

“No a la droga, Si a la vida!”

**Drug Use in relation to Poverty and Coping Strategies
among Street Children in Buenos Aires, Argentina**



Debbie Slijpen

Front-page:

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“No to drugs, Yes to life!”

(Source picture:<http://argentinareporter.wordpress.com/2008/08/27/narco-panic-in-argentina/>)

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**Drug Use in relation to Poverty and Coping Strategies
among Street Children in Buenos Aires, Argentina**

**Master thesis
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Abstract

Based on anthropological fieldwork in Buenos Aires, Argentina, this thesis illustrates how drug use relates to poverty and coping strategies. A multi-approach method is used to clarify how (former) street children cope with their daily lives and future perspectives, while dealing with an addiction. This thesis shows that context factors like societal structures, the family situation and their addiction influence and restrict the opportunities of these children which results in unfulfilled basic human needs. Drug use is a way of coping with the difficulties of life but also makes it more complicated to get out of the stressful situation that street life is. This does not mean street children are fully submitted to outside influences. Although street children are often perceived as passive victims, this thesis shows that agency is a key concept throughout their whole lives. Agency is essential to induce change. Personal decision-making, developing self-worth and a positive mindset, can turn their lives into a success story. Living in poverty and being addicted does certainly not exclude agency, although the allied context factors and influences make it undoubtedly more difficult to exert.

Basado en una investigación antropológica en Buenos Aires, Argentina, esta tesis ilustra como el consumo de drogas se relaciona con la pobreza y las estrategias sobrevivientes. Diferentes métodos son usados para elucidar como (ex) niños de la calle logran sus vidas diarias y sus perspectivas del futuro, mientras sufren una drogadicción. Esta tesis informa que factores ambientales como estructuras sociales, la situación familiar y su adicción influye y reduce las posibilidades de los niños, lo que resulta en necesidades humanas básicas que son insatisfechas. El consumo de drogas es una manera de lograr las dificultades de la vida, pero esto también complica salir de esa situación estresante, lo que es la vida en la calle. Eso no significa que los niños de la calle estén sujetos a las influencias desde fuera. Aunque los niños de la calle muchas veces son vistos como víctimas pasivas, esta tesis ilustra que 'agency' es un concepto fundamental en sus vidas enteras. 'Agency' es esencial para inducir un cambio. La toma de decisiones personales, desarrollar confianza y pensar positiva puede cambiar sus vidas en una historia de éxito. Vivir en pobreza y una adicción ciertamente no excluye 'agency', pero factores ambientales relacionados cierto lo hacen más difícil emplearlo.

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Introduction

“The desperation in your head starts to expand, every time more. You do not know which road to take. The loneliness hits you harder, the intense bleeding of your voice asks for help in silence. You have hit the bottom of the dark sludge and there is no way back.”¹ (Javier - age 17-)

If there were any doubts about whether living on the street is in some way appealing, these are taken away by reading the above. Unfortunately street children are found in almost every country around the world and therefore can be considered a ‘universal’ phenomenon (Raffaelli, 1999:20). It is impossible to give the exact number, but there are estimated to be tens of millions of street children worldwide (UNICEF, 2006). An overwhelming part of their families of origin lives in extreme poverty (Rizzini & Lusk, 1995:392) and these children are a painful reminder of the shortfalls of current interventions to reduce that (Conticini, 2005:69).

Research has suggested that innate capabilities of resiliency enable individuals to overcome the adverse effects of hardship (Laursen & Birmingham, 2003, cited in Bender et al., 2007:26). The cognitive and behavioral strategies that individuals use in attempting to handle stressful circumstances and their emotional reactions to these circumstances are considered to be coping (Carpenter, 1992:50). Agency, the capacity for self-action (Sztompka, 1993:195), plays a large role in this. Agency is embodied in human beings and is the everyday conduct of ordinary people that is found to shape and reshape human societies (Ibid:197). All individuals choose to act in a certain way and according to Selekman (2005: cited in Bender et al., 2007:26) choice is essential to motivate change. The ability to make this choice, is agency. An addiction, which is regarded as a global epidemic, violates this individual’s freedom of choice (West, 2001:3,7). According to Yaffe (2001:179-181) there are different thoughts on how an addiction influences agency. One approach to understand the impact of an addiction is that it can make human beings act differently from how they would act without this addiction, while others believe it influences people not to employ their capacity for rational conduct. However, it may be so that an addiction does not influence agency at all, according to the third approach. The objective of this research is to investigate how the concepts of poverty, addiction, coping strategies and agency relate to each other. What does living in poverty mean? How do poor people cope with their lives and futures and what is the influence of an addiction on this? Does an addiction influence their agency, and if so, in what way?

