Article

Exploring the 'Spoiled' and 'Celebrated' Identities of Young and Homeless Drug Users

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Abstract
Young people experiencing homelessness and who use drugs are vulnerable to being attributed with 'spoiled identities' due to stigmatising attitudes by wider society. This article is underpinned by a symbolic interactionist account of self-identity and stigma. It draws upon ethnographic research in a UK-based supported accommodation hostel for young people and explores how the residents in the hostel related to the labels of 'homeless,' 'drug user' and 'youth' and how these were expressed through their self-identities. Over a period of seven months, in-depth participant-observation, semi-structured interviews and a focus group were conducted involving 22 hostel residents, aged 16 to 21 years old. The data highlight how the residents engaged in processes of 'distancing' or 'othering' by making disparaging remarks about other people in similar situations based on stereotyping. These processes reinforced spoiled identities while enabling the residents to disassociate from them. However, residents also appeared to embrace and celebrate certain features of each label, indicating an acceptance of these more positive features as forming a part of their self-identities. The article concludes by arguing for a nuanced approach to understanding stigma and identity among homeless people, one that accounts for more than just a person's housing situation.

Keywords
drug use; Goffman; homelessness; spoiled identity; stigma; youth

1. Introduction

Young people experiencing homelessness are socially constructed as simultaneously vulnerable and deviant. Vulnerability evokes images of exclusion and helplessness, whereas deviance portrays an image of danger and a threat to the moral order. Based on the work of Wright (1997), and highlighting the interlinked nature of homelessness and poverty, Farrugia, Smyth, and Harrison (2016, p. 241) summarised this dual narrative in arguing that:

> The very term 'homelessness' has had contradictory consequences, drawing attention to a significant form of poverty whilst simultaneously constructing symbolic and moral boundaries around a population of

disordered, unruly subjects that attract more moral condemnation than those who are 'merely poor.'

These contradictory narratives weave their way into legislative and policy responses as well as the public imagination meaning they exert powerful influence over how people are viewed, treated and interacted with. Yet what these top-down narratives cannot tell us is how they are experienced by those subjected to them, nor can they tell us what it is like to be homeless as a young person. Research exploring the identities of people experiencing homelessness has documented its associated stigma and the strategies that people use to cope. In their classic study, Snow and Anderson (1987) used the phrase "salvaging the self" to describe some of the ways in which street homeless people eschew negative stereotypes to

preserve their self-respect and dignity. These strategies involved: (1) distancing oneself from roles, associations and institutions that are inconsistent with a person's actual or desired self-conception; (2) embracing a role, association or institution that is consistent with a person's actual or desired self-conception; and (3) fictive storytelling in which a person tells stories of their past, present or future that contains a fictional element. Subsequent studies have developed Snow and Anderson's (1987) work by identifying yet further strategies used by those experiencing street-based and shelter-based homelessness to preserve their sense of self-worth and protect against stigma (Meanwell, 2013; Rayburn & Guittar, 2013; Roche, 2015; Terui & Hsieh, 2016); some of these have focused exclusively on young homeless people (Farrugia et al., 2016; Kidd, 2007; Roschelle & Kaufman, 2004).

This article adds to this existing 'identity work' literature by drawing on ethnographic research with a group of young homeless people living in a supported accommodation hostel. Drawing on symbolic interactionism and labelling, the article illustrates some of the ways in which the young people in the hostel talked about their homelessness. However, unlike existing homelessness literature, it also attends to two other identity labels that were significant for the participants—being a drug user and being young. Drug use and youth studies represent academic disciplines in their own right, and it can be challenging to condense them and bring them (along with homelessness) together into one conversation about identity. Yet, this ethnographic research revealed that these three identity labels were prominent in the participants' lives and although they could be discussed separately, this would fail to recognise that they were each significant in their identity work. Thus, it is argued that when considering the stigma faced by homeless people and their attempts to cope with it, it is important to recognise other identity categories that operate alongside homelessness.

2. Spoiled Identities: Homelessness, Drug Use and Youth

A symbolic interactionist account of identity asserts that narratives, perceptions and constructions held by society or the 'generalised other' (Mead, 1934) influence the self-identities of those they are imposed upon. Identities are formed and developed in response to understanding the views of others (Mead, 1934). Rather than being an innate quality, a person's identity is the product of a unique and infinite combination of interactions that they encounter throughout their life. Through these interactions, a person internalises attributes that others impose upon them and these attributes are reflected in the person's subsequent behaviours, actions and interactions. When such imposed views are understood as stigmatising, an individual is perceived to have a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963) and this can have a detrimental impact on their wellbeing.

