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A Critical Examination of Homeless Youth Transitions to Independent Housing in Canada

New Perspectives for Practice,
Policy, and Research

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Youth Homelessness: Canada and Toronto

**35,000 –
40,000**

Canadian youth
(aged 13 – 24) homeless at
some point during the year

6,000

Canadian youth
on any given night

1,000 – 2,000

Toronto on any given night

Gaetz, S., Dej, E., Richter, T., & Redman, M. (2016) **The state of homelessness in Canada 2016**. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press; Covenant House Toronto. (2016). **Facts and stats**.

Knowledge Gap

Margins

- ↓ Education
- ↓ Health
- ↓ Employment
- ↑ Trauma

- ↑ Child Welfare
- ↑ Racialized
- ↑ Poverty
- ↑ LGBTQ2S

Street Families → Acquaintances
Youth → Adulthood

Mainstream

Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd & Schwan. (2016). **Without a Home: The national youth homelessness survey.**
Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

Transitioning off the Streets: Longitudinal Studies

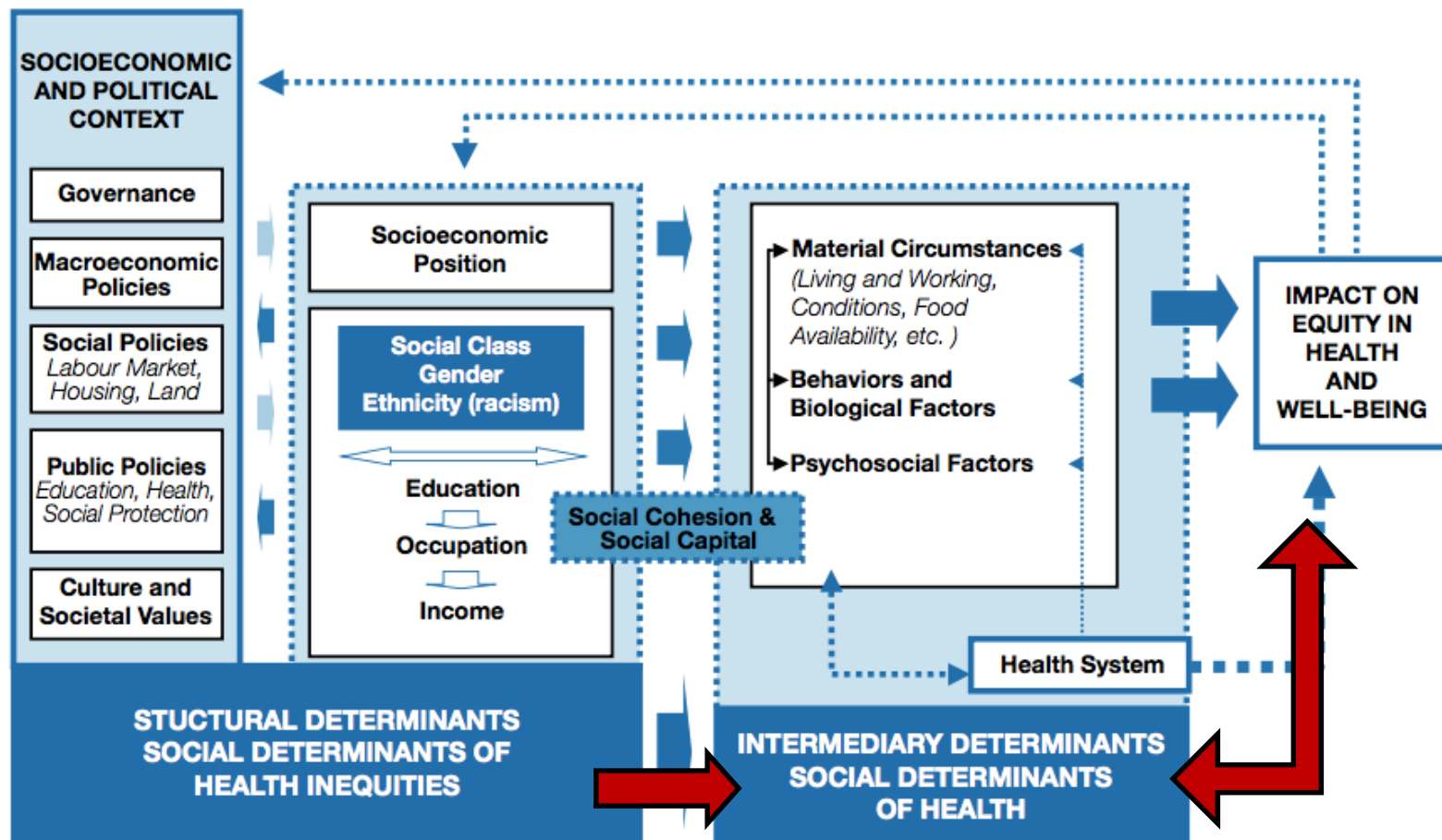
Author(s) (Year)	Method	<i>n</i>	Ages	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Months Followed	# Interviews	Housing Type
Brueckner et al. (2011)	QL	19	16 – 22	79% Female	Not specified	15	5	Supported
Karabanow et al. (2016) Kidd et al. (2016)	QT/QL	51	17 – 25	53% Female	47% Caucasian	12	4	Various
Mayock et al. (2008) Mayock et al. (2011)	QL	30	15 – 24	53% Male	Not specified	18	2	Various
Milburn et al. (2009)	QT	183	12 – 20	63% Female	47% Hispanic or Latino	24	2	Various
Roy et al. (2014) Roy et al. (2016)	QT	365	18 – 25	79% Male	Not specified	21	6	Various
Slesnick et al. (2008)	QT	180	14 – 22	66% Male	41% Caucasian	6	3	Various
Tevendale et al. (2011)	QT	426	14 – 24	65% Male	35% Black	24	6	Various

