

Chapter #12

BEING HOMELESS: AN EMPTY SELF IN AN EMPTY WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Research into homelessness has been predominantly quantitative in design, solution-focused and may have effectively concealed the phenomenon itself. This hermeneutic phenomenological study involved in-depth interviews with six homeless persons currently rough sleeping or staying in temporary hostels in Dublin, Ireland. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 25 years and comprised three men and three women. Five were Irish born and one had moved to Ireland from Asia during the financial boom. Analysis revealed two essential, constitutive characteristics of homelessness, namely boredom as the mood of homelessness and the deeply anxiety-evoking, reduced capacity to care for oneself and to access and utilize care from others. Homeless persons are bored with the relentless waiting that life on the street entails. They live in a state of existential abandonment where the self, cut off from both the past and the future, exists in a meaningless vacuum. Furthermore, homelessness in terms of its origins and continuance can be viewed as a consequence of the breakdown of relationship with self and with others. Homeless persons struggle profoundly to access and maintain meaningful relationships. Through boredom and isolation, homeless persons exist as an empty self, suspended in an empty world. It is recommended that service providers and psychologists adopt more inclusive, creative, caring attitudes and policies underpinned by an understanding of the homeless person's need for meaningful and purposeful engagement in the world.

Keywords: homelessness, phenomenology, boredom, taking-care, relationships, self.

1. INTRODUCTION

Homelessness, in the twenty first century, is a critical issue requiring everyone's attention. In 2011, the Irish census, for the first time, performed a count of persons who were homeless on census night, April 10th. The findings show that a total of 3808 persons were homeless with 64 sleeping rough and 3744 staying in homeless shelters. In December 2013, the Dublin Region Homeless Executive found that a minimum of 139 people were sleeping rough in Dublin representing nearly a 60% increase on November 2012's figure of 87. Also in 2013, the Irish Department of Environment, Community and Local Government found that 89872 households were in need of social housing support with the main applicant being under 25years of age in 11986 instances. This is a net figure and represents those that are not currently receiving social housing support that is those households who cannot be accommodated through the existing housing stock.

2. BACKGROUND

Homelessness is viewed in the literature as a complex social problem (Caton et al. 2005) to which the solution is considered to be the provision of appropriate long-term housing. In addition to the absence of affordable housing, homeless persons are viewed as having multiple needs requiring considerable support to facilitate the maintenance of

long-term housing. These needs can be categorised in the realms of physical health, mental health and addiction and may require short-term or long-term support (Fitzpatrick, Kemp & Klinker, 2000; Quilgars, Johnsen & Pleace, 2008). Whilst there is a growing body of research addressing the enumeration of those who are homeless and determining and investigating pathways in and out of homelessness, there is very little research exploring the everyday experience of being homeless. Martin Seager (2011) argues that the current approach to addressing the plight of those who are homeless or rough sleeping erroneously prioritises physical shelter over psychical shelter. He claims that the focus needs to shift from simply seeking to provide a roof over someone's head to exploring and addressing what is going on inside a person's head. He strongly suggests that those working with the homeless population should not only consider the physical shelter provided by a roof but also the potential psychological shelter or lack thereof provided by others living under that same roof. Seager emphasises the importance of helping homeless persons access homes rather than houses since it is emotional attachments and love relationships that make us the people we are and provide meaning and value in our lives. He proclaims that our need to belong and to have meaning and purpose in our lives is even more primal to our being than our need for food and shelter.

3. BEING HOMELESS

Very little is known about what it is like to live on the street, about the experience of being homeless. Furthermore, few studies have placed the everyday experience of the homeless person at their core. In our efforts to understand the 'problem' of homelessness and find 'solutions' for it, we may have moved away from the actual experience and its underlying phenomenon. Social psychology, with its focus on human behaviour and the social context in which it occurs and its emphasis on such concepts as prejudice and discrimination, attitudes and stereotypes, is well placed to explore the world of homelessness.