Goffman's (1963) concept of spoiled identity involves a person being attributed with a negative or stigmatising characteristic by the generalised other. This is linked with labelling processes in which people who depart from socially accepted norms and rules are labelled as 'deviants' or 'outsiders' (Becker, 1963). According to Goffman (1963), those with 'discredited' spoiled identities are those whose negatively-perceived characteristics are visibly on display—for example, those experiencing street-based homelessness (Snow & Anderson, 1987)—while those with 'discreditable' spoiled identities are those whose negative characteristics are hidden. In day-to-day life, discredited people engage in processes of managing their spoiled identities, whereas discreditable people are concerned with keeping their hidden flaws concealed. These self-preservation activities are often achieved through processes of 'distancing' (Snow & Anderson, 1987) or 'othering' (Rødner, 2005) in which people attempt to deflect attention from themselves by voicing disapproval of other people or situations.

As discussed, a substantial body of literature has investigated how these ideas relate to those experiencing homelessness. Rayburn and Guittar (2013), for instance, found that rough sleepers try to conceal their homelessness, and the associated stigma of being smelly and dirty, by maintaining personal hygiene through showering and shaving. This finding was replicated by Terui and Hsieh (2016) who additionally found that not using drugs or alcohol, maintaining family or partner relationships and being responsible were also virtues emphasised by homeless people in their identity work to evidence that they did not fit with negative stereotypes. Likewise, as others have done (see, e.g., Roche, 2015), Terui and Hsieh (2016) found that individuals emphasised their past or present employment (or their desire to obtain employment) as a means of distancing themselves from the laziness that can characterise derogatory images of homeless people.

In line with symbolic interactionism, people alter their identity expressions in accordance with the social situation they are in (Goffman, 1959). This has also been recognised in the homelessness identity literature. For example, Perry (2013), who conducted ethnographic observations in a doughnut shop which remained open during the night as a homeless shelter, provided detailed examples of the ways in which the homeless visitors performed non-homeless identities in the shop. For instance, some purchased coffee and doughnuts which enabled them to enact a 'patron identity,' while others stated that they were not homeless but temporarily 'displaced.' These visitors also made disparaging remarks about other homeless people such as criticising their poor hygiene and behaviours like eating food out of bins. Parsell (2011) likewise highlighted the importance of context in influencing people's performances by noting that rough sleepers' body language and expressions exhibited gratitude and neediness when in the setting of a charitable outreach service, but they were more as-

sertive when making use of a local café. He concluded, as Goffman (1959, 1963) argued, that enacted identities, or performances, are context-dependant and are influenced by an understanding of normative ways of acting in different settings.

Homelessness, and its associated stigma, clearly represents a significant lens through which to examine and understand people's selves and the identity work they engage in to preserve a sense of self-worth, self-respect and dignity. However, this article argues that when someone is homeless, homelessness is not necessarily the only, or the dominant, label which influences their identity. While labels and attributes that people impose upon others do not denote a person's identity in its entirety (Lawler, 2014; May, 2013), aspects of a person's sense of self are often expressed in reference to labels. Furthermore, when an ethnographic approach is taken, the researcher attempts to understand the research participants and the contexts within which they are situated in a holistic, inductive manner. What emerged from the ethnographic work at the centre of this article was that, in addition to homelessness, two other labels—drug use and youth—were significant for the participants. Thus, before documenting the ethnographic study that informed these arguments, it is relevant to briefly consider drug use and youth as two identity labels.

Much of the identity work pertaining to drug use mirrors that of homelessness. For example, the participants in Rødner's (2005) study distanced themselves from the label of drug 'abuser' by emphasising that their drug use was the result of an informed, rational decision-making process and by arguing that they could exercise self-control. Using Snow and Anderson's (1987) concepts, these individuals distanced themselves from the negative connotations of being a drug 'abuser' while simultaneously embracing the less stigmatising role of drug 'user.' Similarly, one of the most well-known studies concerning drug use and identity explored the 'junkie' label, a pejorative word referring to heroin users (Radcliffe & Stevens, 2008). The authors demonstrated how 'junkie' is associated with criminality and degeneracy and the heroin users in their sample distanced themselves from the label by openly endorsing the association that 'junkies' are dirty, smelly and thieving, as a way of showing that they themselves were not the same. Significantly, some participants had dropped out of drug treatment because they believed that accessing treatment was proof of their 'junkie' status. The stigma of the label and the need to create distance overpowered the need to receive help. This was supported by Livingston, Milne, Fang, and Amari (2012) who explained that self, social and structural forms of stigma have been linked to adverse physical and mental health, non-completion of substance use treatment, delayed recovery and reintegration, and increased involvement in risky behaviours. Kidd (2007) likewise argued that the stigma associated with being homeless contributes to loneliness, low self-esteem, feeling trapped and suicidal

ideation. Thus, given that stigma has such detrimental consequences for people's health and wellbeing, the 'distancing' or 'othering' efforts made by those with spoiled identities serve a protective purpose.