Street children worldwide live in poverty (Rizzini & Lusk, 1995:392) and they often develop addictions to substances (Kilbride et al., 2000:2). A lot of research has been done on street children in all parts of the world (e.g. Sabattini, 1996; Hecht, 1998; Conticini, 2005, Kudrati et al. 2007, 2008), but information about how street youth make sense of their lives and think about their futures themselves is almost entirely absent (Raffaelli & Koller, 2005: 251; Bethlehem, 2009:74). By expanding the knowledge and understanding of what these children need and want, the help offered to them can be improved and become more effective. With this research I hope to

¹ Javier -age 17- (29-04-2009). A piece of his written description of the life on the streets of Buenos Aires.

contribute to this. The approach of development practitioners is too often oriented towards implementing standardized interventions not relevant to children's expressed needs, desires and aspirations (Conticini, 2005:80). After doing research on street children in Dhaka, Conticini (2005:69) argues that for intervention to be effective, sustainable and respectful, the focus on children's deprivations has to be abandoned. Hereby, policy makers and practitioners should pay more attention to the social relationships children build on the street, which provide them protective security, and not just focus on material poverty, he says. For helping them it is necessary to look at their own initiatives (Ibid:81). Are all street children capable of creating these initiatives? What about street children who are addicted? While the existence of substance abuse is often mentioned in researches on street children, investigating its influence on their lives is never the main goal. An addiction can ravage lives and communities according to Elster and Skog (1999:12), which implies it is likely to influence the lives of street children as well. Interesting to know is how the coping strategies of drug taking children take form? Do they flee in their drug use, or are they capable of managing their own life and future perspectives through agency?

The occurrence of street children is present in a lot of Latin American cities. Most researches on street children in this area are concentrated on Brazil, the largest South American country, and the situation in the second largest country, Argentina, is underexposed. One might expect that in a city like Buenos Aires this problem does not rise, since it is known as a modern, developed, European-like city. The truth is absolutely otherwise. Just one day of walking around in the streets of Buenos Aires tells you something different. Children from the age of four till adolescents walking barefoot in the subway trying to sell stuff to buy food, something to drink and in a lot of cases drugs. Children sleeping on the floor in the train stations, in the vestibules of shops and theaters or walking around in the street without knowing where they are or where they are going, usually under influence of the 'new' drug of Argentina: paco or PBC (short for 'cocaine base paste'). Although it is very difficult to determine what paco exactly is, it is certain that it is a residue of cocaine which is smoked (TNI, 2006:5)². It is said to be the most addictive and destructive drug that can kill people within six to eight months of use. This problem has enormously grown in the last few years and is affecting the youth of Argentina. Especially the suburbs of Buenos Aires are associated with this dilemma (Ibid:10). As 'Madres X la Vida'³ shout during their protests every Thursday on the Plaza de Mayo: "Drugs are destroying the youth. Paco is the death. Paco is genocide!".

² A study in Buenos Aires indicates that there are three different ideas about what 'base paste' is. The first refers to the substance that results from mixing and heating cocaine hydrochloride with sodium bicarbonate, which is then smoked. In other countries, this mixture is called 'crack', and its use is widespread. The second refers to the paste extracted from the maceration of coca leaves, which only through subsequent processing with chemical substances can be converted into cocaine hydrochloride; this is also known as 'base cocaine', and it can be smoked, but not injected or inhaled, as it is not soluble. Finally, PBC is defined as the residue from the manufacturing of cocaine hydrochloride. This final stage of processing may leave a residue that is sold as paco.

³ A group of mothers whose children are addicted to paco. They march every Thursday on the Plaza de Mayo, like the Madres de Plaza de Mayo do. They wear black headscarves as a sign of their pain and powerlessness because their children are addicted. They want the government to accept them and ask for closed therapeutic communities who will help their children.

To attain the objective of my research, I chose to study the use of drugs amongst street children in Buenos Aires and how this influences their coping strategies. Unfortunately it turned out to be very difficult for me to get into contact with children still living on the street and using drugs, due to safety reasons. All the people I spoke to concerning this subject advised me strongly not to take the risk of being robbed, raped or worse. Many children who are under the influence of drugs have no idea what they are doing. Therefore I decided to concentrate on adolescents that already left the street and quit using drugs and to focus on their stories about the past, the current situation and the future. The adolescents presented in my thesis are between fifteen and twenty five years old. To make the division between past and present more clear, I will refer to them as children when I am talking about their lives on the street or their time at home, and while talking about their present situation I will refer to them as adolescents.

All of the above leads to the central research problem of this research: 'How does drug use relate to coping strategies of (former) street children in Buenos Aires concerning their daily lives and future perspectives?' From this question I have distilled four themes on which I focused during my fieldwork. First of all I am interested in how (former) street children describe and perceive their daily lives. Besides this I focused on how they see their future perspectives and how this view changed during their lives. Also I looked at how these children influence their future perspectives. Finally my focus was on how (former) street children achieved to get off the street and quit using drugs.

