

---

12-14-2015

## Finding a Place to Belong: The Role of Social Inclusion in the Lives of Homeless Men

Meaghan Bell

*University of Calgary*, [msbell@ucalgary.ca](mailto:msbell@ucalgary.ca)

Christine A. Walsh

*University of Calgary*, [cwalsh@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cwalsh@ucalgary.ca)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>



Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

---

### Recommended APA Citation

Bell, M., & Walsh, C. A. (2015). Finding a Place to Belong: The Role of Social Inclusion in the Lives of Homeless Men. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(12), 1974-1994. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2414>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

---



**Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate**  
*Indulge in Culture*  
Exclusively Online • 18 Credits  
**LEARN MORE**

NSU  
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN  
UNIVERSITY

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN

## Finding a Place to Belong: The Role of Social Inclusion in the Lives of Homeless Men

### Abstract

This study explores the role of informal social support networks of male homeless shelter residents. Authors utilized ethnographic methods, relationality and reflexive research approaches and key informant interviews with 10 shelter residents to investigate perceptions of belonging in overcoming social exclusion and countering the stigmatization cast onto as a result of their condition of homelessness. Study findings challenge our normative conceptions of homelessness by discerning between “rooflessness” and “rootlessness” suggesting that homelessness is more than the absence of shelter, but rather denotes the absence of support and inclusion in one’s community. This research highlights a community within the shelter characterized by notions of acceptance and companionship. The associations shelter residents developed are creative and collaborative survival strategies allowing residents to negotiate their conditions of homelessness. As a result, some residents expressed reluctance to leave the shelter and (re)integrate into the community that had cast them off.

### Keywords

Homelessness, Ethnography, Social Exclusion, Community, Stigma

### Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

## Finding a Place to Belong: The Role of Social Inclusion in the Lives of Homeless Men

Meaghan Bell and Christine A. Walsh  
University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

---

*This study explores the role of informal social support networks of male homeless shelter residents. Authors utilized ethnographic methods, relationality and reflexive research approaches and key informant interviews with 10 shelter residents to investigate perceptions of belonging in overcoming social exclusion and countering the stigmatization cast onto as a result of their condition of homelessness. Study findings challenge our normative conceptions of homelessness by discerning between “rooflessness” and “rootlessness” suggesting that homelessness is more than the absence of shelter, but rather denotes the absence of support and inclusion in one’s community. This research highlights a community within the shelter characterized by notions of acceptance and companionship. The associations shelter residents developed are creative and collaborative survival strategies allowing residents to negotiate their conditions of homelessness. As a result, some residents expressed reluctance to leave the shelter and (re)integrate into the community that had cast them off. Keywords: Homelessness, Ethnography, Social Exclusion, Community, Stigma*

---

Homelessness signifies the absence of a major marker of identity in Western society. The absence of a home poses great threats to social supports and relationships as individuals become geographically distant from customary sources of community and social support (Pleace, 1998; Solarz & Bogat, 1990). As a result of impoverished social support networks individuals who are homeless have limited practical and emotional support available to them, and accordingly feelings of social isolation, social discomfort, alienation, and marginality are not uncommon among this population (Boydell, Goering, & Morrell-Bellai, 2000). Consequently, to be homeless is to exist on the outside – on the margins of the social body. The experience of homelessness can be understood as a radical disruption in the understanding of self. Individuals who find themselves in discrediting situations, such as becoming homeless, can experience “a crumbling away of their former self-images without simultaneous development of equally valued ones” (Charmaz, 1983, p. 168). The continual loss of former self-images through stigmatization, the loss of objects and meanings that once constituted their social worlds, as well as changes in the nature of their social relations and interactions leads to diminished self-esteem, a loss of self-identity and concept of self (Charmaz, 1983).

One of the most salient features of resistance to the homeless’ exclusion and stigmatization is their use of “identity talk” as a means to reconstruct personal identities. “Identity work” includes activities people engage in to “create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of their self-concept” (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1338). Identity work requires having a sense of control or agency over physical settings, arrangement of personal appearance, and associations with selective groups and individuals. Identity work precludes the participation of individuals who are homeless who seldom have the financial, social or logistical support to participate in such activities. Instead, it is through their conversations, and stories that the homeless are able to “construct, assert, and maintain their desired personal identities” (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1338). Juhila (2004) associates forms of identity talk with “talking back,” understood as a practice whereby

individuals take a critical position towards their “given” stigmatized identity. She defines talking back as “consisting of acts which comment on and resist the stigmatized identities related to culturally dominant categorizations and which have the function of presenting the difference between oneself or a group and the dominant definition” (p. 263). Difference characterized between groups need not be defined negatively. Talking back and identity talk are both part of a larger process of identity politics that deals with the struggles over categories. Identity politics is not based on fixed categories, but rather emphasize the positive meanings of difference (Juhila, 2004).

## Literature Review

Despite the explicit connections between structural transformations and the rise in homelessness there has been little effort aimed at resolving homelessness in relation to the social structures contributing to social and economic inequalities (Lyon-Callo, 2000). Instead, homelessness has become a medicalized social problem whereby both the causes and the solutions are to be found within the individual (Lyon-Callo, 2000; Pleace, 1998; Snow, Anderson, & Koegel, 1994). The individual pathologies attributed to the homeless include: physical and mental illnesses, substance abuse, lack of education, childhood abuse or neglect, impoverished social networks, and deviant and criminal behavior (Anderson, 1997; Benzies, Rutherford, Walsh, Nelson, & Rook, 2008; Snow, Anderson, & Koegel, 1994; Walsh, Rutherford, & Kuzmak, 2009). However, these explanations hold serious fallacies as they fail to correlate these pathologies with larger structural forces such as racial and class discrimination (British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, 2004). For example, the prevalence of substance abuse among the homeless population must be understood in relation to larger problems of social inequality and social exclusion that can act as barriers to things such as attaining meaningful employment, which then can lead to an episode of homelessness. Furthermore, ascribing substance abuse or mental illness as a precipitator to homelessness disregards the possibility that substances may be used as a coping strategy, or that mental health problems are a result of one’s experiences on the streets (Liewbow, 1993; Snow et al., 1993).