Finally, unlike homelessness and drug use, the third label of concern in this article—youth—is not usually viewed as a form of deviance (and therefore is stigmatising) in and of itself. However, young people's positions in society mean they are often framed as being involved in deviant activities. Cohen (2002) argued that young people have historically been denoted as scapegoats in that they are blamed for many of society's ills such as drug use and antisocial behaviour. Deviant features of youth have typically been discussed in relation to how young people spend their free time, linking young people to activities which are constructed by adults as having little benefit, or being detrimental, for society (Wilkinson, 2015). MacDonald and Marsh (2005) examined leisure transitions and found that young people typically move from socialising with their friends on the streets to visiting pubs and nightclubs. However, since access to the night-time economy is restricted by age and income, the authors identified a sub-group of young people who, over time, became entrenched in a street culture characterised by drug taking and petty crime. They concluded that long-term involvement in this form of cultural leisure resulted in these young people becoming increasingly excluded from mainstream society. Young people, particularly those from poorer backgrounds, are, therefore, bound up in discussions of street-based cultures, homelessness and drug use, and the stigma associated with these activities.

3. Fieldwork Site and Research Methods

This article draws on data collected for a UK-based Doctoral study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The study took an ethnographic approach to explore the experiences and substance use of young people living in homeless accommodation. Kelldale (a pseudonym)—the fieldwork site—was a supported accommodation hostel in Scotland run by a charity. It was situated on the outskirts of a city centre in an area of high deprivation (ranked in the top quintile of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation). As well as providing physical shelter, Kelldale offered support for those residing there in the form of staff helping the residents to engage in a wide range of activities including managing money, engaging with healthcare providers, mental health support, and accessing education, training or volunteering. These provisions were delivered with the intention of helping the residents to move into longer-term or permanent housing and was based on a 'staircase model.' The staircase model posits that homeless people move through a series of different forms of housing which each become more 'normal' as the individual progresses and is based on the philosophy that people need to be equipped with the skills to manage their own home

before they are given a home (Johnsen & Teixeira, 2010). Kelldale represented a transitional step on the staircase between precarious living and long-term housing.

Kelldale accommodated 14 young people at any one time, with each resident being given their own bedsit in the hostel. A bedsit was a self-contained flat with its own lockable door and within each bedsit was a bed, table and chairs, a set of drawers, wardrobe, basic cooking facilities (a hob, microwave and kettle) and an en-suite shower room. Although the residents' social security Housing Benefit was paid directly to the hostel to pay for their place, each individual was expected to pay a service charge of £10 per week to cover the cost of items like toilet paper and laundry detergent. This money was typically paid from other social security benefits the residents received.

Fieldwork took place over seven months in 2013 and during this time 22 residents participated in the research. Of these, 16 were male, 19 were White and had been born in the UK, 1 was British-Pakistani and 2 were migrants from Europe and Asia. All were aged 16 to 21 years old, and their length of involvement with the study ranged from 3 to 28 weeks. Most of the residents had moved into Kelldale from another hostel. Some of the older residents had been homeless for years and had spent periods of time moving between different hostels, couch surfing and living with their parents. During these periods, some had also lived in their own flat before being asked to leave, usually on the grounds of antisocial behaviour. A small number had been in local authority care. None of the residents had lived with their families directly prior to living in Kelldale but some younger residents had lived in only one hostel in between moving out of the family home and into Kelldale. Two of the residents had slept on the streets but not for any prolonged period (a night or two here and there).

During the fieldwork period, I visited Kelldale 64 times and interacted with the residents on 200–250 occasions. During the first four months, I visited 3 or 4 times per week for 4 to 8 hours at a time before reducing the frequency of my visits in the final three months. Participant-observation was the primary data collection method. This involved 'hanging out' with the residents by spending time in their company, engaging in conversation and joining in with recreational activities. Upon arriving in Kelldale, I would position myself in the reception area or I would go into the 'lounge' which was a communal area for the residents. The residents spent a lot of time in these locations and given that I was, initially, an unknown face, my presence there typically sparked conversations with those who were curious to know who I was and why I was there. When the opportunity arose, I explained my research, my status as a PhD student and asked for their consent to be involved. I had initially been unsure about how I would be received because my middle-class position and stable background were at odds with the socioeconomic and precarious backgrounds of the residents. However, being a White

Scottish female who was closer in age to the residents (I was 28 years old at the time) than most of the staff were, helped us to find some common ground (for example, we had similar tastes in music). As familiarity grew, residents began to invite me to hang out with them in their bedsits. In between these interactions, I took opportunities to scribble fieldnotes which I later typed up. In most cases, I was a participant in the conversations between residents, rarely did I sit back and take a wholly observational role. The aim was to understand the social world of Kelldale by immersing myself in it and learning about it inductively from the perspective of those who were 'insiders.'