Addressing the Gap

Produce an **insider** perspective on the experiences of formerly homeless youth as they transitioned into **independent** housing and attempted to achieve meaningful **social integration**.

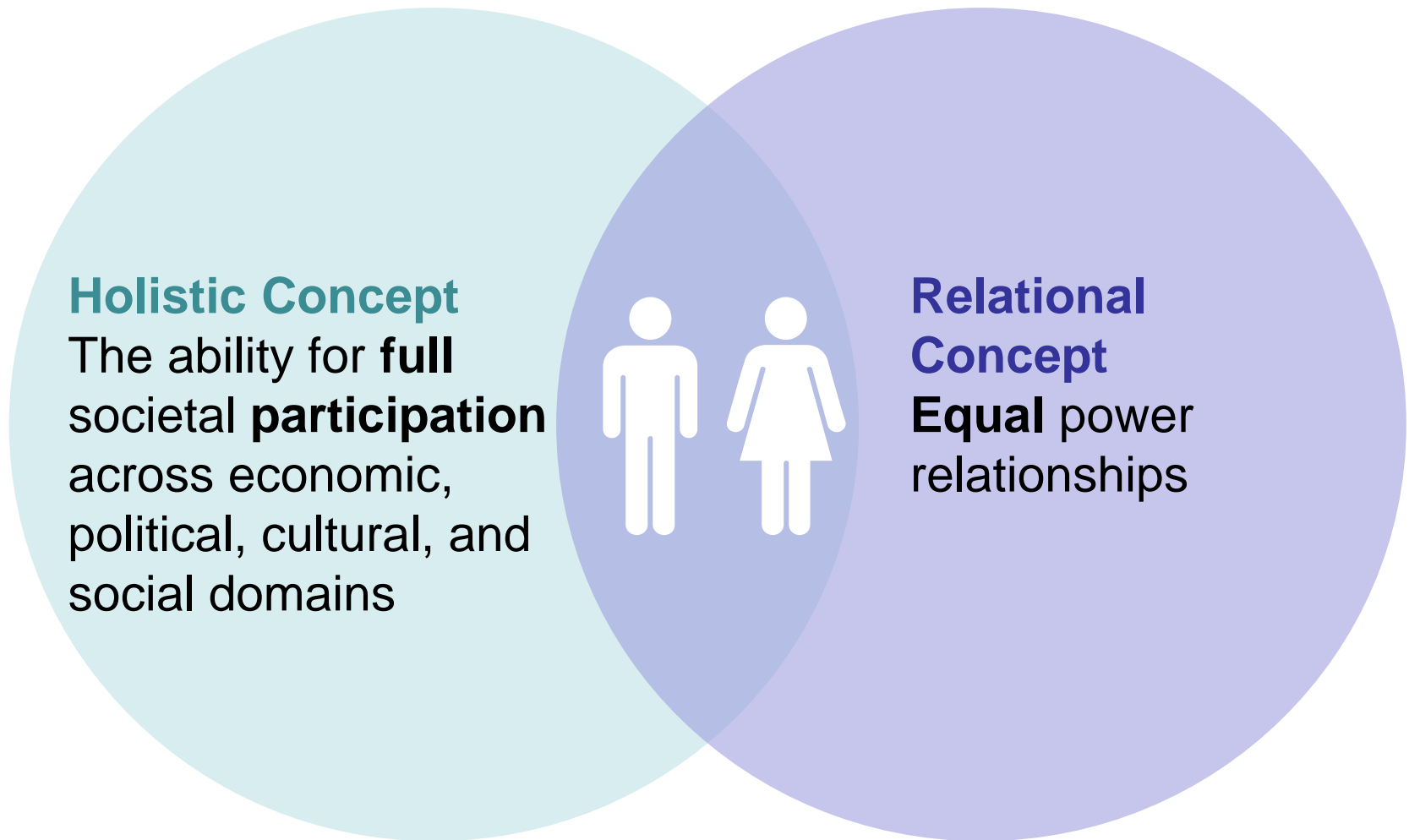


Conceptual Framework



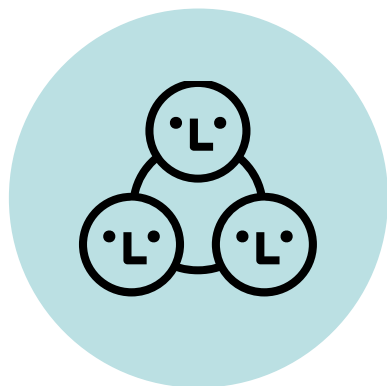
Solar, O., & Irwin, A. (2010). **A conceptual framework for action on the social determinants of health: Social determinants of health discussion paper 2.** Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization Press.

Social Integration = Equity in Health and Well-Being



Popay, J., Escorel, S., Hernandez, M., Johnston, H., Mathieson, J., & Rispel, L. (2008). **Understanding and tackling social exclusion: Final report to the WHO commission on social determinants of health from the social exclusion knowledge network.**

