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Young Adult Experiences of Homelessness: Retrospective Explorations of
Strengths and Resilience

by

Renee I. Hauwiller, B.S.W., L.S.W.

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Social Work

Committee Members
Kari Fletcher, Ph.D., LICSW (Chair)
Lily Tharoor, LICSW
Renette McParland, L.P., LICSW

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

Homelessness is a devastating experience, regardless of the stage of life in which it is experienced. For homeless young adults, the experience is particularly challenging, as what ought to be a time of exploration and self-discovery becomes a time focused on basic survival. In this research study, I explored the first-hand, lived experiences of young adults ($n = 6$) who experienced homelessness between the ages of 16 and 24. Using qualitative methods and a strengths perspective focus, I interviewed six young adults about the way they managed and survived homelessness. I analyzed resulting data from interview transcriptions and developed themes, which included the participants' personal experiences and feelings about "getting through" homelessness, recognition of resources and supports which contributed to their ability to survive and exit homelessness and future hopes and dreams. My findings revealed common themes: study participants drew on internal experiences and coping skills, along with experiences learned from personal history and from homelessness, in order to exit homelessness. The findings also showed participants drew on common resources and supports, including "adopting" a trusted adult for support and taking advantage of more formal systems of support.

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I am incredibly grateful for the participants whose willingness to share their personal stories made my research possible. I am inspired by their strength and resiliency, despite the adversity they have faced in their lives. I am honored to have been trusted with their stories.

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Young Adult Experiences of Homelessness:
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Introduction

Homelessness in the United States continues to be a growing area of concern among human service advocates. The phenomenon of homelessness has changed significantly since the 1950s, both in scope and population. Between 1950 and the mid-1970s, the stereotypical homeless person was a single, white, middle aged male (Kusmer, 2002, p. 230). However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, this paradigm began to shift and homelessness rapidly became more prevalent across an increasingly diverse demographic. This shift is largely attributed to a shortage of affordable rental housing and an increase in poverty (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009). Today, homelessness extends far beyond the single, middle-aged, white male and impacts racially diverse populations and sub-populations; homeless sub-populations include children under 18, families with children, the elderly, people with disabilities, veterans, unaccompanied youth, and young adults.

One important—and arguably less visible—homeless population is that of young adults who are 18 to 24 years in age. Scholars do not agree on a definition of the term *young adult*; depending on the data, *young adult* may refer to individuals ranging in age from under 18 to 30. It wasn't until March of 2012 that the Department of Housing and Urban Development called for a specific youth-inclusive count that would include unaccompanied homeless youth, up to age 24 (National Alliance to End Homelessness [NAEH], 2012). Another commonly utilized data source comes from the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR, 2011) and includes a category of homeless adults

ages 18 to 30. According the AHAR (2011), the number of young adults who are homeless has risen in recent years, from 20.5% in 2007, to 23.5% in 2010, to 23.8% in 2011. This statistic is a point in time estimate, taken from all sheltered homeless people. This figure does not take into account people who are homeless, but not using a homeless shelter (AHAR, 2011). Other statistics that measure homelessness among young adults may reflect youth (younger than 18 years of age) and part but not all of the 18 to 30 year old young adult age group demographic. For example, the NAEH (2013) stated that during a given year, “approximately 550,000 unaccompanied, single youth and young adults up to age 24” may be homeless for a week or longer (p. 5). In this report, the age category included teenagers and young adults aged 18 to 24.

Regardless of the term’s specific definition, young adults are a significant percentage of the overall homeless population, are vulnerable to the circumstance of homelessness, and do experience adverse outcomes as a result of homelessness. Individuals aged 18 to 24 make up 13% of the adult homeless population and comprise 26% of homeless families (Burt et al., 1999). Young adults are vulnerable because they have fewer resources, are generally in lower paying jobs with fewer benefits, and are less likely to have accumulated savings. The conditions that cause young adults to become homeless are usually a result of family problems, poverty, addiction, abuse, and/or trauma. Without a support system, overcoming homelessness may seem impossible for this population, especially because, in the United States, many parents continue to help and support their young adult children through their twenties. Parents are often times used as a fall back plan, meaning that when the young adult encounters a financial or social problem, they can rely on their parents for additional financial assistance and

emotional support. For young adults who are estranged from their parents or who do not have a family support system to fall back on, even a small problem can become a crisis (Ammerman et al., 2004).

Rationale and Research Question

The homeless face significant risks to their health and wellbeing. Being homeless or 'living on the streets' may result in exploitation, assault, abuse, unmet basic needs, chemical abuse, poor health, poor school performance, lack of steady employment, and disruption of social development (Walsh & Donaldson, 2010). A young adult's normalization of homelessness, as he or she becomes accustomed to street life can become an obstacle to obtaining secure housing. Homelessness during adolescence increases the likelihood of homelessness in adulthood (Tierney et al., 2008). Teens continue to develop socially and cognitively into their early 20s and interruption to normal development can impact numerous areas of social and psychological growth. Service providers have observed through anecdotal evidence a disruption of coping patterns that may result in long-term homelessness (Milburn, Rosenthal, & Rotherham-Boris, 2006).

While there is a large body of research on the general effects of homelessness among the 18 to 24 year old age demographic, the authors of these studies have not specifically considered the *perspectives* of homeless young adults, nor have they approached their research using a strength-based lens. While these studies acknowledge the role resilience and protective factors play in supporting young adults through homelessness, very few have examined homeless young adults' own perspectives on the strengths and resiliencies that both helped them through the experience of homelessness

and that developed *from* that experience. The purpose of this research study is to explore and understand young adults own perceptions of how they survived homelessness. In this study, I will explore and examine first-hand experiences of young adults who have previously been homeless in order to shed light on the factors that contributed to their resilience and identify the personal strengths that helped them through homelessness.

Literature Review

In the following literature review, I will explore current research regarding the experiences of homelessness among adults ages 18 to 24 with a focus on resilience and strengths. First, I will explore scholarly definitions of the terms *young adult* and *homelessness*. Second, I will give an overview of psychosocial development as it relates to young adults in the 18 to 24 age demographic. Third, I will explore resilience and strength-based perspectives in social work research, looking specifically at how this approach impacts service delivery for work with young adults experiencing homelessness. Fourth, I will present findings from several studies on young adults and their experiences of homelessness; the authors of these studies used strength-based and resiliency perspectives. Fifth, I will dedicate a special section to vulnerable populations of young people who are overrepresented among young homeless. Finally, I will provide an overview of current services and supports and discuss their implications for social work practice.

Defining Young Adult Homelessness

Across research studies, there are many varying definitions of the term *young adult*. Researchers use a wide variety of age categories as well as terms to define this population. Some of the most common terms include *late adolescence*, *young adult*, and *transition-aged youth* (Panter-Brick, 2002; Rosenthal & Rotheram-Borus, 2005). Without generalized categories or common definitions, researchers resort to broad ranges of age categories when selecting samples for studies.

In addition to these inconsistencies, there is also no consensus among researchers regarding what it means to be homeless, creating additional difficulties in defining the

homeless young adult population. For the purpose of this study, I will use the U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) definition of homelessness:

An individual who lacks housing (without regard to whether the individual is a member of a family), including an individual whose primary residence during the night is a supervised public or private facility (e.g., shelters) that provides temporary living accommodations, and an individual without permanent housing who may live on the streets; stay in a shelter, mission, single room occupancy facilities, abandoned building or vehicle; or in any other unstable or non-permanent situation. [Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C., 254b)]

Causes and Risk Factors for Young Adults

It is important for the field of social work to understand the causes of homelessness, for the purpose of service delivery and advocacy. Zerger, Strehlow, and Gundlapalli (2008) conducted a meta-analysis to review common behavioral health issues of homeless youth. They collected current direct service practices and identified common interventions used to serve this vulnerable population, concluding that there are increasing numbers of young adults experiencing homelessness as a result of escaping abusive parents, being kicked out by parents, and being aged-out of foster care or the correctional system.

Young adults who come from families in poverty have a higher risk for homelessness. Zerger et al. (2008) identified key concerns that speak to the experiences of homeless young adults: being exposed to homelessness and poverty will likely result in risky behavior and this has a negative impact on physical and mental health. Additionally, Zerger et al. stated, “The urgency is for research that informs interventions that work—interventions built on hearing both youth and the adults they trust—and addressing the broader structural causes that lead to homelessness” (p. 835).

There are structural factors that increase the likelihood that young adults will become homeless, especially young adults whose families have fewer resources. Young adults ages 18-24 are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless (Ensign & Gittelsohn, 1998; Ringwalt, Greene, Robertson, & McPhetters, 1998). Because young adults typically have lower paying jobs and fewer benefits than adults, they have a higher risk of becoming homeless (Zerger et al., 2008). Unlike older adults, when encountering a financial problem or a job loss, young adults have limited resources and experiences to draw from that might assist them in getting out of a difficult predicament. Taking into consideration a normative sample of young adults, it is not uncommon for young people to rely on their parents or families to assist them through the transition from late adolescence into young adulthood (Zerger et al., 2008). A young adult who does not have parental or family support is left to fend for him or herself and is at a higher risk for homelessness than young adults who have family support systems.