Participant-observational data were supplemented by semi-structured interviews in the latter stages of fieldwork which were completed with six residents, and a focus group with six residents, only one of whom had also completed an interview. The purpose of these additional methods was to probe further into themes emerging from the participant-observations and to 'fact check.' Some topics, such as the young people's family lives, were not commonly spoken about in day-to-day interactions, at least not when I was present, and the interviews presented opportunities to ask directly about these more sensitive topics. My approach to the interviews and focus group was to inform the residents of topics that had arisen during fieldwork and to ask for their help to 'fill in the blanks.' Usually this was enough information to prompt the residents to talk further about the topics, without much need for probing questions.

The data analysis followed Becker's (1970) sequential approach which involves beginning data analysis while fieldwork is ongoing and using the latter part of fieldwork to conduct checks on prominent themes that have emerged. NVivo10 software was used to store, manage and code the data which was done inductively and thematically.

4. Findings

The following findings are structured in relation to the three identity labels at the centre of this article—being homeless, a drug user and young. These were not the only identity characteristics expressed by the residents, as ethnicity, gender and being a parent were also important, however these only applied to a small number of residents and their discussion is beyond the scope of this article. Although the concept of identity has been criticised for being deterministic (i.e., if someone is labelled as 'young' then this will determine how that person is understood by researchers; May, 2013), the ethnographic approach meant that the emergence of these identity labels came from the residents themselves. In alignment with an interactionist position, it was possible to observe how the generalised other attitude had become intertwined with the residents' expressed self-identities and corresponding behaviours.

4.1. An Ambivalent 'Homeless' Identity

'Homelessness' is the first label to be considered since the bounded nature of Kelldale meant that living in supported accommodation dominated the context of the study. Due to existing evidence about homeless identities, it was important to understand if, and how, Kelldale's residents incorporated this label into their sense of self. Since the participants in this study were not rough sleepers, it was expected that their self-identities would reflect the homelessness setting of Kelldale.

When asked directly about what being 'homeless' meant to them, some residents made a distinction between rough sleeping and their own situation:

> Homelessness to me is you're asked to leave the family home and having nowhere else to go and being put in here. Not like the jakes in the street that walk about with the cups trying to run up to you like that 'geez money' wi' no shoes on!...There's two different sorts of homelessness. You've got the people in the hostels, then you've got the people in the street that are basically roofless, so we are a low homeless. (Nathan)

Nathan considered him and his fellow residents to be 'low homeless,' conceptualising a spectrum of low–high homelessness based on whether someone was a rough sleeper or not. His association with the label of 'homeless' was weak; he recognised that he was technically homeless but his 'low homeless' comment offered a means of distancing himself from the label. This is similar to 'categorical distancing' (Snow & Anderson, 1987) in which people make distinctions about different types or stages of homelessness and position themselves as being favourably different from those perceived to be in a different category. Furthermore, Nathan's comments endorsed a stereotypical view of rough sleepers as being poor, partially clothed and begging, an image that was far removed from his own expressed identity. This is consistent with a tendency amongst homeless people to engage in downward comparison or 'othering' as a coping strategy for a spoiled identity and the avoidance of stigma (Boydell, Goering, & Morrell-Bellai, 2000).

Consistent with Nathan's narrative was Jordan's explicit separation from the label of 'homeless' but, unlike Nathan, Jordan made the comparison between being 'homeless' and having a 'home'. Jordan explained:

> Now it's like I don't really class myself as homeless now cause, like, even though this is a homeless unit that I'm in, in honesty it does feel sort of like home in a way because the people that are in here, everyone's just so friendly to you, like, everyone just gets on and the staff are so funny and all that, plus they're always there, any time of day that you need them they're always going to be there.

Jordan related his feeling of being 'at home' with the relationships he had developed with his fellow residents and members of staff suggesting that he characterised homelessness as synonymous with isolation. This feeling became incorporated into Jordan's sense of self and he later explained that living somewhere that provided stability and relationship opportunities helped him to feel as though he was living the life he wanted. Feeling 'at home' in supported accommodation was also a finding reported by Farrugia et al. (2016) who linked this to the 'moral self' in which the stability offered by such services enabled young people to feel able to exercise responsibility and orderliness.