My fieldwork took place in the Federal Capital of Buenos Aires, Argentina and in one of the poorest districts of Gran Buenos Aires, La Matanza, during the period of February 2009 up until May 2009. To obtain the required information I have used several qualitative research techniques and methods like in-depth open interviews, participant observation, informal conversations and life histories. I have visited two *villas miserias*⁴ several times; *villa* 31 in the Federal Capital and *villa* Puerta de Hierro in La Matanza. There I spoke to adolescents as well as adults who are in one way or another related to the use of drugs there; addicted adolescents, mothers of addicted children, and people who are participating in the fight against drugs. Although my research concentrates on the stories of the adolescents, the insights of others related to the subject, give a deeper understanding of the matter and therefore enrich the research findings.

Due to the sensibility of the subject it was complex to meet a lot of adolescents who wanted to talk about their lives full of difficulties. To enhance these possibilities I have conducted volunteer work in a shelter for boys of the street in the Federal Capital of Buenos Aires. There I gave English lessons and spoke to the boys about their lives on the street, their (former) drug use and their future perspectives. By coincidence I got into contact with Diego, a twenty-four-year-old boy who used to live on the street. Nowadays he is selling the newspaper for homeless people to make a living and improve his life. During the many meetings with him, he shared his life history

⁴ *Villas miserias* are a form of urban habitation, slums, found in Argentina, mostly around large urban areas. These settlements are often created in uninhabitable places or open fields where there is no urban infrastructure. These kinds of settlement are not only found in Argentina, but all around Latin America, only they are named differently: *favelas* in Brazil, *barriadas* in Peru, *cantegriles* in Uruguay, *callampas* in Chile and *ranchos* in Venezuela (Crovara, 2004). In this thesis I will use the short version *villa*, when I refer to one of these settlements.

with me. To get an idea of the several ways of getting off the street and how to quit using drugs, I visited a number of rehabilitation centers in the Federal Capital, in Rio Cuarto (province of Cordoba) and Castelar (province of Buenos Aires). There I spoke to employees as well as patients to get an extensive idea of the therapy, the difficulties and the successes. To warrantee the anonymity of all the people I spoke to, I do not use their real names in this thesis.

I have chosen to use the life history of Manuel as the guideline of this thesis⁵. Manuel is a sixteen-year-old boy, who is living in a shelter for street children in the Federal Capital of Buenos Aires. He has been living on the street for somewhat over a year (during the last two years) and has used a lot of drugs during this period. I use his life history as starting point to be able to tell the stories of all my informants, who of course all are unique. In some aspects Manuel's story is not fully representative for the adolescents living in Puerta de Hierro. This *villa* is a special place with its own characteristics. When necessary I will point out the differences between the two areas I conducted fieldwork in and use the stories of mainly Gloria, Josua and Milton to represent the case of Puerta de Hierro.

I have divided the stories of all the adolescents in three different periods of their lives, namely their time at home, their life on the street and the current situation. These three phases function as central themes of the different sections of this thesis. In this way it is possible to see how they cope with their lives and future perspectives throughout the different phases of their lives and to notice changes in the course of the lives of the (former) street children. How are their needs fulfilled now compared to their time at home and on the street? What is the role of agency in these different phases? Are they subjected to context factors throughout their whole lives or are they able to make their own decisions and induce (positive) change?

⁵ Interviews with Manuel - age 16- (22-05-2009 and 29-05-2009)

1. Home: Poverty, Needs and be(com)ing Homeless

“When I was three years old my mother left me with my grandfather. I lived there with my sister, my aunt and two nieces and my grandfather was the boss of the house. In the beginning I thought everything was fine, but now I know that I did not understand a lot of things in those days”, tells Manuel. Most of the children living in the shelter, come from the street and have already experienced a lot of problems in their life so far. These problems and difficulties arose most of the time at an early age, when they were still living with their families. For Manuel it is too hard to talk about everything that happened in those days. It still hurts him a lot and he does not want to feel the pain again. One of the things he can talk about is that he already at the age of eight worked more than forty hours a week to help his grandfather as a plumber or handyman. He infrequently went to school and soon was behind on the children of his own age. His earnings he had to hand over and were spent on the house, food and cleaning. New clothes were something he never received, but he was actually not interested in that. The only thing he wanted was some respect and love from his grandfather, but also this he never received. He felt discriminated by him, with regard to the other children living there, because he was always held responsible for fights, problems or anything bad that occurred in their household. Even his birthday was never celebrated. Each year on the twenty-fifth of July he got up anxiously for a good birthday, but it never turned out to be like that. In addition to the fact that nobody, besides his sister, cared about his birthday, there would always happen something bad of what he was blamed for.

