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"Eventually it Just Hit Like a Tonne of Bricks:" Life After Homelessness Amongst Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ People in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract
Although Takatāpui/ lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning, plus (LGBTIQ+) people are over-represented in homelessness statistics, there is limited qualitative research that explores the enduring effects of homelessness once they have attained housing stability. Using data from eight semi-structured interviews, we explore life after homelessness for Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ people in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Results show the long-term ramifications of homelessness, stigma, and shame about having experienced homelessness, participants' desire to "turn their lives around," and their experiences of supporting others. These findings show that experiencing homelessness influences people's lives long after they are housed.

Keywords
Homelessness, identity, LGBTQ+, New Zealand, stigma, wellbeing

Introduction

This paper draws on qualitative data to explore Takatāpui/ lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and other minority genders, and sexual orientation identities (such as pansexual, non-binary, and asexual) (LGBTIQ+) people's experiences after they had exited homelessness in Aotearoa New Zealand (henceforth Aotearoa, the te reo Māori/Indigenous language name for the country). Specifically, we focus on stigma and shame about having experienced homelessness, the long-term ramifications of homelessness, participants' desire to "turn their lives around", and their experiences of supporting others. The word takatāpui historically translates to "intimate partner of the same sex," and is widely used among LGBTIQ+ Māori as both an identity in and of itself, to describe their sexuality and gender in culturally appropriate ways, and as an umbrella term that embraces all Māori with diverse sexualities, gender identities, and sex characteristics (Kerekere, 2017).

International literature shows that LGBTIQ+ people comprise 20-40% of those experiencing homelessness, despite only comprising 5-10% of the general population, and highlights the range of predominantly negative outcomes they face (Ecker, 2016; Ecker et al., 2018; Fraser et al., 2019; McCarthy & Parr, 2022). Those who are part of the LGBTIQ+ community experience disproportionately high rates of the structural, social, and biographical factors that cause and exacerbate homelessness, such as poverty, family relationship breakdown, sexual abuse, foster care, substance use, and poor mental and physical health (Baams et al., 2019; Castellanos, 2016; Dempsey et al., 2020; Hail-Jares et al., 2021; Hao et al., 2021; LoSchiavo et al., 2020; McCarthy & Parr, 2022; Quilty & Norris, 2022; Robinson, 2018; Siconolfi et al., 2019; Whitbeck et al., 2004). While much of this is quantitative, there is an increasing amount which is qualitative. The qualitative literature investigates, amongst other topics, family relationships, safety, discrimination, aspirations, coping strategies, service usage, and pathways through homelessness (Côté et al., 2023; Côté & Blais,

2019; Côté & Blais, 2020; Dagkouli-Kyriakoglou, 2021; DeChants et al., 2022a, 2022b; England, 2022a; Quilty & Norris, 2022; Robinson, 2021; Schmitz et al., 2023; Shelton, Wagaman, et al., 2018; Shelton & Bond, 2017; Tunåker, 2015). While pathways into, and experiences during homelessness, are relatively well-covered, there are few studies that explore life after homelessness and its myriad effects; those which do are usually health focused, and situated in the North American context (Ecker, 2016; Ecker et al., 2018).

Those studies that have examined LGBTIQ+ lives *after* homelessness have focused on a number of issues. Researchers have explored pathways out of homelessness for this group, showing the importance of social capital, mutual aid, and community support within the LGBTIQ+ community, and inclusive support services (England, 2022a; Matthews et al., 2019; Milburn et al., 2006; Quilty & Norris, 2022). Others have investigated LGBTIQ+ people's experiences of accessing housing-related support services (Abramovich & Kimura, 2019; Coolhart & Brown, 2017; Côté & Blais, 2019; Ecker et al., 2022; Hail-Jares, 2023; Prock & Kennedy, 2020; Shelton, 2015). Related literature on service provision focuses on how services frequently fail to meet the specific needs of LGBTIQ+ communities (Abramovich, 2016b, 2016a; Bowers et al., 2022; Coolhart & Brown, 2017; England, 2022b; Ferguson & Maccio, 2015; Gattis et al., 2023; Gutman et al., 2022; Hooks Wayman, 2009; Hunter, 2008; Maccio & Ferguson, 2016; Mottet & Ohle, 2006; Prock & Kennedy, 2017; Shelton, Poirier, et al., 2018; Walls et al., 2007; Yu, 2010). Despite its strengths, much of this literature, again, is focused on quantitative data and focuses on the North American context. By drawing on in-depth interviews and grounded theory, our study seeks to provide insight into the ramifications of homelessness both in Aotearoa and for LGBTIQ+ communities.