Despite the proliferation of research around the problem of homelessness in recent decades, the homeless continue to be collectively imagined as a homogenous “highly crippled and dysfunctional population” (Snow, Anderson, & Kogel, 1994, p. 463). As a result of the “picture of rampant pathology” highlighted in literature on homelessness, public perception and discourse surrounding the homeless have followed ensue giving rise to a climate of anxiety and fear surrounding this population (Snow, Anderson, & Kogel, 1994, p. 463). Examples of the social tension surrounding homelessness can be found in legislation that has increasingly criminalized “street life” such as loitering laws (Snow, Anderson, & Kogel, 1994), anti-panhandling and anti-sleeping statues (Rosenthal, 2000); as well as the continued upsurge of conflict surrounding “appropriate” geographical locations for shelters and service providers. Debates over contested landscapes can be attributed to community discourses of NIMBY (Not In My Backyard), which Harter (2005, p. 324) suggests function as control strategies for containment and signify the “powerful symbols of surveillance, hegemony and control.”

Public perception of the homeless and changes in official attitudes on the problem of homelessness, have important implications about the rights of members of the homeless population to access public spaces. Ruddick (2002) has explored the increasingly restrictive legal context for the use of public space by the homeless in Toronto, Canada and found that continued restrictions were creating the negative public perception of the homeless. Ruddick (2002) suggests, the legal context in Toronto “taught the larger, potentially sympathetic public to re-read the gestures by the homeless as aggressive and alien” (as cited in Klodawsky, 2006, p. 369).

While some efforts aimed at producing research and our subsequent policy responses has portrayed the homeless population as in need of social control and intervention, often highlighting their disempowerment, marginality and vulnerability (Anderson, 1997; O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993; Rokach, 2005; Schutt, Meschede, & Rierdan, 1994); others, in contrast, have highlighted their sense of community, collective strategies, and resistance by looking at the agency of people experiencing homelessness (Dordick, 2003, Juhila, 2004; Liebow, 1993; Snow & Anderson 1987; Wagner, 1993). Anderson (1997) suggests, "those who have been marginalized and who have been perceived as oppressed by the larger society have been able to transform their position into positive, collective ones" (p. 3). In her study on homeless women, Montgomery (1994) found that these women felt their hard times contributed to the creation of a new and more positive self. Similarly, Maousek (1991) concluded that the women in her study found the "profound loss of self, which is associated with homelessness, [presented] a spiritual challenge to define one's very existence" (p. 13). While the intent is not to dispute the marginality or disaffiliation of the homeless, rather we wish to suggest current research has overtly represented this population in a way that "magnifies their blemishes" and overlooks their capacities for resistance, strategies for coping and both individual and collective agency (Snow, Anderson, & Koegel, 1994, p. 462).

The research project presented here was conducted for the purposes of a Master's thesis project. The first task of developing the project was to carry out a literature search which yielded a great deal of published research regarding the disaffiliation of people who experience homelessness, I gathered the statistics regarding prevalence of addictions and mental health issues and the high rates of violence and criminality which led me to believe the potential contribution of this Master's project could focus on the demoralization of the homeless – from what I was reading, homelessness certainly seemed like a truly destructive and devastating condition. I knew very little about homelessness, aside from media portrayals and my own experience having just moved to an urban setting, so I decided to take up a volunteer position at one of the shelters. The first shifts volunteering in the shelter dismissed very quickly my notions of the "depressed homeless"- that image we have of ones body slumped over – instead what I saw were lively familial interactions, exchanges and relations between the men. I had not encountered anything about the relationships between people who were homeless (only between the homeless and the non-homeless) nor had I read anything alluding to notions of community in my literature search; why did these areas come up? I went back and included these phrases in my search strategy and used these (much fewer) resources to refine the scope of the project.

Admittedly, what was intended to be an investigative studies of the challenges related to individual pathologies of the male residents at an inner city shelter was quickly re-imagined to try and bring attention to the ways in which social relationships and participation in the shelter community effects how people experience homelessness, and their resulting marginality, including subsequent efforts to exit from the shelter.

My connection to homeless research arose from my research in interpersonal violence and trauma. These are most often inextricably interwoven. It is also through these connections that I draw upon my own lived experiences. In my research am interested in uncovering and telling "homeless stories" in ways that prioritize the voices of individuals directly impacted by poverty and homelessness as a means to acknowledged expertise and autonomy as well as informing policies and practices to enhance social justice for these marginalized populations.

### **Methodology**

In this research we explore the role of social support in the lives of male shelter residents in the creation of alternative social worlds whereby they were able to develop meaningful and

positive conceptions of self to challenge and overcome the stigma cast on to them as a result of their condition of homelessness. Snow and Anderson (1993) have suggested that an understanding of the social worlds that people inhabit requires consideration of the meanings imputed to the objects and symbols constitutive of that world, and it is only through this understanding that we, as researchers, can attempt to make sense of our participants' perceptions of their everyday lived experiences.

Our study is based on ethnographic research methods employed over the course of 18 months at a large inner city homeless shelter in Calgary, Alberta (Blumer, 1969; Charmaz, 2005). We used Symbolic Interactionism (SI), which begins with the empirical world as the object of study (Blumer 1969), as the theoretical framework employed for this study. SI supports in-depth exploratory research of the empirical world in order to uncover the symbols, objects and meanings that make up the everyday lives of our participants. SI is based on the assumption that individuals in the context of their social interactions create and maintain meaningful worlds in order to make sense of their everyday experiences (Benzies et al., 2009; Blumer, 1969). SI was born out of studies undertaken in the 1960's with marginalized populations, most notably recent immigrants in Chicago. It sought to open up lines of communication and understanding between different cultural and social groups (Mead, 1964). Mead (1964) believed it was through the close contact and identification with the daily experiences and perceived meaning of social worlds of participants that helped researchers to better understand the social conditions and needs of participants.