Methodology and Methods



Critical ethnography

- ❑ Understand “choices” given socioeconomic context



Ten months

- ❑ Nine participants



Biweekly informal interviews

- ❑ Location chosen by participants
- ❑ No car
- ❑ 119 interviews

Baseline Demographics

Age

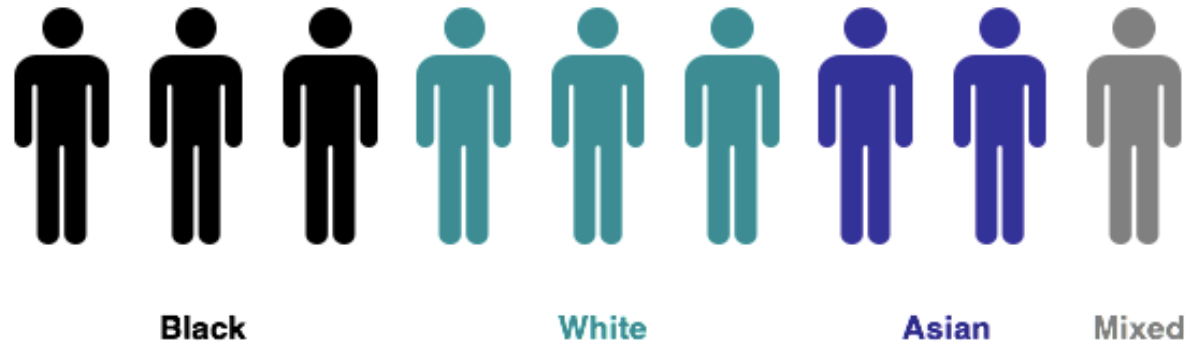


Sex



Baseline Demographics

Race



Education



Baseline Demographics

Sexuality

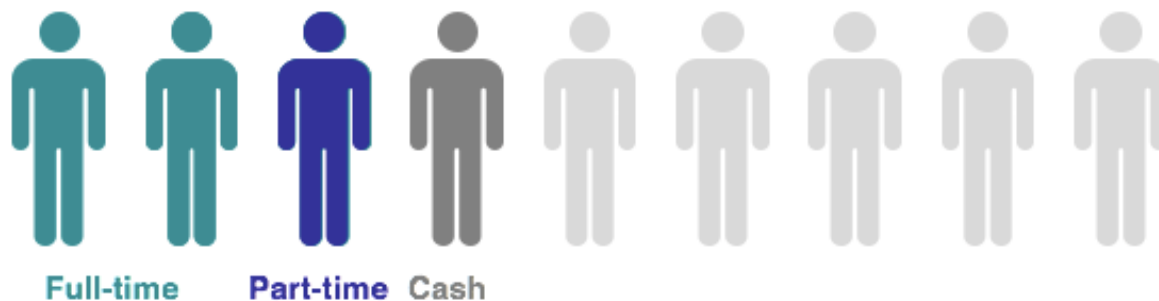


Child Welfare



Baseline Demographics

Employment



Welfare Subsidies



Key Findings

Precarity

Identity

Mastery and Control

Chronic Precarity

I'm tired of the struggle...the struggle. I'm looking at my paycheck...this lady is telling me I'm only going to get \$8.00 from welfare [because of claw backs related to employment income] and that stresses you out. I'm only getting \$8.00 from welfare so now I'm already worrying about January and December. It's just a stressful thing to wake up every day and you know...It blocks off me wanting to go to work, it blocks off me wanting to hang out with people. It's not really a depression state...I just get very introverted. And it sucks because you can't be like that. You have to be professional and go to work. It's easier said than done.

~ Phoenix (Month Nine)

Chronic Precarity

Financial Inequities

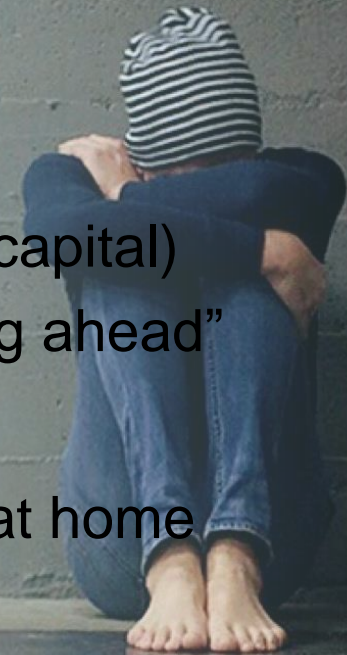
- ❑ Most had income of \$7,872.00/year (LICO \$20,160)
- ❑ Dead end jobs
- ❑ Welfare claw backs

Social Inequities

- ❑ Inadequate mainstream connections (social capital)
- ❑ Limited knowledge re: “getting by” vs. “getting ahead”

Age-based Inequities

- ❑ 63% of Canadian youth (20 – 24 years) live at home



Statistics Canada. (2016). Young adults living with their parents in Canada in 2016.

Identity Evolution

The thing is, adversity and poverty breed tremendous inner strength and maturity, and also a lot of creativity. But the outside world, they don't understand what comes out of hardship. They don't understand it's surviving through hardship and developing resiliency, that's really the part of it that's interesting...that's something that you should try to revive in your own life.

~ Phillip (Month Nine)