This current research aims to look closer at homelessness itself, to uncover or reveal something of the phenomenon of homelessness by placing homeless persons at its core. The study aims to deepen our understanding of the ontological question of what it is to be a homeless person, to deepen and expand our understanding of that way of being in the world. A hermeneutic, phenomenological methodology, based on Martin Heidegger's philosophy was utilised to reveal some essential, constitutive characteristics of homelessness. In-depth, qualitative interviews were conducted with six of Ireland's homeless persons who were sleeping on the street or staying in temporary hostel accommodation. Two essential, constitutive characteristics emerged: *Passing time* and *Taking care*. *Passing time* revealed boredom as the mood of homelessness and disclosed the daily challenges faced in filling or wasting time when homeless. *Taking care* disclosed something of the homeless person's capacity to take care of themselves and to access care from others. It revealed something of the homeless person's relationships with self and others and the deep anxiety such relationships evoke.

3.1. Passing Time

Homeless persons, in this study, live very much immersed *in* their experience of time. From the moment they awaken they are concerned with time and faced with the task of passing the time stretching out ahead of them. Spending twenty our hours a day, every day, with no home to which to retreat and no private space of one's own is both daunting and extremely challenging. Belonging to a marginalised group, living on the edge of society,

having very little money and being unwelcome in most places renders the task of meaningfully filling time close to impossible. Walking the streets endlessly, as time crawls by very slowly, is boring, and facing into another boring day fills the homeless person with a sense of dread.

According to the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1962), 'mood' is a central component of our sense of belonging in the world. We are always in some kind of mood and we exist as part of a world that already has a mood. Furthermore, the mood in which we find ourselves reveals something fundamental about how we are faring, about how we are getting on. The participants in this study are bored: bored with the relentless waiting that life on the street entails; bored with having so little to do and so much time to kill. Bored with walking, walking, walking over the same ground. When we are bored, significance of both self and the world fade, our motivation disappears and time appears to grind to a halt and in so doing becomes pronounced and inescapable (Slaby, 2010). For Slaby, the halting of time that occurs in boredom and the fading of the existential significance that gives meaning to human life are the same thing. Thus the boredom and existential void of life on the street are inextricably linked.

Homeless persons are often socially excluded and live in poverty outside social networks (Aratani, 2009; Craig & Hodson, 2000), denied access to society, refused possibilities to act or take part. Life on the street can be devoid of engagement, meaningful activity and participation in everyday events or activities. Thus homeless persons find it hard to do what we instinctively do when we to occupy ourselves - to actively seek out ways to not be bored (Stewart, 2007). When we approach boredom we engage with tasks and activities directed towards passing time. If we were to strip away the activities of our everyday lives we would find boredom lying in wait (Heidegger, 1998). Participants in this study are only too familiar with this lurking boredom and the emptiness and existential pain it brings. Indeed, the totality of living on the street is imbued with boredom, a boredom characterised by two features: being left empty and being held in limbo (Heidegger, 2001). The participants feel empty as a result of being forced to abandon their authentic selves and opt instead for a shallow engagement in their own lives. To bring their authentic self to the horrors of life on the street would be unbearably painful since to be authentic means to be true to oneself, something which the deprivation and impoverishment of life on the street renders extraordinarily difficult and painful. For Heidegger, to live authentically is to be curious about, engaged with, excited by and fascinated with the world in which we live. The profound boredom characteristic of life on the street makes fascination with or excitement about the world extremely unlikely.

What about the second characteristic of boredom, 'being held in limbo'? The imagined or expected lives of the participants are on hold. Time has stalled. This stalled time or *standing Now* (Heidegger, 2001) causes them to be fully absorbed in the present and for that present to be removed or disconnected from what has gone before and what is yet to come. They are absorbed in filling the present moment without reference to the past or connection to the future. Everything about living on the street is isolating, even our own temporality - our own sense of self. As Slaby (2010) eloquently states: *'The seamless and natural transition from a past via a mattering present to anticipated futures (possibilities) has come to a halt'* (p.12). The participants live in a state of existential abandonment where the self, cut-off from past and future, exists in a meaningless vacuum. This is a bored self, a self left hanging in a purposeless, empty, isolated state.

