month because there was no privacy and it was constantly being burglarized.

Even youth who had resigned themselves to not finding housing but were staying in shelters had to be creative. Chris described how he had been barred from the only young men's shelter because of racial slurs he had evoked to staff. As he was only seventeen years old, he went to stay at another shelter (i.e. adult shelter system requires clients to be a minimum of 18 years old) but had to lie about his age. "I told them I was 21. I have no ID so they couldn't check. I told them I just came up from Montreal and had my ID stolen." Chris also tried to rent a room in a

rooming house with his friend and told the landlord they would split the cost but the landlord would not consent. He was told "one room to one person." Without ID and an income (no social assistance, no job) "no landlord would look at me."

One youth perceived that he was not able to secure a place to rent because of how he looked. Luke described being evicted from his mother's home because of how he liked to dress and because she found him looking at pornography on the computer. "I like to wear women's clothes. I have my own style that my mother hates." Luke began taking down signs across the city of apartments for rent he was interested in so others would not find out about them so he would increase his chances.

Other youth perceived being discriminated against because of how they appeared. Appearing to identify too much with Goth or street culture (e.g. dark clothes, piercings, body markings/alterations/tattoos, dreadlocks, hair dyes…) decreased their chances of breaking into the housing and labour markets. Many youth would actively change their appearance by purposely toning down their image, ex. dying their hair a uniform colour, removing piercings or gages. Their perception was that they had to transform themselves into a more presentable person by projecting a more responsible image. These transformations in relation to participant identity transformations and multiple roles will be expanded upon further in the next chapter.

Youth revealed many failures of the "system," such as, ineligibility for income assistance and inability to rent an apartment due to poor or irregular incomes (which will be described in greater detail in the next chapter), and discrimination by landlords (based on their appearance) or their mistaken belief that renters have to be eighteen years of age. We argue that these barriers create undo risks and promoted risk-taking behaviours, particularly in relation to finding housing and making money. This will be expanded upon further in the proceeding chapter as it relates to identity construction. The different eligibility criteria for sixteen and seventeen year-olds trying to access welfare, the belief that this age group need co-signers in order to rent an apartment, the lack of choice in the shelter system, and the lack of safe affordable housing in Ottawa (Aubry et al., 2007; ATEH) places them at increased risk for victimization by pushing them into precarious rental agreements (if they can access them) that are often located in dangerous places. It also forces them to manipulate systems to their advantage to create opportunities to promote their survival, for instance, as evidenced by Chris's knowledge of hiding his age to shelter staff in order to access the adult shelter system. However, it pushes these younger individuals and arguably more vulnerable group into older adult systems, in which there might be greater opportunities for exploitation and victimization.

The barriers posed by welfare, supportive housing, and shelters pushed many youth to find creative strategies to survive (e.g. unsafe, overcrowded, and unaffordable housing in the private market), and generally pushed them into more dangerous high risk contexts (for example, precarious rooming houses where drug dealing, prostitution and theft were common place). The institutional impact of risk-creation for a much marginalized group such as homeless youth is a phenomenon that has not been fully explored but was evident in the narratives. Youth described

risks they took, in terms of where they slept and how they eked out a living because social safety nets (i.e. income assistance, housing systems) did not respond to their needs and were perceived as inaccessible or posing too many constraints.   These structural constraints have not been examined from the vantage point of pushing youth into risk-taking situations due their quasi-legal adult status but need to be taken into consideration when examining factors that increase harmful risks for "at-risk" youth.

These findings represent only a starting point for such an investigation into the structural constraints that increase a climate of risk-taking, encouraging youth creativity, adaptability, and hence, their survival. The next chapter will examine youth's shifting and evolving identities and how this impacts their perception and management of risks over time.

Chapter Five

Multiple Selves: Evolving Identities and their Impact on Risk

The previous chapter highlighted the phenomenon that most street youth arrive on the streets with pre-existing histories rife with violence, conflict, instability, and neglect, which serve to shape their perceptions of risk and subsequent decisions. Youth revealed that their childhoods and their relationships with their families have an enormous impact on their identity, and the subsequent choices they make on the street that are embedded in their perceptions of risk. Identity formation, according to Erikson (1968), refers to the formation of a coherent sense of self, and is one of the primary tasks of adolescence. From a developmental perspective, adolescence is a critical time of rapid change, formation and evolution (Erikson, 1968). However, this view of adolescence is rather static and assumes that youth pass through stages in a uniform way and arrive at some certain endpoint, which is why this study has borrowed the concept of identity construction versus a more presumptuous, identity formation approach. This study borrowed and blended different viewpoints of adolescence examined in Chapter Two to allow the dynamism of youth's experiences to be explored within changing contexts.

As outlined in Chapter Two, this study took the approach that adolescence is a time of experimentation and self-discovery, particularly in terms of the many role mutations and transformations that many youth undergo. Furthermore, this study viewed identity construction as continuous and complex, tying the past, with the present, with future aspirations, having no certain goal or specific endpoint as many theories of adolescence pontificate (Erikson, 1968; Hall, 1904). Instead of viewing adolescence as necessarily a time of turmoil and growth, in which youth have developmental deficits that need to be overcome in order to ascertain a coherent sense of self (Erikson, 1968; Hall, 1904), this study did not examine youth's identities in terms of deficits but drew upon theories of identity and adolescence that embraced ideas of

experimentation and self-discovery, especially as they pertain to perceiving, taking, and managing risk. In particular, it utilized aspects of Bajoit's (2003) theories of identity formation which was outlined in Chapter Two. Bajoit (2003: 102-104) views identity as provisional and evolving, and this study borrowed his approach to uncover participants understanding of their shifting identities as they relate to their: engaged identity, assigned identity, and desired identity. This trilogy helps to underscore how youth understand past experiences in the construction of their identities, and whether they choose to accept or reject them in the face of their current identities and their hopes for the future. This notion of identity is intimately connected to the risks youth perceive and how they respond to them.

The streets also add to the allure of experimentation by offering several paradoxes in relation to this self-discovery in the search for autonomy. As outlined in Chapter One, Parazelli (1997) borrows Winnicott's (1971) theory of transitional spaces to exemplify this hypothesis. This study concurs with this analysis, that many youth utilize the streets as transitional spaces that allow them to continuously reconstitute their identities by engaging in active role experimentation, but it is important to note and highlight that this is often within an arena of constrained choices. This study makes the point that risk plays a major role in the construction of identity as youth embark on many adventures and gambles. For many youth, it is a time of heightened risk and sensation seeking, however, street life contains many paradoxes such as the search for excitement in the face of danger, and the search for freedom within a context of dependency/captivity, as outlined in the previous chapter. These constraints all have an impact on the risks youth perceive, the chances they are willing to take, and are intimately tied to the construction of their identities.

It is not known how experiencing homelessness and hypothesized concomitant victimizing experiences during such a crucial time of development affects the construction of one's identity. A major contribution of this study is that participant's perceptions of risks are highly contingent upon their conceptualizations of their own evolving identities. We argue that participant's identities shift in response to the multiple roles they played with the accumulation of street experiences and the opportunities that street life offers. Identity construction and risk is also linked to youth's understanding of the roles they played within their families, their peer networks, and their relationships with authority figures. And for some participants, it is also tied to their attempts to disengage from, or exit, street life, this is well supported by previous research (Colombo, 2008; Bellot, 2001).

This chapter will examine participant's conceptualizations of their evolving identities and how they impact their risk frameworks. Identity shifts affected the risk assessments youth made and the gambles they took. Many youth rationalized relevant choices and viewed their identity and the choices they made as directly linked to aspects of their family's identities, accepting certain notions of fate. Other participants viewed their identities and subsequent perception of risk and relevant choices as shaped in direct contrast to their understanding of their families identities, rejecting ideas of fate. While many youth reasoned there was a biological imperative to their choices, they were also invested in trying on new roles and experimenting with different ways of living. Their evolving identities were products of the culmination of new experiences and were intertwined with the new identities that emerged. The impact of street culture and the activities

they engaged in affected the construction of their identities and consequently their perceptions and management of risk. Risk perception is embedded in one's identity which evolves over time with the accumulation and assessment of new experiences.

The next section will examine participants understanding of their evolving identities in relation to their origins and how this affects their conceptualizations of risk. It will reveal the vast spectrum of thought, from acceptance of familial identities as youth understood them, to complete rejection of these and the labels they felt their families ascribed to them, and will tie these together with their perceptions of risk. It will also examine the nuances between these polarities that mould participant's understanding of themselves and the choices they make in relation to risk.

1. Origins: The Impact of Family Contexts on Identity Construction and Risk

The first section illuminates several participants understanding of their identities as they relate to their family contexts. In particular, several youth described their acceptance of their identities as intimately rooted in these early beginnings and this significantly affected their perceptions of risk.

1.1 Acceptance

Several youth believed they inherited certain traits and propensities from their parents. This first group describes participants who explained their choices and identities as intimately connected to that of their parents or their families, and for the most part, they accepted these influences as seriously impacting their current identities and perception of risk. At least seven youth described their choices around roles they played (e.g. hustling, stealing, using violence, using drugs…) as being within the realm of "normal" experiences of their family life and upbringing. However, many rejected aspects of their histories and felt they made different choices than their parents did. For instance, eleven participants witnessed domestic violence growing up and all of them stated they disagreed with it, and vowed not to become abusers or victims, while four participants witnessed their parents using heavy drugs and two of them chose to use softer ones. But two youth in particular, ascribed their current day identities and risk perception as inherently tied to that of their parents, rationalizing current behaviours related to risk. The following vignettes will elucidate this more clearly. Tyler proclaimed that his identity was wound up in his roles as hustler and drug addict, and believed these roles were predestined and attributable to his mother exposing him to these elements growing up.

1.1.1 Vignette of Tyler: Belief in the Biological Imperative

Tyler described his mother as a drug addict ("crackhead") who became involved in relationships with wealthy men, who she "used" to maintain her drug dependency. He described his mother as a hustler, but a different kind of hustler than himself because he claimed she manipulated men to get the financial security she needed to maintain a roof over the heads and to maintain her drug dependency. He revealed that growing up with his Mom was chaotic, that they frequently moved across the country when his mother would strike up a new intimate relationship after things tended to fall apart in her current relationships. He also felt that his mother was vulnerable because of this drug dependency and tended to be drawn to abusive men. He described his childhood as financially and geographically unstable and he admitted he rarely attended school but that child welfare authorities were evaded because they were uprooted so frequently. He recounted many early childhood experiences of growing up on the notorious Vancouver downtown east side, which is well known for heavy drug use and prostitution. However, he did not describe these early experiences as unfavourable but instead as shaping and forming him into a tough and street-savvy young man, where he "earned his stripes" on the street. These early experiences greatly characterize and mould his present day understanding of street involvement and the roles he plays, and his assessments of dangerousness, safety, and opportunity.

Tyler was sixteen years-old and was very entrenched in street life. He admitted that he smoked crack everyday but that he would "do [use] anything [drugs] – ecstasy, pot, powder." He

revealed that he had always been heavily involved in street life, even as a child. He described his mother as a "drug addict. She started smoking me up when I was nine, I was using crack by the time I was thirteen." Tyler cycled in and out of detention centres and the streets and had previous charges stemming from small robberies, breaking and entering, and drug dealing. He lived in Vancouver with his mother from the time he was eight until he was thirteen years-old. He cited the reason for their departure from Vancouver as his mother having too many abusive boyfriends and needing to flee from the violence, so they fled to Ottawa to start over. Tyler revealed that his mother has a drug dependency which she tries to hide from her partners to preserve her relationships. "My Mom is a drug addict who needs a rich boyfriend to keep up her habit, but then they always find out and end up leaving her."

Tyler strongly identified with two roles of his identity. His primary role was as a drug addict, and the second was necessary to satisfy the first, as a hustler. As a self-identified hustler, he admitted to committing criminal acts that included theft and drug dealing to obtain his drugs. Both of these he attributed to his mother's influence and exposure to a deviant lifestyle. Tyler stated: "There are drug addicts who do criminal acts to get drugs, and there are criminals who do drugs. I am a drug addict like my Mom." Tyler described his ability to hustle as a gift. He perceived himself as adept and able to outsmart others.

> I am really good at hustling and ripping things off. I really like to rob safes, I am really good at it and I almost never get caught. But last time, I missed covering one camera and they picked me up four hours later. It's great being only sixteen, because I usually get let off [do not have to serve time] and only have conditions to follow. I am also good at hustling drugs. I walk over to the Mission [men's shelter] and everyone starts saying 'you have, you have' – I take their money and within half an hour and a six block radius I get the rock [crack] to them. I have a

lot of older suppliers because of my mother's connections, because of my age and my looks I get away with it. If I hustle crack, I can make $300 in a morning if I move fast.

Tyler reported that his goal everyday was to make enough money to get a hotel room for the night. He supported himself by dealing drugs, committing small thefts, and panhandling.

Every day I try to make $56.50 for a hotel room at the Concord [downtown hotel]… If I haven't made enough then I spend it all on drugs… I also pan [panhandle]… Not regular panning, but I cruise the mall and ask everyone for $1 for the bus. Every third person gives you a buck then in an hour you've made $30. I can make hundreds [of dollars] a day.

Tyler perceived himself to be masterful on the streets and appeared confident in his twin roles, as drug addict and hustler. He believed these aspects of his identity were direct results of his exposure to substances and street life during his childhood. In terms of risk perception and identity formation, he did not perceive himself as vulnerable though he was assaulted somewhat regularly (by others on the street) and apprehended frequently by the police. He also prided himself on his abilities to evade and outsmart police (e.g. after a robbery) and perceived himself to be powerful because of his street knowledge and skills. Tyler consciously chose not to attend scheduled appointments with his Probationary Officer and directly violated conditions of his probation (by not continuing to reside at the shelter, and by living in the downtown core from which he was restricted), and believed that if he was caught his consequences would be less severe because of his young age. His most pressing concerns did not revolve around protecting himself. His main preoccupation, besides making money for shelter and drugs, was to care for his girlfriend who he believed required protection, perhaps reliving childhood experiences in

which he tried to protect his mother from abusive partners. Previously, he described his girlfriend as "innocent, sweet and immature," and requiring protection from predators because she was desirable. Further he added: "I don't agree with anyone being violent with women. I would never lay a hand on a woman. It doesn't matter what you look like to women, it's more about who you are."

Throughout most of the study, Tyler lived on the streets and used substances daily. However, by the end of the research period, he had been convicted of several criminal charges and was court-ordered to attend an addictions treatment centre for one year. His age could no longer serve as a buffer. Viewing himself as a protector meant that he made certain choices in order to protect those he cared about from being victimized, and that he projected almost complete disregard for his own safety. This informed the kinds of risks he felt were present and the kinds of self or other protection strategies he employed. For instance, being hyper-vigilant to attacks by attacking others before becoming a victim, at least as it applied to others he cared about though not himself, and carrying weapons in order to protect others he cared about (as explored in the previous chapter), formed the major parts of his self-protection strategies and shaped his identity as a protector. His identities as drug addict, hustler, and protector greatly informed the risks he felt were present and his responses to them. Tyler was one of the few participants whose projected identity, risk perception and risk management strategies, did not greatly change over the course of the study.

Participant's identities were not only strongly influenced by their early childhood influences within the family context, but also by their perceptions of their parents identities. Several youth described how aspects of their parents' identities influenced their own. Marie's story demonstrates her belief that her anger and propensity for violence is derived from the same anger her father exhibits. She believes she has inherited her father's anger and rationalizes and normalizes her own violent behaviour within this context. The following vignette illustrates that Marie feels that this anger poses the biggest risk to her well-being. She explains that she has frequently compromised her own safety due to this anger because of her propensity to provoke others, and this has resulted in her being expelled from school and undermined her future goals. For Marie, her anger poses the biggest risk to her present and future circumstances and she directly links it to an innate style derived from her father.

1.1.2 Vignette of Marie: Impact of Parental Identities

Marie is a young woman of first generation mixed east European ancestry who was forced out of her home by her father when she was fifteen years old. Her parents live in Ottawa and have a son who is six years younger than Marie. Her father is in the military. Prior to the streets, she had lived with a foster family on a military base. She was told to leave her foster family's home because they were not able to cope with her behaviour and school difficulties which she reported as: fighting, using drugs, vandalizing school property, and truancy. Despite the conflictual relationship with her father, she remained close with her mother and visited her on almost a daily

basis at her place of work, a salon parlour. She described her father as controlling and the one that makes all the family decisions. When Marie was evicted from the foster family, he refused to let her return home.

During the research year, Marie's circumstances changed radically. Initially, she had been suspended from her school and was working on her diploma through correspondence. She stated she had been suspended because she had been involved in too many fights. "There is too much violence at school. I worry about losing control and hurting people. I am a lot like my father that way. My Dad always wanted a boy, he never really wanted me. My Dad is very violent – I am a lot like him." Her father's temper, which she perceives as having inherited from him, was the impetus for child welfare authorities removing her from the family home initially. Now this same anger has manifested itself in her, resulting in assault charges that have prevented her from attending secondary school. Mid-way through the study she was arrested twice for assaulting other young women. She stated "I am not trying to get into fights but I feel as if people are always trying to pick them with me." Upon reflection, Marie identifies both the conflict with her father and her violent outbursts at school and on the streets as negatively impacting her self-esteem.

A few months later, Marie became pregnant and she and her boyfriend decided to start a family. She left the shelter and moved into his apartment. She revealed that a visit to her family home with her boyfriend to collect some of her things for their apartment opened her eyes to the amount of identity transformation she had experienced since leaving:

> My Dad started calling me names, giving me a hard time. My boyfriend wanted to do something, but I told him not to bother even talking to him. I feel healthier not living there, and I can see now how much it affected me. I feel more in control of my emotions now. I know my father still hates me and treats me differently than my brother, but it doesn't affect me as much now.

