

## **Care, Identity, Social Policy and Homelessness**

### **Author:**

Dr Chris Horsell (Flinders University)

### **Abstract**

Homelessness evokes a broad range of emotional responses often focusing on the concept of care. Drawing on research undertaken for a PhD on social inclusion, homelessness and the role of emotions in the construction of social policy this paper explores the pivotal role of care as an emotion in both constituting and being constitutive of relationships of power in social policy and service provision regarding homelessness. It argues that care, while a contested concept has historically and in contemporary neo-liberal rationalities informing social inclusion agendas, been concerned with caring for in ways implicitly based on expectations about lifestyle changes. However a concept of care that is more receptive to issues of difference and recognition can offer social policy a nuanced response to issues of social marginalisation, specifically in relation to homelessness.

### **Introduction**

In many European countries and Australia, throughout the late 1990s and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century social exclusion/inclusion emerged as a predominant social policy discourse (Askonsas 2000; Percy Smith 2001; Levitas 1996, 1998, 2004, 2005; Cappel and Verity 2014). Summarily, social inclusion was used as a policy response to groups who were perceived as socially excluded. The South Australian Labor Government that was elected in 2002, with Mike Rann as Premier, came to power with a commitment to pursue a social policy agenda that focused on social inclusion. The South Australian policy response was

initially directed towards addressing school retention, homelessness (rough sleeping) and substance abuse, an agenda which also partially informed the social inclusion agenda adopted by the national Labor Government when elected with Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister in 2007.

While social exclusion and social inclusion are contested terms and social inclusion can be credited with some significant successes in addressing social disadvantage and the development of 'joined up government' responses to social problems (Cappo & Verity 2014, pp. 27-29), findings from research undertaken as part of a PhD looking at the South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative response to homelessness 2002-2008, demonstrate significant limitations to social inclusion as a policy response to homelessness.

Conceptually and operationally, the discourse of social exclusion and social inclusion used by government policy bodies and service providers in the homeless sector in South Australia, and more recently by the national Labor Government on the national level, can be interpreted as informed by an uncritical acceptance of existing and normative social relations reinforced by neo-liberal rationalities, the latter being the outcome of specific social, economic and political processes (Horsell 2014). This has meant that policy narratives reinforcing these social relations have dominated discussion, giving limited space to addressing questions of redistribution and the role of emotions in the development of social policy including issues of recognition and voice.

### **Emotions and Social Policy**

Over the past several decades there has been a substantial literature that has highlighted the role of emotions in framing and organising everyday social roles, institutions and social policy (Patulney & Cortis 2012, p. 5). Theorists have begun to address the question concerning the role of social policy in attending to, not only material needs, but also the requirements for recognition of subjects' identities, of which emotion is a central component.

Over ten years ago, Paul Hoggett argued that it is critical to incorporate an understanding of the role and importance of emotion in social policy. Hoggett asserts that the embodied and emotional nature of the subject emerged as a key theme in sociology in the mid-1990s, which provided a counter to the overly rational account of the human subject that had dominated thinking for some thirty years prior. He also notes that traditional social policy has been premised on gendered and realised notions of the subject (Hoggett 2000, p. 141) and inadequate accounts of both the embodied and affective nature of human selfhood (Hoggett 2000, pp. 141-144).

Hoggett (2000) asserts that emotions are constitutive of, as they are constituted by, the social body. Building on this insight, scholars have in recent years begun to consider the role of emotions in inspiring and maintaining activism in social movements (Cvetkovic 2003; Flam & King 2005; Goodwin et al. 2001) and social policy (Hoggett 2000; Froggett 2002).

Much of the more recent literature on politics and activism highlights the critical role emotions play in framing policy issues, providing the motivation to engage in processes of social change and also in maintaining social divisions and othering processes (Goodwin et al. 2001; Flam & King 2005). In Australia for example papers a Special Issue of the Australian Journal of Social Issues deals with the central role the emotions play in social life and social policy (Patulney & Cortis 2012, p. 5).