At the age of eleven his mother, whom he at first did not recognize, came to their house. Finally he had the opportunity to ask her about the reason for leaving him. She explained that at the time she had some issues with her boyfriend, which kept her busy and that is the reason why she left him and his sister. This boyfriend is not Manuel’s father. He does not know who his father is. The only thing he knows about his father is that he and his friends drank, smoked and partied continuously in the presence of his mother. They humiliated and tortured her by burning her with cigarette ends and raping her whenever they felt like it, also when she was pregnant of Manuel. When he asked her why she came looking for him and his sister now, she said she did not. She came to see her father and not her son. However, after a few talks, his mother decided to let Manuel move in with her for a trial period of three months. These three months were very nice and after returning to his grandfather for a while to finish the school year, he went to live with her permanently. His sister stayed with their grandfather. Manuel went to school and worked to help his mother financially. But soon his mother became indifferent and was out of the house most of the time, usually from eight in the morning till ten at night. She expected him to do the laundry and take

care of the house and could not stand him playing. She also hit him very repeatedly, when he was playing instead of doing his chores, which he thought was not fair.

After almost three years he left his mother because of all the problems and returned to the house of his grandfather, who obliged him to find a job. This was very difficult because he was not even fourteen years old. For most of the jobs you have to be at least six- or seventeen. He continuously looked out for a job, but could not find one, which annoyed his grandfather. Then came his fourteenth birthday. His sister and one of his cousins played a practical joke on him and broke two raw eggs on his head. When his grandfather saw this he became furious. What were they thinking playing with food? The most surprising was that he got extremely angry at Manuel instead of the girls. According to him Manuel should know better at his age and he ordered him to leave the house immediately. That is what he did. He took some clothes and packed his bag. Even though his grandfather later on asked him to stay, he left. He was tired, tired of everything, tired of his life...

After reading Manuel's story it is clear that he has experienced a lot of difficulties in his life. He lacked respect, love and attention, which he needed to live a happy life. When studying the basic needs of human beings, the theories of Abraham Maslow, especially his hierarchical pyramid of needs (see figure 1), are clearly present in the literature up until the 21st century. According to Vich (2008, in Rennie, 2008:445) Maslow has left us a guiding legacy in research on human values and Leontiev (2008) states that Maslow's ideas still contain a rich potential awaiting to disclose themselves to a new generation of scholars. According to Maslow (1970:35-47) all human beings have five basic needs that can be arranged in a hierarchy. These five basic needs are, from the lowest to the highest level: (a) physiological needs, (b) safety needs, (c) belonging and love needs, (d) esteem needs, and (e) self-actualization needs. Hereby it has to be taken into account that before higher level needs are even perceived, lower level needs must be satisfied. New (and still higher) needs emerge, when lower needs are satisfied (Ibid:38). Despite the manifold use of his theory there has been some critique on the integrity of his formulation of the need hierarchy (Rennie, 2008:445). The hierarchy might not be that definite, in the sense that fundamental needs are not as hierarchical as Maslow says (Frame, 1996:13). Since I want to take a look at the needs of the (former) street children in the different phases of their lives I choose to work with Maslow's pyramid as a starting point. How and if the hierarchy is applicable in my research will become clear throughout this thesis.

Fulfilling these different levels of needs is more difficult for some than for others. For children raised in poverty it is extremely difficult, because "poverty presents obstacles to fulfilling basic needs" (Prince & Howard, 2002:31). A question that rises is how the existence and endurance of poverty in certain areas and amongst some groups can be explained? Why do some people live in poverty and others do not. From a scientific point of view poverty is described as a 'lifestyle or way of living' of the poor (Palomar et al., 2005:376). Poverty has been defined from a culturalist as well as a structuralist perspective in science. The culturalist view gives an autonomous, self-

reproductive character to the cultural context, which indicates that the values, norms and behaviors of poor persons are the reasons for their poverty. On the other hand the structuralist view considers this 'way of living' as a product of society's economic and political structures (Palomar et al., 2005:376). This implies that poverty is a social problem in which those affected live in conditions of poverty because of segregation, limited opportunities and outside obstacles that restrict their lives (Monreal, 1999 cited in Palomar et al., 2005:376). How both of these views are applicable on the situation of street children in Buenos Aires will become clear in the course of this thesis. In this section I will show how and which role the basic human needs play in the lives of my informants during which I call the first phase of their lives: their time at home.