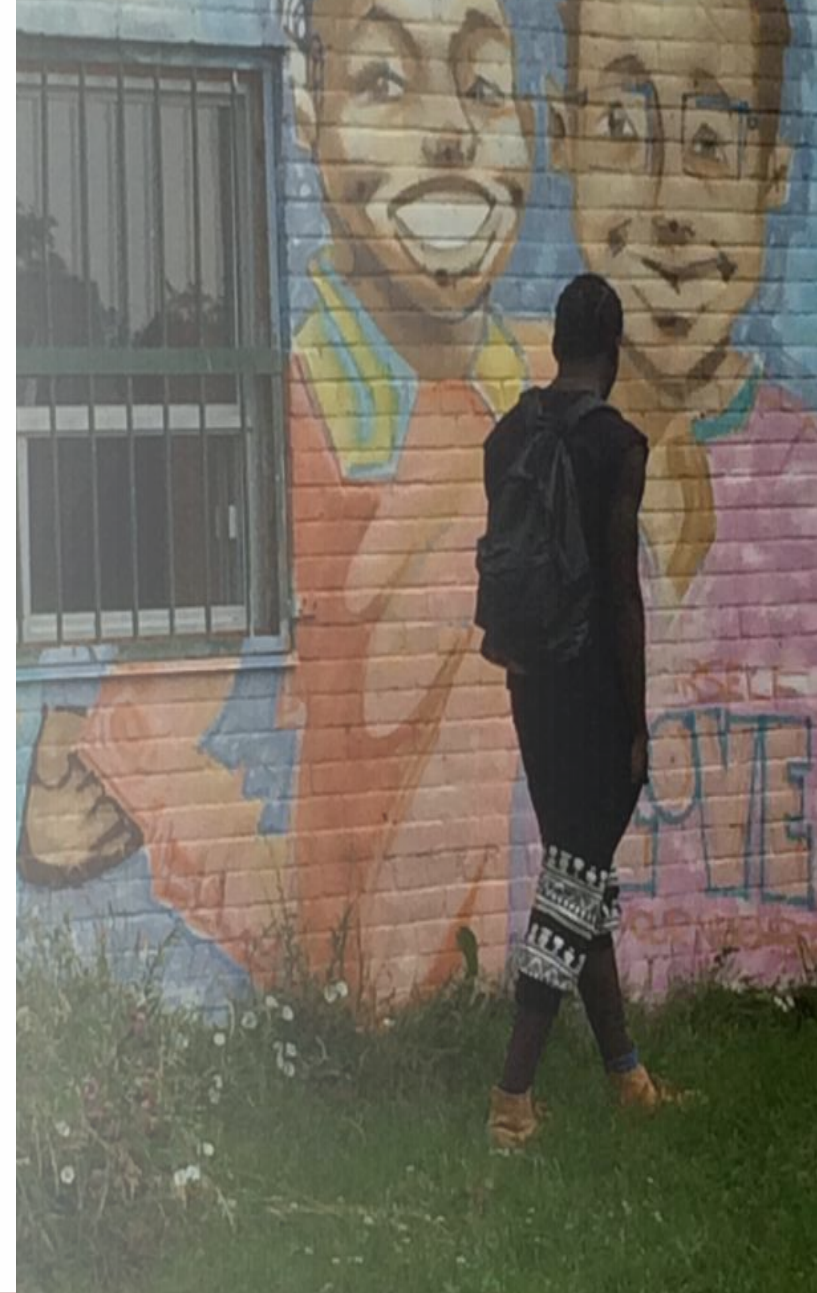
Identity Evolution

Shift in Place = Shift in Identity

- ❑ Home a marker of success
- ❑ Aware of societal discourse re: homeless people
- ❑ Supports embedded in homeless sector (old identities)