Developmental stages in young adults. The period of transition from late teens into young adulthood is generally a time of change. Even for economically advantaged young adults with family and social supports, coming of age brings with it many of life's most significant decisions. Many young adults in the United States rely on their parents as a safety net for situations when they encounter a problem in their young adulthood, in particular. Some young adults even continue to rely upon their parents well into their mid-twenties and beyond for more than the occasional problem (Zerger et al., 2008). In 2011, 59 % of males age 18 to 24 and 50 % of females of the same age resided in their parents' homes, an increase from 53 % and 46 % respectively in 2005 (United States Census Bureau, 2011).

However, having family and parental support is not the norm for all young adults, especially those young adults who experience homelessness. Young adults with a history of adverse life experiences and limited familial support have what may appear to be insurmountable challenges to overcome, increasing their vulnerability to homelessness.

Resilience and Strengths-Based Perspectives

In spite of these significant challenges, the vast majority of young adults do survive homelessness. For many young adults, homelessness is episodic, not chronic (Zerger et al., 2008). Successfully exiting homelessness may bring an increase in self-esteem and a sense of empowerment, enabling young adults to become stronger and more resourceful (Averill, Keys, Mallet, & Rosenthal, 2010, p. 2). In the following section, I will examine factors believed to influence young adults' survival of homelessness.

When young adults who become homeless are able to adapt to their circumstances and develop coping strategies, they show resilience, and are able to survive and overcome risks and adverse experiences. For the purpose of this study, I will use Masten, Best, and Garmezy's (1990) definition of resilience: "The process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances" (p. 426). Several qualitative studies that used a strength-based framework found personal strengths, coping skills, and social supports were factors that enabled young adults endure homelessness (i.e. Bender et al., 2007; Lindsey et al., 2000; Thompson et al., 2013).

Bender, Thompson, McManus, Lantry, & Flynn (2007) conducted focus groups with street youth who were 18 to 24 years of age ($n = 60$) and identified factors that contributed to their ability to survive. Findings suggested the presence of street-smarts, personal strengths, and informal support systems among respondents were the factors that

contributed to their survival on the streets (Bender et al.). Through a strength-based perspective, the researchers were able to identify young adults' "street smarts": their problem-solving skills and specific coping skills utilized while homeless. Street smarts are necessary to avoid being hurt on the streets, they include the ability to find resources, learn who is and is not trustworthy, and adapt to the street economy (Bender et al.). Bender et al. cited interpersonal skills and intelligence as coping skills that aided young adults in positive interactions with other youth in the same circumstance. Having an outgoing personality also allowed young adults to make connections and get their needs met while living on the street (Bender et al.). Young adults who had pets or companion animals identified the pet as a big motivation for them, as well as knowing others who successfully exited homelessness. They also considered keeping a positive attitude to be essential to their survival. Several participants in focus groups identified a belief in God as a source of support and comfort (Bender et al.).

Lindsey, Kurtz, Jarvis, Williams, and Nackerud (2000) used a constant comparative method to analyze data collected from interviewing former runaway or homeless youth ($n = 12$) between ages 18 and 25. Their findings revealed that personal strengths and resources helped youth exit homelessness. In this exploratory study the researchers identified specific strengths and resources that supported or helped young adults exit homelessness. Young adults reported surviving homelessness through learning new attitudes and behaviors, personal attributes, and spirituality (Lindsey et al.). The interviewees' definitions of attitude fell into two categories: what they learned about themselves and what they learned through relationships with others. Learning about themselves included developing self-confidence, learning to accept and love themselves,

learning to take care of themselves and learning what they did and did not want for their future (Lindsey et al.). From these learnings, they were able to identify and set goals for their future. Learning through relationship with others included taking responsibility for their own actions, learning right from wrong, learning how to get along better with others, discovering the impact of their attitudes toward others, and learning to trust and accept help from others (Lindsey et al.). Additionally, being homeless also taught young people how to be a better judge of character and avoid people who might be a negative influence or who might take advantage of them (Lindsey et al.).

Thompson et al. (2013) interviewed young adults ages 18 to 24 ($n = 45$) who were homeless and receiving services at a drop-in center, and explored their perceptions of their own resilience and coping skills. Participants' responses revealed themes of discovering individual strengths, developing a positive life perspective, drawing on external social supports, and discovering individual coping strategies. Participants identified individual strengths that helped them survive homelessness, including being strong and resourceful, respecting ones' self, and desiring freedom (Thompson et al.). Participants described positive life perspective as the ability to accept their circumstance of homelessness and see its positive side, acknowledging the freedom, autonomy, and adventurous lifestyle it allowed. Participants also mentioned belief in a higher power or God as a source of strength and positive perspective (Thompson et al.). Young adults identified two types of external social support: informal and formal. Informal support included friends and family and was considered the primary source of emotional support. Formal support was used primarily in crisis situations and included police, social workers, and counselors. Interestingly, Thompson et al. also identified coping strategies

that would be considered negative in a conventional setting, such as use of drugs and alcohol or engaging in self-injurious behaviors like cutting and burning. Young adults also identified other more positive coping strategies such as meditation, prayer, hobbies, crafts, reading, writing, and playing or creating music (Thompson et al.).

Bender et al. (2007), Lindsey et al. (2000), and Thompson et al. (2013) shared common findings about personal strengths and supports that helped homeless young adults manage their experiences. All three studies revealed a belief on the part of homeless young adults in their own personal strengths. The researchers identified coping skills, motivation, and a change of attitude as specific strengths that helped young adults survive homelessness. They further defined *attitude* as becoming self-confident, accepting and loving themselves, and learning to take care of themselves (Lindsey et al.). Coping skills were also identified as things they engaged in to mentally endure the negative experiences and feelings associated with being homeless. Coping skills could be either negative or positive. For example, using drugs to mentally escape is considered a negative coping strategy and drawing or writing to express them-selves is considered a positive coping strategy (Thompson, 2013). Some of the personal strengths were believed to be internal and some were acquired as a result of experiences encountered while homeless.

Vulnerable Populations

Researchers in the area of young adult homelessness consistently identify certain populations of young people who are more vulnerable to homelessness. The vulnerable populations include youth who have been involved in social service and justice systems.

The foster care system was designed to provide temporary care; however, it is not uncommon for youth to remain in state custody for years and then “age-out” and become emancipated. Youth can “age out” at as young as 16 years old. These youth enter society with few resources and are therefore more likely to become homeless due to a lack of stable housing and financial support (Zlotnick & Robertson, 1999).

Services and Supports in Transition

Services and supports to address young adult homelessness are varied and depend on geographic location; most young adults who are homeless in major metropolitan areas will have access to drop-in centers or temporary shelters for brief overnight stays. Generally, short term shelter services are more available to young adults than long-term housing options.

Youth drop-in centers and shelters are the most common service points for street youth (Karabanow & Clemment, 2004), and they are the most frequently utilized services available to street youth. The drop in center acts as an entry point to access other services. For example, a drop-in center may have resources to meet basic needs and also provide referrals to longer-term social service agencies. Basic needs include meals, showers, clothing, and a place to take refuge from the street (Robertson & Toro, 1998). Referrals to longer-term services include county financial support, vocational training, medical care, mental health counseling and long-term housing options.

In spite of the valuable resources offered at these types of agencies, young adults may still not feel as comfortable utilizing these services than do other homeless populations. Agencies often find that engaging homeless youth is the toughest part of supporting and assisting this demographic. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) found that the

engagement of youth and their willingness to access and participate in formal, agency-based support services relied on an agency's climate and the staff's interpersonal interactions. Building youth-staff relationships is a key way to assure engagement with this population, beyond providing comprehensive, targeted services.

Summary

In this literature review, I explored the phenomenon of young adult homelessness. Until the last decade, most of the research on this topic focused on the adverse effects and risks for young people who become homeless. During the last decade, research has begun to shift toward a more strength-based perspective. There are still fewer studies that share the voices and perspectives of young adults' first-hand experiences, but those that do exist identified common themes of resilience and coping skills as factors that contribute to survival of homelessness and potential positive outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

Understanding concepts and theories that shape research can provide context and help avoid bias. In the following section, I will explore (a) theories of psychosocial development that may illuminate the specific experience of the homeless young adult, and (b) theories of strengths-based research, which I will employ in my study. It is also important that, as a researcher, I am aware of how my personal and professional experiences influence the current study. This section will also include a reflection on my professional and personal lenses, and their potential to influence my perspective as a researcher.

Developmental Theory

Taking into consideration the developmental stage of the young adult when they became homeless provides an opportunity to examine needs of young adults experiencing homelessness. Application of developmental theory with young adults who have experienced homelessness helps researchers and service providers understand the challenges and strengths the young adult likely encounters when faced with the experience of being homeless. Furthermore, their early familial experiences, their age of first episode of homelessness, and their environmental influences impact their development. In this section, I will review Erikson's 1963 theory of psychosocial development (as cited in Forte, 2007), Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), and Saleebey's (1992) explanation of the strengths perspective in social work.