Through a micro-analysis in the process of SI, investigators seek to understand the everyday lives of their participants in order to understand or draw conclusions from the macro structures in which they live including organizations, structures and institutions (Fine, 1993). While interactionists appreciate that much of the world is not of the individual's making including social structures, institutions and ideologies; what they are primarily concerned with is how individuals and collectives negotiate and understand their world. Particularly, how meaning is generated and expressed within that social world (Blumer, 1969; Forte, 2004). SI seeks to challenge the hegemonic presumptions of traditional objective, scientific research that precluded the human experience and interpretation of their empirical world (Fine, 1993). Importantly, SI has also been beneficial in conceptualizing and theorizing issues of stigmatization and labeling as well as impacts of self-image and self-esteem (Forte, 2004).

Exploratory research requires methods that will help the researcher who is "unfamiliar and unknown" to develop a comprehensive understanding of the social world of their participants (Blumer, 1969, p. 40). In order for the researcher to find the sources of meanings within the participant's everyday life, interactionists call for methods of inquiry such as interviews, participant observations, listening to conversations, and accounts of life histories of the participants (Blumer, 1969).

We used two methods of data collection in this study: (1) participant observations and (2) 10 in-depth, qualitative interviews with male shelter residents identified as key informants by the primary researcher who also engaged in the participant observations. Data collection was exploratory in nature, utilizing the methodologies of reflexivity and relationality to become conscious of, and monitor the ways in which our own historical, social, cultural and political ideologies impacted the research process and analyses (Ellis, 2007; Etherington, 2004, 2007). Reflexive and relational methods promote an ethic of transparency and open dialogue throughout the research process to create a research space that is based on trust, mutuality, respect, reciprocity, acceptance and understanding (Ellis, 2007; Etherington, 2007). These methods are premised on a belief of reality and knowledge as socially constructed and situated within the social, economic, political and cultural contexts from which they are derived.

In the first eight months of participant observation the primary researcher gathered data in the form of notes and journal logs which were then used to refine the research problem,

deepen reflection on the study design, inform the development of the interview guide and identify the key informants to be invited to participate in individual in-depth interviews. The decision to engage in participant observation prior to commencing any qualitative interviews was rooted in the belief that some questions thought to be of primary importance to the researcher, were in fact not of high importance in the lives of participants. The participant observations were a very effective way to refine and refocus what eventually became the interview guide (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999) – as well as identifying key informants who were believed to best situated to speak to the topic, and in some cases, on behalf of their respective group. The time spent prior to the commencement of the individual interviews allowed for the development of relationships based on trust and reciprocity between the primary researcher and key shelter residents, which ultimately allowed for a more grounded, contextual and in-depth look at the reality of their life at the shelter (Ellis, 2007).

The research questions, interview guide and identification of key informants were developed through the course of both observing and participating in the social world at the shelter. Many of our initial inclinations and questions derived through the literature review were either confirmed or disputed by the men long before the interviews began. As a result of this engagement, the primary researcher was able to delve much deeper into the phenomenon of their perceptions of belonging and involvement in the shelter community and associated relationships during the interviews. The research questions and interview guides were inspired by the events, interactions and conversations the primary researcher both witnessed and engaged in, as well as embedded in the literature. While the interviews followed a process through the use of an interview guide, participants were provided opportunities to bring up and discuss additional topic areas that were identified as important to them. This was encouraged to not only allow for new information and data not previously collected to emerge, but also to respect the voices and experiences of the men.

Interview participants were selected based on relationships and experiences developed during the course of participant observations. Key informants were invited to participate in an interview based on the belief they were best situated to describe and discuss the phenomenon of interest – and in line with SI principles which advocate research “sedulously seek participants in the sphere of life who are acute observers and well informed” (Blumer, 1969, p. 42). Participants who had provided insights during the research design were invited to participate in the individual interviews. Additional participants were selected based on an experience that research team was interested in exploring deeper – including one participant's recent experience of returning to the shelter after being re-housed; those who were very active in the shelter community as well as one resident who explicitly worked to maintain distance from the groups. The selection process did come with its challenges. Some shelter residents who had heard about the study requested to participate in an interview, however, financial and time constraints, as well as the conditions of our ethics approval (approval was granted for only 10 participants) precluded their involvement.

Interviews with key informants were conducted over a period of five months and all 10 identified key informants agreed to participate. Participants provided informed consent and were given a \$20 (CAD) cash honorarium for their time. Ethics approval was granted by the university research ethics board. Interviews, which lasted between one to three hours were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded with Atlas TI software. Once the interviews were transcribed, participants were provided an opportunity to review and provide any further comments or insights. The data sources used in the analysis included notes, memos and journal logs from the primary researcher as well as verbatim interview transcripts from the ten key informants. Data was analyzed using Atlas TI software with data coded and organized thematically to respond to, and describe the following research questions: (1) What role does social support assume in the everyday lives of shelter residents – what are its benefits and

implications? (2) Does membership in the shelter community and subsequent access to informal social support impede residents' efforts to permanently leave the shelter and exit their condition of homelessness?

The dataset for analyzed was comprised of the words that participants used to describe their experiences and the primary researchers reflections of witnessed interactions and relationships the presentation of findings, however is ultimately the researchers' interpretations. As Bourdieu (1989) explains, researchers have merely produced an account of the accounts of the research participants. Researchers are tasked with grasping participants' realities through the course of data collection and through reflexive measures during the course of data analysis. The process of data analysis then was an attempt to "re-present people's stories as told by them" (Etherington, 2007, p. 599).

Thus, it is important for readers to appreciate the presentations of findings is merely one interpretation – the findings produced are what they are because of how notes and reflections were captured during the participant observations; because of who was chosen to be interviewed and the responses that were probed for elaboration and because of the ways in which data and descriptive quotes were categorized into themes that could reveal more about the social world of the shelter and of the men who live there. Thus, we encourage the reader to continue the reflexive act. As Etherington (2007), advocates to invite the reader to subject the text to deconstructive rereadings so as to turn the critical gaze inward and become conscious of the ideological and political lenses with which you are reading and have the opportunity to generate your own interpretations. Etherington (2007) states:

...reflexive research encourages us, and to some extent demands, a level of resistance, specifically in relation to dominant discourses and ideologies. In this "resistance" approach, the researcher is a construction, and the validity of research is a function of its capacity to transgress, challenge, or subvert existing conceptions. (p. 533)

## Findings

This study (re)presents the experiences of male residents of a homeless shelter, revealing the social world that has been constructed by the residents in an attempt to transcend their stigmatized identities and engender a sense of belonging and self-worth through the adoption of spirited identities. The social world provided the opportunity for members to attain comfort and acceptance in common experiences that arose through their condition of homelessness. Interpersonal relationships helped residents to regain a sense of worth through engaging in identity talk which allowed the men to transcend their superfluous position within mainstream society into a position whereby they saw themselves as contributing and important members within the shelter community. The consequences of these relationships however, were resultant shelter entrenchment as the men came to identify with the social and physical environments of the shelter and increasingly removed from mainstream community. The ability of entrenched shelter residents to achieve housing stability was negatively impacted by the following: fear of losing interpersonal relationships, "survivor guilt" associated with exiting homelessness while important relations were left behind, and the impact of internalized stigma and prolonged segregation from mainstream community.