3.1.1. Psychology, Psychotherapy and Being Bored

It is widely accepted among psychologists and psychotherapists that boredom is a complex phenomenon. Moreover, the mood of boredom can reveal important facets of

existence. So what does psychology or psychotherapy have to say about being bored?

The answer is surprisingly little. In his 1993 book, *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored*, psychoanalyst Adam Phillips devotes a chapter to being bored. Phillips refers to boredom as:

that state of suspended anticipation in which things are started and nothing begins, the mood of diffuse restlessness which contains that most absurd and paradoxical wish, the wish for a desire (p.71).

When we are bored we are waiting, unconsciously, for an experience of anticipation. The homeless persons in this study experience boredom to varying degrees with those in the throes of profound boredom displaying little or no anticipation that things might be different. They speak of a sensation of going round and round, of waiting and waiting, of sitting around, of going from place to place with no desire to get there. For Phillips, the bored child reaches into his recurring state of emptiness from which his desire can emerge. In order to negotiate this precarious process, the child needs a parent to contain and hold him, to be present for and attentive towards him. Many of the study participants did not have a nurturing and caring home environment within which to learn to identify and manage their desire and so may not have successfully attained the developmental capacity to move through boredom to desire. The long-term effects of an abusive or neglectful home when growing up are both well documented and detrimental. When a child is challenged in their emotional or physical well-being to an extent that exceeds their ability to cope, early life stress ensues (Gunnar & Quevedo 2007; Pechtel & Pizzagalli, 2011). Many of the study participants experienced early childhood stressors including neglect, emotional abuse, social deprivation and household dysfunction (including witnessing violence, parental separation, parental illness or death, substance abuse) (Brown et al. 2009). The long-term effects of childhood stress make devastating reading accounting for nearly 32% of psychiatric disorders and 44% of disorders with childhood onset (Green et al. 2010). Furthermore, having six or more adverse childhood events increases the risk of dying 20 years before your peers (Anda et al. 2009) and alarmingly 67% of the population-attributable risk for suicide can be attributed to early life stressors (Dube et al. 2001).

The psychotherapist, D.W. Winnicott (1941), describes the bored child as one who has nothing available to him to enable self-expression. The study participants have very little available to them for self-expression or creativity, being limited to what they can carry or fit in a small locker and being restricted to living out their lives in public. For Winnicott, in order for a child to be able to access a complete experience he needs a supportive and accommodating environment, one which will present opportunities to him without forcing them on him or withholding them from him. Most of the participants grew up in situations that were impoverished, either lacking in stimulation or providing too much stimulation through violence and aggression. In addition, life on the street withholds or denies choices and opportunities with, for example, homeless persons having to accept food and beds as and when they are made available. Living on the street is the very antithesis of a supportive, nurturing environment replete with creative opportunities and engaging stimulation. Furthermore, allowing ourselves experience our desire entails trusting the environment to hold us and risking damage to the self if we are not held. Homeless persons in this current research have numerous experiences of failure to be held, with some having very few experiences of actually being held either emotionally or physically. It is no

wonder then that the risk to an already fragile and damaged self, posed by experiencing one's desire, may simply be too great.

The participants in this study live in a constant state of waiting, waiting to see if they can get a bed for the night, waiting for the hostel to open, waiting for time to pass, waiting for something to change. They wait and wait and they try to do something other than wait and they get bored. Many entrenched rough sleepers have given up hope of integrating into mainstream society; they have been worn down by relentless lurking boredom (O'Neill, 2014). They live on the edge, on the periphery, excluded from everyday routines and rituals. Phillips (1993) suggests that "*Perhaps boredom is merely the mourning of everyday life?*" (p.75). Thus, the participants may, in fact, be grieving for a life they have lost or indeed one they may only have fleetingly glimpsed. Being homeless has stripped them of access to the most mundane, everyday preoccupations most of us take for granted, the banal tasks and activities that provide our day with structure and meaning. Indeed, exclusion from social power leads to withdrawal into boredom, for how can homeless persons engage in society when they do not possess the required currency? Instead, they live in public, on the threshold in what Seager (2011) refers to as a self-imposed '*exclusion zone*' (p.184): a place where they can simultaneously express their conflicting desires to be both visible and left alone, to be seen and not seen, to be neither in nor out.