This analysis of the role of emotions as constituting 'everyday life' (Clarke, Hoggett & Thompson 2006) is central to understanding social policy and practice responses to homelessness. However, literature on emotions, homelessness and social policy is limited.

Farrugia (2010) notes that power relationships, emotions and normative experiences and practices are central to the embodied subjectivities of young people experiencing

homelessness. Authors such as Robinson (2004, 2005, 2009, 2011) examine how homelessness is embodied, felt and lived by the researcher and young people who experience homelessness. Robinson argues that young people are:

*violated, neglected, and excluded ... crushed by the sorrow, shame, and stigma that continue to well from the long-term and repeated hurt and trauma that homelessness entails* (Robinson 2011, p.135).

However a more in-depth understanding of emotional knowledge about homelessness, human suffering and the associated social stigma of homelessness is neglected in homelessness research, policy, and service delivery (Robinson 2011, p.142). A consideration of the role of emotions in social policy and service provision in the field of homelessness establishes the primacy of emotion as a significant determinant of well-being, appraisal and action.

In this paper, I draw upon research undertaken as part of a PhD on social inclusion as a response to homelessness, to examine discourses of the emotion of care that informed paid workers and policy makers accounts of providing appropriate responses to homeless people in South Australia. The paper also draws on Fiona Williams (1999, 2000) discussion of care as one of six 'good enough principles for welfare', which she argues address the social, cultural and political elements of welfare not addressed in the contemporary neo-liberal welfare agenda. I explore the implications of Williams' second principle of care informing a response to homelessness. Williams's espousal of care as a good enough principle of welfare leads to a discussion of the centrality of care in social policy as noted for example by Tronto (1993) and Daly (2002). I highlight the contested nature of care in social policy and the way in which different discourses of care have reinforced hierarchical relationships in the

provision of welfare, but also the possibility of a more sensitive and nuanced response to the needs of homeless people.

### **Care as contested**

Care is most often linked with notions of dependency and questions of power exercised over others; in the context of this paper, this use of care has a lengthy historical trajectory.

However the ethic of care has the potential to challenge contemporary preoccupations with paid work and foster relationships which are interdependent (Williams 1999, p. 677; 2000, p.342). The ethic of care involves relationships of mutual respect, recognition and responsiveness, providing grounding in the growth of civic virtues of responsibility and relationship to others (Williams 1999, p. 678). However, while an ethic of care may challenge the predominant ethic of paid work, care both theorised and practised evokes different meanings for those who care and those who are cared for (Williams 2001a, p. 468).

The concept of care poses central intellectual and political questions for social policy, not least because the manner in which care is given and received reflects significant changes over the past two decades in the relationship between the state, market and civil society as well as the way in which welfare is provided (Daly & Lewis 2000). King (2012) has recently highlighted the frustration aged care workers experience as a result of competing logics of care that are provided via waged relationships, but also through the relationships workers develop with clients. While largely outside the scope of discussion in this paper, parallels can be drawn between workers' experience of disintegration, frustration, dissonance and cynicism, as reported in King's study with aged care workers (King 2012, pp. 53-55) with that of workers who were interviewed for research informing this paper.

## **Methodology**

This paper draws on research undertaken as part of a PhD that uses a social constructionist framework to examine how social policy and service provision regarding homelessness can be conceptualized as both constitutive and constituted by a series of unequal social relations. Social constructionism has been variously defined, but several key assumptions seem common in most accounts.

Firstly, human beings construct knowledge rather than discover it. Constructionist views hold that there can be no unmediated grasp of the world, as is maintained in realist and empiricist traditions. In the social constructionist perspective, the social and political life under investigation is embedded in a web of social meanings produced and reproduced by discursive activities (Burr 1995; Parton & O'Byrne 2000). Central to this notion is the idea that language and discourse mediate social realities (Weedon 1987; Burgmann 2003).