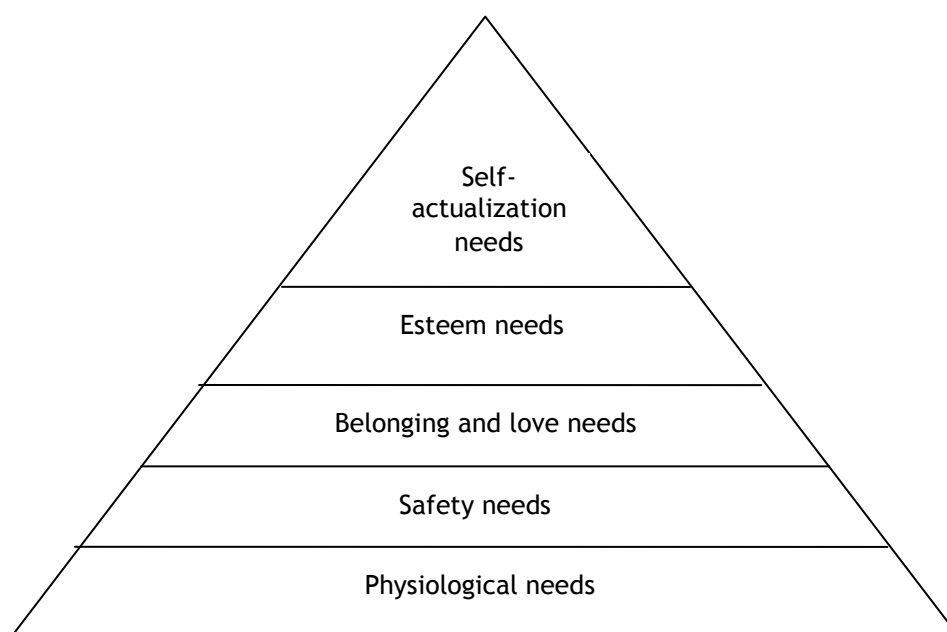


Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs (1970)

Start at the base

The first level of basic needs is concentrated on physiological needs, such as food, water, shelter and clothing. While not explicitly mentioned by Maslow, when investigating drug use the question rises whether drugs can also be seen as a physiological need. Maslow (1970:37) says: "If all other needs are unsatisfied, and the organism is then dominated by the physiological needs, all other needs may become simply non-existent or be pushed into the background". According to Best et al. (2007:306) the parallels with drug-seeking are obvious, as they are with the basic physiological problems associated with drug deprivation, withdrawals and craving. Therefore drugs will be approached as a physiological need in this study.

Due to poverty in many cases these needs are not met according to Prince and Howard (2002:28), who use Maslow's hierarchy to introduce the obstacles presented by poverty in the fulfillment of the basic needs of children. The lives of street children, during their time at home as well as on the street, are indissolubly connected with poverty. This is also the case in Buenos Aires. All of the adolescents I spoke to grew up in one of the slums or other poor neighborhoods of the Federal Capital or the province of Buenos Aires. Some of them even had to work at a very young age

to financially contribute to their household, like we have seen in the story of Manuel. While each adolescent has its specific story, poverty is a recurrent part.

A common finding in studies on street children in Latin America is that economic factors are a reason for children living on the streets, while they are nearly all engaged in some form of economic activity (Rizzini & Lusk, 1995:392). However, given the enormous amount of impoverished families, this cannot be the only reason (Raffaelli et al., 2000:1432). It is notable that these authors mainly focus on the financial aspect of poverty, while poverty is not just about money. "Lack of access to essential resources goes beyond financial hardship to affect people's health, education, security and opportunities for political participation." (UNDP, 2008) Notable is that despite the deprived living conditions, lack of the basic physiological needs is not mentioned by the adolescents when talking about their home situations. Not one of them talked about a lack of food, water or shelter. Neither did they talk about a lack of drugs, while the ones who use drugs already during this phase, make sure they have them. The ways in which these children obtain drugs will be discussed in section two.

That the adolescents did not talk about unfulfilled physiological needs, might have also been due to the fact that I did not ask them specifically about this and that I spoke to them during a time in which these needs are better fulfilled than before. Though by visiting the areas they live(d) in it becomes clear that their circumstances are far from ideal. Many of them live in slums where the houses are small, dirty and overcrowded, without running water and sewerage. During my visit to Diana, who is living in *villa* 31 and has an addicted son, she told me about her financial problems. It is often difficult to buy enough food and clothes for her six sons, her daughter, the daughter's husband and their grandchild, who all live on her premises⁶. Also Rolando, who lives in Puerta de Hierro, has many difficulties with providing for his wife and nine children. He says his children know what hunger is. He works in the evening hours as a shoemaker to improve their financial situation⁷. This shows that fulfilling the physiological needs, although not explicitly mentioned by the adolescents, is not unproblematic.

Despite the fact that the lack of money might not be one of the largest obstacles these adolescents experienced during this first phase, it certainly does not mean they do not live in poverty. Besides the deficiency of money, the lack of security, another feature of poverty, plays an immense role in the lives of the street children in Buenos Aires. This brings us to the next level of Maslow's hierarchy.

Safety Needs

It is a *quilombo*⁸ outside, says Gloria when she is talking about Puerta de Hierro, the slum she lives in⁹. I could not conclude otherwise after taking a walk through the *villa*.

⁶ Interview with Diana (13-03-2009)

⁷ Interview with Rolando (09-03-2009)

⁸ Argentinean slang for chaos.