3.2. Taking Care

Just as boredom illuminates the characteristic *Passing Time*, anxiety illuminates the characteristic *Taking Care*. The participants in this study live in a state of anxiety where neither the world nor its occupants has anything to offer them. They are anxious about themselves, where they will sleep, what they will eat, whether they will manage to stay sober. They are anxious about their families, their friends, and other homeless persons. They are anxious about services and service providers. They are anxious about their future and anxious that the system will forget all about them. For Heidegger (1962) in this state of anxiety we feel '*uncanny*' where '*uncanniness*' also means '*not-being-at-home*' (p. 233). We flee this not-at-home state by absorbing ourselves with our everyday worldly concerns, we flee to the public '*at-homeness*', the '*tranquillized familiarity*' (p.234) of the masses. Rough sleepers have nowhere to which to flee, they are stuck facing their anxiety as they have few opportunities to become absorbed in everyday activities. Thus they struggle to escape the primordial anxiety of Being '*not-at-home*'.

Homelessness, both in terms of its origins and continuance, can be viewed as a consequence of the breakdown of relationship with self and others. In order to maintain a healthy relationship with self we must understand our needs and be capable of fulfilling those needs at least to some degree. In addition, since we are relational, interdependent beings and as such rely on others as well as our self for our existence and well-being we need to be able to access and utilise the care of others.

3.2.1. Caring-for-Self

In order to care for ourselves we must know and understand ourselves, at least to some degree, recognise our needs and desires, and devise ways and means to address them. For Heidegger, it is through our own existence that we come to understand ourselves. He distinguishes between the self of everyday man, the *they-Self* and the *authentic Self*, by which he means *the Self that has been taken hold of in its own way* (1962, p. 167). When we exist as *they-self*, we are absorbed in the world, we exist *dispersed* amidst the *they* and must find ourselves. The homeless persons in this study are revealed to exist outside *the they* of everyday society. They are excluded and marginalised and as such stand out or are

conspicuous. They occupy a place on the edge or periphery of society, a place where they live out their lives very visibly and in public (Seager, 2011). At the same time they are part of *the they* of the homeless world. Like all marginalised populations, homeless persons are talked about in the plural, they are considered to have a single identity, to lack a unique and personal self. It is through this everyday way of Being, Being amidst *the they*, that the self gets covered over or concealed. Rough sleepers exist as part of the collective world of homelessness excluded from the everyday world of mainstream society and it is here on the periphery that they come to know the self and to recognise and meet their own needs and desires.

Homeless persons in this study face multiple challenges and trials in meeting everyday human needs whilst living on the street. They live in a hostile and frightening world, a world which evokes deep anxiety. Indeed, life on the street is often characterised by fear and/or anxiety (Huey, 2012) with many homeless persons fearing and enduring the general public's hateful and anti-social behaviour (Newburn & Rock, 2005). They are constantly faced with choices and possibilities that necessarily matter to them but which they did not choose and do not want. They find themselves concerned with and occupied by a world and existence devoid of possibilities and opportunities they desire.

Participants in this study are anxious about themselves: they worry about their safety and their health. They are concerned about where they will sleep and whether they will be warm enough and secure enough to sleep. They devise ways and means of keeping safe such as sleeping close to others or in view of a security camera. Indeed, being homeless evokes constant stress concerning the ability to find a safe place to sleep or a decent meal to eat (Hopper, Bassuk & Olivet, 2010). The study participants worry about their ability to stay away from drugs and about the damage drugs and alcohol are causing to their minds and bodies. They are anxious about their future, both their immediate future and the rest of their lives. They anxiously wonder if they will ever find a way out of the homeless world. They hope that they will somehow find themselves in a safer, less anxiety-provoking world, a world where they can feel safe and engage with more meaningful and fulfilling possibilities.