In the Aotearoa context, rates of homelessness are officially measured using data from the New Zealand Census. The Aotearoa definition of homelessness includes people living in overcrowded, temporary, and severely inadequate housing, as well as those living rough/experiencing street homelessness (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). At the 2018 Census, there were over 41,000 New Zealanders who were experiencing homelessness (Amore et al., 2020). Of these, rates were nearly identical amongst men and women; half were children and young people aged 0–25; and Māori and Pacific people's rates of homelessness were nearly four and six times higher, respectively, than Pākehā/New Zealand Europeans (Amore et al., 2020). While we do not yet have whole-of-population official statistics on homelessness amongst Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ communities, the recent 2023 Census included questions on sexual orientation, gender identity, and variations of sex characteristics for the first time, meaning this data will be available in coming years. There is, however, a small amount of research on Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ homelessness in Aotearoa. It is estimated that a fifth of transgender and gender-diverse people have experienced homelessness (Veale et al., 2019). Another survey showed that 31% of respondents, who were Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ youth aged 16-25, have experienced homelessness, and 56% have experienced involuntary mobility (Fraser, Jiang, et al., 2022) . Our previous work (drawing on the same data as the present paper) showed that prior to becoming homeless, Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ people commonly experienced unstable family relationships, finances, and housing; they had difficulty accessing housing; and experienced failings in the social welfare system that resulted in a lack of autonomy (Fraser et al., 2021). We have also shown that during their periods of homelessness, our participants displayed considerable strength of character, presented a different self for acceptance, employed multiple survival strategies (including sex work), implemented boundaries for self-protection, and that there were many missed points of intervention and support (Fraser et al., 2023b, 2023a).

Methods

The data we present in this paper comes from BF's doctoral research, which was one of the first to investigate at Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ people's

experiences of homelessness in Aotearoa[1]. The aims of this broader project were: to explore the experiences of homelessness for Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ people; to investigate how Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ homelessness relates to other sites of oppression; and to understand how both government and wider support systems shape the experience of Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ homelessness. Interviews with Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ identifying people who had experienced homelessness were conducted between October 2018 and February 2019 in Wellington. Participant recruitment was carried out via posters in key locations across Wellington, social media and emails, word of mouth, and researcher visits to additional key locations. Some potential key locations—such as soup kitchens and night shelters—were not visited. This was a conscious decision to seek out the viewpoints and experiences of people who might not have utilised housing service providers. We chose against aligning ourselves with service providers as we knew that many people are distrustful of organisations that are meant to provide support, particularly in the Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ community; both through BF's personal experience of volunteering in the community, and research showing that people experiencing homelessness, particularly LGBTIQ+ people, are often reluctant to seek support due to prior negative experiences with support services and authority figures (Bender et al., 2018; Coolhart & Brown, 2017). The research utilised the critical paradigm, which allows for the researcher's values to be central in the purpose and methods of the research (Ponterotto, 2005). The critical paradigm views reality as being constructed through power relations (Tracy, 2013) and it "directly addresses the politics in research by confronting social oppression at whatever level it occurs" (Mertens, 2010, p. 21). This gives spaces for BF's insider position as a queer and non-binary person, enabling them to understand the research findings in ways that outsiders to Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ communities might not.

Eight people were interviewed whose experiences met the Aotearoa definition of homelessness, which defines homelessness as "living situations where people with no other options to acquire safe and secure housing: are without shelter, in temporary accommodation, sharing accommodation with a household or living in uninhabitable housing" (Statistics New Zealand, 2009, p. 6). Two participants were interviewed twice after we read the transcripts of the first interviews with them and realised there were important areas where we needed further data. This was due to BF's insider position as a member of the LGBTIQ+ community, which meant they presumed to understand what was being said, instead of probing for more detail (Kanuha, 2000).

This research used constructivist grounded theory, which meant there was no target sample size set in advance, as this is determined by theoretical sufficiency (Charmaz, 2006; Liamputtong, 2009). Theoretical sufficiency is reached when the data no longer produces theoretical insights (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Charmaz, 2006; Liamputtong, 2009). Once theoretical sufficiency was reached at seven interviews, BF consulted the research team to confirm this was appropriate. An additional participant was interviewed to ensure theoretical sufficiency was reached. A total of 126 codes were created. Of these, 72 were top-level codes and a further 54 were secondary-level codes nested underneath. Codes were created by BF, and the remaining authors were consulted throughout. Coding was an iterative process. During the beginning of coding, the codes were mostly descriptors; as more interviews were conducted, categories were determined, and the data was coded accordingly. These intermediary codes/categories were discussed, refined, and expanded upon with the remaining authors to form our final categories. In this paper we discuss findings related to participants' experiences *after* homelessness; other findings (and further methodological detail) are discussed elsewhere (Fraser, Chisholm, et al., 2022; Fraser et al., 2021, 2023a, 2023b).

Results

The results relating specifically to participants' experiences after exiting

[1] Ethics approval was granted by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee, reference number 18/147.

homelessness are presented below. The categories that were identified are: stigma and shame about having experienced homelessness, the long-term ramifications from experiencing homelessness, a desire to turn their lives around, and supporting others through community involvement and family support.

Table 1 provides basic demographic details for participants. They had experienced homelessness at a variety of periods in their lives, and we kept the inclusion criteria open to any lifetime experience of homelessness. Pseudonyms are used throughout. Most participants were Pākehā/New Zealand European, and in their late 30s. We chose not to collect iwi (Māori tribes/nations) data to maintain confidentiality; the small sample size and small size of the Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ community means participants would have had their anonymity jeopardised as they would have been easily identifiable. For this same reason, we have not specified Omar's nationality. For the most part, participants were highly educated. Four had attended university, and two had attended polytechnics (tertiary institutions that offer hands-on, vocational, study options). Multiple forms of homelessness were reported; however, most had experienced living without shelter, or very minimal shelter (e.g., rough sleeping, and living in garages). We expect this to be in large part because the people we recruited understood homelessness as signifying living without shelter, in comparison to the previously-mentioned Aotearoa definition, which includes a range of circumstances beyond rough sleeping (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). Despite these varied backgrounds, all participants experienced severe poverty and financial insecurity before, during, and after their periods of homelessness.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender and Sexuality	Ethnicity	Age
Avery	Female, Gender fluid, Bigender, Trans, Bisexual	Pākehā	50s
Ayeisha	Female, Lesbian	Pākehā	70s
Clara	Female, Trans, Heterosexual	Māori	30s
Felix	Male, Pansexual	Pākehā	30s
Marielle	Female, Queer, Pansexual	Pākehā	20s
Nico	Takatāpui, Trans, Queer	Māori	30s
Omar	Male, Bisexual	African	30s
Thom	Male, Bisexual	Pākehā	40s