⁹ Interview with Gloria -age 25- (30-03-2009)

There are no streets in the *villa*, only broad sand roads that surround large sets of houses connected to each other by narrow paths of concrete. The houses are small and have a roof of corrugated iron and a ramshackle fence. The fence has a lock, that actually cannot be named a lock because it does not lock anything, but at least combined with the fence it defines the territory. All the houses look very decayed. There is garbage all over the sand roads and concrete paths. Besides there are hanging around adolescents everywhere. When I bring up that it looks like they are all doing nothing, Maria and Veronica [the pastor of the *villa* and one of her co-workers] can only confirm this. That is one of the biggest problems around here. And when they actually do something, it is related to drugs. On our way back to the church, we pass a sandy square upon which also opens out the path from San Petersburgo, a neighboring *villa*. The square is called Lavalle, after a street in the centre of the Federal Capital that is constantly full of activity. At night a lot of young people, but also adults, from Puerta de Hierro, San Petersburgo and their environs, come together on this square to deal and use drugs. Nearby you find lots of girls prostituting themselves for as little as two pesos (less than one dollar), to be able to buy their drugs¹⁰.

What can an area like this have to offer to the people living there? Can it offer what they need? The second level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is concentrated on safety. This entails security, stability, dependency, protection, freedom from fear, anxiety and chaos, need for structure, order, law and so on (Maslow, 1970:39). These aspects are not found by the adolescents living in Puerta de Hierro. Children who live in poverty often live in socially toxic neighborhoods, which makes the location present the greatest challenge for safety (Prince & Howard, 2002:29). This is the reality in Puerta de Hierro and the government and police contribute to its endurance.

It is a 'forgotten place', says Maria. The children who live here are excluded from the system, which means they are not protected by it. They have nothing to expect from life¹¹. Neither the government, nor people outside the slum care about what happens there or in other 'forgotten places'¹². Sometimes there seems to glimmer some hope at the horizon, but almost immediately this is struck down, like last February. A sparkle of hope was given to the people of Puerta de Hierro by the Minister of Social Development and some representatives of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Family, Adolescence and Children. They actually visited the school next to the *villa*, to talk about building a community center for the children. They said to be willing to cooperate, but the majority of the people present doubted their sincerity. 'Just words, no actions', is what many of the people present told me¹³. That there was not made headway at the end of May proved them right. Whether these actions finally will take place, the future will tell. One of the other failing

¹⁰ Walk through Puerta de Hierro with Maria, the pastor of the *villa*, and Gloria, a co-worker of Maria in the battle against drug use and related problems in the *villa*.

¹¹ Group interview with Maria, Celia and Yolanda (05-03-2009)

¹² Interview with Javier -age 17- (15-04-2009)

¹³ Informal conversations with different people present at the visit of the representatives of the government to the school No 162 in La Matanza (20-02-2009)

actions is an actual visit to the *villa*. If the people responsible for these matters on the highest level are not willing to see and experience the reality, who will be?

Security, stability and protection are things that in general are related not only to the government but also to the police. In Puerta de Hierro the situation is different. The *villa* also is a so-called 'liberated zone', according to Alberto, who has lived there over twenty-five years¹⁴, by which he means that the police looks the other way. Drugs, violence and crime are often present in poor neighborhoods (Prince & Howard, 2002:29), which is confirmed by the situation in Puerta de Hierro. This *villa* is known for producing and dealing drugs. It is *the* neighborhood for buying paco. People from all over know this and come here to buy and use it. On each corner you can buy drugs and see people of all ages use, which I saw with my own eyes. Though it happens right under the nose of the police, they do not act upon it. While one would expect the keywords of the police to be security and justice, it seems like these have been replaced by two others, namely money and fear. They are afraid to go into the poor, criminal neighborhoods and make a lot of money by not doing so and tolerating everything that happens. This corruption is the reason the drug problem exists and stays this big¹⁵.

The Federal Capital might not be a 'forgotten place', but the situation on the streets is not that different. According to Hugo, founder of an NGO that runs three shelters, about eight hundred children are living in the streets of the Federal Capital of Buenos Aires. Besides this there are a thousand till fifteen hundred more children that just spend the day, but not the night, on those streets¹⁶. A lot of these children use some kind of drugs, which is a big problem through whole Buenos Aires tell Flora, Andres, Juana and Carlos, who all work with street children and children in various *villas*. According to them, one way of dealing with these problems by the Argentinean government is not to talk about it, which makes it seem like it does not exist. The fact that they do not talk about it does not mean they are not involved. The biggest problem in this country is the involvement in and the corruption of the government and the police in drug issues. They told me that there are even rumors that the government sends helicopters to spread paco in certain areas in exchange for votes. Security, stability, dependency and protection, which are all safety needs, are also here far to seek.

Throughout the Federal Capital, and outside, policemen are involved in crime and drug trade. According to Javier, eight out of ten policemen are corrupt and when propounding this hypothesis to anyone I spoke to relating this matter, it was confirmed. 'There are some policemen who want to do the right thing, but if the rest of the chain is corrupt it does not make a difference', is something I heard a lot. The father of Javier's friends, who is a drug dealer, is also a 'friend' of the cops. He can pass them on the street on his motor packed with marihuana, saluting them and continue his way without any problem. All this because he pays them one thousand pesos (around

¹⁴ Informal conversation with Alberto (22-05-2009)

¹⁵ Group interview with Maria, Celia and Yolanda (05-03-2009); Informal group conversation with Flora, Juana, Carlos, Andres (February 5, 2009); Informal conversation with Alberto (22-05-2009)

¹⁶ These numbers come from a census held by the Argentinean government in December 2007. The actual numbers are much higher according to NGO'S, because the census did not included children living in the *villas* of the city.