Erikson's Model of Human Development. Erikson's (as cited in Forte, 2007) theory of psychosocial development divides the human lifespan into eight stages of

development. At each stage there are opportunities for a developing person to meet a challenge or a task. The psychosocial stages of development were considered dependent upon each other; the task at each stage would need to be accomplished in order to move to the next stage (Forte, 2007). Today, in developmental theory, they are less likely to be considered mutually exclusive. The accomplishment of each task will result in progress, and ultimately strengthen the person's ego capacity. The *ego* is part of the human personality; it helps a person to regulate his or her inner and outer conflict (Erikson, as cited in Forte, 2007, p. 296). *Ego capacity* in this sense refers to a person's self-identity, or self-conscious system, related to their thoughts, feelings, and actions. If the task or challenge is not successfully achieved, the person's development becomes stagnant or results in ego weakness. A weak ego means lack of confidence, poor self-identity, and feelings of incompetence. Although Erikson's theory assumed that each stage needed to be met in order to move to the next, he also asserted that humans could "transcend their limiting power" (Erikson, as cited in Forte, 2007, p. 296).

Erikson's developmental theory was optimistic, because while he did believe that a person could develop "core pathologies," or significant personality problems, he also theorized that with help from others a person can return to previous developmental stages and (to some extent) fix missed developmental milestones, thereby developing a new self-identity, also known as ego strength (Erikson, as cited in Forte, 2007, p. 296).

The first stage of Erikson's model involves the task of "trust versus mistrust," an opportunity for the human infant (birth to one year) to learn whether or not they can trust their caregiver to meet their needs (as cited in Forte, 2007, p. 299). Oftentimes this is maternal care that includes meeting basic needs to support the infant and help her to feel

secure and attached. If the needs are not met or if either the caregiver or the infant is unable to attach and bond, the infant may mistrust the caregiver and learn to mistrust others as she grows older (Erikson, as cited in Forte, 2007, p. 299). Failure to meet this developmental task may manifest itself in the inability to be in secure and trusting relationships in the adolescent years. For homeless young adults who missed this developmental stage, their lack of ability to trust would impede their ability to accept help from others and use resources. Evidence of these qualities among homeless young adults appears in the published research (i.e. DeRose et al., 1999; Slesnick et al., 2000).

In the second stage, “autonomy versus shame,” the young human (ages one to three) develops the ability to self-regulate and control their own behaviors; with the help of a caregiver, the child learns to be less dependent on adults (Erikson, as cited in Forte, 2007, p. 299). Failure to meet this developmental task would result in the child feeling shame and being unable to cope with his environment; he may become easily aroused and be unable to calm himself. Homeless young adults who missed this developmental task may be rebellious and lack impulse control. For example, overly protective parents may result in an adolescent who leaves home and runs away in order to have fun and freedom. Alternately, the adolescent whose parents are passive and whose environment is chaotic may leave home to seek belonging and refuge.

In the third stage, “initiative versus guilt,” the preschool (ages three to five) child’s peers and playmates become important, and being able to select self-chosen activities is the challenge. The development of a conscience may increase ideas of rebellion followed by guilt (Erikson, as cited in Forte, 2007, p.300). Homeless youth fail to meet this stage of development may lack a sense of a purpose, initiative, or a “sense of

themselves.” This stage of development is often mastered in early friendships and school experiences. Homeless youth have an increased likelihood that they were poor as children and because of poverty may have had a disruption to schooling and development of social skills. With lacking social skills and absence of confidence mastering their "sense of self", is difficult (Masten et al., 1993).

In the fourth stage, “industry versus inferiority,” the child’s experiences in school and industry (ages five to 12) become the child’s main source of challenge. With the help of teachers and peers as role models, the child will learn that she is recognized for her achievements and that working hard results in competence. This competence increases the basic ego strength (positive self-concept). If the child is not successful with this stage she may have an inclination toward a feeling of inferiority (Erikson, as cited in Forte, 2007, p. 300). An example of inferiority in the adolescent is low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy. For the young adult experiencing homelessness, these feelings will impede skills in academic and vocational domains. Feelings of inferiority impact a person’s ability to try new things and feel successful. A history of abuse can also impact this stage of development, and research consistently reveals history of abuse among homeless youth (i.e. Busen & Engebretson, 2008; Zielinski, 2009).

The fifth stage, “identity versus identity diffusion” is the major psychosocial challenge for adolescents experiencing puberty. Under optimal conditions, the adolescent is trying to figure out who she is, using her earlier experiences to make sense of where she fits in the world. Teenagers typically “try on” different identities in an attempt to define their beliefs and values. When the adolescent fails to meet this task, she is likely to be confused and embrace a negative identity (Erikson, as cited in Forte, 2007, p. 300).

Young adults experiencing homelessness have often not advanced to this stage because their need to focus on basic survival greatly impedes this developmental stage. This can have the potential for long-term adverse effects on further development. When adolescents are just surviving on the street, they are not able to try on different identities; instead they are required to become tough and defensive in order to self-protect and avoid being victimized due to unmet needs and vulnerability.

“Intimacy versus isolation” is the sixth stage of Erikson’s model, during which the developing young adult is learning about love and close relationships (as cited in Forte, 2007, p. 301). Taking risks and being vulnerable in both romantic relationships and in cooperative and competitive groups will offer the individual opportunities to learn how to navigate relationships and to protect the psyche when problems arise. Ego failures will result in problems such as distancing from others, feeling alienated, and avoiding intimate and mutually trusting relationships (Erikson, as cited in Forte, 2007, p. 301). Young adults experiencing homelessness would likely not have the experiences up to this stage of development that would support their ability to be in mutually trusting and satisfying relationships. Because of the high incidence of trauma in their lives, either prior to homelessness or what occurred after they became homeless, homeless young adults may have difficulty forming positive relationships later in life.

In the seventh stage, the developing adult is challenged by “stagnation versus generativity” (middle adulthood). At this stage, a normally-developed person has a sense of responsibility, an interest in others, and a devotion to important causes. A person who cares for the next generation has successfully met the task of generativity. When an adult

fails to develop generativity, they are often focused on themselves or self-absorbed (Forte, 2007, p. 301).

The eighth and final stage of maturity is “integrity versus despair” (old age). When the mature adult is able to successfully achieve this stage, they have a sense of camaraderie with past and future generations, and their ego integrity allows them to review their life with satisfaction and a sense of meaning. If they experience despair, or in old age feel sentiments of anger, they are experiencing ego despair or ego weakness (Erikson, as cited in Forte, 2007, p. 301).

Emerging Adulthood Theory

Drawing from and expanding upon Erikson’s developmental theory, Arnett (2000) described the stage of development from roughly age 18 to the mid-twenties as being separate from adolescence and adulthood. Arnett theorized emerging adulthood is a period of time that is different from the teen years, and also distinct from full-fledged adulthood, suggesting that emerging adulthood is a time of exploration and development of personal identity. During this stage a young person is trying to figure out occupational goals, find love, and establish world views (Arnett, 2000). According to Arnett, most young people between ages 18 and 25 do not believe they have reached full adulthood because they are often geographically unsettled and may still be obtaining education and training for adult occupations or looking for a mate.

The impact of homelessness during emerging adulthood may have long term consequences, unless the young adult is resilient. For homeless young adults, this stage of exploration is interrupted and in the absence of a family support system, researchers might predict a bleak future for homeless young adults. Dissimilarly, researchers

Masten, Obradavic and Burt (2006) examined resilience in emerging adulthood and found that resilience can emerge during the young adulthood and this stage of development may be a unique window of opportunity for change of the young adults' future life course. With adult support outside of the family, even young adults with histories of high adversity were able to adapt and make positive changes and have future success (p. 186).

Empowerment and Strength-Based Perspective

Merriam-Webster (2009) defines the term *empower* as “to give power or authority to [someone or something].” A secondary definition is “to give ability to, enable, [or] permit.” In social work practice, empowering individuals, communities, and larger systems means assisting the client or client system to recognize their own power and use it for their own (or the community's) benefit. This is especially important for those who are oppressed and marginalized, because their power has been limited or taken away.

Saleebey (1996) explained a strength-based perspective and empowerment of clients as viewing clients through a new lens. Rather than focusing on pathology or what is *wrong* with the client, through a strength-based perspective, the social worker looks for the client's capabilities, skills, talents, hopes, and values (Saleebey, 1996). This perspective does not neglect or recognize that there is an underlying problem or a cause for needing service, but it draws from the client's strengths and resources to create a solution (Saleebey, 1996). The act of devising one's own solution to successfully overcome a problem results in feelings of empowerment.

The literature supports the strength-based perspective for working with young adults experiencing homelessness (i.e. Bender et al., 2007; Kidd, 2003; Lindsey et al.,

2000; Thompson et al., 2013). Working with the young adults' existing strengths and coping skills helps repair previous negative experiences, and the social worker has the opportunity to support the young adults' development of positive self-identity, based on their ability to overcome the challenges they encountered while homeless and turn them into strengths.

Professional Lens

Just as it is important to examine theories that may have bearing on the results of this study, it is crucial to develop an awareness of what I bring to the study as a professional and as an individual. My personal experiences, my Bachelor's Degree in Social Work and my current position as School Social Worker have influenced this project. . In my current position, I have often encountered and worked with young people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. My current professional practice experience was instrumental in my decision to examine this topic through research.

In my present practice I have observed a lack of resources and agencies that serve young adults experiencing homelessness. When I have attempted to access a bed in a shelter for a homeless adolescent, I am oftentimes told shelters do not have beds available. There is a shortage of housing for the young adult population. For those who are able to secure housing in transitional programs or supportive housing programs, it is usually a very positive experience and empowers the young adult to have hope for their future. Understanding the current service and support for young adults experiencing homelessness is important for future social work practice and intervention.

