

## Book Reviews

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Karabanow, J., Carson, A., & Clement, P. (2010). Leaving the Streets: Stories of Canadian Youth. Winnipeg: Fernwood.

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Karabanow, Carson, and Clement's book, "Leaving the Streets: Stories of Canadian Youth," reflect the realities and hardships that individuals experience amidst the process of street disengagement. The authors set out to provide an intimate glance into defining who these youth are, why their life path has ended up on the street, what keeps them there and inspiring stories of those who have achieved a second chance at life. Through personal stories, the authors use first-hand information to define positive and effective strategies to successfully extricate street youth from the ties that bind them to the lifestyle of couch surfing and ambivalent survival. This work avoids addressing the factors associated with homeless youth through an empirical approach, rather it is a collection of stories that intimately portrays a vivid insight into the poverties of street youth culture and the setbacks that lastingly chain youth to the streets. However, the authors focus their main efforts on the internal and systemic incentives to leaving the marginalized population and in the latter portions, shaping and defining the solution to an ongoing social issue. The authors engage in an ethnographic study using qualitative interviews with one hundred and twenty eight homeless youth aged eighteen to twenty four and fifty service providers. Those involved in the study resided in six major Canadian cities including: Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver. Karabanow, Carson, and Clement provide a methodical layout focusing on the intrinsic and extrinsic factors involved in the process of

homeless individuals exiting the street, which creates a strong argument in an attempt at answering the question, what works?

The authors construct their study based largely to define the process of youth's transformation away from street culture and begin by defining their population group. Karabonow, Carson, and Clement identifying street youth as "diverse, complex, and heterogeneous" (p. 20), and define them as "young people who do not have a permanent place to call home and who instead spend a significant amount of time and energy on the streets" (p. 20).

The authors mentioned a number of factors associated with youth choosing a life on the street, however, it was not the main focal point within the study. The authors instead focus on the specific motivations for breaking ties with homelessness and homeless culture and further emphasize the motivations that seem to provide stronger incentives. The process of street separation, as described by the authors, relies on a six-layered process, which outlines the non-linear course of progression in a youth's effort to leave the street. In support of this, the authors identify the presence of motivational factors that heighten the individual's chance at successful disengagement. These factors can be summed into two main groups: (1) intrinsic factors and (2) extrinsic factors.

To study the complexity of dynamics associated with youth's involvement and future disengagement from homelessness, Karabanow *et al.* initially provide experiences and mitigating factors that allow life on the street to be a compelling option for some youth. Early life struggle "including family dysfunction, abuse and trauma, exploitation and alienation, poverty, addiction, mental health and child welfare inadequacies" collectively embody life experiences that play a significant role in the formation of a potentially damaged self-concept. To combat feelings of emptiness, youth search for connection with peers on the street and receive reciprocal benefits

from their activities and associations. This leads to a temporarily satisfied internal sense of self that is developed, in reality, through unhealthy relationships. The authors identify factors promoting successful life change that include a replacement of these unhealthy relationships to counter balance the youth's marginalized lifestyle and internally satisfy the need for healthy connections. Karabanow *et al.* found that youth who were successful in disengagement from the street recognize one or a combination of three relational factors that replace metaphorical holes or gaps within the transient youth. In their stories, youth identified them as (1) recognizing that someone else depends on them; (2) recognizing a sense of self; and (3) finding a passion in which to invest positive time and energy (pp. 39-46).

Though homeless youth, from an outside perspective, seem to hold the key to their own destiny, there are surrounding factors outside of their control that play a significant role in the transition from a life of street oppression to success as a regular functioning part of mainstream society. The authors develop the ideas of motivating extrinsic factors, working in conjunction with the youth's reconceptualization of intrinsic factors, in order to find solutions to combat their life choices. While acknowledging homeless youth's negative experiences, lack of education, poor mental health, challenging access to affordable housing and the negative views towards subordinated youth on the street from the surrounding society, these concepts collectively play a detrimental role and contribute to the success or failure of disengagement from the street. In addition to the existence of external supports, there is a requirement for the youth to accept the offer of a "helping hand" (p. 53), which allows them the opportunity to change their focus from imminent daily survival to the development of their own personal health and well-being. Creating solutions to these problems require effort from institutions and society as a whole to erase our preconceived notions of the marginalized population and instead become a community

that raises a helping hand and allows the act of mutual existence to occur for the benefit of the individual and furthermore as a collective society.

In addition to exploring the numerous intrinsic and extrinsic factors associated with street entrance, living and disembarkment, Karabanow *et al.* examine two other interrelated concepts: (1) social exclusion and (2) social capital (which can be further broken into bonding and bridging). These two concepts relate to society's negative perception and alienation of homeless youth as well as mutual and reciprocal bonds that youth experience while living on the street. The authors suggest that successful severance of street life for a youth "meant a renewed or rebuilt sense of citizenship – a shift away from exclusion towards inclusion" (pp.15-16). Furthermore, during the shift off the street, "social capital bonding need[s] to be broken" (p. 16) and in addition "bridg[ing] social capital with mainstream culture" (p. 16) must occur. This process leads to the existence of a healthy individual who becomes an integrated contributor to the community as a whole.

Social exclusion and the inability to escape the prejudiced perspective found in the wider society often result in relapse and individuals find themselves taking one step forward and two steps back. Social capital plays an equally important role and must be accomplished to complete the full circle of street extrication. Furthermore, the newly found, positive relationships must also revolve around trust and reciprocity. The failure to develop a healthy network of supportive and mutually inclined connections may further perpetuate the youth's low self-satisfaction and sense of loneliness; this may ultimately lead to relapse where individuals find themselves exactly where they started.

The book's presentation and content would be of great interest to academics studying in the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology and social work, however, the book also

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accommodates to individuals outside academia who are interested in an informative and eye opening read. The broad scope of individuals that this book targets creates an effective tool that intimately informs and enlightens, while also holding the potential to motivate key stakeholders such as government, human services and the justice system to help make a systemic change or create new strategies to solve the ongoing problem of street youth.

Complete with illustrations, personal anecdotes and a subjective form of thinking, the authors provided a voice for a group of marginalized people in our society who often get overlooked, stigmatized and ignored. Additionally, the study identifies and offers guidelines to follow and strategies to utilize when creating solutions for the ongoing social problem of youth homelessness. Ultimately, the authors accomplished their goal by concluding that successful disengagement relies on the individual youth to “redefine their sense of self and reconnect with civil society” (p. 126).

Karabanow *et al.* complete a comprehensive, multi- leveled analysis addressing many factors from an individual and professional perspective. I do, however, wonder if additional consideration or comments should be given to the development of intangible skills the youth would require to apply for jobs such as access to a computer and the amount of computer literacy held by a homeless individual. Coinciding with the argument above, substance use and addictions are also a significant part of life on the street, however, the authors under-represented the effects of this lifestyle and may want to provide a more sufficient analysis on how this issue contributes to the entrance of homelessness, and success or failure of street disengagement. Finally, identifying the length or intensity of follow-up work and statistics regarding completion rates of counseling and rehabilitation programs would also be an important piece in understanding the long-term solution to youth’s separation from the streets. Karabanow, Carson,

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and Clement's book "Leaving the Streets: Stories of Canadian Youth" is a fresh and effective outlook in molding and defining an effective solution to the question, what works? I highly recommend it to anyone interested in the topic regarding street population and large social issues.