265 dollars) each month¹⁷. Corruption is present everywhere. The basic needs of freedom from fear, anxiety and chaos as described by Maslow (1970:39), are clearly not being fulfilled by them.

The need of protection, which is a part of the basic needs of safety as well, is another lack in the lives of the adolescents. The police does not protect them, but even puts them in more danger. Street children are forced to do robberies by order of the police, tells Andres, who works with street children. It is no concern of them if something might happen to one of the children, because they are replaceable to them¹⁸. This is also shown by the fact that innocent adolescents are being blamed by the police for something they did not do. A well-known case at the moment is the one of Brian, a sixteen-year-old boy from Puerta de Hierro who has been accused of the murder of an engineer in San Isidro, one of the richest areas of the province of Buenos Aires. Just for being a *villero*¹⁹ and because someone mentioned the name Brian (in general not specifically his name), the police determined that he is the perpetrator. While he is an innocent young boy who loves to play football and wants to be like his hero Riquelme²⁰, they branded him a murderer²¹. They very well know he is not the perpetrator, but closed the case anyway, tells Flora, his lawyer who treats a lot of similar cases of imprisoned adolescents. They need someone to blame and do not want to detain the real killers, because they probably made a deal with them or even gave the instructions for the murder, she says²².

Drug dealers have free play because this absence of protection and become high-up players in the hierarchy of their community. This does no good to the neighborhood. Dealers on the highest level sell their drugs without any problem to the '*transas*', the dealers who sell to the people on the street²³. Two of those '*transas*' in Puerta de Hierro were Rolando and his wife, up until eight years ago. They tried to sell as much drugs as possible to make enough money to buy their own drugs. The police have never obstructed them in any way. According to them a lot of dealers, including them, supply very young people of drugs for free the first couple of times. As soon as they are addicted, they make them pay for the drugs. Then the users are trapped in the vicious circle of the constantly increasing need for drugs and money to buy this. It does not matter to the '*transas*' whether they sell to minors, adults, men or women as long as they sell their drugs. The only goal is to make enough money to buy their own drugs and whether this means the ruin of another child in the neighborhood, makes no difference to them²⁴. As already stated in the Rusk Report (1996, cited in Prince & Howard, 2002:29) "bad neighborhoods destroy good people".

It is clear that there are many obstacles to fulfill Maslow's second level of needs, The government and the police do not provide the security, stability, dependency, protection and freedom from fear, anxiety and chaos the adolescents of Puerta de Hierro as well as the Federal Capital need. In some cases they even provide the opposite. The attitude and actions of both these

¹⁷ Interview with Javier -age 17- (15-04-2009)

¹⁸ Informal group conversation with Flora, Juana, Carlos, Andres (05-02-2009)

¹⁹ An inhabitant of a *villa*.

²⁰ Juan Román Riquelme is a famous Argentinean soccer player, who since February 2007 has been playing for Boca Juniors, one of the most famous clubs of the country.

²¹ www.4semanas.com

²² Informal group conversation with Flora, Juana, Carlos, Andres (05-02-2009)

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Interview with Rolando, inhabitant of Puerta de Hierro and ex-drug addict and ex-drug dealer (09-03-2009)

institutions create societal structures, e.g. limited opportunities and outside obstacles, that restrict the lives of the poor as Monreal (1999, cited in Palomar et al., 2005: 376) explains. These structures play a role in the lives of the street children, during the first phase, which makes the structuralist view of poverty (Palomar et al., 2005:376) applicable in Buenos Aires. If there would be more interest of both these parties their lives would probably be a lot different. Then there might be a lot less children on the street and with virtual certainty the drug problem would not be this extensive. How their families influence the lives of these children is portrayed next.

Belonging and Love

The need for belonging, is the need for positive and pleasant social contacts within the contest of desired relationships with people other than strangers. The interpersonal bond should be marked by stability, affective concern, and continuation in the foreseeable future (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, cited in Mellor et al., 2008:213). According to Maslow (1970:38) higher levels of needs are not perceived, when lower levels are not satisfied. In this phase the third level of needs also plays an important role in the lives of (former) street children in Buenos Aires even though the second level is not fulfilled. An explanation for this can be that the second and third level of Maslow's hierarchy partly overlap here. As soon as you start talking about the family situation or the home of these children, physiological needs (the first level), needs of safety (the second level) as well as needs of belonging and love (the third level) are issues. This is substantiated when we look at the significance of the concept 'home'.