This perspective is indicative of her maturation process in individuating from her parents and is enhanced by the level of objectivity she has gained from not living in her parents' home. This phenomenon is supported by the theoretical underpinnings in Chapter Two that are described by Hall (1904) and supports one of the foundations of psychological thinking around adolescence: developing a sense of consciousness of self as separate from others. While she is sorrowful about not being closer to her father, she has learned how to detach herself emotionally from him. She admits to feeling more in control of her emotions and behaviour, including being less angry and violent. She also experienced an identity shift in her new role as an expectant mother. Her identity was impacted and evolved due to the emotional distance she kept from her father and her rejection of the impact of his violence on her own identity, coupled with her new responsibility of caring for and preparing for her baby. By the end of the study, she was awaiting her baby, attending school, and purposely attempting to avoid conflicts downtown where she felt particularly preyed upon by other young women. During the last half of the study, she was proud that she had no new assault charges and had completely turned her attention to finishing her high school diploma and preparing for the arrival of her baby. She had also stopped consuming drugs and alcohol, not only for her baby's health but also because she felt her substance use made her behaviour less predictable, and hence, she was more vulnerable to being involved in and perpetrating violent incidents. In sum, she felt her substance use and her father's

negative emotional and violent influence had a direct link to the amount of criminal behaviour she engaged in.

Moreover, making changes in these spheres of her behaviour impacted not only her own self-concept but her risk framework. By choosing to avoid engagement in violent behaviour and minimizing her substance use, and accepting the responsibility of pregnancy and parenthood, her risk consciousness was impacted. Through the twin processes of individuation from her family and separation of her identity from that of her father's, she began to see risk in a new light. Knowing that she was prone to resolving conflict physically she chose a different path and minimized this risk by avoiding certain places and people. Becoming pregnant and choosing to raise the baby also added new responsibilities and altered her perception of risk, forcing her to make different choices (e.g. not using drugs) based on this new and heightened perception of risk. For instance, she was aware of the consequences of consuming drugs while pregnant and the harm that may occur to the fetus, as well the repercussions of drug use and the possibility of having her baby apprehended by child protection services. The separation of her identity from her father's coupled with her new responsibilities shifted her identity and subsequent perception of risk. Her initial acceptance of her father's anger as rationalizing her own became insufficient and she started to reject this assumption. In so doing, she described feeling more in control of her life and engaging in less risky activities that she felt reduced threats of harm.

These two vignettes are meant to highlight the interdependent nature of participants' identities with their past experiences which directly affect their perception and management of risk. Tyler

and Marie were chosen to illustrate the ways in which some youth framed their perception of risk within what Bajoit (2003) refers to as "engaged" and "assigned" identities that are intimately linked to their childhood and family experiences. Interestingly, while Tyler's identity appeared more stable around the roles he projected, Marie's went through significant changes, which pushed her into the realm of rejecting certain "assigned" aspects of her identity. The following section will examine aspects of participant narratives that admonished the impact of their families' identities on their own constructions, and in so doing, participants felt they reduced potential harm.

1.2 Dimensions of Rejection

Most participants described the impact of childhood experiences and the relationships they had with family members as directly affecting their identities and the choices they made. Many participants openly criticized these influences and chose different aspects of their "assigned" identities to construct a more "desirable" one. By striving to construct their "desired" identities by making different choices than their parents, or by not agreeing with their perceived "assigned" identities ascribed to them by family members, this directly impacted their perception and management of risk.

1.2.1 Rejection of the Impact of Parental Identities

Many youth identified with deviant traits of Tyler's story but there were stark contrasts to their choices. Several youth flatly rejected their parents' identities as determinants of their own. For example, while Chris had a similar criminal history to Tyler's, involving car thefts, small robberies, and uttering threats, he vowed never to use crack because his father was a "crackhead" and he did not want to become subservient to his drug use. Shane also led an entrenched street life and described a similar childhood to Tyler's centred on his mother's drug use and her short-term and precarious intimate relationships. Chris and Shane, in contrast to Tyler, made active choices around using less harmful drugs, such as alcohol and marijuana, than their parents. Shane described how he became homeless and his perception of his mother's identity, lifestyle, and drug use, affected his choices:

> I left home because my Mom is a "ho" [whore]. She finds guys through internet dating then moves in with them and it only lasts a year or so.. I got tired of having to move around. I ended up renting an apartment with my brother [30 years-old] and selling drugs [weed] but we ended up getting into a fistfight and I trashed the apartment. I hitched a train to Sudbury and almost froze to death, then hitched to Ottawa… I only use alcohol and marijuana – I like to get schmammered. I hate chems [chemicals]. I have seen what it does to my Mom. Crystal meth [methamphetamines] is dangerous – people make it in big bathtubs and you don't know what the hell is in it.

Many youth described their conscious efforts to detach themselves physically and emotionally from their families. Withdrawing from them physically and rejecting their identities, for some, were acts of self-preservation in making room for their own identities to evolve, and directly

impacted their perception and management of risk. Distancing themselves from their families allowed them to separate their own identities from those of their parents, and allowed them to construct their own, either in contrast to them or separate from them, freeing them from the preconceptions of the past in an effort to reclaim their futures. While some youth rationalized and normalized their behaviours as emanating from a biological imperative, especially in relation to their parent's drug use or violence, others rejected this assumption and fought hard to be different and "better" than their parents. Subsequently, their risk frameworks were impacted by their perception of their parents' negative behaviours. Chris and Shane's rejection of aspects of their parents lifestyle, for example, Chris's father's crack addiction and Shane's perception of his mother's short-term and unstable couple relationships, shaped their own perception of risk regarding drug use and intimate relationships which affected the decisions they made, and informed the evolution of their identities.

While many youth described the abuse and instability they suffered in their own homes before leaving, equally prominent themes that emerged were feelings of abandonment, and familial relationships based on dishonesty. Several youth also labeled themselves as the family "scapegoats". They felt they were unfairly blamed and singled out by family members for any harmful occurrences that arose. At least half the participants reported feeling like the primary targets and victims of sexual, physical and emotional abuse, and that they were strongly disliked and rejected by their families. In Colombo's (2008) study the participants who reported the most extreme forms of parental rejection had the most fragile identities and had the most difficult re-positioning their identities and exiting street life. The impact of these forms of trauma, particularly: parental rejection, parental control, and parental denial of the child's needs

(emotional and otherwise), on the development of identity and the youth's coping skills in striving to develop a coherent sense of self has been well supported by several authors (Poirier, 1999; Gilbert, 2004; Herman, 1997). As Tanya's story demonstrates, many youth revealed that they felt less loved than their siblings or their parents' partners, and felt they were not treated equally, supporting dimensions of the rejection hypothesis, however, youth's responses to these experiences varied.

1.2.2 Vignette of Tanya: Feeling Different

Tanya's vignette illustrates that her identity was strongly rooted in her perception of being "different" as compared to her brothers and sisters, and consistently scapegoated. She described that, it was not only the physical and emotional abuse she endured from her mother, brothers and sister that forced her to leave, but that she was tired of "always feeling different," being blamed for events that were not her fault, and her perception that she was not loved.

Tanya revealed that she suffered abuse as a child and as an adolescent but child welfare authorities never intervened:

> My mom always hated how close I was to my foster sisters more than my own sister… When I was nine I used to hide my lunch in my knapsack because I did not want to eat. One time, I forgot all about the lunches I hadn't eaten in my bag and I left my bag on the porch… When my mom found all the garbage collecting

in my bag she beat me with the cord of the vacuum cleaner and told me she was going to beat me again when I got home from school. I was scared all day and let it slip to my teacher that my mom beat me and was waiting for me to get home from school to do it again. Instead of phoning CAS [Children's Aid Society] the teacher phoned my mom, so when I got home she was twice as mad, and beat me twice as hard… I was always the one beaten on by my brothers and sister and my mom never did anything to stop it.

Tanya is a young woman of Jamaican ancestry who had been adopted into her current family as a baby. Tanya explained that she "always felt different, and didn't quite belong," even before she found out at age twelve that she had been adopted. When one of her foster sisters revealed to her that she had been adopted, Tanya felt betrayed by her mother. This act confirmed to her that she was different from her siblings and explained the differential treatment she perceived. Two years prior to becoming homeless, Tanya had experimented with body alterations (e.g. piercings, tattoos), began using drugs, and partying. After Tanya had come home with her lip pierced, her mother sent her to live with her biological family in Jamaica because she was furious about the piercing and the partying. What her mother had anticipated as a punishment for her daughter, Tanya felt was a reward. She described that she felt much closer to her biological family in Jamaica than her adopted one in Canada:

> My mom gave me a one-way ticket and told me not to come back until the lip ring was removed. I really enjoyed meeting my biological family and felt closer to them than my own back at home. When my lip got infected I had to take out the ring and my mom sent me a return ticket home but I didn't really want to leave.

Over the course of the research year, Tanya tried moving back home but the situation deteriorated quickly. Tanya confessed that her older sister was

always jealous of me and beating me up. I got so fed up the last time she hit me, I phoned the police. They [the police] didn't do anything. They didn't believe me, and my family was really fed up with me and they stood up for my sister. My mother told me to leave until I could get along with my sister so I came back here [the shelter].

Despite her residential instability, Tanya remained in high school, planned on going to college, maintained a good academic record, and held down a part-time job. However, when one of her Uncles became ill, he asked her to quit her part-time job and help take care of him and the household chores. He promised to pay her equivalent wages to her part-time job. Soon after starting to work for him, Tanya became pregnant and was trying to conceal the pregnancy from her family. Tanya and her boyfriend had decided to terminate the pregnancy and her family was furious:

> I know it's the right decision [getting an abortion] even though my family is really upset with me… I don't know how to take care of a baby and I am not ready for the responsibility. My boyfriend and I want to get our education and careers first… My Mom wants me to have the baby and give it up for adoption, but I can't go through the whole pregnancy and birth and then give it up. I was adopted and I don't want the baby to go through the same things that I went through.

When her uncle found out that she had decided to have an abortion he refused to pay her. Tanya admitted that terminating the pregnancy was the most difficult decision she had ever made and she felt immense guilt that she and her boyfriend had not used protection. "It's a stupid mistake that I will never forgive myself for." By the end of the study, Tanya was estranged from her family, and her boyfriend was supporting her financially. Tanya stood steadfast by her goals, despite not having a place to live and not having financial or emotional support from her family.

She vowed that she would finish high school and apply for a pre-medical program at college. She wanted to prove to her family that despite the lack of contact she had with them, she would be successful in life. Her career goal was to become a doctor and "prove my family wrong that I can make it and that I'll do better than all of them."

Many youth described themselves as the "scapegoats" in the family. They perceived themselves to be less loved, treated unfairly and differently, and blamed for many things that they did not perceive as being their fault. While Colombo's (2008) study found that youth who experienced the most amount of rejection by parents, organized into separate categories of parental relations of negation and control, tended to have the most difficulties exiting street life and developed very fragile identities, this was not found to be true unequivocally in this study. While youth were profoundly affected by parental relationships and histories, especially ones based on rejection, it did not mean they blindly accepted them, but in turn, they often questioned them and began to reject them as directly influencing the construction of their identities and behaviours. In Marie's case, for example, she did not continue to engage in auto-destructive acts that Colombo (2008) alludes to, acts some of her more "fragile" participants engaged in such as prostitution, but instead chose to examine aspects of her behaviour and make changes to it. In so doing, she felt more in control of her life and felt that she reduced future threats of victimization, at least as they related to her relationships and her life on the streets. In Tanya's case, she accepted the fact that she was different than her siblings and this belief was supported by the fact that she discovered she was adopted. However, she rejected aspects of the "assigned" identity that she felt persecuted for by her family. She set goals for herself and wanted to be successful in life despite the fact that she felt unsupported by her family. Both of these stories illustrate that while there

was an element of victimhood to their relationships with family members, there were equally prominent themes of surviving, of overcoming obstacles, and choosing a path for themselves that was different than their families.

Scapegoating and unfair treatment by families was a prominent theme in several participant narratives, also evident were sentiments of betrayal and abandonment that ran undercurrent and form another dimension of the rejection youth experienced.

1.3 Experiences of Betrayal and Exclusion

Casey and Michelle both described family experiences that left them feeling excluded and betrayed. Casey was sixteen years-old at the beginning of the study. She had been removed from the foster home system when she was thirteen years-old and was placed in group homes until she turned sixteen, then she left the group home and came into the shelter. Though she had not lived with her mother during her adolescence she did maintain a relationship with her. We first met when she had just found out that her mother was moving to the United States with her lesbian partner and she was visibly upset about the news:

> My Mom has always claimed she has a disorder [a mental illness] but she's never been diagnosed with anything. Now she is moving to the States with her partner… My Mom is a lesbian. She first lied to me six years ago when she told CAS that my dad had been abusing her and me, and CAS took me away... I just never know

what to believe with her. I can't believe she didn't let me know about the move, or didn't ask me what I thought before she decided. She's always dating different people and now she's decided to leave with her… Oh well, she's never been there for me anyways.

Hence, Casey's perception of being abandoned and lied to was reinforced by her mother's recent decision to move away with her partner without consulting her or informing her earlier.

Michelle echoed similar sentiments of deceit and betrayal in her family. During her adolescence, Michelle reported migrating between her father's home, her grandparents' home, and the streets, but her childhood was spent living with her mother and stepfather:

> We had to move to Gatineau [Quebec] when I was little because the CAS was investigating my step-dad. We lived there for a few years, but then the DPJ [CAS equivalent in Quebec – Département de Protection de la Jeunesse] started to investigate them and they decided to move to Ohio. My stepdad is an illegal immigrant from there [Ohio], and was here illegally, so my Mom sent me to live with my grandparents and Dad because she worried they would apprehend him and we would be homeless. They sent me an email from there [Ohio] after they had been there a couple months and were settled. But I never really know where they are.

Michelle was unable to explain the secrecy that was rife in her mother's family and why child welfare authorities continued to haunt them. After two years, and only one email message at the beginning of the research period, she had no contact with her mother. Michelle's father had evicted her from his home because she stopped attending school. He let her move back home a few months later once she had agreed to get a job. She was not spiteful about being pushed out,

nor about her homeless experience. She concluded that "the important thing in life is to learn as much as possible." Her initial perception of being abandoned and lied to by her mother was more muted, and her initial reaction of feeling scapegoated by her father had softened. While she continued to feel somewhat singled out by her father compared to her sister, who was one year younger and equally truant but was not ejected from the family home (Michelle stated this was because her sister was only fifteen years-old at the time and her father worried CAS would be involved), she agreed to her father's conditions that she needed to be working or be in school to warrant living at home. By the end of the research period, she had come to terms with this arrangement and her father's conditions (to be working or attending school to remain living in his home), and was less angry and more focused, and she was not as heavily involved in street life. While she admitted to still feeling a bit like the black sheep and disconnected from her mother, her accumulation of negative homeless experiences (e.g. excessive drug and alcohol use, being robbed, harassed) coupled with her own maturation process altered her identity and her relationships with her parents (especially her father), and affected her perception of risks.

Michelle's identity was impacted by these experiences (e.g. abandonment by mother, eviction from father's home, homelessness) and her relationship with her parents changed, in part due to her move back home and acceptance of her father's conditions. She also revealed that she became tired of life on the streets: "the constant boredom, drama, and partying," stating that she needed to leave for awhile to "straighten my life out". However, she did reveal that it was not the streets that were dangerous but what "you are doing" in them that creates the risk. Supporting a criminological perspective (Baron et al., 2007; Whitbeck et al., 1997), Michelle felt that the "partying" (i.e. excessive alcohol and drug use) and "men" were to blame for most of the

danger that was present, citing sexual victimization as a major risk. She continued to socialize with friends who were street-involved, but once she made the decision to move home she cut back on her alcohol use, rarely used drugs, in part, she stated, to avoid potential victimization and because she wanted to move forward with her life.

Many participants understanding of their identities oscillated between an acceptance of assigned identity or a rejection. Three participants in this study (i.e. Laura, Lucy, Olivia), however, suggested that they led a "double life." In these instances, these youth indicated their struggles with reconciling aspects of their assigned identities, engaged identities, and desired identities, in order to remain connected to their families, friends, or services.

1.4 Leading a Double Life – Acceptance and Rejection

In contrast, to Chris and Shane's distancing from their parents, other youth worked actively to preserve and enhance their relationships with their families or friends but suffered from self-loathing because of the lies they had to tell their families or friends in order to keep them engaged. Three youth in particular, Laura, Lucy, and Olivia, all revealed that they felt they were living a "double life," in terms of keeping secrets about their drug use and street lives in order to keep family, friends, or workers engaged.

Laura's story, which was outlined in the previous chapter, demonstrates the "double life" that many youth felt they led to keep their families or friends trust. Moreover, Laura felt that she had to lie to her non-street involved school friends and not reveal her morphine dependency.

> Street life sucks. I feel like I am living a double life. I see my friends from school downtown and I am embarrassed if I am with my street friends. My parents hate street life. I can't tell them about my addiction. I am too ashamed – they would never forgive me.

In Laura's family, her oldest sister had also become street involved, and in doing so, became heavily addicted and estranged from her family. Laura's worry was that she would be compared to her sister and they would become ashamed and resentful of her.

> I can't tell my family about my morphine problem. I am too ashamed. My oldest sister left for the streets when she was fourteen… I didn't see her for four years and because of this I hated her. I resented her because she missed all of my accomplishments [graduation from junior high school]. I don't want them comparing me to her.

In this case, Laura identifies with her older sister's street lifestyle, but is worried that her identity will be subsumed or compared to that of her sister's. She is relieved when her parents find out about her drug use and that they do not compare her to her sister, but in fact, support her in accessing a drug treatment program.