Secondly, from a social constructionist perspective, meanings are not fixed entities that exist independent of an interpreter, but in varying ways are embedded in the positioning of subjects. Berger and Luckmann (1966) were pioneers in the articulation of processes that related to meaning construction. These include externalization practices, such as telling stories, creating an object of the truth, and internalization by individuals of 'the truth'.

The third assumption that underpins social constructionist perspective, for the purposes of this paper is that knowledge is not disinterested but deeply ideological and value laden (Schwandt 2000). To a large extent this follows from the previous comments. As Crotty notes, social constructionists claim:

*That human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting* (Crotty 1998, p. 43).

All knowledge and all meaningful reality is thus contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and is developed and transmitted within a social context (Rosenau 1992, p. 110). Within the context of this paper, this means that, despite the material and social contexts that constitute activities of care, the latter is seen as discursively constructed and a highly contested term.

While this paper draws primarily on an examination of literature regarding care, and agency mission statements, the research on which it is based was approved by the research ethics committee of Flinders University. The aim of the research was to explore how service providers and policy makers viewed social inclusion as a policy response to homelessness. Seventeen semi structured, face to face interviews were conducted in Adelaide from July-November in 2005. The participants in the study were employed in government, local government and non-government responding to homelessness as managers, direct service providers and project officers. Six of the participants were women and eleven were men.

The participants were recruited by sending a letter of invitation to relevant organisations, then following this up by email and telephone calls. No incentives were provided to the participants to be involved in the study. They contacted the researcher directly to express their interest in being involved and a time was then negotiated for the interviews. All interviews took place in participants' places of work. While I was I also aware of my positioning as a research student and as a former worker in the homelessness sector, my findings and interpretation of data my were underpinned by the idea that different identities for both interviewee and interviewer are foregrounded when someone is interviewed. This

called for an appreciation of the local nature of the interview talk and the specific identities that came forward in this situation, which may be loosely coupled to the identities that are constituted and expressed in other situations, including my identity as a worker in the sector.

A significant finding of the research including an extensive literature review found that for service providers and policy actors, contested notions of care formed a central plank in responses to homelessness.

### **Discourses of care**

Williams (2002, pp. 475-483) notes that over the past several decades there have been a number of overlapping discourses of care, beginning in the 1970s with the ‘exploitation’ paradigm that highlighted the oppressed and inferior status of female labour and the political demand for the recognition and reward of carers. The exploitation paradigm was followed by one that was initially strongly influenced by the work of Carol Gilligan (1982), and was more orientated to exploring the meaning of care to those who cared and the normative structures that influence people’s caring activities. Gilligan proposed that women and men operate in two different moral frameworks, in which women assume a notion of responsibility which is assessed in terms of individual circumstances and men operate from notions of rights which are subject to rational assessment. Gilligan suggests that this results in a female ethic of care and a male ethic of justice.

While Gilligan’s work and other studies in her wake have been critiqued for posing undifferentiated categories of womanhood and manhood, her ideas about what constitutes care have provided fertile ground for discussion and debate. Within the context of homelessness, Reitz–Pustejovsky (2002), for example, in a brief study of a homeless outreach team based in south–west Texas, argues that an ethic of care and an ethic of justice are complimentary.

*Caring for the homeless individual requires much of us. Straddling both the public and private domains, it requires both an attitude of concern undergirded by a concern for just treatment. Just treatment is about exposing others to remedies that are supportive of their right to not only a bare existence but also equitable treatment in such a way that universal principles are instantiated within it (Reitz–Pustejovsky 2002, pp. 240-241).*

A number of other authors argue a case for the centrality of care in social policy (Ungerson 1990; Tronto 1993; Daly 2002; Froggett 2002, Hoggett 2009; King 2012). Firstly, care was analysed from a feminist perspective as embedded in gendered relations of power serving ideological and material purposes in the oppression of women in the family and the state (Ungerson 1990).