Stigma and Shame about Homelessness

Most of the interviewees expressed, at some stage, shame about their periods of homelessness and/or behaviours and decision-making. Furthermore, interviewees had internalised stigma about what it meant to have been homeless, and how that reflected on their sense of self and perceived worthiness. This compounded the stigma on their LGBTIQ+ identities. Shame arises from stigma, and shame is inextricably linked to the self in relationship with others; it develops via interpersonal relationships and has a continued relationship with an individual's behaviour (Price Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Shame, therefore, influences how individuals see themselves, and how they present themselves to others. This is a useful way to view an individual's subjectivity and behaviours while experiencing homelessness. However, it is important to be aware that shame and low self-worth can result in an individualistic explanation for structural inequities. As such, those who experience homelessness are likely to internalise that stigma and often feel shame about these experiences, despite the fact that homelessness results from structural factors such as inadequate social welfare and support systems (Fraser et al., 2021, 2023b, 2023a).

Marielle experienced considerable shame about having experienced homelessness, which influenced her perception of self and feelings of self-worth. When discussing her period of homelessness, she reflected on a psychological assessment of herself at the time:

> *…it's very hard to read the words in writing like "I was homeless" like…I got to read one of my psych reports and I just, I sobbed like a baby, like "oh my god this is how I am on paper, this is me.*

This shame about her episode of homelessness has stayed with her for several years and is revealing the long-term ramifications of homelessness and the struggle involved in managing the emotional aftermath of these experiences. The shame Marielle felt about her episode of homelessness is, in part, due to her "*individualised project of the self*" (Farrugia, 2011a, p. 81) not being a success, which results in a "devalued sense of self" (Boydell et al., 2000, p. 31). What these concepts encapsulate is the internalised belief that homelessness is a reflection of the individual's personal failures, which in turn serves to lessen their perceived self-worth. This devalued sense of self, and perceived unsuccessful project of the self, is closely intertwined with the stigma surrounding homelessness and those who experience it.

This combination of shame and stigma often prevented Marielle from seeking help or telling anyone about her situation. For instance, she would hide the fact that she was staying with friends because she had nowhere else to go:

> *I would, I prefer sleeping on the street than I did sleeping at friends' houses cuz I felt so dodgy being in my friends' places and like scrubbing my hair for like 30 minutes and like stealing their toothpaste…it made me feel really dirty…I'm not here on the assumption that it was me in a rough situation, it was me because I'd told them I was having a spat with someone.*

This feeling of being "dodgy" and "dirty" is directly linked to both devalued sense of self Marielle experienced, and her management of the stigma of homelessness. This quote illustrates that Marielle felt ashamed about being homeless and her lack of access to basic needs such as toothpaste and shampoo. This shame, in turn, led to her concealing her homelessness and trying to "*pass*" as housed. Concealing and passing are well-documented forms of stigma management (Begun & Kattari, 2016; Belcher & DeForge, 2012; Carvalho et al., 2022; Rayburn & Guittar, 2013). Stigma management is one of the few means of control and autonomy that a person who is experiencing homelessness may have.

Thom also experienced shame and internalised stigma about his period of homelessness. Towards the end of a prolonged period of time spent homeless, Thom had a moment where he began to reflect on this time. Thom felt that by experiencing a prolonged period of homelessness, he had "*broken everything*" and "*couldn't ever do anything*" with his life, which is indicative of the disempowering nature of homelessness. This again highlights how homelessness can make people feel as though their project of the self has been a failure; it also positions one's experience of homelessness as a personal failing, construing them as an "*agent*" of their own misfortune (Farrugia, 2011a).

Another response to stigma came in the form of concealment and "*passing,*" as per the work of Goffman (1963). Interviewees revealed that our interview was the first time that they had ever shared these stories with anyone. According to Goffman (1963), "*discreditable*" stigma is that which is not immediately perceivable nor known by people around them. Discreditable stigma can be concealed, and people can "*pass,*" i.e., succeed, in their concealment of it. This can be seen in the case of Thom. Thom was one of the participants who experienced a considerable amount of shame about the prolonged period he spent homeless; he mentioned during our interview that only a select few people in his life knew he had experienced homelessness, and that he had never talked about the details he shared in the interview. Thom was ashamed of being seen to have belonged to a stigmatised group of people, particularly now he was living a relatively middle-class life with a stable job. This was a jarring disjuncture between his past, homeless, self, and his current, middle-class, self. He provided an example of this with a story about the food bank collection point at his workplace:

> *…We run a donations to the food bank here…and sometimes you look down and you're like "wow someone's giving…olive oil, that looks amazing"…I just imagine…getting something like that myself when I was in that situation going "what am I going to do with this avocado oil? .... I'll just drink it!"*

This disjuncture between past and present was a somewhat unsettling experience for Thom as it forced him to re-live his shame of having been homeless. Participants internalised stigma about

having experienced homelessness, which served to produce shame, and lessen their sense of self. Stigma and shame related to the ways in which participants presented themselves; they would conceal their experiences of homelessness in order to avoid being stereotyped or judged (Fraser et al., 2021, 2023b). Stigma and shame have clearly had a lasting impact on interviewees and contributed to their trauma of having experienced homelessness.