Similarly, Olivia lies to her family about not sleeping on the streets to preserve her relationships. She admits to lying to them and telling them she is staying in a shelter because she knows they hate street life and find staying in the shelter more acceptable. At one point, her sister denies her access to her home to visit her niece because she is living on the streets, and her father judges her for having too many sexual partners:

> I would like to go home [in a small town] for a visit but not to stay. My Dad is really upset with me because he says I've been with too many guys [starts counting how many sexual partners she has had since hitting the streets]. My Dad is worried that I am being taken advantage of, not just sexually but financially and emotionally… I don't have a good relationship with him. He used to beat us when we were young. CAS never found out and neither did anyone else because he always hit us on our chest or backs so no one could see the marks. I would like to see my sister too, because my niece is turning three, and she [her sister] is expecting again, but my whole family is upset with the life I am leading. They tell me I will never amount to anything. So my sister won't let me see her daughter… I have to lie to them and tell them I am staying at the shelter just so they'll let me visit. They ask me why I don't do something with my life.

Eventually, they allow her to visit because she tells them what they want to hear. A few months later, her father passes away and she goes home for the funeral but her sister does not allow her to stay with her because she does not approve of her lifestyle and feels that she is a bad influence on her daughter. Olivia states: "I just tell them I am at the shelter even though I don't plan on it because of all the rules. That way, they let me see my niece and they are not worried about me." Olivia and Laura admitted that this double identity, downplaying their affiliation and entrenchment in street life while heavily engaged with street culture, was stressful and anxiety-provoking. They revealed that they worried the deceit would cost them their relationships with their families, and they felt pressured to choose which kind of life they wanted to pursue.

Youth's narratives about their shifting identities were strongly rooted in their stories about their childhoods and their perception of their families' identities. Many youth described that they always felt different and were often scapegoated for tragedies that befell their families. Scapegoating was cited by several youth as the impetus for leaving home or being pushed out. Betrayal and abandonment by family members was a strong and recurrent theme. While some youth attributed their street lives as acts of fate because of their parents' involvement in a similar lifestyle, others rejected this hypothesis and rallied against it, actively making different choices than their parents to distance themselves from these identity origins. Detaching and rejecting relationships with family, for many, was an act of self-preservation and resiliency, and also informed their perception of risk and the choices they made on the street. In this light, many youth saw themselves as survivors. In Colombo's (2008) study, she found that youth who experienced parental contexts of abandonment were more likely to appropriate the streets in the quest for autonomy, contrary to those who experienced parental relations of control and denial of their needs (existence) who tended to have more fragile identities and engage in self-destructive activities. This finding was relevant for some participants (Michelle, Olivia, Shane, Luke, Annie) who sought excitement and freedom on the streets and felt particularly abandoned by their parents, but this was not true of all participants. For example, Laura and Ingrid did not feel abandoned by their parents but were very invested in street culture and the perceived freedom it brought, summed up in their words that they were - "living the life".

Some youth tried to preserve family alliances by softening their image and lying about their circumstances (e.g. whereabouts, drug use, friendships), in order to keep their families, friends, or workers, engaged. Despite these differences in youth's shifting identities, almost all of the youth described the importance of peer networks as a strategy they employed for survival, which was, ironically for some, the cause of further victimization and forms another paradox that was found in this study. Peer groups, while they provided some measure of protection also victimized outliers or oppressed members within the group by denying individual opinions and differences to emerge. The importance and impact of peer networks on one's identity will be outlined in the next section.

2. Peer Networks Paradox: Survival and Victimization

Several researchers (Haldenby et al., 2007; Parazelli, 2000) have noted a common feeling among street youth that they perceive themselves as different and have a general feeling of awkwardness or a sense that they do not belong, hence, they aim to find a place of belonging through socialization on the streets. While belonging to a peer group is a natural expectation of adolescent development and was desired by most participants as a way to reduce perceived harm and provide a sense of belonging, it also had its drawbacks and its victims. Gilbert (2004) notes that youth with childhood histories lacking warmth and nurturing search for a place to belong and "affective compensation." Olivia's story is a testament to these findings. Olivia's vignette

illustrates a young woman who was desperately lonely and yearned to belong to a group, whatever the risks involved.

2.1 Vignette of Olivia: Longing to Belong

Olivia had been homeless for roughly two years. Her parents were separated but lived in the same apartment building in a small town outside of Ottawa. Her siblings, an older brother and sister, live close to their parents in neighbouring small towns. Her sister has two young children that Olivia liked to visit. Mid-way through the study, Olivia's father passed away unexpectedly. Olivia lived in various places throughout the study. In the beginning, she resided most frequently at a shelter, but she grew tired of the constraints of shelter living. She opted for living on the streets with her friends and visited her family frequently. She then couch-surfed for an extended period of time, traveled out West for several months, and near the end of the study, returned to sleeping on the streets. Once she became pregnant, she returned to living at the shelter and finally got a subsidized apartment for her and her baby (by the end of the study). Olivia's story highlights a pattern of transiency common to many youth. The trajectories through homelessness, and the accumulation of new experiences requires youth to experiment with different roles that impact the construction of their identities, and in turn, affects their perceptions of risk and practices.

During our first few encounters, Olivia described how lonely she was and that she was trying to gain entry into a street group:

> I have to meet them [street names of other youth] to see whether they are going to accept me into [their gang]. I am gaining higher status because I lift [steal] things they tell me to… We take care of our own, we help each other out… People think I am stupid but I am really smart. I have to know seven cards[playing cards from a deck of cards] by tomorrow and know what they mean – that is my first test [she shows the seven cards that she is trying to memorize and recites their names and meanings]. After that I have to be 'raped' by the leader [female leader]… I don't know what that means but I am sure it's not rape. I really miss my friends [the gang] when I am not with them.

Olivia admitted to committing several criminal acts over the ensuing months to gain entry into the group, tasks she was given to earn their loyalty. Subsequently, she had been charged with shoplifting, trespassing, assaulting a police officer, and breaking and entering. She confessed that she knew that she should stay away from this peer group but that she could not help herself – she was very lonely and wanted so much to belong. Eventually, she did not gain full acceptance and became ostracized from the group. She gave up trying to befriend them and decided to travel out West.

Olivia had enough insight to know that she should "stay away from certain places and people" but she initially decided that it was worth the risk of belonging. As victimization and tragedy accumulated, culminating in an unexpected pregnancy (which she felt was a positive turning point referred to in this study as *bifurcations*), Olivia's investment in this peer group affiliation diminished. She became more preoccupied with finding housing, returning to school, and

preparing for her baby, than meeting the group's demands. Her initial preoccupation of securing her place in this peer group and devoting herself to this group identity lost its potency. As she became pregnant and grew tired of street life her needs changed. Her identification with group membership became less urgent and her own needs took precedence. She individuated from the group and began to assert her own needs. In so doing, her risk perception also changed. She was not willing to take the same kinds of risks to belong and she worried about the health of her baby and wanted to ensure she was able to raise him. The demands of child protective services required her to find housing and stop using drugs if she wanted to keep her child. Current risks had dire consequences and she was no longer willing to take them. This shift in identity from deviant group member to young mother changed her needs and altered her perception of risks. Becoming an expectant mother changed both Olivia's and Marie's identities, this evolution and shift in responsibilization will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Tanya's story mirrors Olivia's sentiments of the paramount importance of peer network membership in adolescence, though not in a street group setting, as she describes a situation prior to becoming homeless. One night she and her school friends were partying in a park "using a lot of coke and ecstasy" when one of her male friends stayed behind with her after everyone else left and raped her. Tanya did not tell anyone about the rape:

> I didn't want to be a rat so I wound up in Roberts Smart Centre [youth treatment and stabilization centre for psychiatric crises] for one week. I was so scared and alone. My Mom was furious but I didn't want to say what happened, so I just pretended I went wild.

Tanya worried that her friends would not believe her about the rape, and worse, would exclude her from the group. She chose to remain friends with this perpetrator even though she was still scared of him. She also decided to reduce the amount of substances she was using and vowed to not be left alone in his presence again.

Engagement in criminal activity and remaining silent on sexual victimization were not the only precursors to maintaining peer group membership. Michelle explained that one of the drawbacks of peer networks, especially with street-involved members, was the lack of privacy and individuality, and the need for conformity to maintain membership and order within the group:

> On the streets everyone is your friend and nothing is just yours. What's yours is everyone else's too. You have to share everything and if you don't, someone will pick a fight with you… If you want to feel rich you buy a pack of smokes, but you have to open the pack when you are alone, because if you don't, everyone who is your friend wants one and they think they are entitled to them.

Bellot's (2001) work supports this finding, stating that as the group becomes the heart of identity, one's own identity often becomes subsumed and diluted under the identity of the group. This pressure affects the kinds of risks youth perceived, took, and managed, especially as it relates to self-protection, victimization, and sometimes the group's desire to retaliate against or victimize others.

Over the course of the year, Michelle grew tired of what she called "the drama downtown." She moved back home and came downtown as little as possible:

> I try to avoid coming downtown. I try to avoid the drama. There's a girl who wants to beat me up because she thinks I stole her laptop and she sent a girl after me to beat me up but I just explained to her that I didn't steal it and now I've been left alone. Everyone is always backstabbing each other.

Michelle felt that the lack of individuality with respect to having divergent opinions from her peer group, and the supremacy of group cohesion, negatively affected her identity. She described feeling caged in by other youth's expectations of her within the group. There were instances she was forced to agree with her peer group's course of action even though she did not want to, because she knew if she openly disagreed she would be excluded and possibly victimized, this included victimizing others to get what the group desired (i.e. robbing or assaulting other youth on the street, or strangers).

A few youth, such as Olivia, relayed stories of being on the outside, of feeling victimized and excluded by peer groups. Claire's picture paints an extreme version of this peer network exclusion, she reported being marginalized by a group of homeless peers who limited her access to services and friendships, culminating in them falsely accusing her of sexual harassment, involving the police and attempting to have her charged criminally.

2.2 Vignette of Claire: Target of Victimization

Claire was an elusive young woman that I ran into several times over the year before she consented to participating in the study. I remember wondering where she had been and what she had been up to each time I saw because of her many disappearances. In speaking with her I realized that her movements were constrained and limited by a group of young women who disliked her.

Claire was of East European heritage and she was adopted into a Canadian family at age three. She has no siblings. She revealed that she elected to leave home because her parents were emotionally and physically abusive. She reported that CAS had been contacted once when she was six or seven years-old, but when she denied abuse was happening they were never notified again. She described her parents as very controlling and conservative. They limited her phone call and internet use, decided which friends were acceptable, and she was not permitted to date. If she disobeyed them, there were physical repercussions. Claire stated that she still had contact with them, and visited them from time to time, but that she found it difficult to maintain a relationship with them. She had recently started taking some college courses and found it challenging to meet the demands of her coursework without a stable place to live and place to work on her assignments. She often stayed at the college overnight and worked on her courses and because she had nowhere else to go. She also described herself as a "candy girl," and enjoyed using marijuana, ecstasy, and speed, and going to raves.

Claire cycled in and out of shelters, couch-surfed and slept on the streets. She also frequented the drop-in centres that serve homeless youth. She had recently been accused of sexual harassment by another young woman who belonged to a group that disliked and harassed her. A member of this same group had beaten her up twice and told her that if she saw Claire downtown she would assault her again:

> I ended up getting barred from the shelter because this girl accused me of sexual harassment and even contacted the police because the group leader told her to lie. The wanted to charge me with sexual harassment, but they had no proof. They [agency] also barred me from using the drop-in because she had lied to the police and told them I was stalking her. We [the girl and herself] used to go to the same group at the hospital and I just tried talking to her on the bus but then she turned it around and told them I was stalking her… She hangs out with this group that hates me…They've beaten me up twice and won't leave me alone and no one wants to hang out with me because they are scared of them, especially the group leader, "the queen". She [the ring leader] wants to be the queen of downtown, she has a lot of people scared. But I don't believe in violence and I let her hit me. I don't fight back because violence doesn't solve anything.

Claire admitted that when she slept outside she had to sleep alone because everyone else was too frightened to be associated with her. She was also instructed by the group not to access the agencies downtown. Even though Claire was homeless she was denied access to agencies that could help her because this group restricted her access and movements downtown. Claire wound up spending more time drifting in other parts of the city because of being marginalized and victimized by this group. Her street identity was impacted by the victimization and marginalization she suffered, as she became undesirable to associate with. However, oddly enough, Claire never described herself as a victim. She utilized her school friendships and college resources to eke out a living and maintain a social life, and was somewhat philosophical

about the group's impact on her life. She described herself more in terms of being a survivor and did not want to be bothered by worrying about what she projected were very trivial matters. She described her response as adaptive to these constraints.

> It's fine, it's ok for now, it's not such a big deal. I mean what more can I do? Everyone downtown is too scared to be around me. I just stay in the west end, mostly at the college library, and I see some of my old school friends from my old 'hood [neighbourhood]. Sometimes they will come downtown and pan [panhandle] with me outside of McDonald's. I always make do, get by, survive.

Claire described choosing different friendships, frequenting different areas of town, and made do within the confines of this group victimization. She rationalized this response within her understanding that she always felt "different" as a child anyway, because of being adopted from another country at a young age. This solidified her belief that she was adaptable, a survivor, and somehow different from other people.

Claire's risk perception, however, was impacted by the threats and her actions were affected by this victimization (e.g. she limited the amount of time she spent downtown and rarely used downtown services). While her choices were impacted (e.g. where to sleep, eat, socialize), she did take risks coming downtown from time to time, and her identity was not grounded in that of victim, but instead was rooted in one of adaptability and nonchalance. Her analysis was convoluted, sometimes contradictory, and complex; and it changed on almost a daily basis, but she described her response to the victimization as one of having to adapt, creatively use resources, a survival response. By the end of the study, however, she grew tired of living by the group's demands. She accepted the inherent risks associated with the group's threats and

decided that she preferred to live downtown even if it meant she had to accept certain risks (e.g. being assaulted, losing friendships). She reached a point where she was tired of acquiescing to the group's demands and refused to let them limit her choices. Eventually, they backed down.

Peer networks represent another paradox uncovered by this study and noted by other authors (Haldenby et al., 2007; Bellot, 2001; Parazelli, 1997). While they provided protection and belonging for some members, youth also reported they felt oppressed within the group, and yet others experienced direct victimization. Youth identities were not only impacted by their peers via peer network membership, victimization, or oppression, they were also impacted by stereotypes and friction with authority figures. Many youth described feeling targeted by the police, and felt unfairly treated because of their appearance, age, and identification with street life. The next section will highlight the impact of Self and Other boundaries on identity construction.

3. Self and Other Boundaries

The relevance of Douglas' (1985) Self and Other boundaries is clearly of use in terms of understanding the construction of youth's identities and the multiple roles they play vis à vis their marginalized status. Douglas (1985) argues that it is precisely those at the margins, those that are socially deviant, that pose a threat to maintaining the social order. She contends that risk

has been used in contemporary western society for blaming and marginalizing an Other who is viewed as posing a threat to the Self, precisely because they have not been brought into line with the norm. Moreover, Douglas (1985) emphasizes that margins, in and of themselves, are dangerous since margins represent vulnerability and frailty. Margins, which delineate concepts of Self and Other, of socially deviant and conforming, serve to reinforce roles and social order. Homeless youth represent the Other, dangerousness and deviancy. They live on the margins and are marginalized by institutional structures, authority figures represented in bureaucracies, mass media, and mainstream public perceptions, however, it is not know how youth perceive themselves in relation to the Self, and whether they do see themselves as this ostracized and deviant Other. Youth identities are complex and dynamic. Participants described how they were judged by authority figures, by workers that represent the Self, and how they reacted to this treatment, and interestingly, also described how they felt judged by other youth, those theoretically encompassed by the Other. While some youth feared authority figures and felt they were discriminated against based on street youth stereotypes, others had divergent perceptions and experiences. There was not a uniformity of experiences in relation to their evolving identities, or in terms of their concepts of marginalization and Self and Other boundaries.

Laura explained that she and her friends felt singled out by the police because of how they looked and because of where they hung out (under a downtown bridge):

> The other day we were sitting under the bridge and the cops came along and searched us all. They started searching my bag… You know people don't know their rights, and they had no right, we were just hanging out. I was embarrassed so I asked them to take me over to the side because I didn't want my friends to see my syringes and know I had been using… At first they took me to the side, then they thought I was resisting so they threw me down. I started freaking out. I told

them I was scared. They handcuffed me and made me sit in the grass while they searched my stuff… Another guy, they pulled his pants down and looked for drugs.

Many youth echoed these sentiments of fear, of feeling powerless, and of being targeted by the police for the way they looked, which public spaces they were occupying, and with whom they were hanging out. Olivia described a similar event:

> Yesterday, me and my friend were walking in the Rideau Centre [the mall downtown] when the cops stopped us. They said that we fit the description of two people that committed an assault recently. They took my friend's survival knife, his grinder with a little crystal meth in it, smashed his pipe on the ground for no reason… I threatened them, asking for their badge numbers and supervisor's name. They had no reason to stop us, we were just walking minding our own business… but you know it's 'cause of they way we look. They let us go after questioning us for ten minutes and barred us from the mall.

In this instance, even though Olivia is unjustly feeling singled out by the police officers, she asserts her knowledge of asking for their badge numbers and their supervisor's name to push back their authority. She is not passively accepting the power they have over her but is actively resisting it. There is another dimension besides the spectrum of the victim/offender binary, one that allows for a space of insider knowledge and savvy to push back this stigmatization and make room for youth to experience power (even though we recognize this as uneven), use their creativity and adaptability, that can be summed up in this other dimension of survivability and resistance. Experiences of this other dimension were not experienced by every participant however, as will be evidenced in the following section, and many felt victimized by these rigid Self and Other boundaries.