Findings are organized into four central themes identified through process of data analysis. Themes are interrelated and interdependent; that is one theme does not necessarily develop or evolve into another, but rather the circumstances that brought these men into the shelters, and that which contributed to their continued residency are embedded with associated

experiences of homelessness and exclusion. The data and presentation of findings should be understood as cyclical and fluid rather than linear, directional and fixed.

To illustrate each theme we chose selected quotes from participants. Some participants are represented by self-chosen pseudonyms; others chose to use their real names.

### *Perceptions of Exclusion: A Stigmatized Body*

All participants expressed feeling of “outsiderness,” a sense of being unwanted by the larger community and the impact of stigma on their everyday lives including using public spaces, engaging with members of the domiciled population, seeking employment and housing, as well managing their appearances. Participants conveyed beliefs their status as “homeless” had simultaneously warranted them the status as “unworthy” fostering societal neglect of both the realities of street life and their own experiences within that world, including victimization. As Justin articulates:

People are dying in the streets every week, but they are homeless and junkies and no one cares... they just don't care, it's “well he's homeless, they'll kill each other off”... Why put resources into looking for a prostitute or a crack head? But living here you see these people every day and realize they are just trying to get through this life.

Not only did participants express feeling as though there was little regard for the lives of the homeless community, they felt the attention they did receive was often in the form of surveillance in an attempt to control their proximity to public spaces and the general public.

If you are carrying a backpack and wearing a baseball hat and hoodie it is game on. Like, it's absolutely reprehensible. They've waged a war, the city really has waged a war on the poor, especially the [shelter]...they [the shelter] are not welcome here and by extension we are not welcome here. Hugh

Negative interactions with the larger community and law enforcement led many to feel unwelcome in public spaces with few alternatives spaces available to them.

You can either hang out in the parking lot of the [shelter] or the [shelter], but when you have no money and nowhere to go places like Olympic Plaza where there are shows and it's a nice place to be. You can go there but after 20 minutes the cops are going to come and jack you up [harass you] and the people there are going to avoid you like the plague. It's like walking around with a big sign on your head that says, “I'm worthless”... the way you are looked on by society, like you feel like an alien... you always have to leave because you're not welcome, you're not welcome, you're not welcome anywhere. In a town of a million people you are made to feel like you're by yourself and you're alone because there is nowhere to go. Justin.

### *Surviving Your Life*

The shelter had come to act as a place of refuge from the violence of their world – the constant clash with the public and inaccessibility of Calgary's “public” spaces. It was through the construction of their social world at the shelter, and the interpersonal relationships that shaped it that fostered a safe haven from the effects of exclusion and disenfranchisement.

The loneliest time is at two in the morning when you can't sleep and there is no one around and you realize that you are homeless. I can honestly say that if it wasn't for the few friends I have made here I don't think I would have made it...the friends that I do have here know me, they know what I am going through and it makes it alright to be me. Nowhere else is that ok...to have a friend here is like I actually matter. Somebody actually cares enough about me to come to me if they are having a hard time. And in a society where you are treated like a piece of shit, and a bum, and lazy, and good for nothing, and criminal or whatever, to have somebody come up to you and say "want to go for coffee," to be not just another bum you know? I have met people here who do care, who do understand...they aren't getting paid to do it. They don't look down on me like "oh you're homeless, that's so sad." Justin

Interpersonal relationships not only helped alleviate isolation, provided physical protection of persons and property, but also contributed to the identification of status based on group characteristics. If you think of a high school cafeteria with lunch tables marked by "jocks," "popular kids," etc...the shelter was organized in a similar fashion with "bottle pickers," "drinkers," "users," "dealers," etc... Involvement in a group made a public statement of your activities and, for some, was a major marker of identity. Moreover, lack of association in any group also made a statement. Relationships were identified by all participants as critical, however, choosing with whom to enter into relationships was a strategic and thoughtful process and was not to be entered into lightly.

It's [relationships] essential. You can't be in here alone... you can't be an island onto yourself in here because people will see it as weakness, like how come no one is attaching? ...like again with the community we keep things on lock down [referring to his and his group's area in the dormitory] we don't let new people in... and just like a family right we take care of each other and look after each other's stuff. Hugh

Everyone clicks up hey; one for safety and two you find people down here that you can relate to. Down here it's fight for survival, it really is... you're in a sea of addiction everyone's got their crutch... stuff gets stolen every night, my cell phone has been stolen, I've been stabbed twice since being here. Shawn

Because residents believed the larger society had little regard for their life, each of the participants discussed the desire and necessity in working together to provide protection for the collective suggesting they must "buddy" up to not only protect one another from outside threats, but from internal ones as well. As there are fewer and fewer public places in which to safely occupy, and not be ticketed for loitering, there is now an overcrowding in the surrounding shelter area, which has according to participants, led to an increase in violence. Hugh recalls incidences when older male residents were being physically assaulted near the shelter and the reaction of the collective to organize and offer protection:

There was a posse being arranged, we started to recruit, one more, one more. We're starting to set up decoy guys and hide in bushes...there are some really decent, shining bright lights of humanity in here. I wish people would see that, no one would believe it. Some of the most decent people I have ever met in my entire life have been in this building and that is an incredible thing to say.