Long-Term Ramifications from Experiencing Homelessness

There were a number of instances where interviewees discussed the long-term ramifications of their experiences of homelessness, particularly regarding trauma and the survival mentalities that enabled them to stay safe during these periods of instability and vulnerability. These long-term consequences of homelessness were not always immediately obvious to participants. The "*trauma of being homeless*" is documented in homelessness literature as having a direct link with poor mental well-being and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Goodman et al., 1991; Haber & Toro, 2004; Kilmer et al., 2012; Pascale, 2005; Whitbeck et al., 2015). Thus, the inherently stressful nature of being without a secure home, facing poverty, and trying to survive extremely difficult situations are not without long-term impacts. Additionally, the conditions produced by experiencing homelessness can contribute to long-term ramifications, such as financial exclusion and overcoming the stress of food insecurity. The negative effects of homelessness—specifically poverty and trauma—do not immediately end when an individual becomes housed, indicating that homelessness fundamentally alters an individual's being and sense of self. Homelessness cannot be easily cast off or forgotten; it continues to have an influence even once an individual has found stable housing.

The trauma of experiencing homelessness was evident during Marielle's interview; she spoke at length about the difficulties she faced in accepting her episode of homelessness once she became housed again. Marielle detailed how she struggled to move away from survival instincts such as constantly assessing the safety of situations:

> *[Homelessness] often puts you in a state of hyper-alertness so you're always ready to fight or flight and I was, at the time, mentally exhausted…Physical exhaustion I could handle…but being mentally constantly asking myself "is this safe? Am I going to get killed?" That caught up with me years later…Eventually it just hit like a tonne of bricks.*

This indicates the trauma of homelessness does not end the second a person becomes housed; it is an ongoing experience that impacts one's life for prolonged periods of time. In addition to this, it can take time for the reality of one's experience—and the trauma inherent in experiencing homelessness—to be realised. It was not until a few years later, when she broke a leg, that Marielle slowed down enough to realise the long-term impacts of her period of homelessness. Breaking her leg was a struggle, and caused her PTSD to flare up:

> *…I'd been holding it in for so long, and then I broke my leg. And my legs are what kept me alive…being able to run away from things…suddenly not having my leg, everything came back. Like I couldn't fight, I couldn't struggle anymore…My PTSD flared up really badly and I was required to take, as part of my ACC [Accident Compensation Corporation[2]] for my leg, ten counselling sessions for PTSD and a lot of it was stemming from my homelessness situation…*

The grief Marielle felt when she temporarily lost the full use of her legs forced her to reckon with the trauma of having been homeless. The prolonged stressors of focusing on survival, experiencing victimisation, having to present as a different self, and a lack of control, all continue to have a significant, and long-lasting, effect on Marielle.

In addition to this, Marielle also noted that there was a lack of support for people who have exited homelessness, which links to participants' needs not being met (Fraser et al., 2021, 2023b).

[2] ACC are Aotearoa's government funded no-fault universal accident insurance scheme.

Marielle said there was no support for her after her period of homelessness had ended:

> *…there's just nowhere that talked about homelessness, like it's kind of that thing that nobody talks about and nobody wants to recognise. You're behind closed doors or out on the street sleeping. Like I always check the community boards in the library…but I don't see anything for people who've gone through it [homelessness].*

The trauma of her experiences while homelessness, combined with her transition back into housing, was a struggle for Marielle as she exited homelessness. Exiting homelessness is a "liminal space" wherein the individual is in between social identities during a transitional period (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2018). There are three potential sites of liminality in exiting homelessness; material, relational, and psychological (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2018). The material site refers to how people feel about their housing, the relation to people's relationships with friends and family, and the psychological aspect of how people manage the stigma of homelessness (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2018). As we can see, the trauma of experiencing homelessness often left Marielle in a liminal state, and despite these difficulties, there was minimal support available for her during this time.

Thom echoed some of the same sentiments as Marielle, noting he often thought about how difficult it is for people who have experienced homelessness to shift out of survival thinking once they become housed: "*Some[thing] I wonder a lot about the homeless community, [is] how much is that moment you live, and how painful that is to yourself in the future, like how you struggled to get out of that moment-to-moment thinking.*" His prolonged period of homelessness meant it was difficult for him to think or plan for the long-term; he was so focused on survival. Exiting homelessness can be viewed as a process (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2018). We can then see the struggle to move beyond survival-based thinking as part of the process of exiting homelessness. This quote also shows one of the strategies Thom employed to achieve this; by using language that distanced him from homelessness. In referring to "*the homeless community*" when discussing his own experiences and feelings, Thom was distancing his present self from his past self, creating distance which gave him the space to cope with difficult feelings (Boydell et al., 2000).