Emerging Adulthood

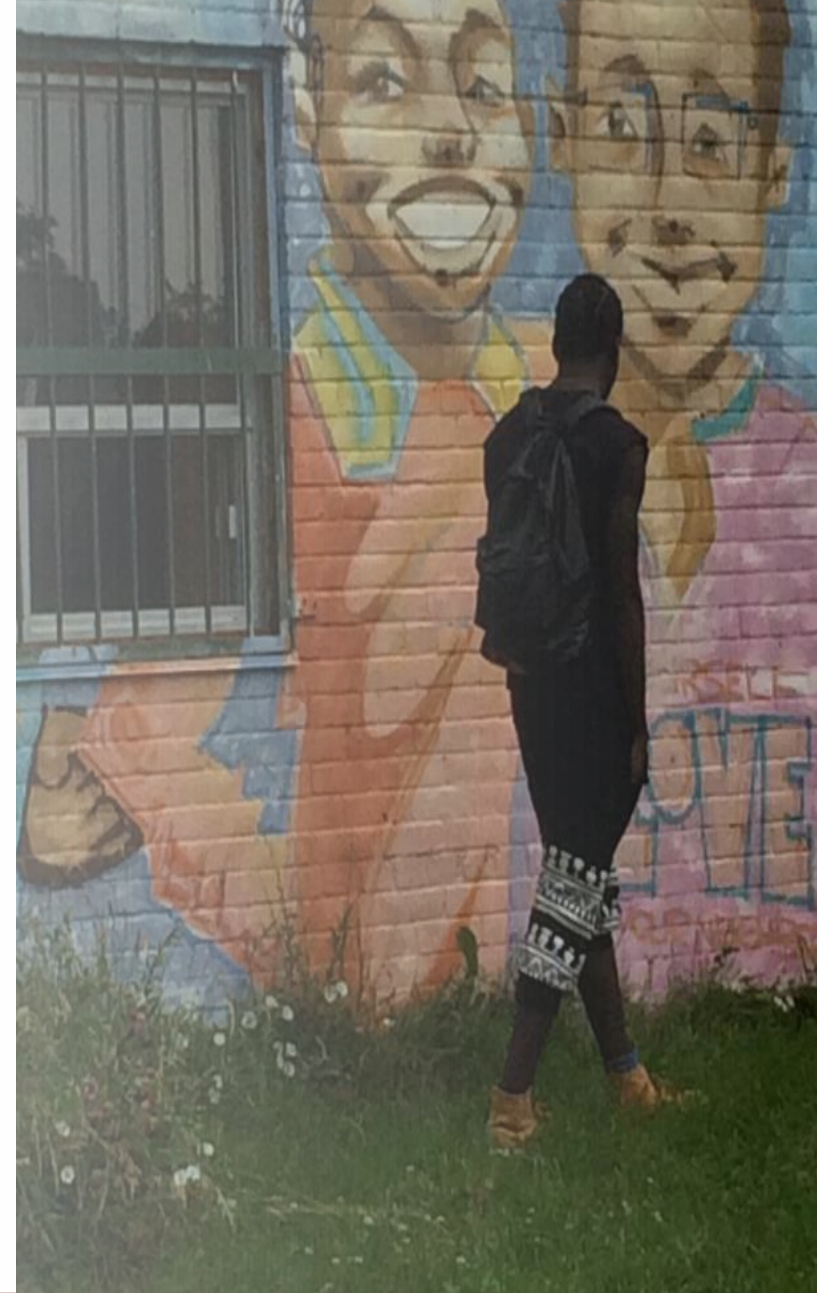
- ❑ Wanted to be seen as independent, responsible, and competent young adults
- ❑ Working through other identity-related issues (e.g., sexual orientation and race)



Identity Evolution

Fragile Identities

- ❑ Linked to tangibles (e.g., housing)
 - could lose at any time
- ❑ Limited intangible assets (e.g., sense of purpose and control, self-efficacy and self-esteem)
 - eroded over time
- ❑ Not confident in education (streamlined and poor grades)