A second strand of analysis has sought to understand the non-material basis of care. Care has been analysed as an ethical and moral orientation, underpinned by particular value orientations and embedded in broad social networks and relationships. This literature sees care as a way of being in society, i.e. we are all at one time or another recipients or givers of care. As such, care is seen to be a central unit of analysis for social policy (Tronto 1993).

A third strand of literature has sought to articulate the way in which public policy has sought to manage the supply and demand of care. Particularly in light of broad changes in gendered relations and the impact of managerial and neo-liberal thinking in social policy, Daly (2002) notes the centrality of care for social policy, on the basis that it frames the boundary between family, state and markets, and plays a central role in shaping human motivations and relations (Daly 2002, p. 254). Daly's argument is that these relations are increasingly managed through

a governance discourse concerned with our connection to family and community rather than the state, resonating with discourses concerning homelessness in the South Australian Social Inclusion reference as being ‘everyone’s responsibility’.

### **The implications of the principle of care for social policy and homelessness**

What then, as Daly suggests, and in line with William’s articulation of care as a good enough principle for welfare, is the role of care in a consideration of social policy and homelessness in Australia? Before making specific comment here it is necessary to consider the dual meanings of care, i.e. caring about and caring for. The latter is associated, following Foucault (1979), with the discipline of care and in particular the discourses of disciplinary power which constitute ‘professional’ caring.

From the theoretical perspective of this thesis, the question of resistance to ‘professional’ care and the possibility of articulating care as gift as developed in the work of the post-structuralist feminist, Cixous, is of some interest in this regard. Cixous (1986) juxtaposes the interpersonal relationships within caring, which are based on a celebration of difference, with the ‘possessive controlling’ of caring for. In both instances, the mechanisms of care lie within the everyday practices of care, whereby the possibilities for care as both discipline and gift are found. Within these practices, what may well be positive, enabling and empowering can easily become controlling and exploitative.

Discourses of professionalisation of care (e.g. Graham 1983; Thomas 1993; Tronto 1993; Milligan 2003; Graham 2007a, 2007b, King 2007, King 2012) have been particularly pertinent in this regard, as investment in caring became codified in new models of care. These discourses have significant relevance for the professional ‘caring for’ homeless

persons associated with rough sleeper initiatives. There has been a considerable literature that has documented trends in recent homelessness policy in Australia and internationally that both covertly and otherwise seek to clean up the streets (Amster 2003; Conradsen 2003; Johnsen, Cloke & May 2005; Goldie 2006; Jacobs 2006; Lynch 2006; Cameron & McDermott 2007). Rough sleeper initiatives, dry zones and hot spot response models in particular, render homeless persons out of place, excluded from prime areas of revitalised urban environments in what Sibley (1995) has named a ‘purification’ of public space. Such initiatives correspond to what I have previously called in this paper the discipline of care (Foucault 1979), and constructs those cared for as dependent, deficient and in need of expert assistance and those ‘caring for’ as experts in the act of caring noted below.

### **The dilemmas of care**

The practice of offering material sustenance, a safe space to stay and a site where wider access to welfare resources are offered to homeless people has a long history. Individual organisations, in particular non-government organisations, have historically had an extensive involvement in the landscape of service to homeless people strongly undergirded by statements of mission/values, often evangelical in intent (Heasman 1962; Owen 1965; Dickey 1986, 2013; Nowak 2001).

