A right to inclusion? Homelessness, human rights and social exclusion

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Homeless people are often considered the quintessential example of a group 'excluded' from contemporary western societies (Mullins, Western and Broadbent 2001; Paugam 1999; Pleace 1998; Commission on the European Communities 1992, 32). It has been noted, however, that not all homeless people suffer from social exclusion (Tosi 1999). Those who do are characterised by an absence of social ties and a lifestyle of 'lack': lack of work, money, family, home, participation and so on (Soulet 1999).

Clearly, there is a correlation between social exclusion and lack of access to fundamental human rights. It is well-established that homeless people experience human rights abuses on a daily basis; in particular, they are denied the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to freedom from discrimination, the right to social security, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to participate in political processes and the right to equality before the law (Lynch 2005a; Sackville 2005; Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic et al 2003; Otto 2002; Goldie 1999).

However, having established this link, it is not necessarily self-evident that the mere creation of rights for homeless people would solve the problem of their exclusion. Indeed, the results of a survey reported on here may suggest that homelessness service providers locate the cause of, and solutions for, the problem of homeless persons' social exclusion elsewhere.

This article will explore the relationship between social exclusion and rights violations in the context of homelessness. It will be concluded, in view of the results of a survey, that homelessness service providers in Queensland may believe that a rights-based approach alone will not guarantee either social inclusion or a realisation by homeless people of their human rights. An examination of social exclusion theory will then be engaged in, in the hope that it might offer alternative suggestions on how the social inclusion of homeless people could be enhanced. It will be argued that although it appears that social exclusion theorists diverge in their characterisation of the causes of and solutions for social exclusion, three conceptions may be gleaned from the

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broader literature, drawing particularly on the work of Ruth Levitas (1998) and Hilary Silver (1994). These three conceptions will be applied to the problem of homeless persons' social exclusion, and it will be found that each of these conceptions offers suggestions (some practicable, others impracticable) for reform.

Homelessness and human rights in the literature

It is widely acknowledged that homeless people in Australia are routinely denied fundamental human rights (see, for example, Sackville 2005; Lynch 2005a; Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic et al 2004; Goldie 2002). Over 14,000 people in Australia sleep on the streets, in parks, in squats or in improvised dwellings such as cars or railway carriages; a further 37,000 people live in hostels, shelters and boarding houses (Chamberlain 2003, 2). Further to this, over 200,000 people are on public housing waiting lists throughout Australia (ABS 2005). Clearly, homeless persons' lack of conventional shelter evidences the fact that their right to an adequate standard of living, including housing, recognised in Art 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), is not being respected.

In addition, homeless people are denied a number of other fundamental civil, political and social rights. For example, it has been established that homeless persons' right to freedom from discrimination, recognised by Art 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), is routinely encroached upon (Lynch 2005a; Lynch and Stagoll 2002). Their right to equality before the law, enshrined in Art 14 of the ICCPR, is also infringed by the selective enforcement of public space laws against them and the imposition of penalties for minor offending behaviour that is directly related to their state of homelessness (such as sleeping out, storing belongings in public and urinating in public) (Walsh 2004a).

The right to social security, recognised in Art 9 of the ICESCR, is often not afforded to homeless people because they are unable to obtain documentation proving their identity, and/or because they are unable to meet mutual obligation requirements (Walsh 2005a; Parkinson and Horn 2002). Further, since social security benefits in Australia are pegged at levels well below the poverty line, it might reasonably be said that even those homeless people who are able to access social security benefits are, in effect, having their right to social security denied them (see Walsh 2005a; Walsh 2003a).

Homeless people are also routinely denied the right to participate in political processes, enshrined in Art 25 of the ICCPR. Due to their lack of access to a fixed

address, they experience difficulty in being registered on the electoral roll, and due to their lack of access to mainstream media, their capacity to engage in free political communication is limited (Walsh and Klease 2004; Harrison and Lynch 2002).

Another human right that homeless people often do not enjoy is the right to the highest attainable standard of health, enshrined in Art 12 of the ICESCR. Homeless people are more likely than the remainder of the population to suffer from a wide range of physical illnesses, including asthma, pneumonia, gastrointestinal illnesses and skin conditions (Kermode et al 1998). They are also more likely to suffer from mental illness and psychological distress (Social Exclusion Unit 1998; Kermode et al 1998). Further, homeless people generally lack access to health-care services, particularly those that offer treatment for mental illness (Gleeson 2000).