Financial exclusion was another long-term ramification that arose in the interviews. Financial exclusion refers to "*non-participation*" in financial services such as banking, insurance, credit, and saving (Wallace & Quilgars, 2005). Poverty is ubiquitous amongst people who experience homelessness (Johnsen & Watts, 2014; Nooe & Patterson, 2010; Shinn, 2010). Financial exclusion is closely linked with, and has the potential to compound, poverty (Wallace & Quilgars, 2005). This suggests people who experience homelessness are likely to face financial exclusion in some form. Omar had gone through a No Assets Procedure (NAP) during one of his episodes of homelessness, which has resulted in his being financially excluded:

> *I had like three grand worth of credit card debt, which is nothing…I've paid it off before. But back then, I was like, I can't pay this off…I went through a No Assets Procedure, a NAP…it's basically a bankruptcy, they say, without all the bad shit…My understanding, for the NAP…was that it didn't stay on your record. It does stay on your record, and I did not know that…I have that stain on my record for my entire life. I can't get a mortgage, can't get a credit card, all that, all for three grand which I could have easily paid off…I got told to do an NAP by a social worker… [she said] "…don't worry, after three years you don't have to declare it or anything like that." I did it, after three years it's still on my fucking record, and I am fucked.*

Omar said that at the time of the NAP he had been in a vulnerable place—he was recently divorced, homeless, unemployed, and struggling with depression and addiction, which had just resulted in him using $20,000 of equity on financing his addiction—and went through with the NAP because it was the only option suggested to him. Thus, Omar's judgment was clouded, and he was easily guided into making a decision he may not have otherwise made. By going through a NAP, Omar became financially excluded; he still has the NAP listed on his credit record, which means he is unable to access a credit card or mortgage. He noted:

> *I know how important credit is…I know banks base loans on somebody's potential to earn, as*

> *well, you know, stuff like that…my convictions screwed my jobs and the NAP screwed my credit…I can't use credit cards, I just have savings and use that. And for jobs, I can't even apply for the seven-year clean slate because I was jailed…*[3]

Omar had high financial literacy and understood the importance of having good credit. The NAP, therefore, had the effect of financially excluding him, and remained a long-term consequence of his episodes of homelessness.

Interviewees reported there were certain habits they had picked up during their periods of homelessness that has stuck with them once they had exited homelessness. These were, in some form or another, related to food. Food insecurity is a significant issue for homeless populations (Crawford et al., 2014; Henwood et al., 2013; Koh et al., 2012). Food insecurity is a stressor during periods of homelessness, so it is natural that people who have been homeless would strive to avoid experiencing this type of stress again. For instance, Marielle described how she stockpiles long-life, convenient food in case she ever needs it again:

> *…Throwing out food is really hard, and I have a cupboard of extra food, like for emergencies…like lots of freeze-dried stuff. And my partner is like "why on earth do we have all this extra stuff?" And I'm just like "because we don't know what's going to happen" Like yeah, there's constantly this awareness of going back to that state…*

Marielle still struggled with worrying about the possibility that she would become homeless again. This again exemplifies the trauma of homelessness, poverty, and insecurity and the stress they cause. Thom has also struggled with his eating habits; he too struggles to leave food unfinished, and eats his meals quite quickly: *"I still think of myself as having a reasonable amount of food issues from then…I tend to eat like it's like the last meal sort of thing, [that] still sort of kicks around"*. Unlearning the habits and mindset that accompanied prolonged food insecurity are a long-term ramification for both Thom and Marielle; they still struggle with instinctively eating like they did while they were homeless, despite the stability that they are both now experiencing.

Frugal eating is another food-related long-term habit that interviewees discussed. Both Thom and Felix mentioned how they still find themselves enjoying frugal meals that they would eat during some of their most severe episodes of homelessness. Thom said that while he was homeless, he ate a lot of rice, and *"…still to this day, white rice with a little bit of soy sauce…that's my jam for a snack, and I just go like "this is like what a poor person would be eating."*" Thom's comment about *"this is like what a poor person would be eating"* shows he has some underlying shame about his continued eating habits, despite enjoying those frugal meals and snacks. This shame is linked to Thom's construction of self and his new, post-homeless, identity. People who have exited homelessness often construct a new self, and work to distance themselves from their past self (Farrugia, 2011b).

Felix spent time sleeping rough in a large Wellington park and had some camping equipment that allowed him to cook meals. When asked if there were any habits he picked up while homeless that have stuck with him, he said:

> *Very frugal cooking styles. So at least when I was [homeless] in Wellington I had camping equipment…an onion, 50 cents worth of luncheon sausage from the supermarket, 79 cent tin of baked beans and salt and pepper sachets from Maccas [McDonald's] and whatever else you were able to lay your hands on, with a 99 cent loaf of bread you can feed four people a reasonably healthy meal.*

He had even used these skills during an assessment for his social work degree: *"I actually did a project of feeding four adults for $10 as one of my first social work practicals, and I pulled it off, so yeah, and to this day I am [still frugal]…"*.

Unlike Thom, Felix did not experience any shame about the frugal eating habits he picked up while homeless; he instead views them as a skill and asset that he is able to share with other people who may be in similar situations. As these examples have shown, exiting homelessness can be a difficult transition for many; securing housing is only one of many steps required for

[3] The 'seven-year clean slate' refers to the Criminal Records (Clean Slate) Act 2004, which states that people are considered to no longer have a criminal record if they meet certain criteria. This legislation was not applicable to Omar as he had served jail time.