In contemporary South Australia, non-government agencies located within the inner city of Adelaide, such as Hutt Street Centre, the St Vincent de Paul Society, Byron Place, Westcare, Catherine House and Fred’s Van, while diverging significantly in practice, mission and philosophy, are prime examples of environments where, at least at a rhetorical level, the art of such care is espoused. In contemporary urban environments these encompass types of care which may be considered as the:

*Proactive interest of one person in the well-being of another and... A set of practices which shape human geographies beyond familiar sites of care provision (Conradsen 2003, p. 451).*

Hutt Street Centre in the inner City of Adelaide for example is:

*...A frontline agency for homeless and vulnerable people. The Centre is accessed by people who sleep in adjacent parklands, squat in nearby buildings and reside in cheap hotels, boarding houses, community housing and public housing*

and,

*Whose vision is for a society where everyone is respected and encouraged to reach and sustain their full potential in a safe, healthy and inclusive community (Hutt Street Centre 2010, Hutt Street Centre, viewed 28/07/2013: <http://www.huttstcentre.org.au>).*

Most of these organisations are highly dependent on volunteers, as the following statement from the Hutt Street Centre website indicates:

*Volunteers are central to the mission and daily running of Hutt Street Centre. Their input is fundamental to the community involvement that the Daughters of Charity have developed since the beginning of the Centre. People come from all sorts of backgrounds with different life experiences and reasons why they offer their services as volunteers (Hutt Street Centre 2010 viewed 28/07/2013, <http://www.huttstcentre.org.au/how-you-can-help/volunteering>).*

While the ethos as expressed in mission statements such as these are not necessarily translated into action, and may attract varying levels of allegiance from both staff and volunteers (Cloke et al. 2005, p. 386), such volunteering can be interpreted as encompassing

diverse forms of care and the activation of ordinary ethics in demanding service environments (Cloke et al. 2007, p. 1099).

### *Cartographies of care*

The moral landscape of services for homeless people has been subject to significant political change over the past decade, exemplified in State inspired critiques of charitable agencies as perpetuating homelessness, accompanied by carefully articulated strategies targeting rough sleeping as the first priority in a longer term objective to 'eliminate homelessness'. Despite this critique, it is fair to say that contemporary expressions of the Christian charity that inform the mission of these agencies, while employing a variety of discourses about causation and agency, provide important insights into a contemporary assemblage of the ethics of care for homeless persons currently at work.

These cartographies of care are characterised by multiple understandings about the relation of worker, volunteer selves and homeless people, while also being marked by a number of differentials concerning caring for and caring about. While there are those who argue that contemporary volunteering in such places are a form of egoism and pragmatic self-interest (e.g. Allayhari 2000), prioritising the interests of homeless persons is not without cost, to both volunteers and paid workers. The ways in which those involved are prompted to act suggests at least a partial sense of the other which is connected, committed and emotional. My own experience as a social worker, in non-government religiously based agencies, would suggest the extent to which this implies recognition of the other's difference, invariably treads a fine line between receptivity to difference and the enforcement, covert or otherwise of the spiritual onto homeless people.

Conradsen (2003, p. 508) has coined the term 'spaces of care' to refer to socio-spatial fields disclosed through practices of care that take place between individuals. Care here goes beyond, but may include considerations of health incorporating not merely a charitable feeling, but a practice of showing kindness (Smith 1998), wherein staff may provide practical help or simply take the time to listen (Conradsen 2003). Academic literature has provided significant insight into the way the relations and dynamics operating within spaces such as drop in centres for the mentally ill (Parr 2003) and day centres for homeless persons (Waters 1992; Llewellyn & Murdoch 1996), provide opportunities for care. In such spaces, otherness characteristically ascribed to such groups is reconstituted as different, and what in mainstream public spaces are considered abnormal or unorthodox behaviours are accommodated as unusual norms.

Discourses of care in organisations providing services to homeless persons in Australia have been historically informed by either a range of Christian charitable perspectives (Dickey 1980, 2013), or more recently, in the case of social inclusion initiatives, a secular based ethos informed by some form of moral universalism (e.g. Kantian based respect for persons, or utilitarian common good). These are evident in statements in National and State policy documents in the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s about the 'unacceptable' face of homelessness.