A rights-based analysis of homelessness would suggest that the creation of additional legal rights, or rights enforcement mechanisms, for the homeless would redress their social exclusion. However, the results of the empirical research reported on here suggest that homelessness service providers may believe that rights alone will not guarantee the social inclusion of their homeless clients.

Homeless service providers' views on homelessness, human rights and social exclusion

In late 2004, a survey of homelessness service providers was undertaken in Queensland which was aimed (in part)[1] at exploring the relationship between the human rights violations faced by homeless people and their social exclusion.

Surveys were sent to all services in Queensland funded under the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP),[2] the Community Rent Scheme

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1   The study reported on here was part of a broader research project on the subject of homelessness and the law. See also Walsh 2005b.

2   SAAP is a consolidation of Commonwealth and state programs aimed at providing accommodation and support services to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. SAAP services include emergency accommodation facilities, hostels, refuges and soup kitchens. Around 1200 organisations are funded nationally under SAAP.

(CRS)[3] and the boarding house program[4] — a total of 227 organisations. Service providers were selected as the target group for this survey for two main reasons. First, surveying service providers rather than homeless people themselves allowed for a broader range of experiences to be canvassed: homeless individuals would only have been able to report on their own experiences, while service providers were able to comment on the experiences of a larger sample of individuals. Second, surveying service providers is methodologically less problematic, since homeless people are generally occupied with more pressing concerns than responding to surveys.

The survey instrument required respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following statements:

1. 'Homeless people have the same rights as the rest of the population.'
2. 'Homeless people are excluded from society.'

Possible responses ranged from 'strongly agree' through to 'strongly disagree'. Space was also provided for qualitative remarks to be recorded.

In total, 264 responses were received; thus, on average, at least one response was obtained from each service surveyed. Together, the respondents indicated that they serviced a total of 2156 homeless people per day, an average of just over nine clients per worker per day. Respondents worked in a range of homelessness services, including services targeted at young people; women and children; men; and Indigenous people. A representative spread in terms of service location was also achieved.

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3   The CRS in Queensland provides funds to community organisations to provide short- to medium-term accommodation to public housing applicants who are in immediate and desperate need of housing. There are 24 CRS services in Queensland.

4   The state-funded boarding-house program in Queensland enables community organisations and local governments to establish boarding houses as a short-, medium- or long-term housing option for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. There are eight boarding house managers whose services are funded under the Queensland boarding house program.

Findings

Table 1: Quantitative survey results

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
'Homeless people have the same rights as the rest of the population.'	56%	14%	6%	14%	11%
'Homeless people are excluded from society.'	38%	42%	12%	7%	1%

The hypothesis for this study was that service providers would agree that homeless people are excluded, and disagree that homeless people have the same rights as the rest of the population. That is, it was expected that the link between exclusion and rights would be confirmed by the respondents. As may be seen from Table 1, the vast majority (80 per cent) of homelessness service providers agreed that homeless people are excluded from society. Yet, a majority (70 per cent) of service providers also agreed that homeless people have the same rights as the remainder of the population.

This result may appear contradictory at first glance. However, the qualitative comments of respondents shed some light on respondents' reasoning. Many respondents remarked that homeless people do have the same rights, but they have difficulty exercising them. They said that homeless persons' inability to exercise their rights is the result of their social exclusion rather than its cause. A number of respondents commented that homeless people lack access to the legal advice and representation that is necessary to ensure their rights are enforced. These respondents concluded that if homeless persons' social exclusion was addressed, they would be more capable of enjoying their rights.

Further, some respondents said that homeless people have the same rights as the remainder of the population, but they do not know what those rights are. Respondents attributed this lack of knowledge to homeless persons' social exclusion — in particular, their exclusion and alienation from the 'justice' system, thus implying that if homeless persons' social exclusion was addressed, they would be more likely to know what their rights were, and thus more able to enjoy them.

Some interesting differences were observed between population groups. Respondents who worked for services targeted at Indigenous people were significantly more likely than other respondents to agree that homeless people are

excluded from society. Respondents who worked for services targeted at young people were also more likely to agree with this statement, although this trend was not statistically significant. Conversely, respondents who worked for services targeted at women and children (that is, domestic violence services) were significantly less likely to agree that homeless people were excluded from society, and were more likely to agree that homeless people have the same rights as other members of the population. No significant differences were observed on the basis of service location.