people to live a settled, healthy, and safe life. It can require re-learning habits, rebuilding oneself financially, and trying to heal from the trauma of homelessness. These survival strategies have thus become an ingrained part of interviewees' day-to-day lives. Habits that are pertinent to survival while experiencing homelessness are often unnecessary once a person becomes housed and obtains an increased level of financial security. However, unlearning them can be a difficult process, particularly as there is often limited support available for people who have exited homelessness—especially that which is sensitive to LGBTIQ+ people. Thus, service providers need to be aware of the multiple long-term ramifications of homelessness, and there needs to be increased support for exiting homelessness and addressing the trauma of having experienced homelessness. At present, there is limited ongoing support for those who have exited homelessness in Aotearoa, aside from those who are enrolled in Housing First services—which have narrow eligibility criteria as a result of government contracting (Fraser et al., 2024). Increased funding is needed to enable all service providers to provide ongoing long-term support after their clients have been housed. For Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ clients, staff needs to be aware that family reunification is often not possible or desirable; that clients may have specific healthcare needs (such as finding General Practitioners who are trained to support transgender patients); and that there is a range of LGBTIQ+-specific organisations in Aotearoa who can support people with things such as updating their identity documents, navigating the healthcare system, and accessing counselling.

Turning Their Life Around

Many participants expressed a desire to, at some stage during their journeys, "*turn my life around*." This links back to our earlier discussion of shame and stigma, particularly in relation to the concept of the individualised project of the self. Turning one's life around is a way for those who have experienced homelessness to construct a new identity, which distances themselves from their previous self (Farrugia, 2011b). The desire for interviewees to "*turn their life around*" related to personal growth, regaining agency, and the intention versus capacity to do so.

Participants' desires to "*turn their life around*" often represented the process of personal growth and a desire for stability. For example, Clara said:

> *I turned my life around, not saying that there's anything wrong with sex working, just that I was pretty much stuck doing that for about 20 years of my life…and it was like well I'm really sick of this…I'm sick of getting paid to be touched, I just wanna be a bit more respectful of my body and my boundaries.*

Clara had spent 20 years working on the streets being "*really harsh and abrasive*" as a survival strategy in order to protect herself. As she was deciding to leave the industry, she saw a counsellor at the Aotearoa New Zealand Sex Workers' Collective who she worked with to learn to be "*a bit more gentler and softer.*" Here we can see an example of a service provider which was able to meet Clara's needs and help her through a period of personal growth. This personal growth, and effort to change her life, had led Clara to volunteer with various community organisations and causes that she is passionate about, which she continues to do in both paid and voluntary positions. This personal growth was clearly a successful attempt on Clara's part to construct a new, softer, identity; while she still spoke openly of her identity as a (former) sex worker and had not discarded it entirely, she was able to shape this identity to fit her new version of the self.

Felix also recounted his attempts to "*turn his life around.*" He said he first began to try to "*turn his life around*" when he moved to Auckland after having suffered serious injuries by an abusive partner: "*In Auckland it [his physical health] was pretty good actually, because I was trying to turn my life around, I'd been in hospital, I'd been to rehabilitation, I lost all my muscle tone so I was back building it*". This attempt to turn his life around is linked to his intention to regain his agency, and bodily autonomy; after having recovered from a domestic violence related injury he began to "*rebuild*" himself and his body. This enabled Felix to create distance from his past self as someone struggling in an abusive relationship, and re-construct himself anew. However, he noted it took him a while to realise he *did* have agency and control over how his life played out and what did, or did not, happen to him. However, these attempts to "*turn my life around*" were not always

successful. As he noted, with a laugh, "*I said I was turning my life around in my early 30s, I didn't say I succeeded*". Felix did not specify the exact reasons why he thought this attempt did not succeed, but this suggests he felt the trajectory his life had taken had not met his expectations.

Having the *intention* to turn one's life around differs from having the *capacity* to do so; the intention to "*turn my life around*" cannot be met until one has the capacity to realise such an intention. For instance, Avery noted that she was only able to turn her life around once she had some stability in her life—in other words, the capacity to realise this desire. She said: "*…that's when my life kind of turned around, because I had that housing stability [that] I needed to focus on other problems*". This relief in finding housing, and the stability that came with it, meant that Avery was finally able to focus on issues she had put to the side while she was looking for housing. Finding stability was difficult, but ultimately rewarding, for many of the participants. This section shows the periods of growth that interviewees have gone through in order to "*turn their lives around*". Instability and experiences of homelessness have made it difficult for participants to establish boundaries and further their project of the self in order to move past the shame and stigma of having experienced homelessness.

Supporting Others

Supporting others was a strong category throughout the interviews. This arose in the forms of; drawing on personal experiences of homelessness to support others, involvement in the Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ community, and supporting family. Participating in community and helping others has been found to help women experiencing homelessness to mobilise their strengths and provide "*a new context that made it possible for them to move forward in a positive direction*" (Montgomery, 1994, p. 40). Furthermore, helping others has the ability to increase one's sense of purpose (Montgomery, 1994). Reciprocity contributes to social solidarity, and for people experiencing poverty, can lessen feelings of shame such as those we have described above (Parsell & Clarke, 2022).