The men also use the collective to provide protection to the residents they perceive as most vulnerable, as Hugh explains:

I know personally there are four of the older guys and two of the MH [mental health] specifically that I have like adopted, and I dare someone to try [to victimize them]. Not on my watch. The good thing about the family aspect of [the shelter] is if someone new and someone picks on [two names of shelter residents] or one of the guys that I genuinely care for the wellbeing of, even if I can't get it done myself, the rest of the "trailer park" is with me. So that family thing is stronger here than it is on the outside, you know what I mean.

If a residents behavior has fostered feelings of distrust among residents the men have devised numerous strategies to not only make it known among the other residents, but will organize to catch someone in the act (such as stealing), or behave in ways to make the individual feel unwelcome until they decide to move onto another shelter. Shawn describes this strategy:

You will see cases of someone stealing, but then everyone comes together and says "ok I was over here, he was there, he was over there, but wait who was the guy sitting there?" We will leave something on the table and pretend to read a book or watch TV until he takes it. Everyone wants to set this guy up, to catch him.

Participants advocated these strategies are vital to their own survival and the maintenance of the collective life, warning an admittance of the "wrong person" into your social network can have devastating and dangerous effects. Establishing associations is an exercise in survival. Study participants advise you need to choose individuals who can make your life more tolerable, safer and enjoyable. When choosing whether to associate with another individual they suggest, residents must consider their involvement in drugs or street crime, their reputation (i.e. are they known to be a "rat" or a "junkie"), as well as the potential of reciprocity and shared resources. All participants discussed the importance of determining who you can trust, relaying there are severe consequences if trust is misplaced. Justin articulates:

I am very careful with who I associate with. For me I'll say hi to almost everybody, but like out here you have to be very aware of whom you're hanging out with, like the wrong person will get you killed. And I've seen it many times. Out of the 800 people here I only have four guys that sit at my table and that I trust.

### ***Finding a Place to Belong: The Shelter Community***

Support among residents extends beyond physical and emotional support to include material resource such as food, money and cigarettes as well as logistical and vocational support including assisting in accessing resources, filling out applications for income supports or searching for employment. During the interviews we brought up the many incidences we had witnessed where someone would come to the intake office in search of food only to hear there was no dinner left over. More often than not, another resident would walk by and say, "hey, I have some snacks in my locker I will grab them for you." The concept of sharing was incredibly important. George says, "[p]eople outside this world would never expect that, that people who are perceived to have nothing give more freely."

Murray captures this sentiment in discussing his relationship to his “best friend” Hugh, saying they provide for one another;

Yeah it’s great, like if I have two smokes and he needs a smoke here you go I’ll give you my last smoke I don’t care, you need a beer, here you go, need a hat? Whatever, it doesn’t matter; I will get it for him.

The relationship between Murray and Hugh is so significant to Murray that when asked about his ideal living arrangements he said, “living with Hugh.” When we questioned whether he would take an apartment if Hugh could not accompany him, he said, “I would find a way to bring him, I wouldn’t leave him.”

Hugh expresses the appreciation he felt for the residents who cared for him after a workplace injury, “I can’t tell you how many guys came over to my bed at night asking me how my back was, asking, *do you need anything, can I get you a cup of tea?*”

For some residents embracing their experience and time at the shelter comes from their perception of what they gain from other residents. Hugh notes that he stays at the shelter because he occupies a role at the shelter that is otherwise unavailable to him. At the shelter he has assumed the role of caregiver; he takes care of the men and in return garnishes a great deal of respect from both residents and staff. When speaking about an incident where conflict arose between two residents, which Hugh assisted to defuse, he says:

And I really like [name of resident], and that night down in the laundry room he came up and gave me a hug and didn’t let go for like 90 seconds, really an odd weird moment, but just because he was scared right. It was childlike. But so now, I have this wounded bird, now he’s my newest wounded bird. He just needs a little direction and a little help.

The role Hugh occupies at the shelter provides a sense of meaning in his life:

You can have a home here. I have a home here, I am houseless but not homeless right now, really I am not...and that’s part of the reason I’m still here.

The men involved in this study found the relationships they formed with other residents to be more “real” and “raw” because of shared experiences. As George states:

I don’t know what it is. I have an idea; it’s that basically we’ve been through almost the same thing. He’s been involved in drugs; I’ve been involved in drugs. I understand where the other person is coming from, which a regular person wouldn’t understand where I am coming from. It’s very hard for a straight person to understand a street person. I understand it because I’ve seen it, I’ve lived through it. It’s hard to get off the streets.

To be a part of the shelter community is to be a part of something; to have a sense of place and source of affirmation in the world. Hugh spoke to the ways in which the feelings others had for him helped to counter the stigma he felt because he is homeless:

It’s just like you have the shittiest boss in the world who calls you an idiot five days a week for eight hours, it’s nice to go home at the end of the day to people who love and care about you, you know for who you are and what you are, not what they perceive you to be. It’s a very big part of this, it’s very important to

me. But not, “oh Hugh, you’re such a good guy,” but that you matter and I give a shit that you come home at night.

Justin describes his relationships as being based on respect:

They don’t look down on you. You can actually talk to them about what’s going on and they’re there and they have the same or very similar experiences... it’s like a subculture... at the end of the day when push comes to shove, it’s been in those hard times when I can’t see my son, and I do want a crack hoot, or a drink, when I’m just, when I feel so alone that you know it’s in those times that I do need to reach out, and it’s in those times that I find the most unlikely of friends.

The men shared that the sense of solidarity and acceptance of one another stems from the communal perception of shared experiences of what can bring someone down into the shelter, as well as a personal knowledge of how difficult it is to get off the streets. Residents at the shelter understand that people do what they have to in order to survive, and they understand this because they do it too. As George explains:

You know a lot of people say this guy does drugs he’s a very bad person. You know it doesn’t make the person bad; it’s the drug that makes the person bad. I’ve met a lot of good people in here. There are a lot of very good people in here that are fighting demons. Just like me. But it doesn’t make you bad, and people don’t understand that.

The relationships between residents were described as having such a strong emotional component that their loss can be devastating. Justin lost the support of a close friend, who was arrested for outstanding warrants and this loss of companionship resulted in an attempted suicide that left him hospitalized for almost two months.