The results of this survey seem to suggest that the majority of homelessness service providers in Queensland may consider rights abuses to be merely one facet of the broader problem of social inclusion, rather than its central cause. If this appraisal of the relationship between rights abuses and social exclusion is accepted, it would follow that the creation of additional legal rights (through, for example, the incorporation of certain human rights into domestic legislation) may not solve the problem of homeless persons' social exclusion. This may be because homeless people lack the means, and often the energy, required to enforce their rights, and because often they have no way of identifying what rights they are entitled to. It is suggested, therefore, that an alternative to a rights-based response to social exclusion be sought.

Thus, we turn to social exclusion theory in the hope that it may offer more holistic suggestions on how the problem of social exclusion might be addressed.

Social exclusion theory: three paradigms

The value of theory is that it offers explanations as to the state of things and, more importantly, potential solutions for dealing with the problems it identifies. Social exclusion theory is one conceptual framework that may inform our efforts to address certain aspects of marginalisation.

The concept of social exclusion has been discussed widely in the literature, particularly over the last 10 to 20 years (see, for example, Social Exclusion Unit 2001; Saunders and Tsumori 2002; Whiteford 2001; Goodlad 1999; Peace 2001; Levitas 1998; Silver 1994). Various authors have described it as an elusive, vague, problematic term, particularly difficult to define, and ultimately an 'essentially contested subject' (Silver 1994, 540; see also Levitas 1998; Peace 2001; Anderson 1997). Yet, a comprehensive review of the literature demonstrates that there is general agreement on what the term represents at its most basic level. At bottom, social exclusion refers to the process, and the state, of being excluded from economic, social and political life. That is, it is argued that a privileged, powerful majority is acting in such a way

that a disadvantaged minority is being forced into society's margins: the result is a polarisation between these two groups. Being shut out of society is evidenced by a range of indices of marginalisation, including lack of education; lack of housing; lack of income; lack of family and social support; and unemployment (Bradshaw et al 2004; Goodlad 1999; Soulet 1999).

Although there is general agreement on the basic definition of social exclusion, commentators differ substantially in their views on its causes and on possible solutions for it. Two key theorists, Ruth Levitas (1998) and Hilary Silver (1994), argue that all of these different ideological viewpoints may be distilled into three social exclusion discourses or paradigms. Ruth Levitas argues that there are three ideal-type social exclusion discourses, which she terms the 'redistributionist', 'social integrationist' and 'moral underclass' discourses. Hilary Silver puts forward an alternative tripartite conception of social exclusion; her paradigms are entitled the 'monopoly', 'specialisation' and 'solidarity' paradigms.

It will be argued here that there are significant overlaps between Levitas's and Silver's conceptions of social exclusion theory. Indeed, it will be submitted that they have devised parallel paradigms/discourses, although neither states this to be the case (see Table 2).[5] Further, it will be confirmed that the three conceptions that they advance are reflected in the broader literature on social exclusion, from both Australia and around the world.

Redistributionist discourse/monopoly paradigm ('welfare conception')

Levitas's redistributionist discourse presents social exclusion as the result of material deprivation, due to the denial or non-realisation of citizenship or participatory rights. Proponents of this discourse argue that the only way to facilitate the sociopolitical participation of the excluded is through universal welfare, including both income support and the provision of core social services (Levitas 1998, 9–13).

Silver's monopoly paradigm proposes that social exclusion is the result of an interplay between class, status and political power. The majority class, characterised by its monopoly over scarce resources, excludes others at will, and inequality is

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5   Levitas (1998) notes that Silver has linked Durkheim's understanding of society to social exclusion (6) and comments in passing (22) that Silver misreads Durkheim by failing to identify the importance he places on work to social solidarity. And, Silver (1994) acknowledges (554) that underclass theories may fall within her solidarity paradigm. Otherwise, their writings do not expressly intersect.

perpetuated through society's major institutions. It is argued that inclusion can only be brought about by facilitating the full participation and citizenship of the excluded group, and that such equality is only possible through the redistribution of resources via the welfare state (Silver 1994, 543).