The perception that youth were deviant because of their identification with street life was a common theme. However, when youth were victims of crimes they felt particularly judged and often were re-victimized by systems that were supposed to protect them, this phenomenon has been cited by other authors (Gaetz, 2004; Karabanow, 2004). For example, Laura had been assaulted by a homeless man and tried reporting the incident to the police but felt that her concerns were not taken seriously because of being young and homeless. She was told they were too busy to follow up with the incident and to come back to look at mug shots (a few months later) when they were less busy:

> I am going down to the cop shop [police station] to try and identify who jacked [assaulted] me, but it was before I went away [to an addictions treatment centre] so I can't exactly remember what the crack-head looked like. I just saw his silhouette. Too much time has passed. The cops were too busy until now to give me an appointment. They don't take you seriously when you look like I look [a street youth]. They figure it's your fault for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In contrast, not all youth felt they received differential treatment by authority figures. Francis account of his experiences with police paints a different picture. Francis claimed that police officers did not discriminate against the homeless or youth, that "they usually approached everybody the same way." He believed that police officers made decisions about how to treat others based on how you behaved with them, "it's all dependent on how you behave with cops." He felt that if you treated them with respect then respect would be reciprocated, even though he admitted police officers have a wide range of discretionary authority over the people with whom

they interact. He cited numerous examples in which the way he engaged with the police determined how he would be treated, stating that when he had been picked up by the police for stealing he immediately "stopped acting like a punk and I showed them some respect and listened to what they had to say, they started treating me with respect". He also revealed some amount of peer conformity by admitting that he would not disclose these feelings outside of our interactions because, ironically, most homeless youth loath the police:

> I would get killed if anyone [other youth] heard me say this, but basically, the group of people in power that have the least amount of prejudice toward the homeless is probably the police. Which, ironically, is the group most hated by a majority of the youth and the homeless. But as it deals with treating people on an equal fair level, the police in general are the ones that will treat them with the most equal respect. You know why? Because the police officers are the only ones who are there every day, that see homelessness face up…they have the best kind of attitude and provide the most valuable service. I have a lot of respect for police officers.

In his view, police officers discriminate the least because they know the context of street life, they are closer to this Other. On the other hand, when he tried to access services at the hospital, Francis felt that he was given second-rate treatment because of the way he looked (i.e. identification with squeegee-ing, panhandling, dressed in Goth). His understanding of these experiences was that institutionalized workers, such as hospital workers, who in this case represent the Self, the mainstream, are more removed from street life and do not leave their institution of work, are more likely to discriminate against or treat the homeless differently and unfairly because they do not have to travel outside of their place of work and do not understand the conditions of homelessness.

Francis's argument, however, that those that are closer to the context of the Other have a better understanding of the stigmatized group did not hold true with his view of front-line workers in the homeless community. Paradoxically, Francis did believe he was treated differently by front-line workers (e.g. shelter workers, drop-in staff) because of his age. He revealed that one of the main reasons he felt disempowered was because of how he was treated due to his age. He stated that these workers (i.e. shelter and drop-in staff) often treated him "as less than an adult" and that "sometimes they don't realize that maybe youth can think on the same level." Francis often felt that he was not treated as an equal and was not heard and respected by service providers. He believed that these front-line workers perceived him as less competent to make decisions than his adult counterparts. "Sometimes they [shelter and drop-in workers] forget that youth may be just as able to make competent decisions as an adult."

This forms another piece of the Self and Other boundaries. Several youth revealed that they felt unfairly judged because of their young age. They felt they were not spoken to or treated as adults would be, but were seen instead as vulnerable and requiring protection ("at-risk"), or as drawn to deviancy and requiring surveillance, or protection. Lucchini (1996) found that the older the street child became the less likely they were seen as a victim, and the more likely they were perceived as a delinquent. This was certainly true in this study. The younger the participant the more likely the youth was perceived as vulnerable and this was a common belief espoused by youth in this study. Many of whom would use this characterization to their advantage. At least half the group endorsed Francis's opinion that they were not treated as adults would be, and felt that workers did not think they were as rational or as competent, but instead viewed them as victims and requiring protection. Some youth described capitalizing on worker's

views of them as vulnerable to acquire the services or materials they needed. Several youth admitted to playing different roles, and using their age and their social skills, including their charm, to their advantage, to manipulate workers in order to obtain what they needed.

A few participants revealed that they often told service providers what they wanted to hear to maintain access to necessary services. For instance, Tyler who was in a drop-in centre when his girlfriend was becoming agitated by the presence of another young woman, responded to her agitation: "shut up and tell them [front-line workers] you aren't going to do anything, that way you can still come to the drop-in." Tyler encouraged her to settle their dispute outside of the agency (fight on the street), but not inform the workers of the fight because it would restrict her access to the agency's services (when agencies are aware that a client has assaulted another client they often restrict their access). Youth were often very aware and astute about their assigned identities by front-line workers and authority figures and used them to their advantage, in particular to diminish harmful consequences (e.g. criminal charges, access to services). Several youth described the many roles they would play in order to access things that they needed.

These illustrations push the boundaries of the static dichotomization of Self and Other boundaries and also exemplify the complexity within these artificial categorizations. While Douglas' work offers a useful schema with which to approach homeless youth's experiences it does not do justice to the complexity of layers to these boundaries, nor to the complexity of identity construction, manipulation and evolution, nor the dynamics of power. Utilizing their

survival skills, many youth purport that they appropriate these images of victimhood and use them to their advantage. They also often resist authority in covert and overt ways. This supports one of Lucchini's (1996) findings around the domains of complementarity. This same analogy could be applied to identity construction. Youth are not only confined to a marginalized status, but instead use aspects of their assigned and engaged identities to cross over into the mainstream whether it be by assuming "socially appropriate" roles as students, workers, or tenants, or mechanisms in the search for justice. There are domains of complementarity within their identities that cross over into the Self and are found as existing in the Other. Youth's identities were not only constructed in relation to being oppressed or marginalized by the Self, but sometimes they were the oppressors and/or they were powerful. Above all, they were survivors.

While most participants, especially the more street-entrenched youth, complained about how they were perceived and subsequently judged by authority figures and street-level bureaucrats, they also felt judged by other youth. Marie, who felt especially persecuted by other young women, surmised that the reason for being frequently targeted and attacked was because she dressed in more expensive clothes and her image did not correlate with street culture:

> My Mom just gave back from the Czech Republic and bought me lots of expensive clothes and a purse. People look at me and wonder what I am doing downtown - if I think I am better than them because of the way I dress. I don't dress like everyone else… Girls at the shelter pick on me and tell me I am taking advantage of the system and I don't deserve to be there, that someone else needs the spot more than me. But I try to tell them that I have as little as them, but I just like to keep busy and make myself look good. I feel like those girls don't even try, they don't take care of themselves and they don't have any goals. I feel like I am always being judged for how I look.

Marie's story highlights the experience that youth frequently judge their peers based on how they look. Marie also admitted that her appearance was very much tied into her identity as being different from her peers, and her perception that she was more successful and was trying harder than them to exit street life, this was based on her perception that she had differing goals and did not look like a street youth.

Youth were very aware about how their appearance affected opportunities, judgement and treatment by others, particularly those represented by the Self. When dealing with opportunities in the mainstream world, many youth tried to alter and soften their image for job or housing interviews to make themselves more appealing and acceptable. In these instances, youth were dabbling at the margins and they pushed at the boundaries of Self and Other, revealing a more nuanced version of Douglas theory and supporting Lucchini's analysis of complementarity. For example, Olivia changed her hair colour to one tone and Laura cut off her dreadlocks before significant job and housing interviews to appear more acceptable and increase their chances of landing jobs and apartments. Michelle pretended to be in school full-time when looking for a part-time job because she felt she would have a better chance with employers if they believed she lived a more "normal" life. Changing and softening their image to appear more acceptable by trying to appear "more responsible" and "normal" were aspects of their outward appearance that they could easily manipulate to their advantage. Youth were keenly aware of the multiple roles they were playing that crossed from the Other into the Self to increase opportunities for stability, to gain the services or resources they needed, or to start the process of disengagement from street life.

Youth were very savvy about how they were perceived by others in many differing contexts, including with family members, with police and front-line workers, and in job and housing markets, and they would alter their appearances based on these changing needs. While many youth initially accepted and internalized stereotypical identities that oscillated between deviant and victim, imposed on them by more powerful Others, their identities also shifted and transformed over their trajectories of homelessness. In the end, many rejected these stereotypes or creatively used them to their advantage (e.g. used their age to diminish legal consequences). Another common element in many youth's stories, ranging from the very street-entrenched to those living more a mainstream life, was the notion of adaptability, creativity, summed up as surviving obstacles. This is a dimension that has been alluded to by others, in particular, Lucchini (1996), who was one of the first to view street children as actors of their own lives and not merely victims or deviants. This will be elucidated more clearly at the end of the chapter. Shifting identities through playing multiple roles was a common theme that emerged and was a strategy youth employed for their survival. The next section will highlight this phenomenon.

4. Role Experimentation and Making Money

Youth's identities shifted based on their changing needs. One aspect of street life that had a huge impact on identity, role transformation and experimentation, in relation to risk, was the different

forms of work that youth engaged in. Attempting new forms of work particularly in the informal economy, came with its own risks, and has been explored by several authors (Gaetz, 2004; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). Working in the informal economy meant work that included but was not exclusive to: panhandling, squeegee-ing, buying and selling items, drug dealing, participating in surveys and doing work for agencies (including internships and acting as resources for agencies involved in community engagement work), babysitting, sex work (including telephone solicitation), working in the service industry informally (getting paid under the table or in kind), working for family members or friends. Some youth even described their engagement in "ethical stealing" as a form of the work they undertook. As described in the previous chapter, because so many youth found welfare so difficult to obtain and/or it did not provide enough income, and/or the job market was inaccessible, they found creative ways to make money or work in exchange for food and/or drugs and/or shelter, and most engaged in some form of work in the informal economy.

Lucy identified herself first and foremost as an injection drug user, this way of life as a form of social identity has been well described by others (Castel, 1998). She described her main role, responsibility and activities as being centred on obtaining $20 a day to maintain her drug use. Her ability to articulate issues around responsible drug use made her attractive to agencies that served youth struggling with addiction. She performed different tasks for these agencies providing her knowledge around harm reduction and substance use. Lucy was also resourceful, she knew which surveys were taking place in the community and how much participants were remunerated, and participated in them to the extent that she was able. When she could not make

enough money through these means of work (e.g. surveys, youth engagement and outreach work) she admitted to resorting to stealing, but only did so when she felt she had no other option:

> We [she and her boyfriend] will steal if necessary but only from big franchises. We are very ethical in who we choose to steal from if we have to. I don't like doing it and don't feel good about it, but it's when we have no choice and we don't want to get sick [from not maintaining daily substance use].

In this context, Lucy's identity as an injection drug user revolves around her need to satisfy her daily drug requirement and to reduce perceived harm of becoming ill. Her daily activities revolve around satisfying this need and her identity is bound up with this responsibility, her social identity is one of injection drug user (Castel, 1998). She views herself as neither a victim nor a deviant but as a survivor who finds creative ways to satisfy her drug dependency, though she is selective about whom she reveals her injection drug use to. While initially quite open about her drug use and passionate around issues related to safe injection use, she admitted that she had not revealed this aspect of her identity to her family and some workers, fearing that it may negatively affect her relationships as many believed she was in recovery. Even though behind closed doors Lucy seemed quite proud to share her insider knowledge of street life and drug use, and emphasized her take on her responsible use, she was a victim of leading a double life, as previously described by Laura and Olivia's vignettes, because she felt she was keeping a dark secret about her use from family and workers that she worked alongside with. At our first meeting she asked questions pertaining to confidentiality, stating

> you won't let the drop-in know right? I mean what I tell you stays between us? I just would feel that I am disappointing them [staff] somehow because I do peer advocacy and engagement work talking to youth about safe drug use but everyone

thinks I have quit, they don't know that I am still using. My mother doesn't even know.

In this light, Lucy played with multiple roles of her shifting identity, ranging from responsible and creative injection drug user surviving the constraints that the streets pose especially as they relate unfairly to young women, to highly politicized peer advocate who projects the image that she is in recovery (not using). Lucy utilizes these different roles to meet different ends. However, in no way does she paint herself as a victim or deviant, but instead portrays herself as a female survivor of the streets who injects drugs responsibly (i.e. this is her social representation).

Some youth however, predominantly the male participants (three of the six: Luke, Tyler, Chris) did gravitate towards deviant identities during parts of the study, and were bound up in the notion that they were hustlers, indicating perhaps the common social perception and stigma that males occupy more deviant roles in society. At least six of the participants revealed that they engaged in selling and dealing items to other youth, often lying about the origins of the product or their functionality. Youth were often victims of other youth's sales pitch and when items sold were not functional, verbal and physical arguments often ensued, with peer group members rallying to the claimant's or defendant's defence. Outside a drop-in one morning, Olivia reported that she had been sold a music player with her last $10 and that it did not work. She was visibly upset and stated "my friends will deal with him [the seller]."   The seller who happened to be one of the other participants (Luke), however, felt that he had earned the money because he had worked hard to hustle his product. His identity was bound up in his ability to

sell, stating "I was a door to door salesman when I was 15. I used to make $500 per day. I can sell anything." Youth used their street-savvy skills to eke out a living whether it was selling weed (which was a common activity reported by almost half the participants at some point in time), selling items (stolen or second-hand), panhandling (9 participants), squeegee-ing (6 participants), or hired to work under the table in various capacities (5 female participants): in restaurants, babysitting, phone solicitation, handing out flyers, carnival work, and included transsexual impersonation.

To portray all the participants work experience as occurring in the realm of the informal economy however, is not an accurate portrayal. At least five of the participants denied ever being engaged in any work in the informal economy, while the other thirteen dabbled in it, with half of those (seven) being quite actively involved on virtually a daily basis. For the youth who were more active in the formal economy (roughly half the group over the course of the study), most had limited experience working in service industry jobs, that they described as insecure and temporary, alluding to labour market trends that have been substantiated in the first chapter. Chris explained that he had jobs for one to two weeks at a time, typically in fast food chains, but they never lasted. He admitted that he ended up being fired because he was caught stealing. He decided that he did not want to be constrained by a work schedule and work at a position where the financial rewards were so minimal; instead, he made money through a combination of petty thefts and panhandling:

> Yeah, I worked at Lone Star and MickeyD's [McDonald's] for a few weeks but I ended up getting canned 'cause I stole stuff… I tried to leave with a keg from the Lone Star and I took other stuff… I had to steal the CHEO [Children's Hospital] charity bottle out of the Beer Store yesterday, there was about $25 in it. I don't

feel good about it but you got to do what you need to do to survive… I stole a car and drove to Montreal last year, but they caught me and now I am on probation for five years. With my record - no one wants to hire me.

In contrast to Chris's story, Daniel was not as entrenched in street life and decided he wanted to exit from the streets. He wanted a job in the formal economy and wanted to stop using drugs. While living at the shelter, Daniel had several part-time service sector jobs, but they lasted only a few weeks at a time. "I got this job at the slaughterhouse but it only lasted a day because the boss said I wasn't strong enough… I think he thought I was too young." A few weeks later, he worked at a fast food chain for a couple of weeks. "I lost my job at Subway for being late too many times… I have been smoking up more lately, I am not dealing anymore, but I need to cut down… I need to find another job." A few months later, Daniel had his own room in a supportive housing complex, was working full time in a bakery, had been promoted several times, and had been given more responsibility and salary.

> I have been promoted to overnight baker. I like it because I work on my own, I am fast and I get most of the work done by 4 am – 1 hour ahead of schedule. It pays $14 an hour… I don't hang around downtown or with the same friends from my past. I don't even smoke up anymore or drink that much. I am living the straight and narrow. I've been to hell and back. I don't miss that life, and I want to move forward. Me and my girlfriend are getting a place together.

He then moved in with his girlfriend and disengaged from street life entirely. In Daniel's case, the role of work played an active part in exiting street life, and choosing a more "normal" life by making a conscious decision to reject his previous street involved life and the activities he associated with it (i.e. drug use).

Youth performed many different roles in relation to work. Typically, the more street involved engaged in different types of work in the informal economy and this has been substantiated by other authors (Gaetz, 2004; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002), while those attempting to disengage chose more recognized forms of work in the formal economy and gradually slipped into more "normal" and socially acceptable roles and this greatly impacted their identities and the kinds of risks they took. With work responsibilities often came the search and acquisition of housing and the choice to disengage from the streets. However, this path was not universal. Some youth were heavily invested in street life and continued to maintain jobs in the formal economy. No stereotype predominated. However, most youth experienced barriers to securing employment in the formal economy because of their age, lack of experience and education, and how they were perceived. Trying different roles in relation to work, whether in the informal or formal economy, is one aspect of risk-taking that youth engaged in. Structural constraints presented in Chapter One (e.g. precarious, insecure, low-paying work; social assistance), and substantiated in Chapter Four, often pushed youth into the informal economy into high-risk and stigmatizing activities (i.e. squeegee-ing, pandhandling, selling drugs, stealing). Other youth indicated that these were the kinds of choices street life presented or the kinds of activities they wanted to experiment with trying. Whether the reasons be structural or individual, or a combination thereof, these experiences all affected the evolution of their identities and the kinds of risks they perceived and managed. As Laura, Olivia, and Lucy's experience shows, many youth led a double life and played multiple roles not only in their work lives, but with their families, friends, and in their dialectic with the Self, crossing over into the mainstream and then back to the margins.

5. An Alternative Conceptualization of Homeless Youth: From Victims and Deviants to Survivors and Risk-Takers

As has been hinted to throughout much of this chapter it is important to highlight another dimension of identity construction of homeless youth that has rarely been promoted, that is one of adaptability, creativity, encompassed by the notion of survivability, a notion that often necessitates taking risks. Taking risks, as has been reviewed in the previous chapter and to a lesser extent in this chapter, is a common element of the homeless youth experience, whether it is understood in terms of adolescent needs, as exemplified in psychological, sociological and anthropological theories of adolescence as elucidated in Chapter Two, or due to structural constraints as outlined in Chapter One, or, to add more complexity to the matter, is most likely a reflection of the manifestation of all these different elements binding together.