Mastery and Control Undermined

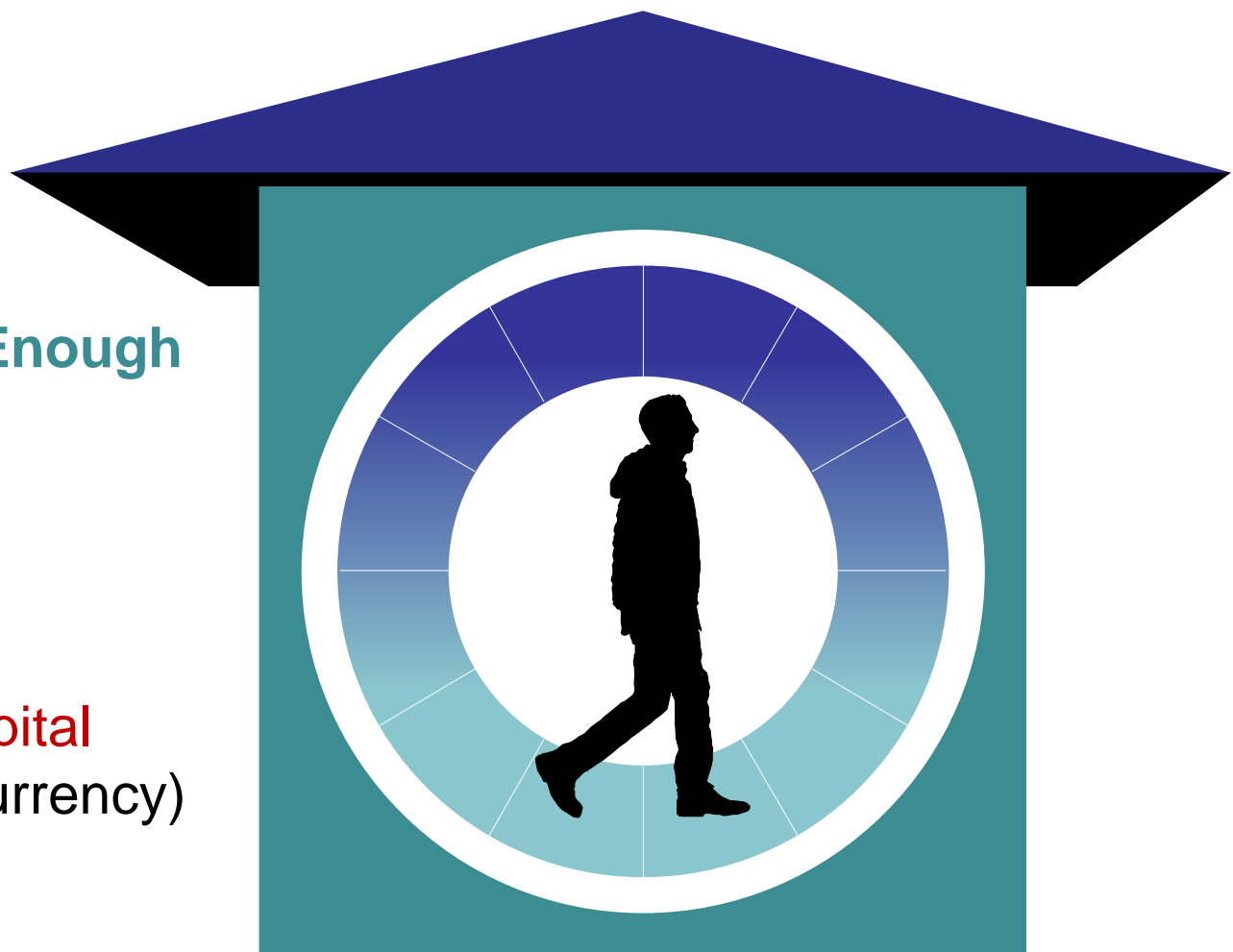
I just live day to day. Now I live day to day. My situation doesn't make it possible to think far ahead...it doesn't work now...something always comes up that I need to pay for.

~ Ashley (Month Seven)

Mastery and Control Undermined

Determination Not Enough

- ❑ Stuck/spinning – lack of purpose
- ❑ Chronic precarity exhausting
- ❑ Limited **identity capital** (self-concept as currency)



Côté, J.E. (2016). **The identity capital model: A handbook of theory, methods, and findings.** Unpublished manuscript, Department of Sociology, The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada.

Mastery and Control Undermined

Poverty as Identity

- ❑ Inadequate consumers

Still the “Other”

- ❑ Inequitable life chances magnified

Life as a “Game of Chance”

- ❑ Focus on short-term survival
- ❑ Less sense of control over long-term outcomes