Involvement in, and support of, the Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ community was one of the ways in which interviewees supported others. This allowed them to both support others and increase their sense of belonging within the community. Felix and Avery had been working together to re-start a social support group for Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ adults that does not involve alcohol and/or bars:

> *in some of the extra volunteer work, community work I'm doing, to redevelop [local Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ peer support group]…so I've got her [Avery] helping with that, she wants to really create something for the older people that doesn't involve going to S&M's or Ivy [gay bars in Wellington].*[4]

Part of the reason for this is because so many people within the Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ community struggle with alcohol addiction and binge drinking (Adams et al., 2022), so Felix and Avery have recognised that it is important to create social spaces that are not based around alcohol consumption. Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ people have high levels of alcohol addiction, which is in part due to bars providing safe spaces for Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ people to socialise, find acceptance and support, and meet potential friends and partners (Greenwood & Gruskin, 2007). Additionally, Felix noted there is a lack of support available to Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ adults:

> *I'm fully aware that there's a huge youth focus still but there's too many people focusing on youth, I wanna be focusing on the rest…cuz youth aren't the risk these days, it's my age group up to 55 kind of age group that have the real difficult and yeah there's just nothing there, which is why we're trying to get [local Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ peer support group] back up and running to at least have a buddy network, a support network.*

This quote alludes to Felix's desire for Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ people to live a good, fulfilling, life, despite the challenges they might face. This was a desire shared by Clara. Clara was another participant who was involved in

[4] This quote comes from Felix, who mentioned Avery by name, without knowing that she was also a participant in the research.

volunteering within the Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ community:

> *actually, I've just been doing volunteer work here with [local Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ charity] for the last year and yeah, it has been really amazing, like the stuff that they do here, I'm like oh my gosh, it's everything I needed when I was a teenager!*

It is important to her, and her values, that she is able to contribute to her community and provide the kind of support for people that she was not able to access when she was a teenager and first transitioned. This echoes other Aotearoa research showing that for Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ people who volunteer in their communities, care is reciprocal—helping others positively impacts an individual's wellbeing (Sligo et al., 2022).

Another way in which interviewees supported others was by supporting their families. This was not always a positive experience for them; Marielle, in particular, became homeless due to the support she was providing her mother. Marielle financially supported her mother to leave her abusive marriage. Being able to provide this support was so important to Marielle that she used all of her savings, and, later, most of her income. This was, eventually, to the detriment of her own well-being as she subsequently became homeless and learnt that her mother had not left her father, yet continued to take her money. This resulted in Marielle losing her trust in her mother, and her relationship with her parents remained strained. We can see that supporting others post-homelessness was a natural follow-on from the support that participants gave to others during their periods of homelessness.

Nearly all interviewees discussed how they had, in some form or another, supported other people who had experienced homelessness through their own work. A particularly meaningful way in which this occurred was by drawing on their personal experiences of homelessness. This was done with the intention of creating systems change and supporting other people who might be struggling. For example, one participant was studying for a counselling degree, and another was studying for a social work degree; both directly drawing on their personal experiences in order to support others. Several interviewees said they wanted to participate in this research so they could *'give back'* with the hope that their stories would be used to build policy, practice, and conversations about how to best support and prevent Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ homelessness. When we first met for our interview, Thom mentioned that he wanted to take part in the research as a way to give back and to be more involved in the Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ community. Similarly, Marielle said she wanted to help in any way she could. Nico and Clara both refused the koha[5] of a $20 voucher as they felt it was not necessary, despite BF's interview with Nico lasting for over two hours and the need for a second, follow-up, interview with Clara. Interestingly, both were Māori, which might suggest that a voucher was too formal and impersonal koha, which instead of lessening the power imbalances between researcher and participant and serving to acknowledge the value of their time and experiences (Head, 2009), actually created too formal an exchange and failed to recognise participation as a form of community connectedness and giving back that are central to Māori cultural values (Davies et al., 2022; Robinson & Williams, 2001). This is similar to results from Montgomery (1994) which found that previously homeless women were reluctant to accept monetary gifts from researchers as they were participating in the research to help other women, and not for the money. Another way in which participants drew on their experiences of homelessness to support others was through advocacy work. Nico had specifically spent time trying to advocate for Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ people experiencing housing problems: *"Because we've been trying to tell the government, and we've been telling the council…it's beyond stuff that we can just deal with ourselves, we need social housing, specifically queer social housing"*. Nico's life experience means that they are able to be an advocate for the needs of the Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ community, and have insider knowledge on the experiences and needs of this particular community and their housing struggles. This section highlights the levels of care and support that the participants have

[5] A koha is a gift, donation, or offering, especially one that maintains social relationships.

provided to their communities, friends, and families. These findings suggest that participants, despite the shame and stigma they felt, were striving to improve the wellbeing of their communities.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our findings provide insight into life after homelessness amongst Takatāpui/ LGBTIQ+ people in Aotearoa. Whilst our participants faced considerable shame and stigma arising from their experiences, and dealt with numerous long-term ramifications of homelessness, they also showed commitment to supporting others and engaging in identity work to "*turn their lives around*". These findings contribute to a richer understanding of the enduring impacts of homelessness on different people's lives; moving beyond a predominantly health-focused body of literature that assesses the health impacts of having experienced homelessness.