Cara also referred to the hostel as her 'home.' Cara was strict about not letting other residents socialise in her bedsit and she enjoyed keeping her own bedsit as a separate space:

> As well as not liking the mess, she said she prefers going to other people's rooms because she spends enough time as it is in her own room. For her it's like going to someone else's house. I asked her about overnight stays and she said it was the same thing. Sometimes if she's at a friend's house the friend will invite her to stay, whereas other times she will message one of her friends saying: "I need to get out of this house can I come and stay with you?"

Cara had constructed her bedsit as a private space that was similar to a kind of home. Her feelings of going to another person's house when she left her bedsit were akin to Kelldale being a small community and visiting her neighbours. However, her need to sometimes get away from the hostel acted as a reminder that her bedsit 'home' and the wider hostel could function as both a pleasant place and an environment that could become stifling. Feelings of being stifled were expressed by many of the residents throughout the fieldwork:

> This place gets to you after a while. You don't know what day it is, what time it is, whether you're coming or going. (Stephanie)

These types of statements highlighted the volatility of feeling at home in Kelldale as, within a short period of time, the residents' actions and statements could fluctuate between expressing a sense of feeling settled and 'at home' and a need to 'get out.' Sometimes, such statements were accompanied by pacing around a room which mimicked the idea of an animal trapped in a cage. Although there was nothing to stop the residents from walking out of the front door, they often had nowhere else to go and therefore feelings of being stifled or trapped were indicative of a much larger barrier: that although Kelldale could assist in distancing themselves from the 'homeless' label and its negative connotations, Kelldale was also not fully their 'home.'

The temporary nature of their living situations, shared living with people they did not choose to live with, and a lack of alternative options all fed into an ambivalence about whether they were 'homeless' or 'at home.' Indeed, although approximately one-third of the participants had explicitly indicated that they either did not view themselves as 'high homeless' (to use Nathan's phrasing) or they felt 'at home' in Kelldale, notably the remainder of the residents barely spoke about their homeless status. Instead, they were more inclined to focus on the future and where they would live next, or they would talk about their past lives which they constructed as being chaotic:

> Andy told me about the socially-rented flat he had once lived in and explained that he was evicted for having lots of parties which became out of control. He explained that he would get so drunk that he would pass out or have no idea what was happening which meant people he didn't even know would gatecrash the party and cause trouble.

> [Later] Andy explained that he has put his name down to get a flat about 30 miles away to live in the same town as his dad who he only recently met for the first time. In Kelldale, he has learned about 'door control' to stop people coming into his space if he doesn't want them to. He is confident he can exercise door control when he gets his new flat.

Meanwell (2013) argues that homeless people construct their past selves as morally problematic as a means of constructing the present self as morally virtuous. In Andy's case, his past self was characterised by chaos and immaturity, his present self was more settled and mature, and this, he believed, laid the foundations for a morally responsible future self. Thus, not only do homeless people preserve their identities by distancing themselves from other people and situations, they also create distance from their past selves. In the case of Kelldale, while some talked about feeling as though they were neither 'homeless' nor 'at home,' most did not talk about these as features of their current identities at all but rather, like Andy, avoided stigma by comparing the past to the future.

4.2. The 'Drug User' Self and 'Junkie' Other

Homelessness was not the only label that emerged from the data as being significant for the residents' identities. Drug use is considered as the archetype of deviance and, consequently, is highly stigmatising (Becker, 1963). While 'drug use' encompasses the ingestion of many different types of substance, some more harmful than others, their position as illegal substances (in the UK) mark them all as morally problematic and, therefore, their use as potentially stigmatising in the eyes of the generalised other. Drug use was pervasive in the lives of Kelldale's res-

idents; while a small number periodically used ecstasy, cocaine and amphetamine, cannabis was the dominant drug, used by at least half of the study's participants daily. None of the residents claimed to have used heroin and there was no observational evidence of heroin use although, as will become apparent, heroin use was highly stigmatising meaning that residents were unlikely to admit to taking this substance even if they had. Thus, the phrase 'drug use' in the context of Kelldale refers to the illicit substances that the residents used and this will be contrasted with heroin use.