In my professional practice, I have had only a couple clients who were able to secure a spot in transitional housing or supportive housing. I found this to be an

incredibly positive experience for my clients. Unfortunately, I have observed more clients who are at risk of homelessness who need supportive housing and are unable to obtain this, due to limited resource, and restrictive eligibility criteria. A greater number of young adults will not receive necessary service and supports and this may have negative long-term future consequences.

Personal Lens

Along with my professional lens, my personal lens needs to be considered. Self-reflection and awareness regarding my personal experiences and how they influence the research are important to recognize and address personal biases in research. My family of origin and upbringing led me to take up social work as a profession and my personal experiences have greatly impacted my reasons for working on this subject matter. I am particularly interested in how people who experience adversity become resilient and survive. I am a resilient person, but I have rarely been able to pin-point the factors that had impact on my personal resilience, despite my history of adverse experiences. The experience of being homeless during adolescence and young adulthood, and surviving it, elicits a deep curiosity from me to learn how the young person manages and overcomes homelessness.

Additionally, the strength-based perspective in social work, I first learned through my personal experiences, and second through my professional work has influenced this research study. Having twenty plus years in the field of social work provides me a unique historical perspective. I started in the field in 1992 and my first position was in a day treatment for adjudicated adolescents. The day treatments' lens was influenced by a pathological perspective, which was the common treatment perspective of the early

1990's (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Having been a 'troubled youth' myself, my perspective was unlike the ideology of that time period. I have consistently felt that identifying a person's strengths and attributes encourages positive change. From adversity, resilience is fostered, strength is gained, and healing and growth will manifest.

This project is written as a requirement for completing a Master's of Social Work degree at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University. Addressing needs and strengths of young adults experiencing homelessness are important factors to research and will influence social work practice.

Methodology

In this study, I employed a qualitative, interview-based methodology to generate rich data on my subject. Qualitative interviewing is one way of collecting information for exploratory research. Being able to explore a topic from the perspective of the population being studied allows for deep understanding of their lived experiences (Padgett, 2008, p. 16). Padgett (2008) described qualitative research as an approach that can offer an inside perspective, (p. 2) and is best suited for topics of a sensitive and emotional nature (p. 15). It is especially useful for researchers who wish to capture the lived experience from the perspectives of those who live it and create meaning from the reports of those experiences (Padgett, 2008, p. 16). From the meaning, concepts, and descriptions I have generated from this study, social workers will have a better understanding of how young adults who have experienced homelessness are able to survive. Using a strengths-based perspective, as described in Saleebey (1996), I conducted this study in order to describe the inside experience of coping with and surviving homelessness. The research question for the study was: “From the perspective of young adults who have previously been homeless, what were their first-hand experiences that contributed to their survival of homelessness?”

Procedures

Recruitment. I used *snowball sampling* to locate participants for the study. This method of sampling is commonly used when the population is hidden or isolated, and the members are not likely to be found or to cooperate without a referral from someone in their own network (Padgett, 2008, p. 54a). For the purpose of this research study, the participants needed to be in stable housing at the time of the interview; this criterion was

established in order to avoid harm to participants who might be considered more vulnerable if they were unstable at the time of the interview.

I began my recruitment efforts for this study by putting up flyers on a community bulletin board at one residential housing facility for young adults. The agency indicated that there were 34 residents in the housing facility and all of them were between the ages of 17 and 26. I received one participant from this agency. Several attempts were made to recruit more participants from this agency by the following methods: adding a \$10 Target Gift Card incentive to the flyers, asking a staff member from the agency to assist by having a conversation with the residents about the study, and offering an evening ‘window of opportunity’ to sign up for an interview.

After two weeks of these attempts without any leads, I devised a new plan for recruitment. I contacted a street outreach worker with whom I had a professional relationship and asked this person for referrals. The outreach worker called two people and gave them information about my study. The two participants then called me and I met them at their apartments to conduct the interviews. I then began contacting other housing programs in order to find young adults with histories of homelessness. While speaking to one of the residential managers about the study, I was invited to a house meeting, where I was able to present information and invite the residents to participate in the study. At this house meeting, I recruited three additional participants. The interviews took place over the following 10 days, by appointment.

Protection of human subjects. Due to the vulnerability of the population of people who have experienced homelessness, protection of participants was a top priority.

Each participant needed to be in stable housing at the time of the interview. Criteria for stable housing included transitional housing and permanent housing.

The research committee reviewed and approved the proposal prior to any interviews being conducted. The study was also approved by the University of St. Thomas institutional review board (IRB) prior to any contact with potential participants. The purpose of the IRB is to ensure the safety of participants in the research study. The interview questions, the wording used, and the order of questions were taken into consideration in an effort to protect the participants from undue emotional stress during the interviews.

Participants were given an informed consent (Appendix A) form prior to beginning the interview, and I verbally went over this form, paying particular attention to the interviewee's right to stop the interview at any point during the interview. Participants were informed that, as a researcher, I understood that they may experience some discomfort during the interview because their experience of homelessness was a difficult circumstance. Each participant was provided with a list of free counseling resources from the area where they currently reside, along with a \$10 Target gift card for their participation. I handed the envelope with the resource list and gift card to the participants prior to the start of the interview, in order to prevent the participants from feeling uncomfortable if they chose to stop the interview early and ensure that they received the resources and gift card regardless. This action also helped prevent the possibility of a sense of coercion on the part of the participants and helped support the voluntary nature of their participation. Additionally, I informed participants that the information they

shared would be kept confidential and their identity would not be revealed or linked to the information they shared.

The participants were provided with an opportunity to share their own story and may have gained some personal benefit from this disclosure. The participants may have gained positive affirmation from this experience due to my identification of their strengths and encouragement of their ability to manage a tough life experience. Overall, the benefits to the participants outweighed the risks.

Data collection. The interviews were conducted in a private setting, mutually agreed upon between researcher and participant. Most were conducted in private rooms within the participant's place of residence. Once the participant signed the informed consent, the interviews were conducted.

I audio recorded the interviews and took notes during the interviews. The questions were asked in the form of a semi-structured interview using a predetermined list of questions (Appendix D). I did ask additional questions and gave prompts as needed. The participants answered questions about their current living situation, how and when they first became homeless, how they coped with being homeless and their future hopes and dreams. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

After gathering the data from participants, the audio recorded interview was transcribed for analysis. To protect the participants' identities, the transcripts were kept on a password protected computer to which only I had access. The state information was de-identified in order to protect participants, and each of the participants was assigned a number: Subject 1, Subject 2, and so forth. For the final paper, I assigned pseudonyms to each participant.

Reliability and validity. I developed the questions for the interview in order to focus the interviews on specific topics and generate specific content. The research question specifically focused on gathering information from a strength-based perspective versus a pathological or problem oriented perspective. From the current literature and theoretical framework, previous researchers identified positive coping skills for enduring homelessness. The questions used in this study were reviewed by peers and the research committee in order to determine the validity of the questions and whether they would provide information to answer the research question, according to Padgett's (2008) guidelines for developing interview questions (p. 113). The research committee went through the questions to ensure that they were clearly worded, were sensitive to the unique vulnerable population, and would result in data necessary to address the research question.

Data Analysis

I completed the analysis by using an inductive coding process. The purpose for this approach was to condense raw data from transcribed interviews into a brief summary of themes. This approach establishes a clear link between the research question and the summary of findings directly from the text (Glaser, 1978).

I used grounded theory, which draws out broad themes observed in the raw data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In grounded theory, themes and sub themes are deducted from interview transcripts. The themes I presented in this study are the ones that most directly addressed the research question, with particular attention to the strength-based perspective. I also analyzed (for difference) the data that fell outside of the norm or

seemed unusual in comparison to the common data. Finally, I compared the final themes related to the strengths based perspective to published literature using the same approach.

Sample

I located and interviewed a sample of six participants who were between the ages of 18 and 24, and who had a previous experience of being homeless. Their experience of being homeless occurred when they were between 12 and 24 years old, and the amount of time they were homeless was at least a week. The current sample included women (n=33%) and men (n=67%). The sample included Caucasian (n=16.67%), Asian (n=16.67%), African American (n=50%), and Native American (n=16.67%) ethnicities. The participants had been in stable housing at the time of the interview from a period of time between 2 months and up to 2.5 years. Demographic details about the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Former Homeless Young Adult Study Participants

Pseudo name	Gender	Current age range	Race	Age of first homelessness	Current range of housing stability
P1	Male	22-24	Caucasian	20	<1 year
P2	Female	22-24	African American	14	<1 year
P3	Male	22-24	African American	12	>1 year
P4	Male	18 -21	Asian American	17	>1 year
P5	Male	18-21	African American	17	>1 year
P6	Female	18-21	Caucasian/Native American	15, 17	>1 year

Note. p1=participant 1, p2=participant 2, p3=participant 3, p4=participant p4, p5=participant 5 P6=participant 6. Age at first episode of homelessness= independent of caretakers. Does not include if there was a history of homelessness with their family of origin.

Findings

The interviews resulted in the development of three main themes: (a) participants' personal experiences and feelings about "getting through" homelessness, (b) participants' recognition of the resources and supports that contributed to their ability to survive and exit homelessness, and (c) participants' personal attributes and future hopes and dreams. Within the theme of personal experiences and feelings, there were three sub-themes: internal experiences (including coping skills), experiences learned from personal history, and experiences learned from homelessness. Within the theme of resources and supports I identified two subthemes: people participants adopted for support, and formal systems of support or service. The third theme I identified was future hopes and dreams.