Most of the youth in this study, whether they accepted or rejected assigned identities and labels ascribed to them reported some notion of being a survivor, or being creative and adaptive, in the face of present-day constraints (housing, making money), or in terms of surviving their own childhood struggles, or current relationships with families. Every youth in this study, whether they self-identified as the family scapegoat, or the target of group victimization, or the powerful street hustler, recounted their stories in some light of surviving some experience and having creative responses to constraints. While some youth did highlight roles in which they felt they

were victims or deviants, these were not uniform descriptions of their identities but instead were only attached to certain elements or certain roles. In some instances they viewed themselves as deviant (e.g. in Tyler's case when he was hustling), or in other roles as protectors (e.g. safeguarding his girlfriend from sexual victimization), or experimenters. Identities were constantly being experimented with, and were shifting, and were ripe to new experiences, and sometimes were shaped in light of new responsibilities (e.g. becoming a parent). These roles and aspects of their shifting identities all affected the kinds of decisions they made in the face of threats or opportunities (i.e. risk). However, it is interesting to note that several youth revealed that they were savvy about what image they were projecting and, in light of this, viewed themselves as creative and adaptable, encompassing notions of survival.

Conclusion

Youth identities were multiple, layered, and evolving. Participants were thoughtful about how their childhood histories and current relationships with their families shaped their own identities and perception of risks. Many youth described how they believed they were the family scapegoats, and reported being repeatedly lied to, abandoned, and abused. These self-concepts affected the decisions they made on the streets. Some youth experienced a transformation in their relationships with their families over the study's period, and many made conscious decisions to detach themselves emotionally and physically from their families, and in so doing,

gained some objectivity about how these relationships affected them. This process of individuation from their families was a catalyst for identity evolution and formation, and is one of the central developmental tasks of adolescence. The process of maturation also enhanced the formation of their identities. For many participants who experienced identity shifts and growth, their risk perception and practices changed as their identities transformed. Chances they took when they were younger, when their identities were more embedded in their origins or childhood were deemed less acceptable and more risky when they were older. For example, Marie's identification with her father's anger lessens over the course of the study and she becomes less prone to resolving conflict physically.

While some youth normalized and rationalized their identities as offshoots of their parents, and understood their own behaviour as framed within these origins, for instance, in relation to the amount of violence they perpetrated or the drugs they used; other youth actively rejected these influences and detached themselves from familial identities, often constructing their identities in sharp contrast to them. The act of conscious detachment was an attempt at self-preservation in constructing their own identities and this, in turn, affected their risk frameworks. For example, some youth made conscious choices to limit and control their substance use and chose softer, safer drugs than those used by their parents and actively rejected the label of drug addict. Other youth also reported lying to family to keep them engaged. They would hide aspects of their behaviour that was implicit in their identity (e.g. drug use, whereabouts, sexual activity) in an effort to maintain their allegiance and relationships, describing this duality of their identity as leading a "double life". Participant's understanding of how their relationships with family members affected their identities was complex, inchoate, and for many, evolving.

Belonging to a peer network or being marginalized by peers were significant factors in identity construction and survival. While some youth attempted new roles, such as committing criminal acts in order to gain access into gangs, this directly impacted their self-concept and identification with deviancy. Others were victims of group membership and were seen as undesirable to associate with, which further enhanced their marginalization. The experiences were not homogenous, but were unique to the individual, which illustrates a more nuanced analysis of Douglas' Self and Other boundaries as outlined in Chapter Two. Indeed, Self and Other boundaries were not only apparent between large powerful bodies (e.g. police, welfare, institutional structures) and the less powerful (e.g. the homeless), but also occur within these marginalized groups (e.g. amongst homeless youth). The boundaries were not neatly drawn between the powerful and the powerless but boundaries existed within these groups, even between those perceived as less powerful (e.g. homeless youth). In fact, participants often cited other youth as their main oppressors. Homeless youth cannot be viewed as a monolithic group, who are victimized equally, because victims were created within this group by their own members. In this sense, those that were ostracized by their own group are the victims of a form of double victimization. Interestingly, however, these youth do not necessarily see themselves as victims. While some youth admitted to feeling victimized by other youth, others did not appear to let it affect their self-concept; however, it did affect decisions they made on the street (e.g. affected their access to services, appearance, and whereabouts). Moreover, youth had different perceptions about how they were treated by authority figures. All of the youth described some element of survivability, whether it was surviving: childhood and relationships with family, peer victimization, street hazards, or drug dependency.

Many youth described being treated differently and unfairly by their families, authority figures, including front-line workers, either because of their age or identification with street culture, there were also experiences to the contrary. The boundaries between Self and Other were not so neatly observed in youth's descriptions of their treatment by police and front-line workers. Many youth exercised their own power and were savvy in using their knowledge and skills to their advantage, for example, asking for officer's badge numbers and supervisor's name, and telling service providers what they want to hear to maintain access to services, and this served to limit the power that authority figures tried to exert.

The experiences that youth described that directly shaped the construction of their identities and subsequent risk perception and practices were not homogenous. Most youth did not passively accept labels as victims or deviants, but tried on new roles that experimented with their self-concept, and in this sense displayed some feelings of control and power within the contexts in which they found themselves. Engaging in different forms of work, particularly in the informal economy, allowed youth the chance to experiment with different roles and gave many the feeling of some control and power over their own lives. Taking risks voluntarily, even within a context of constrained choices, is a developmentally appropriate stage of adolescence (Turz, 1993).

Most youth felt that their identity shifted based on the different roles they needed to play in order for their needs to be met within certain contexts (e.g. lying to maintain relationships with family, playing up age to diminish legal consequences), and in this light they most commonly relayed

stories of survival. Echoing similar findings of Lucchini's (1996) work, evidence of youth sliding into different roles and "domains" that crossed between boundaries of Self and Other were evident in their narratives. Conceptualizations of neat and rigid boundaries of Self and Other as have been theorized (Douglas, 1969, 1985, 1992) could not be entirely supported as youth moved between different domains or work (formal or informal economy), housing, school, family life, and street activities. Indeed, boundaries were found to be more muted and slippery and depended very much on what kinds of activities youth were engaged in and what kind of image youth wanted to project. The spectrum of experiences youth accumulated greatly impacted participant's self-concept. Many experienced an evolution of their identity in their changing relationships and experimentation with new roles, and this greatly influenced their perception of risks and practices. The evolution of their identity also had a huge bearing on their conceptualizations of responsibility in relation to risks and will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter Six:

Managing Risk:

Regulation, Responsibilization, and

Resistance

In the previous chapter, the link between the evolution of participant's identities and how it affected their risk perception was examined. In this chapter, participants understanding of the link between risk and responsibility will be fleshed out. As was outlined in Chapter Two, governmentality theorists, such as Foucault and Dean, propose that there has been a rise in what has been coined the new prudentialism, essentially arguing that there has been a rise in the privatization and individualization of risk. This is based on the assumption that populations regulate themselves through active surveillance and discipline, in which particular norms of behaviour are constructed and internalized by populations, particularly related to the internalization of certain health behaviours and the discipline of practices resulting in "docile bodies". This policing and regulation of populations and the creation of certain types of subjects through strategies aimed at the well-being of the body has been coined by Foucault (1978) as "biopower". However, these theories have not been tested with a rigidly constructed "at-risk" group, such as homeless youth.

In this study, we intended to uncover participants' conceptualizations of the responsibilization of risk and found that they were varied, malleable, and for some, shifted over the course of the study especially in response to their evolving and multiple identities. While some youth felt individually responsible for their own successes and failures others externalized responsibility, blaming systems, families, and/or the environment. While some did purport to engage in aspects of self-monitoring, they did not necessarily accept and internalize responsibility for significant events (e.g. risk outcomes), nor did they adhere to expert advice, but instead often relied on their own instincts. Moreover, several youth admitted to changing and employing different strategies

in relation to risk management practices, and this, in turn, affected their understanding of responsibility and blame.

1. Self-Regulation and Responsibilization

Foucault contends that rule and order have been maintained in modern times through voluntary self-governance. More recently, the rise of neo-liberalism has meant an increasing emphasis on personal responsibility for avoiding and managing risk. This shift in responsibility is based on the assumption that individuals are rational and calculating, and that they base their decisions on the costs and benefits of behaving in a certain way, that renders them as independent as possible, while subsequently minimizing their risk potentials. According to this logic, if one exhibits risky behaviours, defying the norm to minimize risks, it would seem unacceptable, possibly even immoral of them to do so. Those who exhibit socially deviant behaviour, who act in a risky non-conformist manner, would be viewed as responsible for the negative consequences that may ensue. *Responsibilization* refers to this process of "who" and "what" is to blame, and many believe that the rise of the privatization of risk has occurred through the individualization of responsibility. However, it is unclear if a marginalized group, such as homeless youth, practice self-regulation or resist it, and whether they internalize or externalize blame. This section examines dimensions of participants' practices in relation to self-monitoring, regulation, and blame.

A particularly gendered dimension of risk which predominated was participants' concern regarding their sexual health and, in particular, the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). According to Foucault's (1977) "docile bodies" thesis as outlined in Chapter Two, most of the female youth in this study were self-monitoring and indeed self-regulating in their sexual and reproductive health practices. For example, most female participants worried about becoming pregnant and many revealed they took active precautions to reduce the risk. Indeed, of the twelve young women in the study, two had babies during the study, one had a two year-old prior to the study, and two revealed they had abortions during the study. The remaining seven young women did not divulge whether they were or had been pregnant. More generally, the risks inherent in sexual activity were commonly cited as fears, and many young women openly discussed their practices, and strategies to minimize these risks. Furthermore, a few young women divulged changes in their risk perception, their strategies, and self-monitoring of their practices in relation to their sexual and reproductive health over the course of the study.

Olivia believed she reduced her risk of becoming pregnant by monitoring her menstrual cycle. At our first encounter, she described how she had been having sex with her new boyfriend of two days and did not use condoms or other prophylaxis, stating "there is no risk of pregnancy as I am four days before my cycle." Further, when we discussed sexual activity and the risk of contracting a STI, she stated she was not worried because her new boyfriend had not "slept with many girls" and that she is "tested a lot." Mid-way through the study, however, she was devastated when she tested positive for three STIs and had to reveal the news to her boyfriend:

> I am worried my boyfriend is going to break up with me. I feel really ashamed about how many guys I have slept with. He's only slept with three girls so I know I didn't get any infections from him… I know who I got it from. He [another youth] had Chlamydia and I slept with him anyways without a condom. Now I have probably given it to my boyfriend. How am I going to tell him [current boyfriend]? What a stupid mistake.

After receiving the news about becoming infected, Olivia conceded that if she were to have a different sexual partner in the future she would use condoms. Prior to this experience, Olivia revealed that she had also conceived three times but had miscarried each time. After the STI discovery, she became pregnant a short while later, and by the end of the study, had a healthy baby boy. These two events, contracting STIs and becoming a mother, forced her to reconsider her earlier practices. When she first hit the streets, she was not concerned about the risks to her sexual and reproductive health, and did not employ strategies to reduce these risks, except for monitoring her menstrual cycle. The realization of both outcomes urged her to reconsider this approach, and she adopted two new practices, using both contraceptives and prophylaxis in her future sexual relationships and, in turn, became more self-regulating. However, this was not at the urging of medical professionals but these decisions, she revealed, were based on her direct experience.

Marie also became pregnant during the course of the study and elected to start a family with her boyfriend. Prior to becoming pregnant, however, she was very conscious of sexual activity risks. She admitted to practicing abstinence before she met her current partner. Once they started to have sex, she relied on birth control pills, condoms, and the pull-out method to reduce the risk of pregnancy and STIs. She admitted that she worried about getting infected, and becoming

pregnant, and these were her considerations for remaining in a monogamous relationship in which they practiced safe sex. Mid-way through the study, however, Marie was baffled out how she became pregnant when she felt they took all the necessary precautions, stating "I don't know how this happened. But we are going to keep it. I don't believe in abortion. Anyways, most of my friends are pregnant now, too." After the initial shock, she and her partner were excited about having a baby and started making preparations, such as moving into his apartment and acquiring things for the baby.

Unlike Olivia, Marie was acutely aware of sexual risks before hitting the streets, and she employed active strategies to minimize those risks. Marie's story also alludes to the importance of group membership in normalizing behaviours. Her pregnancy becomes validated and is normalized by her peer group (who she identifies as not street youth), and is not influenced by more powerful others represented in systems and institutions (e.g. experts). For Marie, it also becomes a way to distance herself from other homeless youth on the street, who she perceives as not trying as hard as her to exit street life or set life goals, as evidenced in the previous chapter. Pregnancy for Marie, becomes a way to reposition her identity and distance herself from a street identity by accepting a new responsibility (i.e. a baby), and building her life around this new identity as a mother. In light of these new circumstances, she is confirming to herself that her new identity falls into the legitimate world of the Self and what is "normal," and admonishes her ties to the streets. She also endorses notions of the privatization of risk, by espousing beliefs that individuals are responsible for harm that befalls them, and that most female homeless youth she knows do not try "hard enough" to exit the streets or set goals for themselves (as evidenced in the previous chapter).

There was a wide range of responses regarding participants' perceptions and practices with regard to safe sex. Some participants acknowledged that they always practiced safe sex (e.g. birth control, condoms) and that they were fearful of becoming pregnant because so many of their friends were. According to Sadie, who was seventeen years-old and living in the shelter and looking for an apartment for her and her two-year old son, becoming a mother at her age was somewhat of an expectation. Similar to Marie's story, most of Sadie's girlfriends either had children or were expecting, and the responsibility of child-rearing always disproportionately fell on the women:

> It's all on us [young women] to raise the kids and they [the children] need you in the morning twenty-four-seven – there is never a break. As soon as we have the kids, the guys are gone, they aren't reliable. My ex has only seen my boy four times since he's been born and now he's fighting me for custody because he's trying to control me, get back at me.

The perception that young women assume the risk of pregnancy and responsibility of raising children was a theme that predominated. There was a spectrum of experiences and strategies that young women employed to reduce the risk of getting pregnant, and acquiring STIs. Most female participants, however, were conscious about the risks inherent in sexual activity and took steps to actively minimize them by surveying their own habits and ensuring they had appropriate protection, such as condoms and birth control pills. Most female participants viewed themselves as responsible for their own sexual and reproductive health, but they also blamed sexual partners for not being forthcoming about their sexual histories, or for not having adequate protection. Unlike female participants, male participants did not disclose sexual health risks and it did not

come up in conversation. I can only speculate that this was perhaps because of our obvious gender difference, and/or perhaps because my pregnancy made them uncomfortable discussing sexual issues, and that males are not responsibilized in the same way girls are for their sexual reproductive health, in particular, risk of pregnancy.

Self-regulation occurred not only in relation to sexual and reproductive health but also in relation to participants' physical and mental health. Female and male participants alike revealed that they often struggled with mood swings, and in particular feelings of depression, that they often attributed to drug use and/or emotional issues stemming from relationships with their families. Interestingly, several youth reported feeling more emotionally stable once they left their homes and lived on the streets. Several youth also reported that their drug use, and withdrawal from substances in particular, negatively affected their mood. At these times, some youth revealed that they accessed mental health services. Again, there was a wide range of responses in terms of self-monitoring with regards to participants mental and physical health.

For example, Luke, a seventeen year-old of South-east Asian descent, revealed that he had attempted suicide twice. However, he downplayed the significance of these events and, in fact, laughed about them, blaming their occurrence on his withdrawal from morphine. He had recently decided to abstain from injection drug use and revealed that he now only uses "chemicals and pot." For him, the switch from injection drugs to what he perceived as "safer" drugs, was an effort to mitigate episodes of suicidality and promote his mental stability. Hence, Luke actively monitored his mental health status by employing a risk reduction strategy (e.g. not

using injection drugs and choosing 'safer' ones) that was driven by his personal experience and insight, and not expert advice. The decision to do "softer drugs" was because he viewed them as "safer". His self-monitoring and in turn self-regulation was not due to advice of authorities or expert systems, or "strategies" he felt subjugated by as governmentality theorists hypothesize. His interpretation and understanding of the urgency to abstain is spurred by intuition, personal experience and will.

Similarly, Annie had made the switch to softer drugs because she had found her physical and mental health suffered when she was using harder drugs, such as methamphetamine. She revealed that at the height of her use, she had lost a significant amount of weight and had been "down to 107 pounds." Her perception was that her physical health was at its worst, she never ate, and that she never wanted to "look that unhealthy again." Moreover, her perception was that her mental health and her self-esteem were negatively impacted, stating "I didn't like who I was on meth [methamphetamines]. I wasn't myself. I was all nasty and uptight. I was a real bitch." She stated that her decision to quit using methamphetamines was also inspired by her fear of getting "bad drugs." She revealed that you "never knew what you were getting. What kind of trip [drug reaction] you are going to have," and that "meth is made in bathtubs, you don't know what the hell it's mixed with." Annie's story demonstrates that not only did her risk perception change in relation due to her drug use and its impact on her physical and mental health, but that she is acutely aware of these changes, and is constantly monitoring her own body and mind reactions to promote her well-being. Her decisions are based on her own situated, local knowledge of her body and her understanding of health.

Lucy, on the other hand, identified herself as an injection drug user and was a vocal advocate regarding drug user's rights and their health promotion. Lucy's story demonstrates her awareness of risks inherent in using drugs, but also illustrates her conviction that it is the individual's responsibility to keep oneself safe, endorsing a more individualized notion of responsibility and risk.