A key finding of this paper is that of the role of stigma and shame. Takatāpui/ LGBTIQ+ people who had experienced homelessness faced high levels of stigma and shame regarding both their Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ identities and their experiences of homelessness. This served to lessen their feelings of self-worth and caused them to present as a different self in order to have their needs met (Fraser et al., 2023b). Rhetoric of individual responsibility means that many of the participants viewed their experiences of homelessness as a source of shame and felt strongly that there was a social stigma attached to having experienced homelessness. The literature tells us that LGBTIQ+ people experiencing homelessness feel increased levels of shame about their homeless status when compared to non-LGBTIQ+ people experiencing homelessness (Gattis, 2013). Additionally, LGBTIQ+ people experiencing homelessness report heightened levels of self-blame and discrimination related to homelessness compared to their non-LGBTIQ+ counterparts (Kidd, 2007; Milburn et al., 2006). While much of the LGBTIQ+ homelessness literature focuses on the stigmatisation of LGBTIQ+ identities, our findings show a need for researchers to not forget the obvious: that poverty and homelessness are deeply stigmatised, and can create intense shame. It is neoliberal cultural norms that position these structural failures as a personal responsibility. From this base, we can work to explore how other forms of stigma intersect to, perhaps, heighten feelings of shame and a negative sense of self. Brown (2006) notes that shame can be seen as the intersection of feeling trapped, powerless, and isolated. Homelessness is an experience that is frequently, and deeply, isolating and disempowering—which is directly linked to the ways it is stigmatised (Bower et al., 2018; Rea, 2022). Stigma and shame were isolating experiences for our participants, and lessened—but did not totally eradicate—the agency available to them (Fraser et al., 2023b, 2023a). Additionally, our findings align with those of Dej (2016), who reported that the shame that accompanies experiences of homelessness is articulated through neoliberal discourses of self-responsibilisation; that "homeless people strive to be good, neoliberal citizens by regarding the self as the site for reformation and normalization" (2016, p. 131). Our results are consistent with this; participants attempted to "turn their lives around" and return to the norms that they had transgressed. This speaks to the importance of shifting narratives of homelessness from problematising the individual to clarifying and addressing the structural and systems failures that serve to produce homelessness (Fraser et al., 2021, 2023b, 2023a).

We see that shame and stigma influenced participants' sense of self, which contributed to some of the lasting psychological impacts of homelessness that they experienced (Eswara Murthy et al., 2021). Homelessness was a traumatic and stressful experience for participants, which shaped both their sense of self and behaviours, and it was not until they had achieved an ongoing sense of stability that they were able to begin to process these experiences. This echoes research showing that stable housing provides people who have experienced homelessness with the time and space needed to feel psychological pain (such as trauma and loss), and the challenges associated with processing these feelings (Padgett, 2007; Patterson et al., 2015). While increased stability enabled participants to begin such work, we also saw that this was often a lonely and isolated process. Several participants noted that they did not feel there was appropriate support for them to navigate the lasting impacts of homelessness, and

that important people in their lives (such as their partners) struggled to understand these parts of them. We continue to advocate for the need for increased funding so that ongoing, long-term support can be provided to those who have exited homelessness. Our interviews acted, in a small way, as a means for participants to further navigate this pain and make meaning of it. Sharing their stories was an act of identity work in and of itself, enabling participants to take some positive meaning from their difficult experiences, albeit to a limited extent. As discussed earlier, several interviewees explicitly noted that participating in this research was one of the numerous ways in which they sought to "give back" and support others, particularly in ways that aligned with Māori cultural values.

In their research on older women's experiences of homelessness, Gonyea and Melekis (2017) found that intersecting stigma and marginalisation contributed to a devalued sense of self, and that embracing identities that connected them to the social world enabled their participants to develop a sense of a valued self. One of the main methods this was achieved was through nurturing and taking care of others (Gonyea & Melekis, 2017). Our findings reiterate this; the care work that our participants undertook showed a range of methods through which they were able to resist disempowering and oppressive structures. Doing so enabled them to combat some of the stigma and shame they faced, and embody their different values. Furthermore, there is a small number of papers which show that LGBTIQ+ people undertake care work, mutual aid, and activism both whilst experiencing homelessness, and afterwards (DeChants et al., 2022a; England, 2022a; Schmitz et al., 2023). Many of our participants were deeply connected to the Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ community, and it acted as an enduring source of kinship and support for them (Quilty & Norris, 2022). While LGBTIQ+ identities can, and are, a source of stigma, this "difference" is not inherently a disadvantage; the community and kinship these identities give way to are a deeply beneficial form of support and strength (Prendergast et al., 2001). Additionally, this community involvement and care work were a way for participants to contribute to challenging the many structures that had failed them (Fraser et al., 2021).

While Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ people face stigma, discrimination, and shame unique to those aspects of their identities, our findings emphasise the lines of solidarity that homelessness creates. Experiencing homelessness had a significant and lasting effect on our participants' lives, and while it was intricately tied to their LGBTIQ+ identities, other homelessness literature, such as that which we have discussed, shows how these experiences mirror those of other minority groups who face similar stigma and marginalisation. Stigma and discrimination are intersectional and intertwined; in focusing on the more internal effects of exiting homelessness—as opposed to the logistics of exiting and more easily quantifiable outcomes such as physical health, as much of the existing literature does—we contribute to excavating the role of structural and cultural factors (McCarthy & Parr, 2022). Homelessness is heavily stigmatised, and having intersecting, marginalised, identities can increase the level of shame and stigma that people who have experienced homelessness face. However, we have also shown that these marginalised identities can serve to create community and be a source of joy, strength, and a means to give back.

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Ethics Statement

Ethics approval was granted by the University of Otago's Human Ethics Committee, reference number 18/147.

Data Availability Statement

Data (i.e., interview transcripts) cannot be shared due to confidentiality. The Takatāpui/LGBTIQ+ community in Aotearoa is so small that anonymity could not be guaranteed even when identifying information is removed from transcripts. Thus, we are unable to make data available in order to protect our participants. Ethics requirements for this study stated that only the research team (i.e., the authors) would have access to the transcripts. The University of Otago Human Ethics Committee gave ethics approval on this basis.

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