Table 2

Themes/Subthemes and Sample Responses of Former Homeless Young Adult Study Participants

Category	Thematic category	Sample response
<i>Theme 1: Participants' personal feelings and experiences for 'getting through' homelessness</i>		
F&E 1	Internal coping	Well, you don't really get through it; you just find ways to survive. Stealing stuff, a little prostitution, knocking people over, being conniving, anything under the law, that God wouldn't approve of. And then God himself, because you are wondering where am I going to go? How am I going to eat? Don't want to do this, don't want to do that, so hope, faith, and a dream that it could change.
F&E 2	Experiences learned from history	My old school and church has an outreach project that fed people. There were food shelves where I could go, I knew a lot of this because me and my mom were poor, so I knew how to use these and I knew where to eat at least.
F&E 3	Experiences from homelessness (Three mini-themes: being on the street, trust, self-protection, and fending for self)	I learned that I am not scared of anything. People have tried to rob me, people have run up on me, people have tried to rape me, but I discovered that I can fight. I can, when it comes to defending myself I am able to do this. It was something I never thought, 'cause you know, my mom used to abuse me really bad and I always just kind of took it.
<i>Theme 2: Participants' identification of resources/supports that contributed to their ability to survive and exit homelessness</i>		
R&S1	People they adopted	I didn't tell people what I was goin' through; I was basically just a loner. Nobody knew I was homeless, I always had money 'cause I was doing what I was doing [dealing drugs]. Only my closest friends knew, my friend Andy and his mom, <i>that's my mom</i> . I slept there, she made breakfast for both of us, made sure I went to school; I owe a lot to her.
R&S2	People they adopted	My only friend there [in the house where he stayed] was this old guy named Ted. He actually moved out of there because he said they were getting crazy. He is still around the projects, but he is still good. I was supposed to get a place with him. ("Is he like a parent to you?") More like a brother, he said he adopted me as his brother

		in his native religion. Me and him got along good, I help him and he helps me out.
R&S3	Formal supports/ services	I was still seeing my therapist at the time [I was homeless and living in a shelter] a little bit regularly at that time.
R&S4	Formal supports/ services	I found out about [name of agency]; that's when I got grocery gift cards, department store gift cards, that wasn't until I was 17 going on 18. I had just turned 18. I was going on 2 years basically without nothing and I didn't even know this [resource] existed.

Theme 3: Participant's future hopes and dreams

H	Hopes and dreams	I am going to school for nursing, I want a college degree, I don't want to live pay check to pay check, from you know, [fast food restaurant] or something. I want to stay clean, I don't want to go back to drugs or drinking, and I want to find my own place to live. You know, that's about it.
H	Hopes and dreams	There are two important days, the day you were born and the day you figure out why you were born, so I mean that is part of my puzzle, figure out why I was born, so you know it's just I guess that is the purpose, figure out why I was born and the day I solve the piece of the puzzle, that's it.

Note. F&E = feelings and experiences, three sub-themes. R&S = resources and supports, four sub-themes. H = hopes and dreams.

Feelings about “Getting Through” Homelessness

Internal coping. Three of the participants in the study described their internal thoughts and feelings while homeless. All of them felt that the experience was tolerable if they did not think of their future beyond the present. The participants described the need to just focus on basic survival. Focusing on basic survival served as a distraction from the reality of their circumstance. Kyle mentioned that he viewed his experience of homelessness as a trial. He stated,

The way I saw it, when I was there, it was just a small portion of a trial that I have to overcome myself, so that is how I kind of saw it. I kept on the positive side I guess. I wasn't going to give up on life because I am outside sleeping in the

park; I still went to school, I did my best to make sure I woke up the next day. I took it day by day, so I wasn't thinking about what I will do next week if I am out here. It was more like what I will do tomorrow. I would make a plan: "Okay now what do I do?" I kept it really simple; I didn't think of the big picture I guess. I had to just start with the portion I had on my plate, the day or tomorrow; I just went with it.

Another participant in the study, Gabriella, described a similar strategy of being in the present:

I guess I just didn't think about tomorrow, I was just worried about here and now. Like how am I going to eat lunch? And after lunch, it was how am I going to eat dinner? And after I had dinner, it was where am I going to stay? Where am I going to stay the next day? It was really just about, I don't know, you just turn on survival instinct, you just go into survival mode.

Another participant shared a similar experience and also found that being homeless alleviated his symptoms of depression. Emmanuel felt that being focused on survival and being in the present provided a distraction from his sadness. Talking about how he coped while living in the woods by himself, Emmanuel stated,

At first it was a little bit saddening, but it gave me peace though, because normally I am depressed. That gave me some time to figure out what I should eat and instead of focusing on different things. There were still days when I was still depressed. It just kept me busy, so it was more of a good thing.

Kyle, Gabriella, and Denny described the feelings associated with the tangible experience of being out in the world without shelter as a 'survival instinct' or living in the present moment with a focus on basic needs. The way they managed or coped was by not thinking too much about their future, or in some cases, even about tomorrow.

Lessons learned from personal history. The participants have personal histories and experiences that they utilized in the process of surviving homelessness. Tom recognized his own racial privilege and his access to resources both prior to and after becoming homeless. When I asked tom to share something he learned about himself through the experience of being homeless, Tom responded,

I learned how fragile the system can be, because some of the situations that helped me cope through homelessness were partly because I am white and I do have a lot of resources. I think it would be tough if I came from poverty and it was also just a matter of luck for me. It is not about myself that I learned that. It is just what I have learned from society. Just how tough it can be for people, especially young people who found those kinds of situations.

Tom had been stably housed for two years at the time of the interview. He came from a two-parent family and his family has been able to help him emotionally as well as financially. For instance, his Dad gave him a used car and helped him with maintenance of the car. Tom's situation was different from the other participants, because he was older than the others when he became homeless; he'd already completed high school and he went right into a shelter until he located an apartment in a supportive housing unit. Tom shared that he has mental illness, and he is cognizant of what his challenges are in relation to this; he also recognized that he had additional supports because of his disability.

Another participant spoke of how his prior experiences in his family of origin impacted his present coping skills, especially his ability to manage difficult emotions. Kyle described how he learned to cope with difficult emotions by separating his feelings from his thoughts. He stated,

When I grew up, I guess I, the thing that made it easy was I detached myself from emotions; when my parents left, when I started 7th grade, I don't mix emotions with what is going on, so I don't feel bad, I don't, I just separate. I separate what I am feeling, it don't matter, that is the thing, the only reason why.

Kyle also spoke of how being homeless wasn't really difficult for him; he credited this to his independence, another learned skill he attributed to his family history. He said, "It wasn't that big of a deal because I was already used to being on my own, even though I was with my family." Denny had similar experiences, except his were accompanied by

feelings of regret and loss of childhood. Denny was much younger when he left home; he said he had been mostly on his own since the age of 12. Denny shared,

I left the house when I was 12. I came back to visit my mom, but I was living on the street, I was out there. I thought I was grown, I know now that I wasn't, you know better when you get to this point. But when you look back and wish you could do that different, say that in a different way, you know what I mean?

Later in the interview Denny made several comments about wishing he'd had a childhood and wishing he'd had parents who took care of him. Denny shared that he thought his mom had a mental illness and that she would *"beat the hell out of you for nothing."* He felt his homelessness at 12 years old was partly due to the need to escape her abuse. He recalled, *"I'll take my chances out here (on the street), anything was better than that [mom's physical abuse]."* While Tom's personal and past experiences were viewed as assets, Denny's past experiences were viewed as deficits, but both of their experiences had an impact on their survival. Tom's ability to view his experiences as assets may have enabled him to exit homelessness quickly, while Denny's view of his experiences as adverse may have resulted in a personal toughness or strength that enabled him to become independent from his parent.

Lessons learned from homelessness. All of the participants shared things they learned about themselves from their experiences. The things they learned included confidence from their strengths and their personal resourcefulness, pride in their ability to handle difficult situations, their realization that they were smart, their ability to see the good even in a bad situation, and their ability to be strong and defend themselves.

Each participant shared that they gained a feeling of personal strength from experiencing and surviving homelessness. This feeling of strength was something they

did not necessarily have prior to becoming homeless. Two participants described what they learned about themselves. Kendra, with a sense of amazement at herself, stated,

One thing I can say for sure, I learned is how strong I am. How I can go through shit and make it through, like ah it's crazy! It is crazy how I made it through stuff!

Similarly, Gabriella stated, with strong conviction and genuine belief in herself,

I am smart, as I, you know, that I am really smart. I have had to use critical thinking skills, being homeless. Like, what to do, where to go and how to get there.

Three additional mini-themes arose within the theme of experiences learned from homelessness, which are specifically related to how participants gained personal strength: (a) being out on the street all alone, (b) being able to recognize who they could or could not trust, and (c) being able to protect and fend for themselves.