### ***Leaving your Home for a House***

While there are personal, social and institutional pushes for the men to take leave of the shelter and enter into permanent, independent living arrangements, there are significant barriers to successfully exiting the shelter. The creation of surrogate families to replace the ones they had lost, or never had proved to be one of the most significant barriers. During our 18 months at the shelter there were countless incidences where residents would obtain housing and presented their big news to their various groups in a very eager and excited manner. In the days and weeks that followed their move out of the shelter however, they would begin to reappear at the shelter for visits, meals and eventually were back living there.

In response to the phenomenon of residents returning to the shelter after receiving housing, Murray states:

Yeah they don’t want to leave; there are older guys that don’t have a wife, a family. This is their family. That’s not me, but that’s what it is. It’s the camaraderie right, these guys are the only guys they have; they come back at seven at night, drinking their beers and yak yak yak. I see it every night. I know a guy who has an apartment and he sleeps here every night.

Justin comments similarly:

The next thing you know you're in a house by yourself, or with roommates, and you start to wonder "hey I wonder what's going on at the [shelter], not because it's the [shelter], but because that's where your support system is. And that's why a lot of people end up coming back.

Hugh was not only reluctant to leave for fear of losing the supports he received but he also felt a sense of guilt for leaving those who relied on him.

I feel a responsibility to try and help some of these guys, I hate to say this but some people there's hope in, and others not as much. I really try and do whatever I can to help them realize that and get out, I mean I've gotten guys work, gotten outfitted for work, bought guys stuff to go to work; now part of me stays because of that sense of community and because like I'm scared to leave some of these people behind, like I'll worry about some people and I feel connected, there's something in me now, this inner activist now. I feel like I'm just not ready to go, because it's just not right, because there are guys in here that are absolutely never going to get out.

Gary, a man who chose to come back to live in the shelter after being housed in the community, stated:

I was working, but do you know what's funny? I had my place, I got everything I need and I'd go do the same thing. I'd go and bottle pick and visit with all my friends. Even when I had my own place and was working I was bored... you have everything you need, I would sit and drink my beer in front of the TV and it wasn't worth a flying shit... I've been homeless here; I've had a home and wished I was homeless because it sucked... I could live like this till I die.

For some it was the trauma and fear of rejection by the larger community who may not understand some of the experiences these men have had that made them reluctant to leave.

You know you try not to get used to it, not to get comfortable but you do. There are always so many people here. I am broken, damaged. Who will have me out there [in the community]? Shawn

Not everyone describes the shelter as home, Justin states:

This I would never consider a home, ever. I tried very hard not to get comfortable here. This is not a home, nothing is ours, your locker can be searched at any time, you can be asked to empty your pockets at any time. People get paid here to watch you. I can see why people stay here, and why they start to live here, I just haven't given up hope yet. The day you give up hope is the day this place becomes your home.

Justin does however acknowledge the difficulty of transitioning from the shelter into single dwelling living, something he has experienced numerous times since the age of 12 saying:

It's lonely. When you get back into society and you play happy neighbor. It

becomes weird because that's [shelter] where your closest friends are, but it's also a source of shame because it's the [shelter]. Say you're going out for diner and your walking down the street and see someone you know, and you've been through a lot with these people, and you say hi to them, and then the normal people you are with are like "well who's that?" Simple question and when you say you used to stay at the [shelter], well those people aren't calling you back. So you're by yourself. You walk outside and there are people everywhere but there's no one to talk to. You start talking to someone on the street [laughs]. That's why people give up and come back here. Because you stop caring; your entire life changes over night. You go from being homeless to having a place that's safe and quiet but you're by yourself. So it's everything you wanted but in the same hand it's nothing if you can't live in your own skin right?

Shawn states, "I don't know if I want to go, need to go or have to go. I might just stay here. I'm o.k. here."

### Discussion

Traditionally, homelessness has been conceptualized as merely the absence of shelter, but findings from this study aligns with homelessness research discerning "rooflessness" from "rootlessness," signifying that homelessness cannot be understood as merely the absence of shelter, but rather indicates the lack of a secure and satisfactory *home* (Rokach, 2005; Walsh, Rutherford, & Kuzmak, 2009). The absence of a home often corresponds with the loss of one's sense of identity, self-worth and self-efficiency (Boydell, Goering, & Morrell-Bellai, 2000). To be homeless is to have your condition of homelessness be the prime marker of identity – an identity of loss and failure (Anderson, 1997).

As a result of the stigmatization cast on to the homeless population, which is a result of the refutation to access social, economic and political power, it is often difficult for individuals who are homeless to not only try and ascertain a positive sense of self, but to also protect themselves from the processes of separation and labeling into categories based on disapproval, rejection, and discrimination (Kaufman, 2004; Phelan, Link, Moore, & Stueve, 1997). Snow and Anderson (1987) however have argued, despite the contention of "the homeless constituting a kind of superfluous population" in the sense that they fall outside the "hierarchy of structurally available societal roles and thus beyond the conventional, role-based sources of moral worth and dignity that most citizens take for granted" (p. 1336); members of the homeless community are able to generate personal identities that do, in fact, yield a measure of self-respect and dignity. This body of research portrays members of the homeless population as active agents who respond and react to their condition of homelessness in a number of ways (Liebow, 1993; Wagner, 1993; Wright, 1997). The sense of personal identities that are created by individuals experiencing homelessness must be understood within the context of their condition of homelessness.

