Book Reviews

Karabanow, J.; Carson, A., & Clement, P. (2010). <u>Leaving the Streets: Stories of Canadian</u>

<u>Youth</u>. Winnipeg: Fernwood Press.

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The book, "Leaving the Streets: Stories of Canadian Youth," composed by Jeff

Karabanow, Alexa Carson, and Philip Clement is a compilation of research involving real world

experiences with youth street disengagement shared by Canadian youth that are either in the

exiting process, or have already exited street life, and service providers working in this field.

This book is a product of detailed interviews with 128 youth and fifty service providers in

various Canadian cities including Calgary, Vancouver, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, and Halifax.

This methodology allows the audience to observe street disengagement on a vast level as the

cities participating in this research are all across Canada. Through the use of various points of

view, the authors are able to create an in-depth, detailed review of how street life, and

disengaging from street life, follows a perplexed and unique path that is encompassed by

hardships and complexities. Rather than focusing on the typical theoretical framework of what

motivates youth to turn to the streets, Karabanow et al. avoid the aforementioned norm, and

explore the motivation of youth to disengage from the streets. The book is focused around the

supports and barriers that youth face when disengaging from street life. Karabanow et al. utilize

two interrelated concepts: (1) social exclusion and (2) social capital. The authors consistently

create strong links throughout the book, allowing for the audience to keep a consistent

connection with the central theme of social exclusion and social capital.

The authors describe street disengagement as a "non-linear" path that includes six generic layers: (1) factors that ignite thoughts of leaving the streets, (2) wanting to change, (3) support, (4) transitioning away, (5) a change in routine, and (6) exiting (p. 14). The layers and the two interrelated concepts go hand in hand in terms of street disengagement, and provide a strong outline for the barriers and support youth encounter.

Karabanow et al. root the entire book within the two interrelated concepts of social exclusion and social capital, and how these two concepts are a direct interplay with the barriers and supports youth face when attempting to leave the streets. Social exclusion is described as the seclusion from a mainstream society, the estrangement of street youth, and proves to highlight the barriers youth face when disengaging from street life. The authors point out that social capital involves a complexity that "refers to notions of trust, reciprocity, social support, and social ties embedded within networks." (p. 15). Karabanow et al. break down social capital even further by describing social bonding and social bridging. Bonding is viewed as connections within one's own community and preexisting networks, whereas bridging is extending outside of one's direct environment to create new ties. Each of the six layers are directly related to either social exclusion or social capital. Both of these prove vital in the exiting process. Karabanow et al. seamlessly tie together the two interrelated concepts with the six layers to create an informative masterpiece and dissection of street disengagement.

Karabanow e.t al. implore that the decision to leave the streets is not an easy one but can often be a rapid one, and involves various circumstances that can ignite the idea of leaving the streets. For example, "[n]umerous youth recalled a specific traumatic event that led directly to their decision to get off the streets." (p. 25). Karabanow et al. explore that it is not only a traumatic event that can lead youth to getting off the streets but influences such as the draining

aspect of street life, or simply boredom of being immersed in street culture. In order to begin the exiting process, youth must come to acknowledge that they desire change within their lives. This can be embedded in many different aspects. The authors noted that "[o]ne of the most frequently mentioned factors that motivated young people to get off the streets was some form of increased responsibility…" whether that was in the form of having a child, being involved in a serious relationship with another person, obtaining necessary support, or even developing a sense of self that would inform youth that they are worthy of far more than they were providing themselves (p. 39). Karabanow et al. also highlight the point that having a strong desire to exit the streets is a commonality amongst a vast majority of youth, and is a necessary component as they embark on their new journey. Support and help are essential for those hoping to leave the streets, and the authors make it evident that without support exiting would be a considerably unlikely and even more challenging. This support may be delivered in terms of social assistance, familial support or support from a loved one. The authors acknowledge that youth that are considering exiting street life rarely find support from their peers who have not considered this option. This leads to breaking the bond between street youth and leads into the fourth layer, transitioning away from the streets. Karabanow et al. point out that a change in routine is an important component. The authors point out that youth change from routines such as waking up in a shelter, going to sell drugs and panhandling to going to work in legitimate employment, paying rent, and waking up in a secure housing environment. Karabanow et al. define success in a way that is attainable by all, and focusing upon the small victories as success as well. The term "successful" exiting isn't gauged on the youth leaving the streets, but rather the authors "gauge it on how they grown in their relationship to how they see themselves and their self-worth can grow." (p. 115).

Karabanow et al. beautifully link social capital or social exclusion in every one of the six layers. In terms of barriers and support, every one of the six layers provides exactly that; a barrier or a support. For example, transition away from the streets involves both social exclusion and social capital when looking for housing. Street youth are alienated from the rest of society typically based on appearance when dealing with landlords, hence social exclusion. Karabanow et al. report that many youth were, in fact, turned away from renting a given apartment based on the street youth appearance. In terms of social capital, youth are participating in social bridging by extending beyond their social environment, out to landlords and service providers in hopes of securing housing. Bonding of social capital is also evident in support through programs such as alcoholic anonymous which provides a homogenous community where individuals feel they belong and are surrounded by others in similar situations. Karabanow et al. highlight the idea that personal issues, whether mental illness, housing, employment or general life skills, all present barriers to street youth, but are attainable to rise over with the proper support. Through bridging social capital, youth are able to extend beyond their personal social realm and into the environment of those who will support the personal growth these individuals are experiencing. By bridging, youth are taking the necessary actions in order to promote personal success, and, in turn, ensuring their chances of a "successful" exiting. The authors describe the difficulty an individual may have breaking the ties to their peers immersed in street culture, and the importance of moving away from the culture as a whole.

Karabanow et al. state in one section of this book that many street youth secure housing on the grounds of luck, an arbitrary concept not commonly taken into consideration within the realm of sociology. This book should reside in the collection of every current and aspiring criminologist and social worker. The views, opinions, and experiences of the youth are heart

wrenching but extremely important for this type of audience to encounter. The insight delivered by the service providers also serves as an observational view into the lives, struggles and successes of street youth. Using many different youth and workers provides different outlooks into similar situation, thus reinforcing that individuals face situations in multiple, and unique ways. The intended audience of this book is geared towards those individuals in the fields of sociology, social work, and criminology, whether they are workers, students or professors. Sketches of the hardships faced by street youth are embedded throughout the book and act as a visual aide in describing the complexities of life as a street youth. Expert's composed by Pixie, an individual participating in the research, provide a poetic foreshadow at the beginning of the chapters that add a unique texture and intimate element of the book.