Being on the street all alone. Five of the six participants spent some portion of their homelessness without a place to sleep at night. Some of the places where they slept at night included a park bench, in the woods, in a car, under a bridge while lying on cardboard, in a public school without permission, and on a city bus where they slept while riding all night. The conditions of being homeless may seem unbearable to an outsider, but most participants found that it was tolerable, and the positive nature of their personal perspectives regarding the act of sleeping in places not ordinarily meant for sleeping was unexpected. Five of the six participants agreed that being on the street or in the wilderness was not as bad as one might predict. Instead, they reported how they got used to it, and how during the experience they felt a sense of peace and quiet. Kyle shared something he liked about sleeping on the park bench:

I kind of enjoyed it. When I wanted to sleep I could look up at the sky and basically look up at the stars; that was one positive thing I liked to notice, and time to think about myself.

Determining who is trustworthy. Another learned behavior from homelessness was determining who was and who was not trustworthy. Emmanuel encountered a situation where a friend's family member took him in to stay with them, but also spread rumors and lies about him to his friends. He said he lost all of his friends over these rumors and lies. He also stated that he'd had a feeling early on that it might not be in his best interest to stay with this woman, but he didn't listen to his intuition. He learned through this tough lesson to listen to himself in the future. When Tom was in a shelter he learned how to deal with a person who was a drug addict. He indicated that he developed a good relationship with this person, even after she stole his medications and his food. He proudly stated that he has the ability to establish relationships, even with someone who is difficult to like, and this is a good skill to have. Kendra discussed her lack of trust in people, specifically people from formal support systems. She has wanted to get help from a disability worker, but it has been hard to let people in. She shared during her interview that it was difficult to allow the researcher into her life and to share her story. But, because someone she trusts referred the researcher to her, she was willing to allow this interview to take place. She also wanted to be helpful, because she could personally identify with the need to get a school project completed, as she'd recently been in the same situation with a project for school and had problems recruiting people to help her with her project. Kendra stated,

I would have switched workers, because I don't fuck with [trust] people, to have someone come in, you know, I don't usually let people in, that's why I was going to meet you [the researcher] somewhere else, but then Mike [outreach worker] said you needed help with your research. I just had a research project and no one wanted to help me with it.

Protecting and fending for oneself. While personal strength was learned from the act of being able to survive on the streets, knowing who you can or cannot trust helped participants feel smart, and also helped them survive the experience of homelessness. The skill of being able to protect and fend for themselves contributed to their feelings of independence and self-reliance, as well as helping them meet basic needs. Denny spoke of his ability to meet his own needs, even as a young child. When asked how he was able to take care of himself at a young age, he stated,

I wasn't like a weak minded person when I was younger, I've always been gullible, it was normal to me. If I was hungry, I just had to get myself something to eat. My parents didn't bring groceries in for me and get me something to eat. That was normal to me, so it didn't bother me. Maybe I grew up before my time, mind-wise. I wasn't going to starve.

Gabriella discussed the feeling that nothing scares her anymore, because of so many scary things she encountered while homeless. She learned to defend herself and this now gives her a sense of strength and security. Gabriella shared, *“The first time someone tried to physically inflict harm on me, I was able to defend myself.”*

Resources and Supports

“Adopted” parents or siblings. Three of six participants identified someone (sometimes more than one person) they adopted as a support person while they were homeless. The people whom participants adopted were a friend’s parent, a friend’s grandparent, homeless outreach workers, and an older adult who became a friend. After a couple of years of being homeless without support, Kendra finally connected with some outreach workers and she shared how she adopted them as parents:

I called a number or something, I believe. Jennifer was the first person I ever met that worked with them [street outreach workers]. I was so tight with that lady, I loved that lady. And I took Jennifer and made her my mom. I called her for everything. Jennifer introduced me to Andy; I'm having coffee with him

tomorrow. I can't wait. I adopted him as a dad; he is cool as fuck. I haven't seen him since he changed jobs. That's what happened with Jennifer, she changed jobs. It hurt my feelings; I'm so used to those guys.

Kendra also shared that the most helpful thing about these relationships was *“having someone to talk to; I used to call them for everything. When I'm talking about when I adopted these people, I adopted these people! These were the only people I talked to since I'd been gone from home.”* Denny adopted his friend's mom as his own mom. He stated, *“His mom was basically my mom, that's my mom. I slept there, she made breakfast for both of us, made sure I went to school; I owe a lot to her.”* At seventeen years old and homeless, Emmanuel befriended an older man, whom he referred to as someone who was, *“more like a brother [than a parent], he adopted me as his brother in his native religion. Me and him get along good, I help him out and he helps me out.”*

Adopting someone as a parent or being adopted by someone as a brother was significant for three of the participants. Two participants did not identify someone they adopted; this was likely due to the fact that they already had some close family or companion they were connected to, despite their homelessness. Tom continued to have a relationship with his parents and he also had a social worker from the county's Human Services department prior to going to a shelter. Gabriella became homeless after a fire destroyed her home; she was already independent from her parents and had been cohabitating with a boyfriend. When they lost their home due to the fire, she and her boyfriend were homeless together for five months.

Formal supports and services. Formal supports and services are agencies that address the needs of homeless youth and young adults. This includes shelters, food pantries, drop-in centers, street outreach programs, county agencies, churches, and other

community agencies. All of the participants were able to identify formal support systems and services they used at some point during their homelessness, but for some it was a long time after they became homeless before they got connected to resources. Gabriella only reported using a couple of services while homeless; she mostly relied on herself, surviving homelessness by selling and using drugs. For Kendra, accessing formal support services was delayed for a couple of years. She shared that she didn't use shelters during the first two years, because she didn't know about them.

I didn't know shit about all that. I had never been to a shelter without my mom and my sister. Going to a shelter on my own, I didn't know nothing about that. It wasn't what I knew anything about. I just had never been to one on my own, so I wasn't about that. I was like couch hopping then or being outside.

Kendra eventually did get connected to an outreach program and when she talked about this experience she was able to identify how it helped her and what the outreach worker did to support her. Kendra's experiences were significant because now she has future goals related to providing programs to at-risk youth. These goals will be addressed in the theme of future hopes and dreams.

Kendra draws from her own past experiences with a program she participated in through the YMCA. After being homeless, she got involved with this program and she learned there are so many things you can do with your time to have fun and give meaning to your life. Kendra shared with regret that if she'd had these experiences earlier in her life it might have changed outcomes for her. When talking about the outreach program in which she participated, she shared this experience:

It's tight [canoeing], at first I was terrified. He [outreach worker] always gets me cause he always feeds me, first time we went to [sandwich shop]. We did stuff I never did before. I held this life line when we went down the elevator thing, it was scary, I was afraid I was going to get sucked in. It was cool, he taught me different stuff. Fishing trips, stuff outdoors, like cooking outdoors, etc.

Participants' Future Hopes and Dreams

Kendra and Denny were in the older age range of the participants in this study; both were living independently in their own apartments, both identified the desire to heal from their past, and both identified future goals that included improving the lives of others. Denny talked about his goals and related them to his daughter; Denny's goals included a strong desire to provide a good life for his daughter. Denny identified that he enjoys opportunities to play with his daughter, noting that it gives him back some of the childhood he missed. While talking about hopes and dreams, Denny stated,

Get my baby girl a backyard. Her mom lets me see her whenever I want. This is one of my pluses. People look at me like I'm crazy. I feel like God gave me her, to have a good life. She is smart too, she can read already.

Denny's eyes lit up and he had a big smile on his face when he shared information about his daughter. He appeared very proud of himself as a father. Denny also discussed his feelings of pride about earning his own paycheck from being employed. The researcher identified the benefits of having a real job, instead of illegal stuff that may result in jail-time. Denny agreed and stated,

You know how much I smiled off that? I don't know what this survey is all about but like I've been to jail and all that too, and it is better this way, I like to have a paycheck that has my name on it, you know what I mean?

Later in the interview, Denny proudly talked about how he has paid up his rent a couple months ahead and is able to help another friend with bills.

Kendra has a goal of earning a degree in human services and starting her own program for at-risk youth, with an emphasis on African American youth. She is well aware of the current problems with over-representation of African Americans in prison and correctional facilities. She has a goal to start a diversion program, similar to a "boot-

camp,” but more therapeutic than punitive. Kendra hopes to have a positive influence on future generations.

Gabriella is currently in school earning a degree and she is expecting a baby in several months. Gabriella struggled with chemical addiction while she was homeless. She also had significant and unexpected losses in her life. As a teenager, she lost a baby during the later stages of her pregnancy. Shortly after this, when she was living with her boyfriend, she became homeless because of a house fire. Gabriella reported feeling scared about her future, because her experiences led her to believe and know that life is unpredictable and tragedy can strike anyone at any time. When Gabriella talked about her fears she stated,

Well I have my boyfriend, we are engaged. You know, I mean the whole reason I am homeless is because my house burned down, you know there are outside forces that can fluctuate your situation in any way it chooses. You could be doing everything right and all of a sudden, JUST BAM! You are fucked, you have nothing. What are you going to do?

Most participants’ feelings about the future are positive and hopeful. Because they are stably housed and working on personal goals, they have clear ideas about how they want to proceed. The three oldest participants in this study are Denny, Kendra, and Tom; they are also the participants who are the most independent. Denny and Kendra have their own apartments and Tom is in supportive permanent housing. All have completed high school or the equivalent and are employed and/or in post-secondary education.