The participants in this study struggle to feel at home within the world and equally within themselves. In the absence of a home they feel less grounded in the world and are deprived of the benefits a home delivers in terms of providing status, helping us know who we are and keeping us safe (Fox, 2008). A sense of inner peace or harmony evades most of the homeless persons in the current study. Instead they live with deep anxiety, in a state of inner turmoil where internal conflicts battle for dominance. They consistently fight with themselves to stay engaged in their own lives, to look after their own basic needs, to pay attention to the signals and messages their bodies convey concerning hygiene and nutrition. They live with an on-going battle between the part of them that wants to stay alert, engaged and present and the part of them that desires disconnection, numbing and withdrawal. This battle is made more difficult by the ready availability of a variety of drugs and mind-numbing substances. Many realise that they need to rely on their own inner resources to cope with life on the street but often they feel empty and depleted without a solid internal strength on which to depend.

Getting to know oneself and coming to rely on oneself are achieved through experiencing the bare, stripped down reality of existence without the comfort and reassurance of the social world (van Deurzen, 2002). For Frankl (2004), this involves discovering and deciphering the one true meaning of our existence, a unique meaning which only we have the ability and responsibility to realise. Exposure to the harsh, uncompromising reality of life on the streets is a daily occurrence for homeless persons so encountering themselves at a deep and fundamental level, caring for themselves, alleviating

their anxiety, learning to rely and depend on themselves is very much their reality providing they can manage to stay present and sober.

Existential psychology encourages us to live a life determined by our values and ideals. Whilst this may be admirable and worthwhile it poses significant challenges for homeless persons. Seeing beyond and rising above the everyday to connect with our core values and ideals is extremely challenging when our survival is constantly threatened. Being restricted to social contact predominantly with other homeless persons limits opportunities to encounter or connect with others who may be better placed to engage with their own ideals and values. Without a quiet, private place – a place to reflect and contemplate, a place to feel less anxious – connecting with higher order values and beliefs is particularly difficult.

Many of the study participants exist in the world as anxious, fragmented selves lacking cohesion and inner harmony. Many experienced childhoods dominated by neglect, exclusion and chaos. Some were moved from home to home, some grew up with addiction, violence and aggression. Many report childhoods where they felt unwanted or burdensome, upbringings characterised by anxiety, isolation and disconnection. Many experienced parents who struggled at a fundamental level to deal with their own emotions leaving little or no capacity to contain those of their children. For many, experiences characterised by empathic attunement and appropriate reactions were rare if they occurred at all. Life on the street perpetuates these deficits through the continuance of relationships lacking in both empathy and attunement. Indeed, entrenched homeless persons remain on the street because of self-alienation and distrust of others (Seager, 2011). Adlam and Scanlon (2005) concur that rough sleeping can be viewed as the most extreme expression of psychological homelessness referred to as the '*un-housed mind*' (p.452). Being deprived of empathy, having their emotions ignored or treated with ambivalence, both as children and as adults, has led many homeless persons to doubt the significance and ownership of their own internal world and to lack the adequate structure to tolerate and express their emotional reactions. Fostering a sense of identity is further compounded for the homeless person by society's insistence on constructing an identity for her (Seal, 2007), an identity that is characterised by just one factor – her homelessness (Parsell, 2008).

Appropriately meeting one's needs in the homeless world is extremely challenging when the world is either forced upon you (such as allocation and timing of beds and food) or frustratingly withheld (such as rituals and practices surrounding the allocation of beds). Thus many homeless persons struggle to manage their own internal conflicts within an external world characterised by rejection, exclusion and neglect. They live on the border of society, a place they can tolerate, a place somewhat removed from their unconfined internal and external worlds.