Being a drug user also influenced the residents' self-identities but, unlike homelessness, was embraced (Snow & Anderson, 1987) or celebrated. This was apparent when some boasted about their drug use:

> I can smoke four joints and it's not obvious that I'm stoned because I can act normal. (Jordan)

The bragging nature of such statements suggested that some readily internalised a 'cannabis user' or 'drug user' self-identity. Boasting about, or celebrating, their drug use was further evidenced when some of the residents changed the lyrics of a pop-song by Daft Punk from "we're up all night to get some" to "we're up all night to get stoned" and excitedly wandered around the hostel singing it loudly and repeatedly. Further evidence of the residents' acceptance of the 'drug user' identity was their conversations about who looked more intoxicated in comparison to others:

> Tom commented that it's funny how some people can smoke weed and not look stoned whereas other people are obviously stoned. I said that it's obvious when Matt's been smoking because his eyes go puffy. Danielle said: "Aye and Chloe and Craig's eyes used to go dead bloodshot." Tom replied: "We wouldn'ae let them come down to the office when they were stoned because we would get caught."

While those engaged in substance use typically embraced and embodied the drug user dimension of their selves, this had its limits. Notably, they made clear distinctions between their own drug use and that of 'junkies.' As discussed, the word 'junkie' is a highly stigmatising term as it not only refers to the use of heroin but heroin users' associations with criminality and immorality (Radcliffe & Stevens, 2008). It is common for users of certain drugs to distance themselves from those who use other drugs (Furst & Evans, 2015; Palamer, 2014) so, they can minimise their 'spoiled identity.' In Kelldale, the residents frequently teased each other and made jokes about being heroin users. For example, Stacy pretended to be a heroin user and claimed that she needed to get her "green juice" (methadone), and Craig joked that he takes "smack" all the time. Consistent with the embodied aspect of drug use and their playfulness, residents sometimes mimicked a 'junkie' by changing their voice to

an exaggerated and nasal Scottish accent that involved elongating certain words. These impressions always involved asking for money or drugs which was consistent with the image of 'junkies' as 'scroungers' (Radcliffe & Stevens, 2008):

> Jordan did an impression of a junkie which involved putting on a whiny voice that sounded like he was holding his nose: "Awriiiiite, you got any spare change pal?"

Although the residents engaged in identity work to distance themselves from heroin use, by making fun of it, they were also aware that heroin use was a part of their lives. This was partly due to the overlap between homelessness and heroin use, and partly due to people close to the residents being heroin users:

> Andy explained he had once lived in a hostel which was full of "old junkies": "It's basically a five-storey building full of junkies." The other boys nodded in agreement. Andy said that one time he was leaving his room at the hostel when a guy asked him if he wanted to buy a bag of "smack." Andy replied to the guy saying: "Naw, do I look like a junkie?" He seemed insulted and annoyed by being offered a bag of heroin. The three residents generally talked about junkies in a derogatory and disdainful manner.

> During the focus group, when I asked why 'junkies' are so bad, Tom replied: "Everyone might slag them and hate them, I don't know about them, but I've got one or two in the family." Chloe responded: "So do I." And Craig agreed by saying "ninety-five percent of my family are junkies, true story." Danielle added "it's just another thing, isn't it. Some of my pal's mums are kit heids [heroin users]."

Identity work around substance use was, therefore, an important feature of the resident's lives. They embraced and even celebrated their cannabis use while simultaneously denigrating those who used a different substance, heroin. When this was probed further in the focus group, the residents agreed that this is because heroin is more "addictive" than cannabis meaning that people resort to "robbing old ladies" and begging for money on the streets. However, paradoxically, some of the focus group residents also talked about the measures they had taken to buy cannabis when money was tight. These included going hungry because they had used their food money for cannabis, spending their service charge money on cannabis and accruing arrears as a result, selling personal items, stealing items like mobile phones from friends to sell, drug dealing to make money for cannabis and lying to family members about what they needed money for (e.g., food, a haircut, a bus fare) so they would lend to them. Despite these details, they continued to embrace their cannabis user identities, indeed it appeared as

though the focus group participants competed with each other when listing these money-making activities rather than representing them as problematic. Meanwhile, they continued to construct heroin users as being worse. This was summed up when Tom claimed that if someone tried to bring heroin into Kelldale they would be "disowned" by the group but if they brought in cannabis, they would be invited to join them.

4.3. The 'Young' Self

Youth identities emerged during conversations about the ages of the Kelldale residents in relation to my own. At the time of fieldwork, I was 28 years old (6 to 10 years older than the residents) and my age was regularly raised as a topic of conversation by the residents in relation to themselves. The following exchange occurred in one of the bedsits where a group of residents were socialising:

> They laughed about a bird pooing on Ryan's shoe and this led to a string of conversations [which were] peppered with laughing and singing. Music was playing in the background and now and again Cara or Ryan would sing a line of a song....At one point Cara and Ryan started trying to hit each other's sunburned areas (Cara's arms and Ryan's chest) in a friendly play-fighting manner. Ryan turned to me and said with a smile: "I bet you wish you were our age again!"