All of the participants used some type of support service to access their current stable living situation. Participants were connected to and received support from social workers from schools, county agencies, and homeless outreach programs. They also reported using health clinics and food pantries while homeless. These support services

were identified by participants as helpful and necessary for them to get into stable housing. Even though all of the participants eventually used transitional and supportive housing services, five of the six participants did not use temporary shelters while homeless, preferring to just be out on their own in the woods, in parks, or on the street. Only one of the participants went into a shelter for homeless young adults during homelessness.

Summary

The participants in this study shared their experiences of homelessness; each participant had his or her own unique story and history. Combined, they revealed strengths, individual coping mechanisms, lessons learned from homelessness, how personal histories impacted resilience, and hopes for the future. This study identified how each individual coped with homelessness, what was learned from the experience, how personal histories impacted levels of resilience and what each participant hoped for the future. In the following and final section, I will include a discussion that locates this study's findings in the larger scholarly conversation on the topic of young adult homelessness.

Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to explore lived experiences of young adults who had previously been homeless, analyze participants' experiences, and identify factors that contributed to getting through these experiences and eventually exiting homelessness. Understanding participants' experiences of homelessness allows researchers to consider the factors that influenced their ability to manage the experience. In this section, I will examine the ways the findings of this study align with and differ from the published literature on the topic.

Feelings about “Getting Through” Homelessness

Participants in this study described two methods of getting through homelessness: internal coping skills used while homeless and drawing on the experiences they learned from their past histories. They also described the things they learned *while* they were homeless.

Internal coping skills. Internal coping skills were identified as a key tool for getting through homelessness. Half of the participants in this study discussed the way they internally coped with the experience of living on the streets. They described the feeling of a survival instinct and a strategy of simply focusing on their present basic needs. They reported not thinking too much about the long-term future, only what they needed to do immediately in order to survive. These findings align with Unger et al.'s (1998) findings on street youth's' use of emotion-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping refers to coping with the outcome of the stressor; for example, reducing anxiety by pretending a problem does not exist (Unger et al.). However, Unger et al. also found that street youth who use this type of coping tend to have more symptoms of depression,

poor health, and substance abuse. The current study's findings do not match these conclusions; in fact, more than one study participant reported symptoms of depression lessening while focused so intently on basic survival. The strength-based lens of this study also shows participants' present-moment living as a positive coping strategy, rather than an adverse or damaging experience.

Lessons from personal history. Participants in the current study shared that they learned how to shut down emotionally from earlier exposure to trauma in their family of origin. Experiences from participants' past histories were identified as a source of strength, even when the participants' experiences were adverse. They were able to draw from past experiences and realize how this contributed to their coping skills and ability to manage homelessness. For example, growing up in poverty meant learning the social service systems necessary to access resources. Participants discussed how they learned to take care of themselves in their family of origin, so taking care of themselves on the streets was not much different. Additional experiences included learning how deal with painful and emotional feelings by detaching from their emotions and learning how to fight and be tough as a result of past physical abuse.

The research literature review did not produce previous studies where homeless young adults identified their past experiences from family histories as a source of strength. On the contrary, most of the research in this area identifies the problems from the family of origin that contribute to the young adult *becoming* homeless. Homeless youth have often been victims of various forms of parental maltreatment (Kim et al., 2009; Ringwalt et al., 1998; Unger et al., 2014; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990; Wolfe, Toro, & McCaskill, 1999). Depending on the researcher's theoretical lens, these experiences

may be considered risk factors, causative factors, or adverse experiences that contribute to homelessness. However, using a strengths-based perspective as a lens, these adverse experiences become positive tools that produce the strength to overcome future adverse experiences. The strengths-based perspective of this study shows participants' history of abuse as a factor that contributed to their strength and helped them manage homelessness.

Lessons from being homeless. Participants identified numerous lessons learned from the experience of homelessness, which are divided into three mini-themes: learning how to manage being alone and rely on oneself, determining who is trustworthy, and realizing power to protect and fend for oneself.

Managing being alone. Participants learned how to rely on themselves and cope with being alone, without any support. One way they managed this was through the internal coping strategies identified earlier in this discussion. Participants in the current study identified a spiritual or faith-based belief that helped them cope with homelessness. These findings were consistent with published studies on this topic. Lindsey et al. (2000) and Thompson et al. (2013) found that a belief in God or spiritual being helped youth through being alone and homeless. Bender et al. (2007) also found that youth learned how to get their needs met while on the street, and reported that this helped them stay focused and that they were less likely to feel alone.

Learning who is trustworthy. In addition to dealing with being alone, participants in the current study also needed to learn who they could trust while homeless. In this study, participants reported that they needed to learn who they could trust while homeless, which is a finding consistent with several studies from the published literature. Bender et al. (2007) and Lindsey et al. (2000) found in their research that learning who

was trustworthy often occurred as a result of being taken advantage of or being assaulted. Participants also shared that they needed to learn how to protect themselves as a result of being homeless (Bender et al. 2007; Lindsey et al., 2000).

Learning to protect and fend for oneself. Learning to protect and fend for oneself was a major lesson participants learned from homelessness. When one participant was physically threatened, she realized that she could fight; until this point the participant never knew she had this ability. The victimization or assault of homeless young adults is a common theme in the research literature (Walsh & Donaldson, 2010). The findings from the current study that show how young adults developed street smarts in order to survive homelessness do align with the literature, particularly the findings of Bender et al. (2007) and Lindsey et al. (2000), who found that youth and young adults are vulnerable and can quickly become victims to many adverse experiences on the street.

Summary. The participants revealed strengths that came from past history and experiences, as well as strengths that derived from what was learned while homeless. Participants discussed internal coping strategies, their learned independence, the need to learn how to protect themselves, both physically and emotionally, and the experience of discovering who they could trust.

Resources and Supports

Findings from this study revealed that there are a variety of resources and supports young adults access while homeless and while in stable housing. Examples of formal resources participants used were health clinics, street outreach workers, food shelves, and free meals at churches. Participants also identified informal supports; these were people they “adopted” as parent figures or older sibling figures.

People adopted for support. Findings from the current study revealed that young adults experiencing homelessness want to have someone to refer to as a parent. Half of the participants stated that there was someone in their life that they "adopted" as a parent figure or an older brother. Participants indicated that the most important part of these relationships was having someone to talk to and someone who understands them. The participants who had been homeless at an earlier age and therefore had been homeless for a longer time especially came to establish trust in outreach workers, so much so that they "adopted" them.

The published research literature also discusses relationships between mentor figures and homeless young adults, though it primarily focuses on the importance of these relationships from the perspective of the mentor, rather than the mentee. For instance, Kidd et al. (2007) found that, for outreach workers, being able to develop a relationship with youth and young adults is key to engaging them. Thompson et al. (2007) also described the importance of effective skills for connecting with youth who are homeless. However, the findings in this study reveal new information about the importance of mentorship to the homeless youth themselves.

Formal supports and services. Participants reported not knowing how to get support and feeling that some of the formal supports available were not helpful. One participant identified that the most helpful aspect of working with a homeless outreach worker was simply "*having someone to talk to.*" Two of the participants who connected with outreach workers while on the street expressed in detail why the outreach worker was cool and what the outreach worker did with them. In addition to street outreach workers who provided supports and services, several of the participants identified

previous and present people from whom they received support in the form of formal counseling and therapy. This finding is consistent with previous research studies which show homeless youth and young adults indicating a supportive person as one way to manage and cope with the experience of homelessness (i.e. Thomas et al., 2011).

It is important to consider the state of stability that the participants were in at the time of the interview. Though all were considered stably housed, the duration of stability was from a wide range of time. Two of the participants had been stable for less than six months, two of the participants were stable for less than one year, and the remaining two participants had been stable for two or more years. Some researchers have conducted studies with homeless youth while they are on the street, and therefore less likely to be emotionally stable. For instance, Kidd et al. (2003) found that the most important support for homeless youth were other street youth. This is was not consistent with the findings of the current study; only two of the participants spoke of being with others while on the street. The remaining four were completely alone and did not rely on friends. Because the participants accepted help and support from formal systems, it is possible that their lack of support from peers was due to the fact they did not have a social support network. For youth who are able to develop and connect with other street youth, the street becomes home and the community of other homeless individuals becomes a family.

Summary. Participants identified resources and supports that helped them through their experiences. Most of the participants used basic needs resources at the beginning of their homelessness; for example, a meal in a church or treatment for a minor medical issue in a free clinic. It was not until further into their episode of homelessness

that they utilized services that would help rectify their circumstance. The primary sources of support were people they adopted and basic needs resources.

Participant's Future Hopes and Dreams

Participants shared their future hopes and dreams. There was a notable difference in the clarity of hopes and dreams of participants who had been stably housed for a longer duration and those who were more recently homeless and had been stably housed for less than six months. The participants who had been stably housed longer had clear and specific goals and they were working toward them. The young adults who were in stable housing for only six months or less had vague hopes and dreams. This is likely due to the recent episode of homelessness, and the insecurity accompanied by the experience. Kidd (2003) identified a theme of hope felt by street youth who felt optimistic about the future. The participants in the current study discussed their hopes and dreams relative to their futures. This finding was not consistent with the research literature.

Strengths and Limitations

This qualitative study was rich with personal experience and candid self-disclosure; the participants were thoughtful and expressive. Experiences shared by each participant were emotionally painful and at the same time were awe inspiring for me as a researcher. The participants' understanding of their own personal strengths and coping skills were remarkable, and yet each participant also was humble about his or her accomplishments. The participants may have benefitted from the opportunity to share their story; Lindsey et al. (2000) found that by identifying their "steeling qualities" (strengths), outreach workers could help homeless youth recognize what qualities they do

have and help them develop these in order to benefit them in the future. It is my hope that the interview experience was mutually beneficial to both researcher and participant.