1.1 Vignette of Lucy: The Responsible Drug User

Lucy was a sixteen year-old from the Ottawa area. She revealed that she started using opiates around the age of thirteen. At this time, she started abusing prescription drugs that she would find when visiting friends' homes. Around the same time, she also began stealing and using ketamine from a veterinary clinic that her sister worked at. She explained that life at home during this time was full of conflict and tension. Although her parents eventually separated they had a tumultuous relationship, beginning even before she was born, when her father left her mother while she was pregnant with her. She described her father as a white-collar worker, and stated that her mother had a physical disability that prevented her from gainful employment and resulted in dependence on provincial disability benefits and her father's income. Lucy also revealed that her father was emotionally abusive. She described being in junior high school one day, when she was called into the principal's office and told that she would not be allowed to

return home because CAS (Children's Aid Society) was investigating abuse. She stated: "I wasn't given any notice. I never had the chance to go back to our apartment and get my things. I never saw my home again." Lucy shuffled into an emergency shelter, then to a foster home, and then decided to go back to the shelter to "take care of my mom" (where her mother was also staying). Since that time, Lucy had been receiving drug counselling services, and did stop using for an extended period of time, but when she began dating an older youth who she described as "abusive and a heavy drinker," it spurred a secondary alcohol addiction. Lucy broke up with this boyfriend because she realized he "wasn't good for me." Soon after, she met her current boyfriend who initially was abstaining from drugs, but had been an injection drug user in the past. Once he relapsed and began using again, she started injecting drugs, too. Lucy had been living on the streets ever since. She stated that her mother has had her own apartment for the past year and she "temporarily" stays with her, but that mostly she "crashes with her boyfriend and friends" in apartments, abandoned buildings, or on the streets. Lucy reported that she has no contact with her father or his family because they disapprove of her drug use and street life.

Lucy revealed that her "whole day revolves around how we are going to make the money for our habit. We [she and her boyfriend] know we need to make $20 a day for our drugs and we are very worried about getting sick [withdrawing]." Lucy confessed that she made money in a number of ways (as was outlined in the previous chapter) to support her drug use, such as, surveys, youth engagement work, and "ethical stealing". She was very conscious about the risks inherent in injecting drugs and was eager to politicize others.

Lucy also exemplifies Castel's (1998) findings that "addicts" often view their drug practices as a way of life and their social identities are representations of the relational nature of these dependencies. Drug use, for Castel and Lucy, is not so much about the substance or chemicals involved but about the relational nature to the substance itself and the context in which it is acquired and maintained, this is equally so for other participants, Ingrid and Tyler.

Lucy's social identity as an injection drug user also encompassed the strategies she employed to minimize harm and her political convictions with regards to drug use. She was strongly invested in projecting her image as a "responsible" drug user.

> I never share equipment. I've never had an abcess… We really need a safe injection site here in Ottawa. I have to try and find a place downtown that's out of the way to shoot up, but you worry about people jumping you for your stuff, or the cops taking your gear [instruments], or seeing you… Sometimes I will go to the SITE van [community organization that supplies drug instruments] twice a night to get clean gear. I've even stopped using a belt and now use a tourniquet. I don't even share [tourniquet] with my friend who is Hep+ [hepatitis]. I am a very careful user.

The notion of the privatization and individualization of risk is apparent in Lucy's narrative. She is proud that she has not become physically ill from her drug use as evidenced by the lack of abcesses and believes that this is because she is a responsible and "careful user." Lucy is very invested in projecting her image as a responsible drug user because of how injection drug users are viewed and she wants strongly to combat this stereotype of deviancy and irresponsibility. By portraying herself in this way she crosses over into the responsibilized Self by accepting and internalizing responsibility to keep her and others safe, though her activities (i.e. injection drug

use) could be characterized in the category of the Other as strongly "polluting," as ones that are deviant and transgress social norms.

Lucy is acutely aware of the inherent risks and actively monitors and changes her strategies (e.g. switched from belt to tourniquet use) to reduce potential harm and accepts responsibility for keeping herself safe. Moreover, while she views maintaining her drug use as her main responsibility she also holds it responsible for her estrangement from her family. She stated that since she hit the streets and has been actively using, her father and his family will not agree to see her and, in fact, blame her for choosing street life. In this sense, there is a triple form of responsibilization occurring. Lucy feels individually responsible for her addiction, and tries to promote her well-being by being a careful user, but she also blames her addiction for estrangement from her father and his family. Lastly, she also perceives that her father's family blames her for "choosing" street life and her continued substance use.

At the other end of the spectrum, of addiction and responsibilization, is Tyler's story. Tyler claims not to take active measures to reduce potential harm and is rather glib about the risks that he is aware of, but elects to ignore or downplay. His story also illustrates the difficulties this population has accessing programs that are designed to promote health in the adult population, but ignore parallel pressing concerns in the youth population. While Tyler claimed to like to use any substances, his drug of choice was crack. At the time of the study, free crack pipes were being given out in the community to reduce the risk of hepatitis infection. But unlike needle exchange programs, which are funded provincially and can be accessed by under eighteen year-

olds, the crack pipe program was targeted for the adult population (e.g. eighteen year-olds and over), and was a municipal pilot program launched by a more liberal municipal government (the program has since been dismantled). Tyler revealed that he smoked crack on a daily basis and shared pipes "all the time." He stated that when he tried to access the free crack pipes he was turned away because he was not eighteen years-old. Sometimes he would send a friend to get a free pipe, but then he would have to share his drugs and the pipe anyways, so he stopped trying because he figured it was not worth the cost. Tyler explained that he knew he could contract hepatitis from sharing pipes but that it was "worth the risk." I ran into Tyler one last time before he entered an addictions treatment facility where he had been court-ordered to reside for one year. At the time, he stated that he was "dope sick" from using too much ecstasy and proceeded to vomit a few times on the sidewalk. In contrast to Lucy's narrative, Tyler wanted to project an image of irresponsibility and carelessness, with regard to how much and what kinds of drugs he used. He prided himself on being able to handle any kind and amount of drugs, and gave the impression that he did not monitor the quantity of drugs he used or cared about the methods of administration. He also denied being overly concerned about the potential risks to his health. In this vein, Tyler disproves the notion that internalization of risk, and individualization of responsibility attached to those risks is a foregone conclusion, as he projects an image that he is not overall invested in policing himself and denies engaging in any form of self-monitoring or regulation. Moreover, he stated that he enjoyed "living the life" and taking any opportunities that street life presented. Tyler appeared to be invested in portraying himself as the Other and resisting more mainstream existences (Self). He downplayed giving much thought to living a more "normal" life, principally because his childhood had a similar character and was full of

change, constant adaptation, upheaval and instability, he appeared to resist conformity and normalcy.

Adding a different dimension and complexity to the continuum of self-regulation, with respect to the risks inherent in drug use, lies Laura's story. At the beginning of the study, Laura admitted she was a daily morphine injection drug user and was trying to find about methadone treatment programs to quit using substances. After several attempts to access these services, she decided that she needed more intensive treatment to fight her addiction, and she decided to investigate residential treatment programs. Initially embarrassed about her addiction and concealing it from her family, she finally turned to them for help once they discovered that she was using. However, she was adamant about finding an addictions treatment facility with a medical detoxification program, because her fear of becoming sick from withdrawal:

> My Mom and her best friend are pushing me to go to Detox [facility to temporarily dry out – do not prescribe medication to aid with painful withdrawal symptoms] right away but I want a program with a med detox. I feel like if I go to Detox for a few days it's setting me up to fail, to relapse, because I'll have to wait to get into a treatment centre [long-term residential facility]. They don't seem to understand, and they think I am copping out, looking for an easy fix because of the meds they can prescribe you in a med detox program. I am scared of getting very sick and I don't want to relapse. I tried to quit cold turkey on my own for three days before, and I got really sick. I am never doing that again.

In Laura's case, she is not only actively self-monitoring her needs, but her family is monitoring her behaviour as well. Not only is she assessing her own needs and trying to access appropriate services to meet those needs, for instance, her fear of painful withdrawal symptoms that she

perceives will lead her to relapse, she had to insist upon them with her family who she perceived as bullying her into a treatment system that she felt was inadequate and would set her up for failure. In this vein, Laura's perception of successful recovery is contingent upon her own risk consciousness, but it is competing against her family's risk framework as well. In Laura's case, she feels responsible for her addiction treatment plan, and her family holds her responsible too. Furthermore, her family monitors her abstinence and develops a "list of rules and conditions," that she has to abide by in order to return to live at home, such as abstaining from substance use, before going into a residential treatment facility. This list, developed by her mother, included: "no drugs, no needles, shower every day, eat a healthy lunch, and be respectful of others." Upon reviewing these conditions with Laura, she then told her daughter she would have to "mother herself," that is monitor herself by adhering to the list of rules. Laura's story illustrates a complex arrangement of surveillance. While Laura is told she needs to monitor her abstinence, her family also monitors and regulates her behaviour as a condition to receive their help and support. There is also a third element to this interplay between her risk framework and responsibilization. While Laura did feel responsible for her own recovery and wanted to make her family "proud," she also felt that the system was responsible for not providing what she needed in a timely manner and with the requisite services, that is, a residential addictions treatment facility with a medical detoxification component (these services are limited in Ontario). She searched for months before finding a program that could adequately meet her needs and finally secured a place in a residential treatment centre.

Indeed, many youth complained about the wait for methadone maintenance program services and about the lack of medical detoxification programs. For instance, Lucy admitted that she had

looked into the methadone maintenance program, as unlike Laura she was not interested in a residential treatment facility, but that there was a two to three month wait and that she did not want to "take that spot away from someone else who is worse off than us [she and her boyfriend]." While many youth held themselves responsible for their own drug use and its consequences, they also indicated that they held the system responsible for not providing adequate services in a timely manner. In fact, Ottawa does have a shortage of addiction treatment services for the youth population as is evidenced by the plans underway to build a new facility. This was not only true of addiction treatment services, but of social, housing, and health services as well, which were often perceived as inaccessible, or treatment was differential because of being identified as young and homeless.

Responsibilization as a concept in relation to risk perception and practices, had many layers that spanned a spectrum of responsibility and blame, from the individual to their families, to systems and institutions, to the environment itself. While there was evidence that youth did feel individually responsible for harm that befell them, it was not exclusive to them alone, but services within systems were also viewed as culpable in their continued victimization, deviancy, and/or homelessness. For instance, accessing social assistance, for sixteen and seventeen year-olds, was viewed as a waste of time and energy and almost impossible to access by almost all of the participants when they were sixteen and seventeen years-old. As outlined in Chapter Four, many youth described the barriers they faced when they tried to access social assistance systems, housing and labour markets, and many blamed the system for their inability to exit homelessness. Thus, youth not only blamed themselves or their families for negative occurrences, such as

addiction, homelessness, and poor health, but also held the system accountable for their victimization, deviancy, and/or sustained homelessness.

Lastly, participants also blamed the environment for increasing risks and negative outcomes. Many youth described that certain people and places were responsible for choices that negatively affected them, such as drug use, unsafe sex, and criminal activity. The context of homelessness itself was often blamed for encouraging victimization. Ingrid, Olivia and Daniel all cited certain places that facilitated their drug use, and in turn, made changes to their risk prevention strategies such as: staying away from certain places or people to decrease the risk of relapse or increased use. For Ingrid, her risk prevention strategy included staying away from "crack alley" (e.g. a strip of street that runs in front of a main shelter and drop-in centre) to reduce temptation. For Daniel, he associated his crack addiction with living in a rooming house, claiming that his use started there and ended with his eviction from his room. His subsequent risk management strategy was to avoid renting in a rooming house again, thereby reducing his risk of crack addiction. For Olivia, certain places and people were responsible for drug experimentation and criminal activity:

> I get a lot of people getting me to try a lot of drugs, and I really don't want to get into that kind of stuff… A lot of shit out there is really dangerous, like, eight times now I've been offered crack, and I won't do it! I try my hardest to stay   away from people who do it, or have offered me to do it, and that's hard, because a lot of people have offered.

Once she made the decision to leave the streets, she avoided certain places and the people associated with occupying those spaces to reduce the chance of substance use and criminal activity, as she had outstanding criminal charges related to previous gang activity.

In sum, participants described a range of health worries related to sexual and reproductive health, to mental and physical health, and to drug addiction and withdrawal. While there were some commonalities in their self-monitoring, ranging from the vigilant and "responsible," and the concomitant use of active strategies to reduce risks, others were less concerned and did not employ risk management strategies, perhaps in an effort to resist advice from "experts" and the constant messaging of institutions providing assistance. Roughly two-thirds of the participants appeared to internalize and individualize responsibility for their health and well-being. However, among most of these participants that projected an image of individual responsibility, they also recognized faults in the system and externalized blame for some of their risk-taking behaviours due to constraints in the system for not providing adequate services to meet their needs. This was not merely the case for addictions treatment services, as evidenced by Lucy and Laura's narratives, but also for social assistance, supportive housing, and health care systems. Youth were acutely aware of drawbacks, inconsistencies, and barriers to systems that are allegedly established to help marginalized populations. The next section will examine the messages that youth receive from relevant experts, such as the workers they interact with, regarding risk and responsibility and they ways in which youth respond to and deploy strategies, including ones of resistance.

2. Relevance of Expert Knowledges and Practices of Resistance

According to socio-cultural risk theorists, the importance of expert knowledges are paramount, and are central to the formation of certain types of subjects. In this light, experts outline the risks and the appropriate behaviours to avoid and minimize risk, and the relevant population internalizes and follows these guidelines through active self-governance. Risk-avoiding behaviour becomes a moral enterprise relating to issues of self-control, self-knowledge and self-improvement. This increase in self-management, through the privatization of risk, means that those who do not behave in morally appropriate ways are to blame for their own misfortune, thereby absolving society of any responsibility to care for those less fortunate. However, what these theorists assume is that people respond to these expert messages in a uniform way. As will be illustrated below, responses to expert advice vary, are complex, and are context and person-specific, and can result in practices of resistance.

Marie admitted that she struggled with depression and was very depressed when she lived with her parents and foster family before hitting the streets. When she was fifteen years-old, she attended a "suicide party" with a few of her friends in which they all attempted suicide. She ended up at the children's hospital and had her "stomach pumped." She explained that "nobody talked about what happened," and the event was never discussed within her family. Shortly thereafter, she began seeing a psychiatrist but her family remained silent about the depression.

At the time of the study, she revealed that she no longer had suicidal feelings and was in fact no longer on anti-depressant medication (though she did admit that she still struggles with symptoms of depression), but she did continue to see her psychiatrist. She also revealed that she tried not to consume alcohol, and rarely smoked marijuana, because she found it affected her mood and caused her to be more depressed. During the study, her psychiatrist urged her to reconsider starting a different anti-depressant because she was still depressed, but Marie stood by her conviction that she did not like the way the previous anti-depressant made her feel. Marie's perception was that she was very sensitive to medication and was not interested in experimenting with a new anti-depressant. "My doctor wants to switch me to Paxil [anti-depressant] but I am really sensitive to medications and I don't find they work. That's why I stopped Prozac [another anti-depressant] last year. I do feel down most of the time though."

She also did not have the funds to purchase the medication and she had been denied benefits that would cover her prescription medication by welfare in the past, so she was not interested in trying to apply for these benefits again. While Marie was acutely aware of feeling down, and was very open to discussing these feelings, she did not feel the medication would be beneficial, nor did she believe it would be paid for by social assistance. The possible benefit did not outweigh the risk and the work involved. While she monitored her own mental and physical health status, and openly discussed mental health symptoms, she did not take "expert" advice and start a new medication, but followed her intuition including cutting down on her substance use.

Like many youth, while Marie was self-monitoring in regards to her health, she preferred to try and deal with these issues in what she perceived as a non-invasive and self-controlling way. She admitted that she found counselling, goal-setting and engaging in productive work (e.g. attending school, working under the table at a restaurant, babysitting) more beneficial to her mental health than following expert advice (e.g. taking prescribed anti-depressant medication). "I just prefer to deal with things on my own. When I keep myself busy, get out, and dress well, put myself together well, I feel better."

Indeed, many youth were fearful of taking prescribed medications for mental health symptoms, and did not follow professional psychiatric advice, but instead preferred to try and deal with symptoms on their own and in their own ways, such as talking to friends, "herbal" methods (over-the-counter alternative medicine pills and marijuana), and artistic expression. These acts of resistance to power and authority illuminate some of Foucault's thesis on power that was highlighted in Chapter Two, namely, that where there is power so too is there resistance.

A common thread of resistance that emerged, in terms of self-monitoring one's physical and mental health, was the importance of instinct, and making choices that youth described as feeling right for them, even if it went against expert advice. As outlined in Chapter One this is a common finding among youth. While many youth endorse having some form of health issue, they rarely access professional services (61% do not) and those who do (25%) report that they do not heed medical advice (Bourns & Meredith, 2007). Youth practice resistance in many forms:

resisting advice from medical experts, parents, and front-line workers, and frequently follow
their own intuition or local knowledges (i.e. peers).

Indeed, as outlined earlier, Laura's desire to find an addiction treatment centre with a medical
detoxification component was critical to her facing her addiction. This meant that she trusted her
own instincts, and practiced resistance by going against her mother's advice and the professional
advice her mother sought. She clearly was not subservient to expert opinion:

> I feel like my mother and her best friend really want to help me, but they don't
> really understand. They haven't gone through this before. They think they know
> what's best, because they are reading up on addiction, and talking to professionals.
> But I need to do what's right for me, and I don't want to get sick or relapse. My
> mother has an appointment next week with an addictions counsellor for advice and
> she wants me to come, but I know the kind of treatment I am looking for.

Laura's story illustrates that while she is cognizant of other's opinions, she elects to do what,
instinctually, feels right for her and resists the advice of others. Expert knowledges were not
central to her decision making, but her experience of having suffered painful withdrawal before
led her to search for the kind of programs she feels would best meet her needs.

Furthermore, when I asked participants what kinds of messages they received from interactions
with workers, such as shelter and drop-in workers, medical professionals, social assistance and
housing workers, and police officers, in relation to risk, responses varied.   While a few youth
sought out support from front-line workers or health professionals, others were very wary of

accessing help. Youth did not blindly accept opinions of those that were considered experts. While some youth actively self-monitored symptoms, related to their health or their substance use, others were free-spirited and experimental, testing different roles, relationships, and substances. While some youth did mention messages in relation to risk they heard from front-line workers (e.g. dangers of Hepatitis and STIs), the relevance and importance of "experts" in their lives did not predominate in their risk consciousness. Their childhood histories, and accumulation of street experiences and opportunities, coupled with their own individuation framed their risk consciousness and subsequent decisions. Bellot (2001) and Levac (2005) have both noted that front-line workers, in general, occupy little space in the lives of homeless youth. This was certainly true in this study. Even those youth that were connected to mental health and addictions systems and sought regular support, ultimately determined their own treatment plans, and did not blindly accept professional advice. Often their decisions were a combination of influences with their own instincts and peer advice prevailing as the chosen way to proceed. One of the factors that greatly influenced youth's risk perception, in relation to responsibility, was the importance of significant events denoted here as bifurcations from their trajectories of homelessness.