3.2.2. Being-Cared-for

Relationships, for the study participants, are characterised by anxiety and are often transient, fleeting, disempowering and threatening. They lack balance and are often characterised by rejection and abandonment or by control and disempowerment but rarely by mutual respect, caring and collaboration. Knowing if, who and when to trust is a complex matrix made extraordinarily difficult when living within a community where everyone is immersed in that same struggle. Furthermore, the participants are anxious they will be abandoned and forgotten once again. They struggle to maintain family ties as, for most, such ties are angst-ridden and involve on-going rejection, isolation and abandonment.

For Heidegger, we exist in the world with others who necessarily matter to us since we are essentially referential beings where everything exists in reference to everything else. Furthermore, it is an essential human characteristic to *be-with* even when we are alone and

isolated. Homeless persons encounter others in the world as indifferent and alien leading to feelings of isolation and rejection. For Heidegger (1962), *Being missing* and *Being away* are both forms of *Being with* and as such are very familiar ways homeless persons encounter others on a daily basis. Many of the study participants are in families where they feel their parents are and always have been either physically or emotionally *missing*: families from which they were removed for periods of time, families from which they were taken *away*. They exist in the world today missing supportive relationships from family and from the broader community; they exist away from family and the broader society. Homeless persons exist in a world where they do not matter to most other human beings, a world where they are passed by, overlooked and ignored at best or more likely treated with outright contempt and disdain.

Homeless persons have a number of their everyday needs taken care of for them by services and agencies which allow little or no involvement for the homeless persons in resolving or managing their own concerns. Food, beds and financial allowances are provided within strict parameters and conditions. Securing employment when living without an address and being subjected to the trials and conditions involved in securing a bed for the night is next to impossible. Thus many homeless persons are dependent and disempowered having few opportunities to manage and determine their own lives, all of which evoke anxiety. In contrast, some homeless persons are treated with respect and warmth by some care-workers and agencies they encounter facilitating them to take responsibility for their own existence and those issues and concerns that matter to them.

For Spinelli (1994), we can never fully share our human existence with others and so each of us is alone in our worldly experience: *'And yet, paradoxically, this "aloneness" emerges precisely because we are in relation to one another'* (p. 294). The participants in this study feel particularly alone, they struggle to share their inner experiences with anyone and so live with a sense of deep, prevailing anxiety. In order to manage and sustain a meaningful and purposeful existence, we need cohesive, supportive, caring relationships with others, something the participants find deeply challenging to achieve. Many have anxiety-evoking, problematic, depleting relationships with their families with some feeling obliged to provide support and care for other family members when they are already struggling, at a profound level, to care for themselves. Others feel that, in order to survive and look after themselves, they have to break all ties with those who treat them with debilitating judgement and harsh criticism.

For the participants, relationships within the homeless community are compromised by the lack of trust that permeates therein and the anxiety this evokes. Some express strong feelings around others who exploit limited resources and the ethical and moral questions therein. Some feel very much a part of the homeless community and feel strong empathy and compassion for others with some expressing a desire to work with the homeless community if and when they manage to find a way back into mainstream society. Some of the participants have developed supportive and nurturing intimate relationships which provide a sense of belonging, physical intimacy and social support. Intimate partners help each other to stay sober, remind each other to shower and change and provide a shoulder to cry on. They can be collaborators in planning a way out of homelessness, a way back into mainstream society. But partners can also let you down, evoke feelings of isolation, abandonment and anxiety, feelings that are particularly hard to manage when you have no other supportive relationships to which to turn, no home or safe haven to which to retreat. Furthermore, some participants find intimate relationships hard to tolerate or impossible to attain as they struggle to negotiate the boundaries between self and other, to find containment either internally or externally, to remain engaged though not enmeshed, separate though not aloof.