One large and impactful limitation of this study is the small sample size ($n = 6$). Participants were selected through snowball sampling, so the sample is not representative of the general population of homeless young adults. Recruitment was challenging with this population; this is consistent with the literature, which often refers to youth and young adults who are homeless as the “invisible and silenced” (Tierney & Hallet, 2010). For instance, though a flyer was posted in a transitional living program where 34 young people live, only one person contacted the researcher for an interview. An additional five participants were recruited, after being directly referred to by someone they knew. Two of the participants called the researcher after being contacted by an outreach worker, and another three participants were recruited after I had the opportunity to meet with potential participants, introduce myself, and explain my study. Future researchers should be cautious about generalizing these findings, as the study’s small sample size lacks the ability to be representative of the larger population of homeless young adults.

Recommendations for Future Research

Young adult homelessness from a strengths-based perspective is an area of research that is understudied. The fact that the current findings align with the sparse studies that take this same lens with a similar population implies that there is room for further research in this area, perhaps with larger sample sizes to produce more generalizable results. There are two areas that could be explored further. First, the current study results invite an additional study that compares the age at first episode of

homelessness with factors for resilience. Though the current study was small, the findings regarding the participants' age of first episode and the duration of homelessness are intriguing. For example, researchers might choose to further explore the factors that impact young teens when they first became homeless and how they exit and become stable. If researchers honed in on the younger youth who had short durations of homelessness, they might be able to produce results that would support new early intervention models.

Second, research that evaluates programs that serve homeless youth and young adults and use a strength based perspective may influence future programming. The results of this study, along with other research that employed a similar lens (i.e. Ensign & Gittlesohn, 1998; Lindsey et al., 2000; Molnar et al., 1998; Whitbeck et al., 1999), point to the benefits of a strengths-based perspective rather than a pathology perspective. The current study results show that a strengths-based perspective encourages homeless young adults to shift focus from adversity to strengths developed *through* adversity, often resulting in a sense of success and self-confidence.

Implications for Future Social Work Practice

Again, the results of the strength-based perspective in this study imply that social workers should consider the approach they use when working with youth and young adults experiencing homeless or at risk of homelessness. Using a strength perspective intervention model for this population has potential to become a new best practice for social workers. Because of the adverse situations homeless young adults and homeless individuals in general have often endured, it is likely they have a history of trauma as well. Social workers are appropriate to apply their clinical skills with a focus on trauma-

informed care. Applying the three dimensions of intervention to work with the homeless population would ideally be accomplished through practice with individuals, families and groups (micro dimension), program development (mezzo dimension), and advocacy for large system and societal change (macro dimension) (Integrative Framework of Generalist Social Work Practice, MSW handbook, p. 10).

Understanding the first-hand experiences of young adults who have known homelessness guides the social worker toward empathy and compassion. Social workers are charged with the responsibility of social justice. The condition of homelessness is largely attributed to poverty. The National Association of Social Workers' code of ethics calls on the professional social worker to advocate for the poor and vulnerable (NASW Code of Ethics,). This research project addresses the individual experiences of young adults experiencing homelessness and it touches on the mezzo level of the supports and services available or unavailable to the homeless population. There are implications for intervention at the mezzo level of practice; specifically, strength-based and resilience-based models of practice. The study was focused on the personal coping skills utilized during homelessness and the strategies utilized for exiting homelessness.

Conclusion

Based on this research, social workers must continue to influence policy change, specifically regarding issues related to poverty. Because poverty directly influences homelessness, and because social workers often work directly with the homeless, social workers are in the position to speak and advocate for those who are impoverished.

Lastly, researchers have concluded that children who experience chronic adversity do better when they have a positive relationship with a competent adult. Professional

social workers must continue to mobilize general populations and stakeholders toward mentorship programs that address the needs of at-risk populations of children, adolescents and young adults. I conclude, the above ideas employ all three levels of intervention, policy changes that impact wide-spread poverty (macro) and direct practice that offers mentorship to at-risk individuals and communities (micro and mezzo).

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CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS
GRSW682 RESEARCH PROJECT

Young Adults Experience of Homelessness: An Exploration of Strengths and Resilience

I am conducting a study about homeless young adults. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because I have become acquainted with resources and support services from the agency where you may have utilized resources and services. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Renee Hauwiller, a graduate student at the School of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas, advised by Dr. Kari L. Fletcher, faculty and committee chair also from School of Social Work, St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore the personal experiences of young adults who have experienced homelessness. I am particularly interested in understanding the young adult's opinion and perspective related to their strengths and factors that impact their resilience.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: Allow me to interview you in person, face to face, at a location we mutually agreed upon. I will ask questions about your experiences while living without permanent housing or homeless. The interview will take about 45-60 minutes. I will digitally record our confidential conversation, followed by transcribing the data to analyze at a later date. I will not identify you in my study, just information you share as it relates to my study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has minimal risk. Because you may have had adverse experiences while homeless, I recognize that my questions could elicit emotional responses. I assure you, I will be sensitive and respectful with my questions. If at any time during the interview you (the respondent) wishes to withdraw, I will readily accept the respondents decision to withdraw. The benefit for the respondent of participating is an opportunity to share your story as it relates to your experiences of homelessness. As a thank you and token of my appreciation for your time I will give you \$10 Target gift card, at the conclusion of the interview.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any type of report that I publish, any personally identifying information will be NOT be included with my report. Research records will be kept in a locked file in my office and digital data kept on a password protected computer file. Research records I will create include: an audio-recording, transcript and computer records.

Audio files will be deleted from password protected device after being downloaded. All records related to this study will be destroyed by August 1, 2014.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and may stop the interview at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Catherine University, the University of St. Thomas, or the School of Social Work. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will be destroyed.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Renee Hauwiller. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at (phone) my advisor is Dr. Kari L. Fletcher, she can be reached at (phone). You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study and to be audio-recorded.

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Print Name of Study Participant

Renee Hauwiller

Signature of Researcher

Date

HELP



WANTED

Are **YOU a Young Adult, 18-24 years old with a past experience of homelessness?**

*What were your experiences while living without permanent housing?

*Who was helpful to you? Are there supports on the streets?

*If you are willing to talk about your experiences in a short face to face interview, I want to hear from you.

*This is a research study looking at the coping skills and strengths a person experiencing homelessness uses during their experience of being homeless.

*Thank you gift for participating (\$10 Target gift card)

You may participate in this study if: You are 18-24 years old at time of interview, you were homeless at least 1 time for a week or longer from age 16-24 and you are presently in stable housing (transitional living program, supported housing or independently living on your own).

Renee Hauwiler	Renee Hauwiler	Renee Hauwiler	Renee Hauwiler	Renee Hauwiler	Renee Hauwiler	Renee Hauwiler	Renee Hauwiler	Renee Hauwiler	Renee Hauwiler
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Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

Hello Participant,

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me and allowing me the opportunity to interview you. We will meet on DATE, TIME, PLACE. If you can't make this time, please call me to reschedule. (PHONE) I am currently a graduate student at University St. Thomas and St. Catherine University, working toward my Masters in Social Work. I am writing a clinical research paper to criteria for my degree. This topic of study was my choice and comes from both my work experiences and my personal experiences. I have a long history working with youth and I have a personal history of overcoming adversity.

I am interested to hear from you and learn from your experiences, primarily how you managed and handled being homeless. I am particularly interested in your strengths and coping skills which you felt helped you while you were homeless. Additionally, my hope is that I will gain insights from you that will assist me and my profession in providing service.

This interview is completely voluntary. If at any point you do not feel comfortable or do not want to answer a question, please let me know, I will move to the next question. Participating will give you an opportunity to share your story and to be heard! You will receive a \$10.00 for your participation, just as a small token of my appreciation for your time.

Please look over the enclosed, *Informed Consent* I will request that you sign this when we meet, if you choose to be in my study. I will bring another copy to our meeting, no need to remember to bring this one.

With gratitude,

Renee Hauwiller

(cell phone with text)

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Demographic

1. So, how old are you?
2. What gender do you identify with?
3. How long have you been living here (transitional housing or temporary

housing)?

Personal Internal Attributes & Interests

4. What are some words you would use to describe yourself?
5. What are some of the things you like to do with your time?

History of homelessness, number of times and duration, age of first time

6. How old were you the first time this happened?
 - 6.a. With family? And out on your own?
7. How much time have you spent without a permanent place to live?
8. What is longest amount of time you have been without permanent housing?

Currently Housed/Retrospective thoughts

9. When you look back on the time(s) you were without permanent housing, can you recall how you got through that experience? How you coped?

Services and supports

10. Please share some of the services you have used while without permanent housing?

10a. Expand: What was the most helpful? Least helpful?

Internal strengths and learning

11. What is something you have learned or discovered about yourself from this experience?

Internal coping skills

12. It is hard for me to imagine how it may feel like to be in your shoes, what are some things you do that help you get through this experience?

13. Tell me about an experience you encountered while homeless where you felt you handled something well?

Internal Strengths and learning

14. What are your future hopes and dreams?

15. Is there anything else you would like me to know about you?