3. Bifurcations

Significant events, for many homeless youth, were described as catalysts that encouraged their exit from or altered their entrenchment in street life in some way. Bifurcation is the term employed in this section to connote this change process that resulted in departing or pulling away from their identification as a homeless youth and embarking on a new course. Bifurcation is a term used by chaos theorists and mathematicians to connote a radical change process, and a change of direction (Jacobs, 2000). According to Jacobs, bifurcation entails that a "system's instabilities of some sort can have become so serious that for it to continue operating as it has been is not a practical option. It must make a radical change – take a fork in the road, travel into new territory" (Jacobs, 2000: 87). This seemed like a particularly apt term as it applied to radical changes youth made in their lives when their lives became too unstable or conditions too intolerable. These decisions birthed significant changes, altering their current path, in essence, transforming their ways of being and their operating systems. Olivia used the term "revolutionary" to describe how her life changed once she found out she was pregnant. This phenomenon captures the essence of the monumental changes youth made in their lives that severely impacted its future direction and subsequent perceptions of risk and denotes a sense of evolution.

Similar to Karabanow et al.'s (2005) study of homeless youth, as outlined in Chapter Two, the phenomenon of experiencing significant and traumatic events often encouraged disengagement, and eventual exit, from street life, and subsequent changes in behaviours. As will be highlighted

in the next vignette, Daniel described his trajectory into drug addiction and homelessness as his awakening to "straighten himself out," which ultimately affected his own self-concept around responsibility and blame.

3.1 Vignette of Daniel

Daniel was a seventeen year-old originally from a small town outside of Ottawa. He lived with his mother, young brother and older sister until the age of fifteen. His parents divorced when he was six years-old and his father moved to the city. He described both his parents as working professionals and having secure well-paid jobs. He stated that, at age fifteen, he was sent to live with his father in the city because he was "partying, drinking and using ecstasy, and cutting class," and that his mother was tired of dealing with his delinquent behaviour. Once in Ottawa, Daniel began using more substances and eventually dropped out of school. He also started stealing from his father to pay for his drugs. When his father found out about the stealing and the drug use, he evicted him. Daniel rented the only place that would rent to him, a room in a rooming house where most of the tenants were using crack. It was not long before he was addicted to crack and revealed he was "spending all of my OW [social assistance] on crack." He stated: "my parents told me they won't let me move back home 'til I clean up my act. I came from a normal family and everything, but I just screwed up." Eventually, he was evicted and ended up in the shelter. Leaving the rooming house life behind, Daniel made the decision to stop using crack and switched to using softer substances.

Over the course of the year, Daniel was very preoccupied with finding employment. He worked several odd jobs in the formal economy, sold marijuana in the informal economy, and by the end of the study, had secured a full-time job as a baker and had stopped dealing drugs. He had also moved from the shelter into a supportive housing complex, and then in with his girlfriend, and disengaged from street life entirely, and stopped using drugs. Over the course of the year, he had planned on moving home to his father's or mother's place several times, but it never quite worked out. Several times he expressed sadness about not being able to "go back to my life." Daniel expressed remorse for his "screw ups," and at one point, when he had secured employment his father agreed he could move in with him, but then at the last moment reneged the offer. Daniel was very disappointed:

> Yeah, my Dad had told me I could move back in with him once I clean up my act, you know, once I have a job and stop using drugs. But once I did these things he changed his mind. He decided that we just don't do well together… My Mom is splitting up with her boyfriend and has decided to take a job in the U.S.A., so I can't move in with her. I guess I have to grow up sometime, so it might as well be now.

In Daniel's case, there were two identifiable bifurcations in his story which affected his subsequent decisions and the direction his life was headed, they also impacted his understanding of responsibility and blame. The first was overcoming his crack addiction by removing himself (involuntarily) from the place he identified with using. While he blamed the location and easy access to drugs for his addiction, he also blamed himself. The second turning point was the refusal of his parents to allow him to move home, which further reinforced his internalization of blame. Daniel viewed both of these as catalysts for his own maturation and independence, and

subsequently internalized and individualized his struggles. He expressed several times that he had only himself to blame for being homeless and addicted. This notion was also supported by his family's belief system, evidenced by their message that he could move home if he secured a job and stopped using drugs. However, when Daniel met these two criteria they were still unwilling to have him at home. This further magnified and reified Daniel's belief that he had "really screwed up," and this, in turn, led him to internalize and individualize his problems with addiction, homelessness, and school failures.

Indeed, some youth identified significant events in their lives for changing the course of their street lives, and this directly impacted their ideas about risk and responsibility. Ingrid revealed that witnessing her previous boyfriend's murder had a huge impact on her street life, at least for a time. After the murder, she became romantically involved with her previous boyfriend's best friend, stating: "he's the only one I can be with after what happened." They moved into an apartment together and Ingrid revealed it was the first time she had housing in five years on the street. However, after a few months of overcrowded apartment living, where their place had become a "crash pad" for all of their friends, and increased morphine use, she and her boyfriend decided to leave street life and move back home to her parents' house in the country. During this time, Ingrid explicitly tapered her morphine use and eventually quit using altogether, at least for several months. The monotony of living with her parents, being disconnected from street life (e.g. especially abstinence from substance use), and holding down a "boring job" triggered her return to the streets. In an email correspondence I received from her, she stated: "homelessness sux. When u do good and fall back down it gets harder and harder to get back up." During my encounters with Ingrid, she never blamed her family, or friends, or the system for her

homelessness or drug use. She never viewed herself as a victim, and she never blamed anyone but herself for her decisions. She accepted responsibility for both her successes and failures. She did however, cite the significant event of her partner's murder as affecting her decisions, in terms of her choices regarding intimacy, her desire to disengage from street life, and her efforts to quit using drugs.

Similarly, several female youth cited abortion and pregnancy as significant events in their lives that changed the direction of their lives (bifurcations). Annie and Tanya both chose to terminate their pregnancies. They described this decision as significantly impacting future life decisions. Both decided to limit what kinds of drugs they were using, be more discriminating about who they were spending time with (intimately and otherwise), and be more goal driven (e.g. became more invested in their education, or finding jobs and/or housing). They both felt culpable for not taking precautions to guard against pregnancy, only blamed themselves, and both agreed they were going to be more "responsible" in the future. Marie and Olivia, on the other hand, decided to become mothers and accepted this responsibility even though it was unplanned.

Other significant events which influenced youth's perception of risk and responsibility, and subsequent decisions, were the impact of relationships. Several youth, including Laura, described how changes in their relationships with parents or friends acted as turning points. When Laura's parents found needles and other drug paraphernalia in her bag they confronted her about her addiction. Up until that point, Laura felt that she had been living a double life because her family and school friends did not know about her drug use and the degree of her street

involvement. She lived in fear that they would find out. "My Mom was more understanding than I thought she would be, and wants me to get help. My Mom, sisters, and friends, are helping me look into addiction treatment centres." Though this support was not without tension and conflict, she did acknowledge that without the support of her family and friends she would not have entered a treatment facility. Laura admitted early on in the study that she had been trying to fight her morphine addiction on her own, but that the draw was too strong. She felt she was not a "typical addict" as she was "responsible, mature, and I have always held down a job and gone to school at the same time. But the high is just too good, too powerful." Interestingly, Laura sees herself as subservient to her drug use. She does not hold herself responsible but does feel ashamed about it. Laura's conceptualization of responsibility in relation to her drug use, are the drugs themselves. If they were not so powerful, then she would not be a slave to them. Her family and friends finding out about her drug use, inadvertently, was the springboard for her getting help. While she feels embarrassed about her dependency, she does not feel solely responsible.

In sum, turning points in participants' lives represented significant events that impacted their disengagement from homelessness and/or substance use, or altered their choices in some way, which subsequently affected their risk perception and practices. Within these turning points there were very varying degrees and dimensions of responsibility. While some youth felt individually responsible for victimization others projected the blame onto others, including families, friends, systems, and the environment.

Conclusion

Participants described a range of practices with regards to self-monitoring. While some youth actively engaged in self-monitoring to minimize perceived risks, others were cavalier in their practices and were resistant to expert messaging. Moreover, with the passage of time and the accumulation of street experiences, some youth actively changed their risk management practices to reduce potential harm. Similarly, the range of responsibilization for negative outcomes extended from the individual, to one's peer group and family, to systems they were dependent on, to the general context of homelessness. While much internalization of blame was evident it was not an absolute, as participants turned blame outward and cast the net wide to include the environment, and the failure of systems that they viewed as sustaining their continued victimization, deviant behaviours, and homelessness. Resistance to power took many forms as Foucault has suggested. Many youth resisted expert (i.e. medical) advice, parental advice, and advice from front-line workers by following their own intuition and relying on personal experience.

Many youth also described bifurcations in their lives that significantly affected their choices and risk perception and management. For many, these included traumatic and significant events that forever altered their understanding of street life, for others it was the experience of homelessness and substance dependency itself that provided the springboard for change. Participant's

conceptualizations of responsibility and self-regulation were not as straightforward, universal, and totalitarian as governmentality theorists would have us believe.

Homeless youth's understanding of risk and responsibility were organic and heavily embedded in their own knowledge, insights, instincts and local knowledges (i.e. peers), and were not significantly impacted by messages from expert knowledges, apparatuses, and strategies. In sum, findings indicate a sharp contrast to the governmentality thesis of regulatory strategies in managing risk. Moreover, some youth, such as Tyler, recanted any form of self-regulation and admitted that they practiced no self-monitoring in relation to the kinds of drugs they used, nor the quantity they consumed. In this light, there was a wide spectrum of image projection in relation to self-regulation. Some depicted themselves as extremely self-monitoring and "responsible," others wanted to be seen as disinhibited and free-spirited and perhaps practicing resistance to a risk and safety zeitgeist - disproving the belief that regulation is everywhere. Thus, while many youth's activities could fall into practices of the Other by virtue of them being deviant and transgressing social norms, their view of individualized responsibility to keep themselves and others safe could fall into the realm of the responsibilized Self. Boundaries between Self and Other described not only behaviours or stereotypical images but participant's views of responsibility and blame which allowed them to be seen as more "normal". The next chapter will examine the implications of this study and directions for future research.

CONCLUSION

This study provided a starting point for an exploration of how homeless youth conceptualize risk. The first chapter outlined the relevance of homelessness as a social issue with a particular emphasis on the rising numbers of homeless youth and the paucity of research on their lived experiences. Methodologically, research has been limited with homeless and street youth because they are marginalized and much of their behaviour is highly stigmatized (Benoit & Jansson, 2006). While there is a dearth of knowledge about their experiences, the literature that is highlighted demonstrates the negative impact of early childhood experiences and/or the negative sequelae of street involvement, namely, overwhelming evidence of victimization and criminalization, which reinforces stereotypes of them as victims or deviants (Bellot, 2001).

As has been argued throughout this dissertation, it is our contention that a sociology of risk has largely supplanted a sociology of deviance and victimization that characterizes and homogenizes the literature encompassing this "at-risk" group. Moreover, terms like "at-risk" are not deconstructed for the meanings imbued in these constructs and characterizations, as they apply to the population they are describing, or to the settings they are stigmatizing. Furthermore, research conceptualizations of risk and "at-risk," based on categories of victimization and deviancy, are preordained by the experts designing and embarking on the studies. With little input and collaboration from the youth about their experiences it is not known what knowledge is missing about other kinds of risk, as their viewpoints and insider knowledge are missing from instrument construction and collection. The theoretical framework of this ethnographic study hoped to

reverse this knowledge imbalance. Risk theories and discourses, to date, have been based on 'expert' knowledges and have examined risk in terms of grand theories but have ignored the individual's perception of risk, and their risk practices and knowledges. This research hopes to remedy this gap by exploring how homeless youth, an identified "at-risk" group, understand, are affected by, and respond to risk. To meet these ends the research question asked: "how do homeless youth conceptualize risk"?

The relevance of this study is the cultural, historical, political and social contexts in which it unfolded. The proliferation of risk is symptomatic of the uncertain times we live in and have come to dominate our everyday life. Risk analyses based on our risk consciousness permeate daily decisions we make, from decisions surrounding conception and "healthy" pregnancy, to raising children, to caring for the elderly. No segment of life is immune from a risk logic being brought to bear in regulating our activities. Researchers have noted that while homeless youth have been deemed an "at-risk" group they are the least likely to reach out for help, yet there is a moral imperative to intervene due to their fragile social status.

But equating risk with danger has not always been a foregone conclusion. This study harkened back to another time when risk was conceptualized as chances or gambles that could bring benefit (i.e. opportunities) or incur loss (i.e. harm) (Bernstein, 1996; Fox, 1999). Youth described chances they would take, such as, joining the carnival or hitchhiking across the country, and they were thoughtful about the consequences of these gambles. The outcomes of these experiences as well as significant events that touched their lives impacted future assessments of risk. These monumental experiences also affected their understanding of

themselves and who they wanted to be (i.e. their "desired identity" (Bajoit, 1999, 2003)) and impacted future decisions. Hence, their conceptualizations of risk changed over time with the accumulation of experiences (negative and positive). Most importantly, youth tended to view risk-taking not simply as experiences of victimization or deviancy but as experimental and character-forming. While many described risks they took as necessary for their survival, their responses to these experiences were demonstrative of their creativity and adaptability that helped them to discover things about themselves and who they wanted to become, and subsequently altered future perceptions of risk and practices.

1. Implications

The aim of this study was not to prescribe interventions but to offer a launch pad for exploration into how homeless youth conceptualize risk. Indeed, it was to explore how youth make assessments about risk, and what strategies they employ to minimize harm or maximize benefit. As was expected, based on clinical experiences, risk assessments were heterogenous and ran the gamut from those participants that were extremely risk-averse to complete risk-embracers (or at least espoused beliefs that they were fearless in order to portray an image of rebellion). Thus, it is difficult to state any unequivocal truths about youth's perceptions and responses to risk. Moreover, the results of this study are not generalizable due to the small sample size, having said that, a few broad lessons can be drawn from the results.

First, as a starting point is important to ground our knowledge of risk from youth's viewpoints and not our own conceptualizations. Basing interventions on the "experts" point of view, will only exacerbate pre-existing dissonances between "helpers" and their interventions and the lives of homeless youth. As we can see from rates of victimization and criminalization exhumed in Chapter One, traditional forms of intervention to reduce rates of victimization and deviancy have not been entirely effective. One of the objectives of this study was not to superimpose ideas of victimization and deviancy onto youth's experiences but to begin where they are at. The same principle should hold for clinical practice. This is not a new phenomenon and in fact is an old adage of social work theory: "start where the client is" (Shulman, 1999). By embracing this approach, an unfolding of context and meanings can occur and conceptualizations of risk will have relevance for the targeted youth perhaps providing a gateway for change (i.e. minimize harm not normalize behaviours).

Several assumptions and paradoxes were uncovered in this study's analysis. First, the streets were not only seen as places of danger but as generators of excitement and opportunities for self-discovery, this finding parallels what others have found (Bellot, 2001; Parazelli, 1997; Lucchini, 1996). What this means for social work and other forms of clinical practice though, is that many youth did not characterize their experiences as ones of victimization or deviancy. Instead, many youth equated harmful experiences as character-shaping. Some described themselves as "warriors" (e.g. Ingrid), but many viewed themselves as survivors who were resourceful and creative, and who were not necessarily passive but actively practiced resistance to those who tried to exert authority over them (e.g. police, other youth...). Instead of the common stereotype that pervades adolescent literature that views youth as impulsive, rebellious and cognitively-

stunted, this study found that many youth were thoughtful about their lives, their identities, and their relationships with others, and were very conscious of social stigma. Moreover, most of their risk assessments were malleable and shifted over time, based on the accumulation of new and monumental experiences which also served to shape and re-shape the construction of their identities.

Street life opportunities conceptualized as active risk-taking was provided as a rationale by more than half the group (11 of the 18) for being drawn to the streets. These youth indicated that they felt they had more control over their lives and ultimately power over choices on the streets than in their previous lives. They also endorsed feelings of alienation, solitude, boredom, and constraint that triggered their departure to the streets and experimentation. In this sense, the absence of traditional rites of passage (d'Allondans, 2005; LeBreton, 2005; Jeffreys, 2005) and the ritualized testing of one's limits appears to have particular relevance both individually and structurally. "A safety at all cost" approach to risk (Colombo, 2008; Furedi, 2006) has rendered youth isolated and alienated from older generations, and obviously denies one of the essences of adolescence, that is a time of risk-taking and heightened sensation seeking and a testing of limits (Turz, 1993; Hall, 1904). Examining this absence and perhaps re-inserting common and culturally appropriate measures and social structures to redress this void may be a useful way to satisfy this need, instead of denying its existence and attempting to prevent adolescence from occurring (Parazelli, 1999).

The second paradox revealed that drug use was both constraining and liberating, as has been described by other authors (Bellot, 2001). In terms of clinical practice, it is important to

highlight the relational nature of addiction, both towards the substance itself, the context of acquisition, and the impact on identity. A few participants described the stigma associated with use and the need to lead a "double life," thus hiding their use to maintain relationships. The risks inherent in acquisition for young women were also elucidated by a few participants, especially the risk of sexual exploitation. This is particularly relevant as female youth tend to be overrepresented in the homeless youth population in Ottawa (57%) (Bourns & Meredith, 2007), and they certainly were in this study (2:1 ratio, females: males). It is important to have this broad view of risk when assessing drug use: not only in terms of employing a harm reduction approach to the actual utilization, but applying such an approach to the context of minimizing the inherent dangers involved in acquisition. Moreover, examining both the drawbacks and benefits of drug use is a better starting point for intervention because it recognizes the ambivalence many youth have about their use, and respects the ensuing paradox of freedom and dependency.