As I have alluded to previously in this paper, in Christian organisations these discourses range from explicit evangelical intent, which seek to transform homeless people's lives to a more Christian based lifestyle (e.g. Salvation Army), to discourses that emphasize accepting homeless people for who they are (Daughters of Charity, St Vincent de Paul). More secular based ethics of care have their own contingencies involving the requirement for service users

to conform to normative standards of lifestyle behaviours (e.g. accommodation, substance use, achieving self-sufficiency, independence, realising potential or rousing the level of self-endeavour). Despite significant divergence, in all of these discourses, there remain tensions between an ethic of care that, at least at a rhetorical level, prioritises accepting homeless people as themselves, and a practice of care that invariably becomes reformulated by the production of particular homeless spaces by staff and volunteers.

My own experience as a social worker in a Day Centre for homeless persons run by the Daughters of Charity and a Night Shelter auspiced through the Society of St Vincent de Paul, while anecdotal, provides useful data for reflection in this regard. In both, the ethical context for the provision of care was variously coded in terms of welcome, friendship or haven whereby, for however brief a period, homeless persons are ‘made to feel at home’. Over the past two decades this organisational ethos has been informed by a wider climate of professionalism whereby both organisations have employed social workers and allied health professionals who are seen to give the organisations legitimacy as ‘centres of excellence’. In both examples previously cited, organisations’ mission statements convey a strong sense of the otherness of homeless people with an equally strong sense of being there for the other. Whether religiously based or emanating from modern rational subjectivity, this sense of caring originating from the self in many ways fails to recognise the difference of those who live beyond and reject the meta-narratives of normality and seeks a conversion of, rather than a conversion for, on the part of the worker. This is further evidenced in views that foregrounded the expertise of workers articulated in some of the interviews I conducted for this thesis as exemplified in the following comment:

*Oh... look the advantage is that homelessness is always a pretty emotional type of headline...help the homeless etc... We tend to bring it out every winter and then*

*conveniently forget it... I think what social exclusion has done is it has put it very firmly on the agenda as a social issue which must and can be tackled by people in the know... that is a partnership between government and people (Respondent 1)*

This also remains the case in regard to the more secular based ethos of care referred to earlier informing social inclusion initiatives.

On a more global level, this ethic can be critiqued for failing to deal adequately with otherness and is linked to ideas about civilizing the uncivilised, making respectable the irresponsible, or the fetishes of independence and autonomy. The principal difficulty in these discourses from an 'inclusive' perspective is the divisive moralities that expect particular responses from the homeless service recipient. What alternatives then are there for a care that acknowledges and encompasses recognition and receptivity and is provided regardless of individual response? Such an ethic of care would seem to offer social policy an alternative way to respond to homelessness than current in social inclusion policy agendas.

### **Conclusion- Post-secular care?**

Coles (1998) has posed a form of post-secular charity which, he argues, in light of the failure of Christian charity and secular charity, encompasses a receptivity to the specificity of another and a generosity to the other in the context of that specificity, rather than the context of oneself. Coles writes:

*Giving must navigate the tensions between receptively addressing the other's extant perspectives, desires and joys on the one hand and responding to them in ways that might enhance the other's capacity to receptively and generously engage the world of the other (Coles 1998, p. 105).*

Bauman's post-modern ethics (1993) similarly invites the deployment of moral stances of being there for someone else that are not contingent on other variables and King's (2012) deployment of Bolton and Boyd's (2003) typology of emotional labour provides for an analysis of the way organisations can facilitate the provision of care to vulnerable groups that is receptive to issues of recognition and difference.

Ultimately the critical point of debate concerning care is about whether a policy and service response should be based upon an expectation of some form of lifestyle change (whether that be religious or otherwise), or one that acknowledges and recognises the moral terrain of difference of the homeless people concerned. Advancing this discussion is outside the scope of this paper. However it is clear that care that acknowledges a sense of the other has a crucial role to play in addressing the requirements of a more informed and receptive policy response to homelessness.

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