

## Book Reviews

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Carson, A., Clement, P., & Karabanow, J. eds. (2010). Leaving the Streets. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

Reviewed by: Danielle Schmidt, MacEwan University

Alexa Carson, Philip Clement, and Jeff Karabanow conducted an in depth analysis of how Canadian youth disengage from street life with their book “Leaving the Streets.” This book uses a combination of firsthand accounts from current or prior street youth as well as sociological research to gain insight into how Canadian juveniles managed to remove themselves from street life and the processes involved in making the transition back into society. After giving a brief synthesis of how and why youth become homeless or begin engaging in street activities, the main focus of the book becomes how youth manage to remove themselves from that environment. By focusing on the narrow topic of youth extricating from street life, the authors’ are able to focus on the specific processes involved in leaving the street and re-establishing routine life.

“Leaving the Streets” is divided into comprehensive sections outlining the different procedures and steps involved in the exiting process. Each chapter of the book focuses on a separate process, eventually culminating into a somewhat linear course a youth follows in order to successfully exit street life. The book presents these processes in “Layers,” the first of which “Consists of precipitating factors that initiate thinking of street disengagement” (p. 13). In the second layer, youth are motivated to change “[t]hrough increased responsibilities such as becoming pregnant” which consequently leads to the third layer; “[s]eeking support” (p. 13). From that point, layer four “[a]ddresses transitioning away from the street” which is followed by “[r]estructuring of routine.” By completing all of these steps, the youth will eventually be able to

## Book Reviews

“successfully exit” the street (p. 13). Each chapter examines these layers in depth and interprets how each of these steps brings a youth closer to successfully exiting the street.

Carson, Clement, and Karabanow break up the sociological research they present with numerous quotes from a variety of individuals. These quotations provide evidence and examples for the research and facts presented throughout the course of the work. These quotations are taken from “128 youth and fifty service providers in Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver” and provide a variety of different points of view (p. 9). The authors’ make sure to interview both street youth and service providers. This is important in providing insight into both the personal experiences of street youth, as well as the expertise service providers have dealing with various kinds of youth and varying circumstances. The research conducted by the authors allows for the book to provide more than just dry statistics and facts, rather, it allows the reader to comprehend the experiences of those who are directly impacted by youth homelessness.

Carson, Clement, and Karabanow attempt to prove that living a normal life after living on the street, even for a long period of time, is possible. Despite this possibility, the exiting process is very difficult and involves not only acquiring a steady income and a place to live, but a change in attitude as well. The authors’ suggest that the reason youth first enter into the street environment is due to a lack of stability and a sense of detachment from family. In order to regain entry into mainstream society, youth must either reform bonds with their old family or create new bonds of friendship with those not involved with street life. The critical point being, youth cannot successfully transition out of street life without a stable network of friends or family that are not a part of street life in any way. The authors’ state that this can be challenging since some of the first and most stable relationships these youth establish is with those they meet

## Book Reviews

after entering the street. These relationships must be forgone when a youth wishes to disassociate with street life. Similarly, positive relationships youth may have formed with service providers must also be relinquished when youth are attempting to exit. In order to successfully exit the street, youth must completely abandon all aspects of street life, including moving away from the downtown core and discontinuing all previous relationships with those on the street. Essentially, “Leaving the Streets” argues that youth must start over and form new bonds with people that are part of conventional society.

“Leaving the Streets” allows the reader to understand the struggles all adolescents generally undergo when trying to establish a normal life after living on the streets. Although the book provides many individual experiences through the numerous quotations presented throughout the work, youth homelessness is examined through a generalized scope. The individual’s testimonies were used to prove universal points about street youth, rather than examine that individual’s specific experiences. In other words, the authors’ tend to view street youth as undergoing similar experiences and assume those experiences are the same for all street youth. If the authors’ utilized both a macro and micro approach when researching youth homelessness, I feel as though it would add to the work. For instance, many of the quotations provided by the youth briefly touched upon an individual’s experience as a drug dealer, drug addict, sex worker, etcetera during that person’s life on the street. I am interested to know how the experience of a drug addict might differ from that of a sex worker and what other challenges would be associated with certain lifestyles as individuals’ faced trying to exit the street.

In addition, I became personally interested in the lives of some of the ex-street youth that gave testimonies, especially those who had provided numerous testimonials throughout the work. I would be interested to see what kind of lives these youth were living at the time the book was

## Book Reviews

being written. Also, it would have been helpful if the authors' gave a brief summary or expanded upon some of the youth's histories, for instance, what age the youth left home and how long they were on the street. This would help contextualize the youth's testimonies. Furthermore, it would have been beneficial for the authors to dedicate a portion of the book to update the readers on the current statuses of the youth that were interviewed. For instance, if some of the ex-street youth had gone on to lead successful and productive lives or perhaps some had returned to the street. Some of the main arguments of the book are that reintegrating back into society is possible after being homeless, however; maintaining a regular life after being a destitute is extremely challenging. Updating the readers on the lives the street youth currently live would prove these points. While some of the testimonies did include brief updates on some of the youth's progress in exiting, it still would have been advantageous for the authors to include a formal portion on the book discussing the personal histories of youth and their current situations.

The intended audience of "Leaving the Streets" includes sociologists, social workers, corrections workers, service providers, child and youth workers, and criminologists. The book would also appeal to sociology or social work post-secondary students or more specifically, those interested in the study of deviance in society. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in expanding their knowledge on homelessness and youth. I found this work especially interesting since "much of the literature concerning street youth has focused on the etiology of street culture; there have been few systematic analysis of strategies employed by this population to disengage from homelessness" (p. 9). As stated in the book, many people, myself included; tend to ignore a critical segment of the homeless population that actually do manage to regain their place in mainstream society. This book provides plenty of new information about the exiting process that has previously been ignored in the academic world. I found "Leaving the

## Book Reviews

Streets” a captivating combination of firsthand accounts and sociological research on the exiting process of street youth in contemporary society.