Levitas's redistributionist discourse accords closely with Silver's monopoly paradigm: both attribute exclusion to material deprivation and inequality, and both claim that if social inclusion is to be fostered, inequality must be reversed through the provision of benefits and social services. Both Levitas and Silver draw on the work of T H Marshall (1950) in their capitulations on this discourse/paradigm; Marshall argued that inequality was based on class, and that it could only be abated through the provision of social citizenship rights through welfare (see also Walsh and Klease 2004). This discourse/paradigm locates the cause and the solution of social exclusion in the welfare state. For this reason, this discourse/paradigm will hereafter be referred to as the 'welfare conception'.

The welfare conception of social exclusion is reflected widely in the broader literature. It is commonly argued that social exclusion has to an extent supplanted the concept of poverty, broadening the notion of social disadvantage to encompass themes such as marginalisation and participation (Peace 2001; Zappala, Green and Parker 2000; Duffy 1999; Soulet 1999; Bittman 1998). Many commentators have argued that participation in certain activities in sociopolitical life is necessary for an individual to be considered 'included' in a society, and that a certain level of material resources is required to enable this accepted level of participation to occur (Zappala, Green and Parker 2000; Bittman 1998). As Levitas identifies, Townsend's (1979) conception of poverty is often considered to be a key source of modern social exclusion theory. Townsend defines poverty as relative deprivation; he argues that a certain level of resources is required to achieve a particular standard of living, and if this cannot be attained, the individual or family concerned will be forced to withdraw from ordinary social life (Townsend 1979, 31). Further, many commentators have concurred with the Marshallian view that social exclusion is essentially concerned with exclusion from the benefits of citizenship; many have argued, along with Levitas and Silver, that individuals who are disadvantaged to the point that they are unable to participate in economic, social and political life are effectively disenfranchised citizens (Walsh and Klease 2004; Whiteford 2001; Goodlad 1999; Dahrendorf 1985).

Thus, Levitas, Silver and the broader literature demonstrate that social exclusion is commonly attributed to relative deprivation caused by deficiencies in the welfare state. One possible solution for social exclusion put forward in the literature, therefore, is that the excluded be provided with a sufficient level of material

resources, either through income support benefits or adequate social service provision, to enable them to participate in economic, social and political life.

Social integrationist discourse/specialisation paradigm ('labour market conception')

Levitas's social integrationist discourse presents social exclusion as the result of a breakdown in social solidarity, attributed mainly to unemployment. On Levitas's analysis, this discourse is based on Durkheimian theory, which holds that social, cultural and moral ties bind individuals together, creating social cohesion. According to this discourse, the most important of these ties is participation in paid employment; that is, it is argued that moral integration is achieved through work. If a person does not participate in the labour market, moral integration breaks down, and that person is excluded from society. Under this paradigm, it is said that policy responses to social exclusion should focus on committing welfare funds to labour market programs aimed at encouraging paid employment, rather than merely supplying the excluded with 'handouts'.

Similarly, Silver's specialisation paradigm considers social exclusion to be the result of social differentiation, brought about by the economic division of labour. The argument is that the division of labour results in the creation of distinct social spheres, and people are unable to move freely between these different spheres. This eventuates in discrimination by social groups against individuals who are not included in its membership — for example, welfare recipients are stigmatised as unworthy recipients of government 'handouts'. It is argued that to facilitate inclusion, people must be able to move freely between social spheres; that is, inclusion is brought about through exchange (Silver 1994, 542–43).

Levitas's social integrationist discourse and Silver's specialisation paradigm both attribute social exclusion to non-participation in the labour market. While recognising that employment is not the only means of promoting social integration, they both state that unemployment results in discrimination and isolation from mainstream social groups, and that social inclusion will best be promoted if exchange between these groups is made possible.[6] Since this discourse/paradigm locates the cause of and the solution to social exclusion primarily in labour market participation, it will hereafter be termed the 'labour market conception'.

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6   What is missing from this analysis, of course, is a broader consideration of 'relational' exclusion, including the fact that the loneliness and isolation experienced by many 'excluded' people is a result of dysfunctional familial and other relationships; see Robinson 2004.

