

Place and Belonging in a Homeless Hostel

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Overview

- Policy context
- Research aims
- Methods
- Theoretical framework
- Findings:
 - Present an alternative understanding as to why homeless youth engage in various behaviours including substance use

Homelessness in Scotland

- Since 2010 homelessness has steadily declined in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2014a)
- 60% of people spend time in temporary accommodation while their application is assessed (Shelter, 2015)
- 1 in 4 of these households spend at least 6 months in temporary accommodation (Shelter, 2015)
- In 2013-14, 7,663 young people (16-24 years old) made a single person homeless application which equates to 31.5% of total applications (Scottish Government, 2014b)

Current policy context

- Welfare reforms
- Move to Universal Credit
- Squeezed private-rented sector (McKee, 2012)
 - Homeownership: mortgages and deposits
 - Social housing: huge supply issues
- Young people are overrepresented in the PRS and are disproportionately affected by welfare reforms, unemployment and debt

Therefore...

- Despite homelessness declining, a sizeable number of young people still present as homeless every year
- It is likely that many are spending significant amounts of time living in temporary accommodation
- There are fears that homelessness levels will increase in the coming years
- Young people are likely to be the worst affected

Youth, Homelessness & Substance Use

- Drug and alcohol use on its own is viewed as problematic in most cases
- However when the factors of ‘youth’ and ‘homelessness’ are added into the mix, it often leads to forms of ‘moral panic’ (Cohen, 2002)
- Many temporary accommodation services for homeless youth offer ‘substance misuse treatment’ as part of the service while others will only accommodate abstainers.

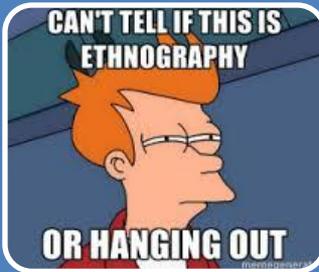
Is substance use always bad?

- For many homeless young people, drug and alcohol use can have devastating consequences
- Rather than taking at face-value the belief that substance use is always negative, it is important to understand possible reasons for these behaviours which can shed light on wider social processes

Aims of Research

- What are young people's experiences of living in homeless accommodation?
- What meaning does substance use have in their lives?
- How do the physical and social contexts of their lives interact with their substance use?

Fieldwork



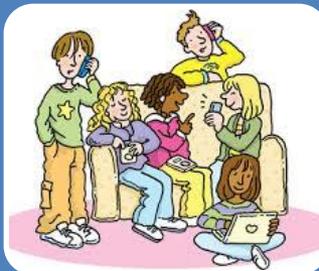
Ethnographic approach

- Participant-observation
- Interviews
- Focus group



Temporary accommodation hostel

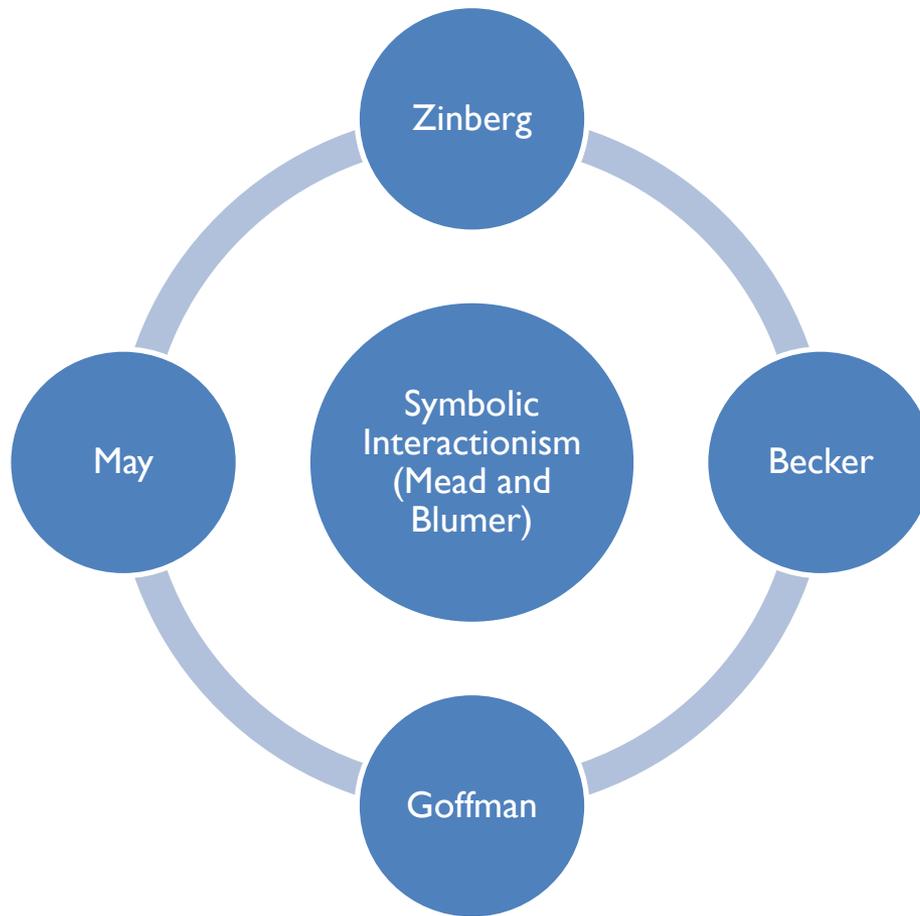
- Seven months
- Fourteen bedsits



Participants

- 22 young people
- Aged 16 to 21 years old

Theoretical Framework



1. We act towards things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for us
2. These meanings are constructed through social interactions with other people
3. These meanings are transformed through subsequent social interactions