Knowledge of youth's self-protection strategies is mostly absent from the literature on victimization and deviancy, but was found to be well understood by front-line workers in this study. One of the strategies youth employed to protect themselves from perceived harm was to always carry some sort of weapon (e.g. knife, chains, mace…). Thus, while most youth downplayed potential dangers that were present most did take measures to protect themselves and were not simply careless or unprepared. Thus, there was an awareness that harmful risks were present and one should assume that youth are savvy about dangers and take measures that they feel are within their context of possibilities. Hence, assuming that most youth carry multi-purposed weapons is a reasonable assumption and may provide a forum for talking about safety.

Furthermore, hyper-vigilance was another strategy youth employed to protect themselves and others and was frequently referred to, especially as it pertained to relationships with peers.

Peer networks, especially experiences of belonging, victimization and deviancy, are common themes that emerged and deserve special attention because of their ability to so profoundly affect youth's lives on the streets. Though rarely documented (Tyler, 2007), the "drama," for lack of a better term, needs to be emphasized as a major source of risk for homeless youth. Several participants revealed that they were negatively affected by either in-group victimization through censorship of beliefs and actions, to out-group victimization, as their movements and socialization were monitored and regulated. In fact, these instances of victimization were commonly cited by youth as the main sources of oppression and risk, and were also well-understood by front-line workers in this study, but remain underreported in the literature. One common strategy deployed was being hyper-vigilant to the threat of emotional or physical attack. Bearing in mind that peer networks represent a paradox of safety and harm is an important enlightenment. Of course, the paramount importance of peer networks is not a new finding for the literature on adolescence, but it is an important finding in terms of this population. Peer networks among homeless youth are mostly described in terms of what kind of epidemiological relevance they have, and do not reveal the complex forms of oppression, protection, and regulatory mechanisms they possess that dramatically affect youth's activities, well-being and survival on the streets. Exploring these power systems helps to reveal the complexity and multi-faceted nature of peer networks (i.e. providing belonging and protection but are also oppressive), especially as they pertain to risk and the decisions youth make.

One of the implications and central contributions of this study is that conceptualizations of risk are very much embedded in who we perceive ourselves to be, how we think we are perceived by others, and who we wish to become. Utilizing Bajoit's (1999, 2003) tripartite theory of identity construction allowed for a deeper understanding of the connection between participant's perception of risk and these identity constructs. This dynamic nature of identity construction underscored the shifting and evolving nature of risk perception and management. What this means for practice and theory is that identity is very much embedded in our understanding of risk, and is directly linked to our assessments and tolerance of risk, however, this has not been examined previously and requires further investigation. This study uncovered that risk and identity interacted and acted upon one another; were amorphous and temporal, and should not be constrained by realist assumptions. Not only would this be a good point of departure for future research but notions of identity need to be rooted more firmly in grand social theories of risk. This requires further exploration, development and integration.

Youth's conceptualizations of themselves and who they desired to become severely impacted what kinds of risks were taken and perceived. Douglas's (1969) theory of purity and danger and constructs of Self and Other, and Goffman's stigma theory, had particular relevance in this study. However, the rigid boundaries that Douglas describes were more nuanced and malleable than theorized and youth dabbled and transgressed boundaries of Self and Other. They were also keenly aware of labels and stigma and sometimes used these attributes to their advantage (e.g. to access shelter services, to rent apartments, to get jobs). In this sense, they were not only marginalized passive victims but were active agents manipulating systems and images to their advantage.

Constructs of Other were not only imposed on them by others (through processes of stigmatization and labelling) but were self-imposed in order to project images of themselves as risk-takers, anarchists, and "social deviants." Luke's story is a good example of this phenomenon. He portrayed an image of himself as a deviant and desperately tried to project that image, however, there were limits to the kinds of risks he would take (e.g. he quit hard drugs). But it was important for him to be seen as "different" and a "crazy mother fucker," in order to maintain his tough image on the streets because he was tired of being a "pushover." Similarly, youth shared sensational stories of survival and experimentation perhaps in an effort to feel alive and test their limits (as has been theorized by several anthropologists (d'Allondans, LeBreton, Jeffreys)), and relive the adrenalin-rush that accompanied them, but also to provide a sense of belonging. Thus, it is important to not assume that youth only exist in the Other, but to uncover what meanings these constructs have for them in their daily lives. Equally, it is critical to be aware that most youth are savvy about how they are viewed, stigmatized and labelled by others, and sometimes adopt these attributes for their own benefit; without minimizing the alienation these processes also cause. In this sense, they viewed themselves more as survivors and highly adaptable, displaying some measure of prowess and power, and were not merely resigned to being categorized as victims or deviants. The complexity of these constructs needs to be deconstructed for what shifting meanings they have for the individual and this study shows that it is difficult to apply these concepts in a broad-based way. Future research needs to uncover the complexity of these processes and examine youth's power in navigating these meanings and not simply assume that they are simply acted upon and stuck in a pre-ordained powerless Other.

Self-regulation and responsibilization had particular relevance for participants in this study, particularly as they relate to expert knowledges, morality and blame. However, participants' experiences again were not universal as they have been characterized as such by governmentality theorists (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1991), but instead were found to be varied and ran the spectrum of being extremely self-regulating and internalizing responsibility to purporting a complete disinterest in self-monitoring (e.g. Tyler's story). Several participants admitted that they actively monitored their health (reproductive, mental, physical – especially in relation to drug use) status and took precautions to reduce negative risks from happening (e.g. unplanned pregnancy, abcesses). Some youth engaged in "high-risk" activities, for instance, injection drug use, and were very conscious of their "responsibility" towards keeping themselves and others safe, proving notions of the privatization of risk. However, other participants revealed distrust in expert systems, did not follow expert advice, and actively practiced resistance to expert messages or authority figures, whether it be not following medical advice or disregarding messages from front-line workers.

The privatization of risk was not the only form of responsibilization and blame that occurred. Participants also projected blame onto family members, peer influences, system barriers, revealing again the interdependent nature of risk assessments and identity, and disproving elements of simple individual responsibility, self-blame and immorality. Moreover, in some cases living the "double life" meant that some participants not only monitored their own behaviours but were monitored by family members. Notions of self-regulation and responsibilization were not simple, discreet and one-way, but were embedded in a myriad

context of interaction and directionality in which youth often pushed back notions of blame and immoral behaviour.

Significant events in youth's lives greatly transformed their notions of responsibility and self-regulation. These bifurcations dramatically altered their risk assessments and their life paths. For some, unintended or intended pregnancy forced them to radically alter their behaviours and contexts (e.g. find housing, quit drugs…). Violence related to street life, and poor health related to continued drug use, were also catalysts. What these experiences did was to push youth to consider the risks (good and bad) inherent in continuation and for some there was an epiphany about the instabilities and discontinuities in their current lives. This resulted in changes needing to be made. And these changes greatly affected their ideas around responsibility, agency and identity.

Judgements about risk were intuitive, organic (rooted in the youth's ideas about themselves, others, their histories), and affected by localized dangers and opportunities. This implication runs counter to ideas expounded in the risk society thesis (Beck) that view risks as "democratic" and "glocal." Indeed, risk constructs not only were embedded in the "who" youth perceived and desired themselves to be, but by the "what" of local contexts. Similarly, the relevance and importance of "experts" in their lives did not predominate in their risk consciousness. Most youth did not blindly accept messages and advice from expert systems, but instead challenged them by basing their decisions on what constrained choices were available, and what felt right for them. One of the major contributions of this study is that it aimed to uncover the intersection of individual and structural level factors that impinged on youth's conceptualizations of risk.

One of the most important findings of this study, and one of the hypotheses based on years of clinical work with this age group, is that structural barriers facing sixteen and seventeen year-olds pose enormous obstacles that push them to make constrained and sometimes "dangerous" choices (e.g. renting a room in a rooming house, working under the table) that may lead to exploitation or poor health (e.g. deficient addictions resources for this age group – see Chapter Six). While there is a tendency to view this younger cohort of the population as vulnerable and requiring protection there is a lack of resources and choice within existing ones, especially as they are denied access to adult services (e.g. social assistance, shelters, housing and labour markets, addictions services). These obstacles were examined in Chapter One and empirical findings in Chapters Four and Five provide the voices behind the structural analysis.

Several participants revealed that the social assistance system for sixteen and seventeen year-olds was too onerous, cumbersome and impossible to access, so would not even bother applying. In particular, needing to contact the youth's family to prove that residing there was not an option was a risk some youth were not willing to entertain for fear that their location may be revealed or they might be sent home. Finding the home unfit was also a determination made by the front-line worker, and many youth felt these workers could relate better to their parents and took "their side." The obstacles inherent in this system were imbued with strong moral undertones that made youth feel that they were failures for not living at home and attending school regularly. Worker's subjective judgement of eligibility was a common complaint among youth. These barriers meant that youth often sought other ways of making money in the informal economy, including but not limited to: panhandling, squeegee-ing, buying and selling items, drug dealing,

sex work, etc… One of the ways this could be redressed is by making social assistance easier to obtain and navigate, not requiring families to be contacted.

Similarly, housing systems represent another hurdle for this age group. While there are some affordable social housing units in Ottawa, it is never enough, nor is there enough choice. Moreover, the private market poses many barriers due to landlord's lack of knowledge regarding tenant rights and age criteria (e.g. many believe they need a co-signer), and discriminate against them based on their young age and association with the streets. Again this pushes youth into arguably dangerous places to rent (e.g. rooming houses) and precarious rental arrangements. Youth are often unaware of their tenancy rights and are frequently exploited (for instance, utilities are not fixed if broken), or evicted without just cause.

To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to examine the social construction of risk among an "at- risk" group coupled with a symbolic interactionist approach. It was hoped that this exploratory study would reveal the micro-level and interactional processes of risk perception and management to broaden out previous grand theories pertaining to risk. It is hoped that the study's outcomes will further advance our understanding of risk theory and may develop initial models of risk perception and management among this group that could be examined with other vulnerable groups for comparison and development of theory. In addition, it is anticipated that these results may stimulate constructive academic debates by challenging previous grand level theories of risk that have not been tested but only theorized. It is hoped that this work will stimulate further research on risk and our understanding of its' insidious nature, relativity, and reflexivity. Several points for future research and theory development include: examining the

links between risk and identity; exploring risk perception and management among "at-risk" groups – points of convergence and divergence; unearthing the various forms of self-regulation and responsibilization as they pertain to risk. Moreover, it is critical that risk constructs are deconstructed for their social, political, historical and cultural assumptions.

This research has several potential outcomes for risk prevention and management, and for broadening out constructs of victimization and deviancy. Clinically, providing workers with increased knowledge regarding youth's conceptualizations of risk will help develop a more collaborative intervention plan and may mitigate future dangers and help broaden choices. This knowledge could also help orient new workers to the field of the realities and complexities of the hazards, opportunities, and constrained choices homeless youth face. It may also serve to develop a youth-centric model of risk that could be utilized by front-line workers to plan interventions. One of the impacts that is hoped for is a move away from the dichotomization of youth's experiences as ones of victimization or deviancy, and a move towards examining youth's strengths and ambivalence: their creativity, adaptability, reflexivity, and power and practices of resistance.

On a policy level, the study's outcomes may add political pressure on policy makers to recognize the structural barriers that increase a climate of risk-taking that frequently lead to victimization or criminalization of homeless youth. It is hoped that the findings from this study will have a positive impact on lobbying for better housing, employment and supports for homeless youth (including peer supports). Moreover, it is hoped that this study demonstrates the heterogeneity of the population and their experiences, and thus supports the central importance of engaging

youth in service provision and planning to better meet their needs. The importance of respect, choice and adaptability in services and programs is paramount. Integrity, above all, is founded on the genuine participation and collaboration with youth incorporating their viewpoints; interweaving their insights and knowledge into the core of practice, interventions, and policy-making, by enshrining their active participation from planning to delivery to evaluation.

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Appendix One

Research Questions

- How do youth conceptualize risk in terms of their street life experiences?

- What kinds of risks are perceived?

- How does risk perception affect choices and subsequent decisions?

- What kinds of risks do they chose to take or avoid, and why?

- How are risks judged, evaluated?

- What is the link between risk perception and identity formation?

- What is the connection between risk and responsibility?

- How is risk perception influenced longitudinally?

- What kinds of messages do youth receive with regard to risk (from other youth, workers, media, agencies)?

- How are risk knowledges shared and interpreted in the community?

Appendix Two

EARN MONEY

You are 16 or 17

You enjoy talking about your experiences

Take a card for contact info and contact Sue-Ann

GAGNEZ de l'ARGENT

Vous avez 16 ou 17 ans

Vous aimez parler de vos expériences

Prenez une carte pour l'info et contactez Sue-Ann

Appendix Three

Sue-Ann MacDonald, MSW, PhD candidate in Social Work (Université de Montréal – McGill University)

Risk Perception Among Homeless Youth

Purpose of the Study

● to obtain a better understanding of *risk perception* among homeless youth

Risk perception is the subjective judgement that people make about the characteristics and severity of a risk.

Participation in the Research

● the researcher wishes to 'follow' (informally observe, speak with, and shadow) 16 and 17 year-old 'emancipated' (legally independent) homeless youth.

● the researcher is hoping to follow approximately 15 youth (aged 16 and 17 years old) over a one to two year period.

● the researcher wishes to observe youth in their interactions with other youth and their interactions in the community at large (ex. Where do they go? Who do they interact with? What do they do? How does risk perception affect their decisions? What risks are present?). In particular, once trust is gained, the researcher hopes to observe participants outside of the agencies (where so many studies have been done) and follow them in the natural environment to determine what risks are present, perceived, managed and avoided. It is hoped that this will shed light on what kind of 'risk analyses' youth make.

● participants will be remunerated $10.00 for the 1st meeting, and be given $10.00 every two months until the end of the research period.

Research Questions

-     What kinds of risks do you face?
-     How do these risks affect the decisions you make?
-     How do you avoid risks?
-     What kinds of experiences are victimizing?

Appendix Three continued…

- How can you avoid risky or victimizing experiences?
- Do risks and victimizing experiences increase/change the longer you are homeless?
- What kinds of messages do you hear from workers regarding risk and victimization?

Inclusion Criteria

► 16 and 17 years old

► homeless (shelter, 'couch-surfing', sleeping 'rough', marginally housed)

► emancipated (legally independent – not requiring parental consent)

► willing to allow the researcher to observe them

► English and French speaking

If you have any questions please contact Sue-Ann MacDonald (819-712-1958).

Appendix Four

CONSENT FORM

Research Title: Risk Perception Among Homeless Youth

Researcher: Sue-Ann MacDonald, Doctoral Student, School of Social Work, Université de Montréal

Research Supervisor: Céline Bellot, Professor, School of Social Work, Université de Montréal

Research Objectives

The goal of the study is to obtain a better understanding of risk perception among homeless youth. The objective of this research is to shed light on how homeless youth perceive risks and respond to them. To realize these objectives, the researcher wishes to 'follow' (informally observe and speak with) several 16 and 17 year-old 'emancipated' (legally independent) youth.

Participation in the Research

Your participation in this study will consist of allowing the researcher to observe you going about your daily activities a couple of times a month over a period of approximately one year. Your participation in this study is **voluntary**. The researcher will observe, listen and talk with you to learn about how you feel and how you respond to risks you face. No tape recorders will be used, but quick notes (ie. fieldnotes) will be taken once the researcher has finished observing. Youth that are willing to participate will be selected from agencies that serve the homeless (shelters and drop-in centres) in downtown Ottawa. The researcher also hopes to attract youth that are non-shelter users (ex. couch-surfers, squatters…). The researcher will officially request permission from the agencies to post notices of the study and to inform staff and clients of her goals. Homeless youth who are still 'wards' of the state or who live with their families and are not considered to be in a position to make legal decisions for themselves will not be studied.

Confidentiality

All information obtained during the study will be treated as confidential. No information will be transmitted to another party. However, if at any time during the study the researcher becomes aware that the law requires her to divulge certain information (ex. child abuse, imminent harm to self or other), she will take appropriate action and inform the relevant authorities.

Certain precautions will be taken to guarantee confidentiality. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym (a made-up name). Only the researcher will have access to the list of participants and the master list of pseudonyms and identifying information, and only she will be collecting and analysing the data. All research materials will be kept in a secure location, in a locked cabinet in a locked office. Personal information will be destroyed within 7 years after being collected (Université de Montréal research protocol).

Advantages and Disadvantages

By participating in this research, you will help to bring about a better understanding of the risks homeless youth face and hopefully improve front-line practice. In some instances, you may be faced with painful emotions arising from the interviews. Should this happen, please bring this to the researcher's attention and she will do her best to refer you to the appropriate resources.

Right of Withdrawal

You have a right to withdraw from the study anytime, without penalty and without reason. If you decide to withdraw from the study please speak with the researcher at the telephone number indicated below. If you withdraw from the study, the information you have provided will be destroyed.

Indemnity

Participants will be remunerated $10.00 for the first meeting, and be given $10.00 every two months until the end of the research period.

CONSENT

I declare that I have understood the above information and obtained the responses to my questions about participating in this research project. I agree to participate and know that I can

withdraw from the study at anytime without prejudice and without justifying my reason for doing so.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ First Name: _____

I attest that I have explained the goal, the nature, the advantages, the risks and the disadvantages of the study and have responded to the best of my abilities and knowledge to the questions posed.

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____ First Name: _____

For all questions pertaining to the study, or to withdraw from the study, please contact:

Sue-Ann MacDonald, Doctoral Student – School of Social Work, Université de Montréal

(514) 343-7223/ (819) 712-1958.

Any complaints regarding your participation in this research should be addressed to the ombudsman of the Université de Montréal at (514) 343-2100 (the ombudsman will accept collect calls).

Thank you for your participation.