My leisure interests and ideas of fun were regularly perceived by Ryan and others as different from theirs because of our age differences. This highlighted how the residents enacted distinctive forms of leisure and playfulness that they perceived as being appropriate for their age but not mine. Using Goffman's (1959) argument that performances can be indicative of a person's self-identity, this extract (along with several others that were similar) suggests the residents held ideas about what it meant to be young, and they embraced these characteristics of a youthful self-identity.

For Liam and Jordan, who were both 17 years old, being young formed a strong feature of their identities and it further intersected with their belonging to the 'Goth' subculture (Hodkinson, 2002). Liam and Jordan portrayed their Goth identities through wearing dark clothes, baggy jeans, hoodies and t-shirts emblazoned with the logos of heavy metal, punk and rock bands. They had several body piercings, tattoos, dyed their hair in bold colours and wore heavy eye liner. They frequently referred to themselves as 'Goths' with a fierce sense of pride. The intersection of this Goth subculture with being young was illustrated when they talked about an upcoming 'prom' at an under-18s nightclub that was known to attract members of the Gothic subculture:

> Liam said that he's wearing a dress to the prom and Jordan said he's wearing his Spongebob Squarepants pyjamas....They had put the Kerrang channel on the TV

and a song by the band Bullet for My Valentine came on. Jordan stood up and announced he was going to do the "[name of nightclub] dance." This involved him mouthing the words to the song and making dramatic arm movements.

As is apparent from this extract, Jordan and Liam's worlds were constructed by them as fun and youthful. This was most clearly demonstrated by Jordan dressing up in cartoon pyjamas; a strong symbol of childhood and one way of challenging adult norms of looking and behaving in certain ways. They held a distinct non-adult sense of self and a perception of adulthood as representing the antipathy of fun, subcultural belonging and being carefree. In a conversation with Liam about the adult responsibilities of budgeting, the 17-year old responded: "Fuck being a grown up! I never want to grow up!"

In contrast to Liam and Jordan, Matt was approaching his 18th birthday and was excited to enter the world of legal adulthood so that he could drink alcohol in pubs and nightclubs. For two weeks, Matt spoke enthusiastically about his upcoming birthday and explained that his older friends and relatives were planning to celebrate with him by going to the pub. Turning 18, for Matt, symbolised a sense of freedom to engage in the legitimate drinking culture. Although turning 18 enabled the residents to drink alcohol legally, most had been drinking from a younger age. The following conversation between Liam and Jordan (aged 17) and Danielle, Chloe and Garry (all aged 21) revealed some of the complexities of youth leisure, legality and identity:

> Liam and Jordan told us that they're going to the nightclub tonight for the prom. Danielle and Chloe overheard this and asked if they could go too. The boys said yes but Jordan pointed out that it's an under-18s night. Danielle replied: "Oh we'll get done for being big paedos!" Garry asked if that meant there wouldn't be any alcohol. Liam said yes, but that everyone just gets [drunk] before they get there.

Despite the shared interest in going to nightclubs and drinking alcohol, the four years that separated these residents in age was significant due to the 18-year old legal marker which divided them. This marker was embedded in the self-identities of the residents and this extract revealed its power over the behaviours of those involved. As well as the marker influencing the drinking behaviours of the residents, Danielle's comment about the older residents being paedophiles suggested that she viewed the older residents as adults and the younger residents as children. Therefore, despite the residents' shared interests in nightclubs and drinking, age served as a powerful structure in constructing the boundaries of 'child/young person' and 'adult/young person' identities.

Furthermore, some older residents constructed the under-18 residents as being more vulnerable due to their age. On one occasion, Tom (aged 21) had heard a rumour that Matt was going to be evicted from the hostel for not paying his service charge (referred to, by Tom, as "rent"). He expressed his thoughts to a staff member:

> That's shite though. He's a 17-year old boy who's been used to living with his [mum] and you are kicking him out for not paying rent to somewhere where he needs to pay for his [electricity] too!