Belonging

‘...the process of creating a sense of identification with, or connection to, cultures, people, places and material objects’ (May, 2013: 3)

- May (2013) constructs three types of belonging:
 - Cultural
 - Relational
 - Sensory
- ‘Hierarchies of belonging’ – some people belong more than others

Sensory Belonging



Belonging to the
physical environment

A sense of familiarity
with the sights, smells,
sounds, tastes and
physical sensations of
a particular
environment



Place-Making

- Similar idea to 'home-making' but 'place' is a more fluid and widely applied concept
- Wilson, Houmøller and Bernays (2012):
 - Efforts by young people to avoid conflict and unpleasant features of their family life while also acting in ways to create more pleasant, safe places for themselves within their domestic space.
- Requires use of the senses

Control and Surveillance

- CCTV cameras
- Intercom and panic alarm
- Room checks
- Locked doors
- Rules

Entering Kelldale was Conditional

One evening when two of the older residents – Danielle and Chloe – had gone to the pub, they returned inebriated and loudly laughing and singing Bonnie Tyler’s ‘Total Eclipse of the Heart’ which they had apparently performed at a karaoke night. Upon their arrival at the front door, two staff members had gone outside to assess the residents.

After 20 minutes the staff decided to let them into the building. Emma (staff member) explained later that this was because the girls were in “good spirits” and did not present as being aggressive. Danielle and Chloe were told to go to their rooms and were banned from spending any more time together this evening.

[Field Notes, August 2013, Staff Office]

However after being escorted by a staff member to their rooms, I could see on the CCTV monitors that the two residents immediately attempted to go to each other’s rooms, thinking that the staff member had left. They were promptly escorted back again.

Permitted Place-Making

- Decorating certain spaces (the lounge and bedsits)
- Domestic chores (doing laundry, cooking etc.)
- Recreation (watching TV, playing games, hanging out)
- Eating meals together
- Smoking tobacco

Permitted Place-Making

The armchair and bed were the prime spots for sitting when hanging out in someone's room, followed by one of two wooden chairs and lastly leaning against the kitchen worktop. It was an implicit rule that the occupier of the bedsit and their girlfriend/boyfriend could sit where they wished and that whoever ended up sitting closest to the door had to get up to let someone in if there was a knock. The young people demonstrated their familiarity and belonging in a bedsit, even when it was not their own, by claiming their preferred seat without waiting to be invited to sit down. This included some of the resident's sprawling out on another person's bed.

Breaking the Rules

- Vandalism/graffiti
- Stealing food and other items
- Accessing spaces that were usually off-limits
- Consumption of alcohol and drugs in the building

Stealing Food

Very often, when some of the young people were in the lounge, they would steal items of food from the kitchen when the staff were not looking. Tom, in particular, took every opportunity available to steal yoghurts from the fridge as these were his favourite. As well as getting enjoyment from eating extra food, stealing from the fridge became a form of entertainment.

Chloe, Tom and Danielle started giggling and covered up the yoghurts with kitchen roll to conceal them from the staff. As soon as Gayle (staff member) left the kitchen to go into the office, Chloe started frantically stuffing yoghurts into her pockets to take up to her room later.

[Field Notes, October 2013, Lounge]

Substance Use in the Building

“See when me and Garry were in my room, did you know that we were doing buckets in the toilet? I took my bucket in and then came out and sat and he took his in” (Tom, resident, 20 years old).

[Focus Group, October 2013, Lounge]

“The good old way, drinking it out a McDonald’s cup, 3L [three litres of cider] straight! I had like eight cups and was away wie the fairies” (Amanda, ex-resident, 17 years old).

[Interview, August 2013, Amanda’s Flat]

Substance Use in the Building

One evening, in one of the bedsits, some of the residents had made up a bucket containing Salvia but they told Matt that it was cannabis. Matt took his share of the bucket while the others waited to see what effect it would have on him:

“It was hilarious, he just kept saying ‘I don’t feel well, I don’t feel well’” (Chloe, resident, 21 years old)

[Field Notes, October 2013, Lounge]

Later during the focus group, the same incident was brought up again and everyone who was there, including Matt, found it funny and spoke about it in a tone that conveyed excitement and pride. It turned out that Danielle had filmed the incident on her phone and she showed me the video which was of several residents sitting in a bedsit laughing at Matt who was rocking back and forth on a chair and becoming paranoid because the staff were “bing bong-ing” him to tell him the Job Centre was on the phone and wanted to speak to him. The furniture in the bedsit, the ‘bing bong’ speaker system and the presence of several other residents sitting or standing in close proximity to one another were all integral features of the story.

Discussion

- Kelldale placed great restrictions on the movement and conduct of residents inside the building
- Residents therefore had to devise their own ways of place-making to create feelings of sensory belonging
- The physicality, sociality and constructed meanings attached to various parts of the hostel were interwoven with the intoxication experience
- Therefore, substance use can be viewed as an important mechanism for facilitating feelings of belonging in the context of a homeless hostel

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