We are ontically related to those in our life whose very existence is what makes them significant to us, those who cannot be replaced in the event of loss (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986). Unlike other relationships, our relationships with our parents cannot be replaced with other parental relationships and furthermore these early relationships, regardless of their current status or level of engagement, have global significance and consequences concerning all other relationships. Our family of origin provides our source of caring (Swenson, 1998), gives us a sense of stability, and is permanently physically embedded within us (Jackson, 1995). Our family home is the birthplace of belonging, of caring and concern (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). However, for some, the lived experience of home can be more reminiscent of a prison filled with fear, anxiety, isolation and exclusion (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998) than a place of love and care. For many of the study participants, early familial relationships were characterised by anxiety, rejection, abandonment, isolation, indifference, aggression and chaos. Some were moved from home to home whereby parents were regularly 'replaced' with 'new parents' resulting in ontical relationships being replaced by functional relationships. This leads to an emphasis on relationships that meet instrumental needs rather than recognition and support concerning the need for connection and deep engagement with those holding ontical significance, those who matter by virtue of their very existence, those who can alleviate existential angst. Many of the participants are in deep mourning, mourning for the loss of parental relationships they needed but never had, loss for what was and what might have been, loss for the future that will never be.

Many of the participants grew up without what John Bowlby (1988) refers to as a secure base, a safe place to which they can return for physical and emotional nurturing from an attentive and responsive parent. Instead they experienced parents who were often unavailable or absent physically or emotionally through depression or drug or alcohol misuse; parents who were unresponsive, overwhelmed and chaotic. The participants continue to live lives devoid of a secure base, lives dominated by feelings of being unwanted and rejected. When they venture out into the world they do so alone and unsupported, when they are frightened there is no-one to provide reassurance, when they risk engagement with the broader external world they do so without the safety of a secure space to which to retreat and be cared-for should they need it. Many struggle to realise a cohesive sense of self and thus experience considerable difficulty in relating to others and to society in ways that would allow them access and receive care, ways that would alleviate their anxiety, ways that would promote and support a healthy and rewarding way of being in the world. They exist as an empty self in an empty world.

4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Passing time and *Taking care* have been revealed as two essential, constitutive characteristics of homelessness and as such government agencies, policy makers, service providers, psychologists and psychotherapists need to understand these characteristics and incorporate methods and strategies to address them in the care of homeless persons. Homeless persons live a boring life within a boring world. Thus, homeless boredom must be tackled on two fronts; the already existing boredom of the homeless world and the boredom experienced by the homeless person. Therefore, there is a need to address the lack of meaningful, fulfilling and creative pursuits and activities with which homeless persons can engage, both on a daily basis and in the medium-term future. Sending homeless persons out onto the street with nowhere to go and nothing to do is inhuman and intolerable. Homeless persons need services that encourage and facilitate them to take responsibility for

their own care and well-being, perhaps for the first time. But homeless persons cannot take such responsibility in a world where they are excluded and alienated, a world wherein they are treated with disdain and contempt.

5. CONCLUSION

Homeless services and government agencies need to provide a bridge between the marginalisation and isolation of the homeless world and mainstream society by helping homeless persons access and utilise meaningful, purposeful, creative activities and pursuits which will help them engage with life both now and in an anticipated future. In addition, homeless persons need to be supported and contained so that they can feel psychologically safe enough to reach into their deep emptiness to allow their desire to emerge. Psychologists and psychotherapists are well equipped to play an active part in providing the emotional and psychological safety necessary to enable homeless persons to trust both themselves and the world; the safety to allow their desire to emerge from the emptiness of profound boredom.

Many homeless persons live without the support of parents and extended family, many have difficulty forming and maintaining intimate relationships, and consequently many live without crucial ontical relationships. Families at risk of homelessness, families ravaged by drugs and alcohol, families battling unemployment and poverty need instrumental and psychological support to maintain and negotiate relationships that are irreplaceable by their very nature. Homeless persons need support in accessing and maintaining ontical relationships if they are to achieve a fundamental sense of belonging and connection in the world. Social psychology has an important role to play in understanding and promoting the type of secure relationships necessary to foster the sense of belonging essential to successful engagement in society.

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S. Eustace

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For Jack, Katie and Tom: may you always have a sense of belonging and containment, and may you always love and be loved.

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