The labour market conception of social exclusion is also reflected in the broader literature. Various commentators have noted that the labour market provides a, if not *the*, key means of integration in Western societies (see, for example, Peace 2001; Duffy 1999; Social Exclusion Unit 2004). It has been said that paid work operates to create social cohesion not only because participation in the labour market is expected and 'normalised' in Western capitalist societies, but also because it allows for 'normal' socioeconomic activities to be performed — such as consumption, production and the accumulation of capital — and because it facilitates 'normal' social interactions and groupings (Dutton 2005; Social Exclusion Unit 2004; Peace 1999).

One Australian empirical study has found that a correlation exists between employment status and social exclusion (Mullins and Western 2001). The United Kingdom's Social Exclusion Unit has concluded that labour market factors drive social exclusion more than any other factor (Bradshaw et al 2004, 11; Hasluck and Green 2004). And research in Europe has found that instability in an individual's working life is associated with a weakening in social links (Paugam 1999). Also, it has been argued that state welfare spending reproduces social exclusion rather than abolishing it, and that the focus of social welfare policy should be on 'getting more welfare claimants into work', rather than providing them with 'handouts' (Saunders and Tsumori 2002). All of these findings present non-participation in the labour market as a cause of social exclusion, and suggest the promotion of employment to be a potential solution to social exclusion, in accordance with Levitas's and Silver's premises.

Moral underclass discourse/solidarity paradigm ('underclass conception')

Levitas's moral underclass discourse states that those who suffer from social exclusion make up an 'underclass' characterised by 'welfare dependency', criminal activity, moral ambiguity and low educational attainment. The excluded are depicted as suffering from a pathological moral and/or psychological condition resulting from a failure of socialisation, particularly in relation to paid work and marriage. The focus of this discourse is on the moral and cultural characteristics of the excluded, rather than the structural causes of exclusion, such that their exclusion is presented as a choice on their part rather than a product of circumstance.

Silver's solidarity paradigm is said to be based on Durkheimian notions of collective conscience and social solidarity. Under this paradigm, social exclusion is considered to be the result of a breakdown in social ties between the individual and society. The excluded group is said to have rejected the collective values of the common conscience. This failure to assimilate into the dominant culture results in their anomie and a reputation for 'deviance'. Under this paradigm, the excluded are said to be in need of moral reintegration if social cohesion is to be restored.

Levitas's moral underclass discourse is, in essentials, almost identical to Silver's solidarity paradigm. Both theorists state that social exclusion is characterised by moral condemnation of the 'deviant' excluded, and can only be solved if they are morally and culturally 're-educated' — for example, through punitive measures. Since in this discourse/paradigm both theorists attribute, and limit, social exclusion to the existence of an amoral, criminal underclass, this conception will hereafter be termed the 'underclass conception'.

The conception is most readily located in political debates and mainstream media discussion, and has been widely criticised in the literature. The notion that social exclusion results from the moral failure of the individual seems popular within the community, and it is often adopted by conservative politicians as a means of justifying residual welfare (Watts 1996). In Australia, the idleness, precarious moral status and fraudulent tendencies of the excluded are commonly cited by the federal government to justify the expansion of mutual obligation requirements and other residual welfare initiatives (see, for example, Dutton and Hockey 2005). Ultimately, blame falls on the excluded themselves, who are said to have failed to *include themselves* in social life.

Many commentators have demonstrated that this conception is predicated on prejudice, labelling and victim-blaming, and, for this reason, its credibility has been questioned (Watts 1996; Whiteford 2001; Paugam 1999). Yet, this interpretation of the causes of, and potential solutions for, social exclusion is alive and well in popular discourse.

Table 2: Silver's and Levitas's conceptions of social exclusion compared

	Welfare conception	Labour market conception	Underclass conception
Corresponding Silver paradigm	Monopoly paradigm	Specialisation paradigm	Solidarity paradigm
Corresponding Levitas discourse	Redistributionist discourse	Social integrationist discourse	Moral underclass discourse
Cause of social exclusion	Income inequality; relative deprivation of the excluded group resulting in withdrawal from social life	Unemployment and resultant discrimination and disconnection from mainstream social groups	Pathologies inherent in the excluded, including idleness and moral ambivalence
Solution to social exclusion	Material support/ social service provision	Labour market programs	Socialisation and moral integration

Finding solutions to the problem of homeless persons' social exclusion

The conceptions of social exclusion outlined above each suggest reasons for the existence of social exclusion, as well as policy solutions to the problem in the context of homelessness.