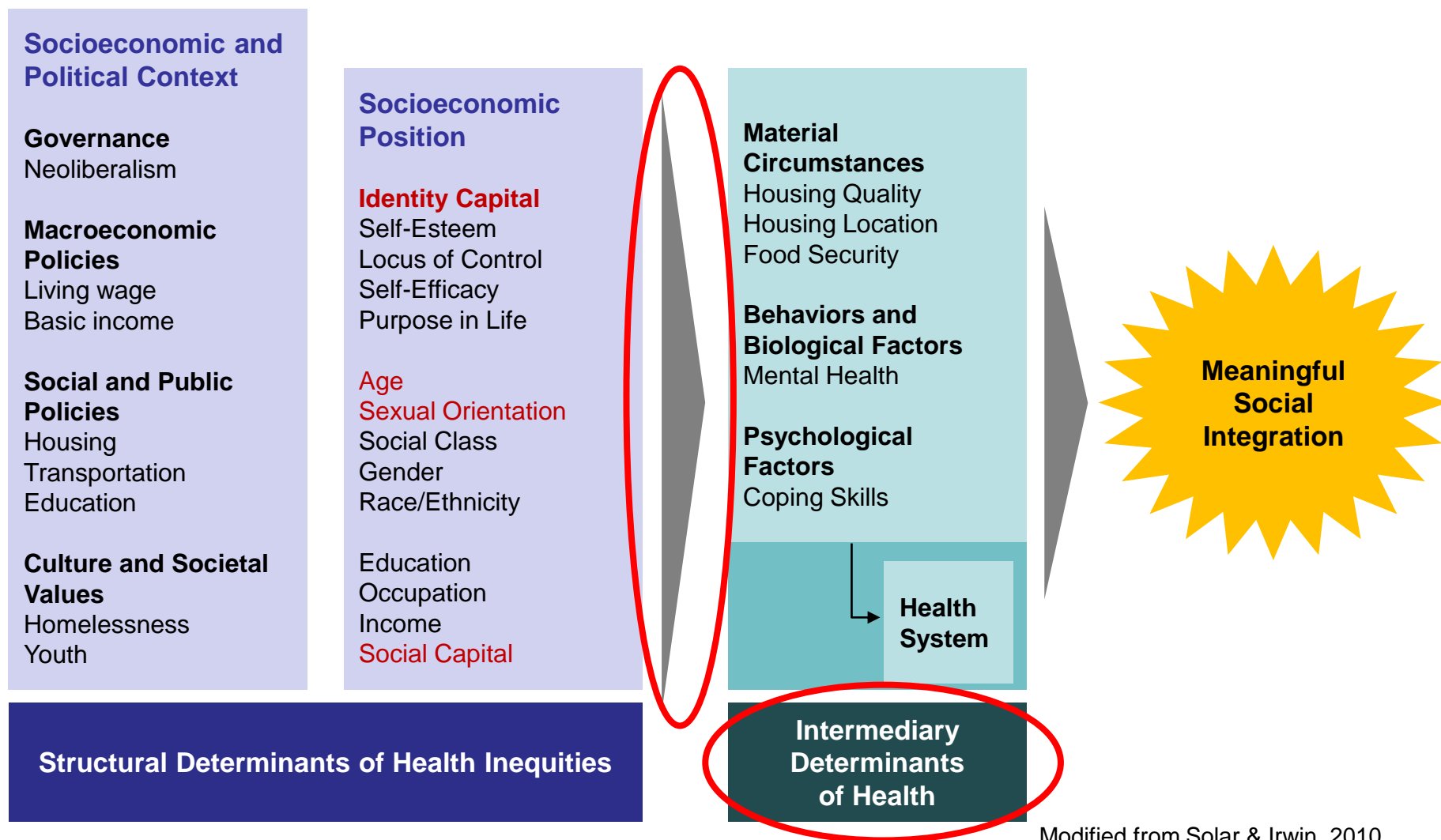


Conceptual Framework and Implications

New Framework

Implications: Practice-Policy-Research

Social Integration Framework for Homeless Youth



Modified from Solar & Irwin, 2010

Implications: Practice

- ❑ Incorporate teaching re: identity capital into staff training
- ❑ Decentralize outreach services to less stigmatizing locations
- ❑ Develop programs that foster social capital
- ❑ Re-define success – much more than “no longer homeless”
- ❑ Be transparent with youth about likelihood of escaping poverty with limited education and/or skills training

Implications: Policy

- ❑ More affordable and better quality housing
- ❑ Consider providing a basic income for low-income youth living independently
- ❑ Provide free tuition plus living expenses for post-secondary education and training with no welfare “claw backs”
- ❑ Adopt a broader perspective to ending homelessness – the provision of a home alone will not end homelessness

Implications: Research

- ❑ Define and measure social integration holistically – include economic participation
- ❑ Implement more longitudinal studies – highlights “real world” challenges to social integration
- ❑ Conduct more qualitative studies so we can design youth-informed interventions and have youth-informed public policies
- ❑ Consider integration as a primary outcome measure in intervention studies with homeless youth (none to date)

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