By contrast, though, sometimes their age was taken as an indication that these residents were more likely to cause trouble, endorsing a deviant narrative of youth: "There's gonna be riots in here man with so many young ones in here just now." (Danielle)

Overall, in Kelldale, age and youth strongly featured in the conversations and behaviours of the residents indicating that they were embedded within their self-identities in different ways. In line with a symbolic interactionist stance, it was apparent that the residents constructed the youthful features of their self-identities in relation to their understandings of the generalised other attitude. In other words, they were aware of how youth is constructed in society and this understanding intersected with how their youthful status was internalised. For Ryan, Liam and Jordan, being young was felt positively and in this sense could be viewed as a celebrated identity. For Matt, being under the legal drinking age was a cause of frustration but turning 18 would enable him to access the adult forms of leisure while still being considered as a young person. Danielle and Tom, on the other hand, thought of themselves as adults and they reinforced the (adult-dominated) generalised other attitude that young people are simultaneously vulnerable and deviant.

Notably, these youth self-identities were enacted and discussed in relation to youth narratives broadly and were not specific to the context of homelessness. This is significant because one might expect that when someone experiences homelessness, this component of their lives overrides everything else. Studies of youth homelessness typically focus on the homelessness and the extremes of vulnerability (such as emphasising the negative effects of homelessness on a young person's wellbeing) or deviance (such as the toughness required to negotiate living on the streets or in hostels). They rarely recognise the features of youth which are visible regardless of a person's housing status such as playfulness and a desire to be a part of the legitimate night-time economy. Therefore, when considering the self-identities of those who are homeless, it is apparent that other features of people's lives, such as their age, are likely to exert a strong influence on how they see themselves.

5. Conclusion

This article has focused on a group living in a supported accommodation hostel and explored their self-identities as they relate to the 'generalised other' labels of 'home-

less,' 'drug user' and 'youth.' Vulnerability and deviance are concepts which penetrate these labels as those who are young, drug users and/or homeless are simultaneously believed to require help and social control to ensure their lives align with acceptable, normative standards of behaviours. However, these labels are not just used to describe people's objective positions in society, they are layered with assumptions about *who* people are and what their 'natural' selves encompass. Symbolic interactionism is valuable here as it argues that people's self-identities and intertwined behaviours are the product of an infinite and unique combination of interactions. Despite people often framing other's self-identities as innate and fixed, interactionists demonstrate how they are dynamic and influenced by the people they interact with.

Given the power of labels, it is necessary to understand how those on the receiving end of them experience these processes. This is particularly important when the labels have stigmatising implications that are damaging for people's wellbeing (Kidd, 2007; Livingston et al., 2012). The analysis in this article revealed the nuanced ways that the participants related to different labels. Despite the stigma associated with homelessness, drug use and youth, there was little evidence that the participants had internalised stigmatising attitudes into their self-identities or were negatively impacted by them. Data pertaining to each label indicated that the residents were aware of such stigma and reinforced it by making disparaging and stereotypical remarks. Such endorsements are consistent with processes of distancing (Snow & Anderson, 1987) or 'othering' (Rødner, 2005). Homelessness and drug use were caricatured by drawing on their extreme forms—rough sleeping and heroin use—and reinforcing stereotypes of begging and poor personal care. In doing so, the residents were able to distance their forms of homelessness and drug use and portray these, and themselves, as 'better,' more fortunate, and with higher morals than 'junkies.' The 'youth' label also revealed some 'othering' behaviours; with younger residents rejecting adulthood (i.e., Liam's statement of "fuck being a grown up") and older residents drawing upon vulnerability and deviant narratives when describing younger residents, arguably as a means of positioning themselves as more capable and mature.

In addition, participants (re)defined the labels in positive ways and expressed accounts which could be deemed as celebratory. Claims of feeling 'at home' in Kelldale, whilst being laden with ambivalence, can be understood as attempts to positively internalise what many would see as a difficult living situation. This is largely due to some residents experiencing Kelldale more favourably relative to their previous living circumstances. The use of cannabis was bragged about, formed a large part of everyday conversations and was the subject of a song that was performed throughout the hostel. Youth was likewise celebrated by some residents taking advantage of subcultural activities provided for, and associated with, young people. Thus, 'spoiled identities' and 'cele-

brated identities' sat closely alongside each other with the residents managing to avoid stigma associated with their marginalised positions by focusing their attention on more positive formulations of the labels.

Overall, the nuances of self-identity explored in this article suggest that people in marginalised housing situations, such as homelessness, should not be understood only on the basis of these situations. Just because someone is experiencing homelessness does not mean that homelessness dominates their sense of self. Likewise, it is not possible to understand people's self-identities only from the perspectives of being young, using drugs or any singular identity category. An ethnographic approach offers an inductive way of understanding how different labels and associated identities simultaneously come into play in a person's life. This is important when considering the impact that stigma has on people's wellbeing and the identity work they engage in to protect against stigma and preserve a sense of self-worth and dignity.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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