Welfare conception

In the literature, the social exclusion of homeless people has frequently been attributed to their poverty, in accordance with the welfare conception of social exclusion (Talbot 2003; Soulet 1999; Duffy 1999; Tosi 1999). The most common explanation for homeless persons' forced withdrawal from society is their inability to afford the necessities of life, which in turn prevents them from participating in the economic, social and cultural life of the community. The vast majority (approximately 90 per cent) of homeless people in Australia rely on social security benefits as their sole source of income (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2005) and, since these benefits are pegged at levels well below the poverty line (Walsh 2005a), homeless people are unable to afford such basics as food, clothes and conventional shelter. Further, the level of assistance in the form of social service provision that is afforded to homeless people is woefully inadequate. Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP)[7] services are forced to turn away around one-third of those who approach them in need of assistance (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2004).

The welfare conception of social exclusion would suggest that if homeless people were provided with sufficient material resources, their social inclusion would be enhanced. It seems that there is some truth to this: if homeless people were provided with sufficient income support to enable them to afford their basic needs, their capacity to participate in social life would be greatly improved. However, in order to promote social inclusion, the level of support provided to them would have to be sufficient to enable them to participate at the same level as that of the majority — that is, they would have to achieve the same standard of living as that which prevails in the wider community (Bittman 1998; McHugh 1999; Whiteford 2001). The support provided would have to allow for them to engage in mainstream leisure activities, many of which involve the consumption of goods and services (see Bittman 1998; Whiteford 2001). It would have to facilitate their participation in political life, which would involve having access to mainstream media, including the internet (Zappala, Green and Parker 2000). It would also need to be sufficient to allow for equal access to health care, including mental health care, as well as legal assistance and other core social services.

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7   See above, note 2.

Thus, the welfare conception of social exclusion may provide a more holistic alternative to a rights-based solution to the problem of homeless persons' social exclusion, suggesting that substantial changes to welfare and social service provision would be required to facilitate their participation in social life.

Labour market conception

The labour market conception of social exclusion suggests that a key means of alleviating the problem of social exclusion is to promote labour market participation among the excluded. In relation to the exclusion of homeless people, it would therefore be argued that policy initiatives should focus on ensuring that homeless people are gainfully employed.

It is true that the vast majority of homeless people are unemployed. Only 3 per cent of homeless people in Australia report being employed on a full-time basis; a further 7 per cent report that they work part-time (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2005). However, the capacity for employment to address homeless persons' social exclusion may be limited.

Over 60 per cent of homeless people accessing SAAP services report that they are not in the labour force (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2005). Homeless persons' prospects of obtaining employment are extremely limited for a number of reasons. First, their lifestyle generally does not permit them to obtain or retain a job (Robinson 2004). They are often unable to get a good night's sleep, have a clean shower or keep to a timed schedule. Second, they do not have access to the resources required to prepare a résumé, and many are unable to access essential documentation such as proof of identity (Gaetz 2004). Third, their lack of a fixed address and lack of access to a telephone further compound their difficulties in entering the labour force, as they cannot easily be contacted by potential employers (Forell, McCarron and Schetzer 2005). Fourth, many homeless people suffer from severe mental illness, which significantly impedes their capacity to obtain, and retain, a job (Lynch 2005b). Thus, while employment may have the capacity to address various aspects of social exclusion, for many homeless people it is not a realistic option.

Having said this, for those 30 per cent of homeless people who are unemployed and are seeking employment (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2005), finding and keeping a job may indeed have the potential to facilitate their inclusion in social life. Employment has the potential to address the problem of homeless jobseekers' exclusion in three key ways.

First, employment provides workers with both formal and informal social networks

that can serve as a source of personal support. Formal associations, such as industry associations and trade unions, provide workers with many forms of practical and legal assistance, as well as facilitating social and professional networks. Further, relationships with co-workers often facilitate social interactions outside the workplace (Baron 2001). The vast majority of homeless people do not have access to these support systems, and this may indeed contribute to their social exclusion.

Second, employment has the capacity to reduce the level of discrimination suffered by homeless people. Homeless people are often denigrated for being 'idle', 'dole-bludgers' and 'welfare cheats' (Walsh 2003b; Talbot 2003; Baron 2001); lack of employment is a key source of discrimination against homeless people. Addressing this discrimination might go some way towards achieving increased social inclusion for homeless people (Lynch 2005a).