Critical in our understanding of the intricate and dynamic relationships formed within the shelter is the perception of meaning within the context of their lives premised in exclusion and stigmatization. The relationships formed among the men have become the only viable alternative, and source for a positive affirmation of self. The sense of "outsiderness" and forced dislocation was profound among the men involved in this study. The correlation between their perception of being unwanted, and further entrenchment into street life is critical in the degree that, as Thompson (1928) observes, if people believe a thing to be real, then it is real in its consequences for them (as cited in Cohen, 1985). The consequences for the men as a result of their sense of neglect, has been the adoption of social adaption mechanisms and psychological

survival behaviors. Similarly, to the findings of Anderson (2003), Frankl, (1985), Goffman, (1981), and Liebow (2003), the men in this study have adopted “spirited identities” whereby the level of trauma resulting from the degree of estrangement experienced by these men necessitated the adoption of survival behaviors that would allow them to transcend their superfluous position. These survival behaviors are evident in the forms of identity talk encouraged among residents aiding in the development of a positive sense of self and affirmation within the group. Additionally, the men have symbolically constructed their social world in a way that defined the moral order in such a way that their reality (homelessness) became tolerable, and to a degree embraced in order to salvage a positive conception of self. The defining symbolic features of the social world were aligned with the essential elements of community and availability of social roles that would produce a sense of worth and belonging. The function of the group was not only premised in the collective effort of the acquisition of physical survival necessities (important resources), but more importantly was the fulfillment of what Erikson (1966) and Becker (1962) have identified as the human beings greatest drive – a sense of personal worth.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) provide four essential elements in defining a sense of community: membership, influence, reinforcement, and shared emotional connection; suggesting there is an “inherent need for people to know that the things they see, feel, and understand are experienced in the same way by others”; and that individuals will perform a variety of tasks to achieve feedback and reassurance that they are not “crazy – that what they see is real and that it is seen in the same way by others” (p. 13). McMillan and Chavis (1986) demonstrate the often-overlooked communal nature of youth gangs who, they suggest can be considered a community of alienated individuals. The formation and maintenance of youth gangs are sustained through their collective shared history of estrangement and exclusion from traditional forms of community and social interactions. Membership in youth gangs provides the means by which the youth come to feel they have a place to belong and attain emotional and physical security as a result of their membership. The inference then, is that membership within a community may be particularly important for marginalized and excluded individuals because by virtue of their membership they can exhibit more influence and hold a greater degree of power (physical, political, material, and emotional) over their environment than is otherwise available to them as an individual (McMillan & Charvis, 1986).

The characteristics of community noted by McMillan and Chavis (1986) are not easily available to the men outside of the shelter environment. Thus the men have come to occupy various roles within shelter that help to shape their sense of self. For instance Hugh describes himself as the “caregiver”; he looks after the new residents, the elderly and those residents with mental health issues. Shawn is known as the “councilor” and prides himself on having residents come to him for help or to just talk; George identifies as the “volunteer” who can always be found helping out in the kitchen; and Justin, through his physical presence, and gang affiliation, offers security and physical protection for the group. The men feel that they contribute to the functioning of the shelter and more importantly, the community and the members within it. At the shelter they are contributing members, whether it is resources such as extra food from the kitchen, cigarettes obtained through government assistance checks, humor, or empathy and understanding. In mainstream community they are denied this opportunity – in fact are constantly demonized as “non-contributing” members.

In addition to the availability of socially valued roles (despite the fact that they are only valued within the context of the shelter), the men stay at or return to the shelter after receiving housing for three primary reasons: fear of losing the support of their community; survivor guilt; and internalized exclusion. It is important to reiterate the importance of Thompson’s (1928) notion, (as cited in Cohen 1985), if people believe a thing to be real, than it is real in its consequences for them. The relationships that exist between people who are homeless have

been dismissed and undervalued based on the assumption that they are premised in substance use, deviance and insignificant in their own right. However, the men who participated in this study experienced their relationships as fundamental in their quest for self-worth. There was a sense of acceptance and belonging that arose through the relationships that countered their invisible and disenfranchised place in mainstream society. The residents believed their relationships, and shared experiences created a sense of belonging; and hence proved real in its consequences for them – reluctance to leave the people who accept and support them. There was a sense of fear and uncertainty in their ability to develop meaningful relationships with people considered “normal.” A logic that relationships established with the domiciled population would be inauthentic as they felt they could not only share their personal experiences of trauma, violence, and homelessness; but that these experiences could not really be understood by the “normals.”

The fear of losing the support attained through their relationships, without the subsequent development of alternate sources of support from the larger community was compounded by the guilt of abandoning, or taking away the support they extended to others. A sense of obligation to each other had developed whereby some residents expressed not wanting to leave the shelter and exit their own condition of homelessness because of the uncertainty of what would happen to those left behind. Participants exhibited a form of survivor guilt about leaving their relationships, which in some cases negatively affected their ability to maintain housing. For example, there were numerous anecdotal reported evictions as a result of inviting friends over to their new residences.

Finally, the internalized experiences of exclusion and stigmatization endured throughout the course of their episode(s) of homelessness deepened their level of entrenchment. The men came to associate more with the social and physical environments of street and shelter life than with the social conditions and requirements of the normative mainstream community. A process of normalization occurred to street life and what was required for survival: physically, socially and psychologically. Their entrenchment into the street and shelter life removed their status of homeless as the primary marker of their identity, as they came to adopt and embrace a new social role within the shelter community. No longer were the men anonymous and invisible.

Reducing the incidences of homelessness will require that we re-imagine our conventional understandings of the “home” breaking away from the middle class conception of the home (i.e., nuclear, hetero-normative). For many of the men at the shelter, whom have spent years living their everyday lives amongst hundreds of other people, the silence and isolation of single dwelling apartments can be unbearable. Re-imagining housing options, such as community housing allows for a less radical transition as the men become accustomed to living on their own while still having social contact and relations.

### **Limitations**

One limitation to this study is in relation to the theoretical framework applied to the methodology. While SI was chosen particularly for the preference given to both personal agency and the important of relationship in the creation of meaning. SI is a micro-analytic framework, which precluded the examination of larger macro analytical elements. Thus, larger societal structures that influence the everyday lives of the participants in this study, while important, remained largely unexplored. However, this was a conscious decision in the study design as a substantial body of research exists concerning this area (see for example Dear, 1987; Harter et al., 2005; Lyon-Callo, 2004; O'Reilly, 1993).

