

# Homeless youth on the road and in the streets ethnography paper assignment



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They are people without homes. ” -Sheila McKenzie Agency is the capacity for human beings to make choices and act in the world. Free will, according to Wisped is “ putative ability of agents to make choices free from certain kinds of constraints. Do Finiteness’s informants have agency? Believe they do have agency, just because they do not have one specific place to call home, does not mean they are not capable of making hoicks and imposing those choices on the world.

As stated in the quote about, just because they are without a home does not mean they are social inadequate. The majority of these youth came from volatile home and family environments and made the choice to leave. Others were desperate for ‘ freedom’. These young people were able to make the decision to leave home for the search of something better, but without the means to provide better for themselves - they end up on the streets. As discussed in the text, adolescence is a time of “ emerging independence” (p. 7), this is when kids are tarring to take control of their life choices, so saying these kids have no agency is absurd.

Chapter four of this text focuses heavily in on the homeless youth community and “ family”. In order to survive, the street kids that are new to the streets must learn the “ ropes” of life on the streets. The best way of doing that is by socializing with the members of the community/” family’ that are already familiar with the ways of survival. The new street kids become uncultured to the street life society’s culture. They learn from other street kids how to survive and fit in the street kid community/”family)d’. The street kids bond on a personal level and become “ family” mainly because of their shared traumatic experiences.

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Be that of volatile home environments or family lives, or other traumatic life experiences. Other street kids that left home in search of freedom and independence bonded and became family because of their shared experiences in life, on the road and their initial pulling away from a “dull existence” (p. 37). The kids teach each other skills, like panhandling and train hopping, to take care of each other. Their relationships are much more intense than those relationships of a happily adolescent, but on the same hand they are also much shorter lived. The street kids also have a much larger social network due to their nomadic lifestyle.

They often know several street kids where ever they may travel to. A benefit of this is having that sense of “family” when they arrive to a new place. The street kid community operates as a family not only by uncalculating new street kids but by watching out for each other and providing help and support. They recognize that a family is a group of people who take care of each other, make sure each other is k and that everyone as food to eat. Because the street kid community/” family’ is so close knit, they often know what is going on with one another even if they are on the other side of the country.

They help street kids out that are struggling. They all communicate and know each other. The communication spreads quickly as well, if something happened to someone on the East Coast, the street kids on the West Coast would know about it in a few days - much like news travels through a typical family. Some would question the validity of these relationships, but these fictive kinship take on the role of a family that these oaths may not have

ever known. In short, they have each others backs and in most cases, have been more like family than their real families were.

In some cases, these kids were tossed out of their homes, in which they were typically abused and neglected, so the kids on the street accepting them and taking care of them, may very well be the first time they've had someone looking out for them. A lot of these kids come to the street looking for freedom; freedom from abuse, freedom from rejection, freedom from situations they could not handle or the freedom to do what they wanted to and when they wanted. A lot of them felt that leaving home and living on the streets was their only solution, and would allow them the freedom that they so desired.

Living on the streets and traveling extensively like the street kids do, may be a coping mechanism for some of these kids. Living on the street is their way of dealing, or not dealing with their lives at home. Whatever their reason may be, many of them left home in the search of something better or for adventure. They expect their life to be better and in some ways it may be better for them. They develop close relationships and fictive kinship with their street kid family and may finally receive the close relationships that they were lacking in their home lives.

There does not seem to be any division of labor by gender in the street kid community, mainly because they all do the same thing to survive - panhandle, steal, sexual favors, steal, boost, and work odd jobs ?? mainly day labor or seasonal jobs. In a community such as this, where most of the don't have the identification required to pick up any kind of real job, there is

no competition for jobs and no separation of labor by gender. I don't feel there to be any kind of separate gender roles in this community at all, this community appears to be very egalitarian in social relations, much like the food-foraging societies.

Some of the subsistence and livelihood strategies of the street kid community include: ways of finding food; how to find shelter; ways of making money; sexual favors; dealing drugs; stealing, boosting, and scams; getting a job. In regards to finding food, the Street kids have discovered and taken full advantage of the fact that Americans are a wasteful culture. They know that when they look in a trash can or a dumpster, the food isn't really going to bad, just no longer wanted and therefore considered trash by the person who disposed of it.

The street kids also will find church feedings, soup kitchens and take handouts. These characteristics very much remind me of food foraging societies - granted the street kids are not hunting wild animals, but they are hunting and gathering food, from where ever they can find it. Like the foragers, the street kids are very mobile - they usually are constantly moving. Another common, shared trait of a food foraging group and the street kids is small group size. Street kids do not travel in big groups - most tree kids travel alone or maybe with a few other kids.

In regards to finding shelter, most street kids stay outdoors, in places like parks, behind building or under awnings. Typically, kids would gather together in certain areas to sleep, much like the Net people and their co-sleeping/group sleeping habits. This can be considered an adaptation in the

Western world, because co-sleeping allows the street kids to protect one another and perhaps allows for some sort of comfort and bonding time with one another. According to the book, the street kids typically do not stay at homeless shelters because they feel unsafe in them.

One of the things found the most interesting was in regards to squatting. This is where many of the normative and rules come in to play with the street kid community. According to the informants, you have to know someone to get into the squat, you have to know the people you bring back with you if you do have a room at the squat and if you don't follow the rules of the squat - you're going to get tossed out. Because most of these street kids left home to break away from the rules of their parents, they avoid the squats and the rules of the squats.

You would think that the kids would want to have a dry and warmer place to stay in than sleep on the streets, but their dislike of authority and rules leaves them on the streets. I see the squats as an adaptation in this community - mainly because, street kids don't like rules, but the kids that live in these squats realize that they need to have some order so they don't draw attention to the squat and lose their shelter. Subculture, according to the Haviland text, is a "distinctive set of standards and behavior patterns by which a group within a larger society operates, while still sharing common standards with that larger society".

Reading that definition, I would have to question if the street kid community is really a valid subculture, mainly because there aren't a lot of standards that appear to be upheld in this community. These kids go where the wind blows

them and just do what it takes to survive. However, when look at the definition on Wisped, “ In sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, a subculture is a group of people with a culture (whether distinct or hidden) which differentiates them from the larger culture to which they belong”, I tend to believe that they are a valid subculture.

Although they may not have many standards, they do have their own culture and behavioral patterns that are apparent an outsider looking in. They take care of one another, they teach one another, the develop close bonds - they do most of this in ways different then we would and I do believe that this makes them a valid subculture.