Third, employment often provides people with financial benefits. If homeless jobseekers were able to obtain employment, it is possible that they would no longer suffer from such extreme poverty, and thus their capacity to participate in social life would be increased. The federal government has recently boasted that average weekly earnings of employees in Australia have increased by around $100 in the last five years (see ABS 2005), which would seem to imply that those who are unemployed would be significantly better off financially were they able to secure employment. However, this claim must be treated with caution. The Australian Bureau of Statistics recently reported that the mean weekly income of low-income households is only around $270 (ABS 2005). This is significantly less than the poverty line, which for a couple with no children is currently at $426 (Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research 2005). Indeed, it has been found that the majority of low-income households spend around $100 per week in excess of their income (McCarthy and Wicks 2001). Thus, while employment may offer other benefits to homeless jobseekers in terms of social inclusion, it is possible that it might not provide them with sufficient income to facilitate participation in social life.

Underclass conception

The underclass conception would suggest that homeless persons' social exclusion is a result of their criminality, moral ambiguity and unwillingness to 'assimilate' into the dominant culture's institutions. Consistent with this viewpoint, homeless people are often presented in the popular media as being dangerous, irresponsible and amoral (see, for example, Weston 2005; Martin 1996). Current images of homeless people are generally condemnatory, and include 'lonely old drunk', 'metho'd out', 'vagrant', 'bizarrely dishevelled', 'drug taking', 'deranged' and 'beggar-predator' (Furlong 2001). There seems to be a general belief within the community that homeless people are

indeed to blame for their own plight — that it is their laziness, criminal tendencies and/or anti-social behaviour that have resulted in their social exclusion (Walsh 2003b).

However, the balance of opinion in the literature discredits this appraisal. It has been noted that homeless people are not characterised by distinct 'deviant' social attitudes; rather, most express a strong desire for the lifestyle experienced by the majority (Deacon, Vincent and Walker 1995). Further, the view that homeless people are part of a 'criminal class' has been contested. It is now well-established that much of the 'criminal' behaviour that homeless people engage in is trivial, does not pose a risk of harm to other community members and is often unavoidable. For example, homeless people are most often charged with minor summary offences as a result of their having to live out their lives in public space; by necessity, when homeless people sleep, urinate, defecate, store their belongings and drink alcohol, they must do so in public, and many of these things amount to criminal offences (Walsh 2004a). Some homeless people suffer from mental illness, and attract the attention of the criminal law as a result of behaviours associated with that illness (Lynch 2005b). Others are charged with petty theft for stealing food and other necessary items (Walsh 2005b).

Of course, since the offending behaviour of homeless people is generally unavoidable rather than reflecting deviant social attitudes, the imposition of penalties on homeless people with the goal of 'moral re-education' will not promote their social inclusion. Rather, it will serve only to further exclude them by promoting feelings of anger, injustice and disillusionment towards society's institutions (Gaetz 2004).

Conclusion

A rights-based approach to social exclusion would advocate that social inclusion can be brought about through the creation and enforcement of legal rights for the excluded. However, the results of a recent survey of Queensland's homelessness service providers demonstrate that they may be of the view that a rights-based approach may not, on its own, guarantee the social inclusion of homeless people.

Social exclusion theory offers a number of plausible (and less plausible) alternatives to address the problem of homeless persons' social exclusion. The three main conceptions of social exclusion expounded by two key theorists, Levitas and Silver, suggest that the problem could be addressed through the provision of material resources, employment and/or moral re-education.[8] Some of these have merit: in

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8   Again, what is missing from these proposed 'solutions' to the problem of exclusion is a consideration
    of 'relational' factors contributing to exclusion; see Robinson 2004.

particular, increased income support and social service provision have the potential to address homeless persons' poverty and thus enable them to participate in mainstream social activities. Also, the provision of employment would offer some hope of social integration to those homeless people who are able to participate in the labour force.

Of course, the creation of legally enforceable rights is certainly consistent with a goal of social exclusion. Yet, social exclusion theory suggests that a holistic social policy response is required; a political decision must be made that the inclusion of socially excluded groups such as the homeless is a 'good' worth paying for. Until this happens, homeless people are not likely to realise their 'right' to inclusion. ●

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