## Conclusion

There are systematic and personal barriers for people trying to exit homelessness, which are exacerbated by extensive, conceivably lifelong, periods of disenfranchisement and exclusion. The pathways into homelessness has been subjected to much investigation and are well established, but what has received considerably less attention is the impact of loss and social dislocation on the social identity of people experiencing homelessness and how this may impact strategies to end homelessness (Dordick, 1995, 1997). In this study, the inability for residents to occupy a valued, or at least non-stigmatizing, position in the larger community led many to embrace their membership in the social world of the shelter, and consequently deepened their entrenchment in homelessness. The perception of options available to the men was: be nobody and alone out there (in mainstream community); or be somebody and accepted in here (the shelter). The social world, actualized through the personal relationships between residents, provided the opportunity for members to attain comfort and acceptance in common experiences that arose through their condition of homelessness. It provided the space for shelter residents to seek refuge from the violence inflicted onto them by the domiciled population as a result of their spoiled identity as “homeless.” The social support extended to members of the shelter community restored a sense of worth and reaffirmed residents’ status as worthy human beings. Consequently, the sense of acceptance that was generated within the shelter community acted as a deterrent for some men to permanently take leave of the shelter as the end of their condition of homelessness corresponded with the loss of their support and community.

Homelessness is an emotional and psychological condition affecting individuals in a myriad of different ways. The battle is not putting people into houses, but rather accepting people into our communities with meaningful opportunities to participate. Collective efforts must be made to break down the discriminatory practices that sustain the “outsiderhood” of member of the homeless, and recently housed, populations. Simply providing housing is not enough; individuals exiting homelessness must have opportunities for meaningful community engagement. Denying opportunities to those recently housed can, and does, lead them back to the shelter.

Homelessness is a complex multifaceted social issue and strategies aimed at ending it must too by multifaceted, holistic, and focused on social transformation in both social and economic structures as well as the collective conscious. Research is needed to inform policy and programs that privileges the voices of those experiencing homelessness. Further, there is a need to understand the factors that contribute to individual’s inability to maintain their housing, as we heard time and time again, “housing someone is the easy part, maintaining that housing is the hard part.”

Plans aimed at ending homelessness must focus on community (re)integration and capacity building. Strategies must promote human dignity through community inclusion and acceptance; allowing marginalized individuals the opportunity to access and create a place and purpose in society. Until we can achieve this individual’s will continue to cycle in an out of homelessness as efforts to re-house them deepen their sense of isolation and they return to the only community that will have them – the shelter.

## References

- Anderson, I. (2003). Synthesizing homelessness research: Trends, lessons and prospects. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 13(2), 197-205.
- Anderson, R. (1997). Street as metaphor in housing for the homeless. *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 6(1), 1-12.
- Becker, E. (1962). *The birth and death of meaning*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press of Glencoe.

- Benzies, K., Rutherford, G., Walsh, C., Nelson, A., & Rook, J. (2008). Homeless shelter residents: Who are they and what are their needs within a context of rapid economic growth? *New Scholarship in the Human Services*, 7(1), 1-14.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Boydell, K., Goering, P., & Morrell-Bellai, T. (2000). Narrative of identity: Re-presentation of self in people who are homeless. *Qualitative Health Research*, 10(1), 26-38.
- Charmaz, K. (1983). Loss of self: A fundamental form of suffering in the chronically ill. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 5(2), 168-195.
- Cohen, A. (1985). *The symbolic construction of community*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Ellis, C. (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(3), 3-29.
- Erikson, E. (1966). The concept of identity in race relations: Notes and queries. *Daedalus*, 95(1), 145-171.
- Etherington, K. (2007). Ethical research in reflexive relationships. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(5), 599-617.
- Frankl, V. (1985). *Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press Books.
- Goffman, E. (1981). *Forms of talk*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Juhila, K. (2004). Talking back to stigmatized identities: Negotiation of culturally dominant categorization in interviews with shelter residents. *Qualitative Social Work*, 3(3), 259-275.
- Kaufman, J., & Johnson, C. (2004). Stigmatized individuals and the process of identity. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 45(4), 807-833.
- Liebow, E. (1993). *Tell them who I am: The lives of homeless women*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- McMillan, D., & Charvis, D. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14(1), 6-23.
- Phelan, J., Link, B., Moore, R., & Stueve, A. (1997). The stigma of homelessness: The impact of the label "homeless" on attitudes towards poor persons. *American Sociological Association*, 60(4), 323-337.
- Pleace, N. (1998). Single homelessness as social exclusion: The unique and the extreme. *Social Policy & Administration Issues*, 32(1), 46-59.
- Rokach, A. (2005). Private lives in public places: Loneliness of the homeless. *Social Indicators Research*, 72, 99-114.
- Schensul, S. L., Schensul, J., & LeCompte, M. D. (1999). *Essential ethnographic methods: observations, interviews, and questionnaires* (Book 2 in Ethnographer's Toolkit). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press
- Snow, D., & Anderson, L. (1987). Identity work among the homeless: The verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *The American Journal of Sociology* 92(6), 1336-1371.
- Snow, D., Anderson, L., & Koegel, P. (1994). Distorting tendencies in research on the homeless. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 37(4), 461-475.
- Solarz, A., & Bogat, A. (1990). When social support fails: The homeless. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 18, 79-96.
- Wagner, D. (1993). *Checkerboard square: Culture and resistance in a homeless community*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Walsh, C., Rutherford, G., & Kuzmak, N. (2009). Characteristics of home: Perspectives of women who are homeless. *The Qualitative Report*, 14(2), 299-317. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol14/iss2/6/>

Wright, T. (1997). *Out of place: Homeless mobilizations, subcities, and contested landscapes*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.

### Author Note

Meaghan Bell holds a Master's degree from the University of Calgary and has been engaged in community-based research with marginalized populations for the past six years. Her research interests include stigma and belonging as well as barriers and facilitators to service utilization. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: Meaghan Bell at, [msbell@ucalgary.ca](mailto:msbell@ucalgary.ca).

Christine A. Walsh, Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary has a program of community-based and participatory action research with populations experiencing poverty and homelessness. The aim of this research is to promote well-being, social inclusion and social justice among marginalized and socially excluded populations. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: Christine A. Walsh at, [cwalsh@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cwalsh@ucalgary.ca).

Copyright 2015: Meaghan Bell, Christine A. Walsh, and Nova Southeastern University.

### Article Citation

Bell, M., & Walsh, C. A. (2015). Finding a place to belong: The role of social inclusion in the lives of homeless men. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(12), 1974-1994. <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss12/4>

---