What is home actually? The words home and house are often used interchangeably²⁵, however according to Mallett (2004:63) these are related but not conflated. She says: "Home is place but it is also a space inhabited by family, people, things and belongings - a familiar, if not comfortable space where particular activities and relationships are lived." The physical place, house, is simply one aspect of home. Home is also a private space that offers freedom, control, security and a context for close, caring relationships (Ibid:71). In this definition security, which is an aspect of safety needs, as well as close, caring relationships, an aspect of love and belonging, play a role. I find it impossible to make a division in what exactly means security and what exactly means love and belonging to the adolescents I spoke to. It is not clear for instance whether neglect is a lack of security or a lack of love? Therefore I choose to place the family or home situation of the adolescents in Buenos Aires in Maslow's third level of needs. Hereby I need to remark that the aspect of physical safety offered by a family, i.e. a physical place or a house, falls within the first level of needs, elaborated on at the beginning of this section.

Prince and Howard (2002:30) say that poverty influences the way parents interact with their children, and especially economic hardship makes parents less nurturing, because they have other priorities. This shift of priorities is also present in Buenos Aires. Especially in Puerta de Hierro children are very often neglected by their parents, according to Juana, who works at the school

²⁵ I also use these words interchangeably throughout this thesis, because I find it difficult to determine whether for the adolescents the place they lived was just a house or also a home. However in the discussion on homelessness and drug abuse being a cause or consequence I find it very useful and necessary to point out the existing difference between these two terms.

next to the *villa*²⁶. Many parents work so much to make a living they do not have time to look after their children. “The children are often left to sink or swim”, she says. Stories about children being by themselves all day, even sometimes locked up in the house, or a nine-year-old who is left in charge of his younger brothers and sisters all day, are not rare, tells Maria, the pastor of the *villa*. However the reason for neglecting the children is not always a result of economic hardship. As Diego told me, his parents were so occupied with family problems they set no rules for him and paid no attention to him. He felt like nobody cared about him²⁷.

Another problem that arises regarding the need for love and belonging is the imprisonment or death of one or both parents. In Puerta de Hierro a large part of the children do not live with (both of) their parents tells Manuela, who also works at the school next to the *villa* and has become a confidant for many of the children there²⁸. They live by themselves, with their brothers and sisters, their grandparents or aunts and uncles. According to Maria, especially the father is often no part of the home, because he has left his family for another one, or due to imprisonment or death. However this is not just the case in Puerta de Hierro. More than half of the adolescents I spoke to in the Federal Capital have lost their father at a very young age, or do not even know who their father is.

The death of one or both parents can also create a feeling of loneliness. This is what Javier experienced after the death of his father and during the illness of his mother. They were both diagnosed with HIV/AIDS when he was very young. His father died when he was eight years old and during this time his mother was already ill. Because she spent much time in the hospital and because of her drug addiction, that occupied her when she was at home, he felt alone. Despite this his mother meant everything to him. “She was my mother, my friend, my everything”, he says. After her death at the age of thirteen his aunt got custody over him and he went to live with her. Unfortunately he never felt like he belonged there²⁹.

Physical and sexual abuse are also very much present in the lives of street children, in their homes as well as on the street, says Lucia, who has lived on the streets of Buenos Aires forty years ago. She also refers to her own situation as she was frequently physically abused by her father³⁰. Physical abuse used to be part of the lives of Emilio, a seventeen-year-old boy who is living in the shelter and Gabriela, a twenty-five year old girl living at one of the Remar³¹ centers as well. Raquel, an eighteen year old *travesti*³² as she calls herself, was continuously sexually abused by the boyfriend of her mother. She grew up with her father and went to live with her mother at the age of eight. She lived in this awful situation until she was fourteen years old and then left her ‘home’.

²⁶ Informal conversation with Juana (06-02-2009)

²⁷ Interview with Diego -age 24- (12-03-2009)

²⁸ Informal conversation with Manuela (17-02-2009)

²⁹ Interview with Javier -age 17- (15-04-2009)

³⁰ Interview with Lucia (23-02-2009)

³¹ Remar is a Christian NGO, based on self-help that dedicates itself to help all kinds of marginal people like drug addicts, alcoholics, delinquents, homeless and abandoned children.

³² It sounds the same as the English transvestite, but it does not mean the same. A transvestite usually dresses as a member of the other gender just part of the time, while Argentinean *travestis* live twenty-four hours a day as a woman. In addition they undergo a partial physical change by means of hormones or plastic surgery but they leave their male genitals untouched. (www.noticias.nl)

She had no idea what was going to happen to her and was scared to leave, but even more scared to stay³³.

If we look back at the story of Manuel, he unquestionably experienced a lack of security and love and belonging in his home situation. He felt discriminated and not loved by his grandfather, neglected and not loved by his mother and he does not know who his father is. Besides neglect he experienced other kinds of abuse like child labor and physical abuse. Since he witnessed more difficulties during his childhood than he could talk about, his life history might include even more types of abuse. Clearly the second and third level of needs are not fulfilled during the first phase of the lives of the street children: the home situation. The adolescents incorporated in my research never mentioned anything concerning these needs when talking about this first phase. Therefore, in this phase, it is not yet useful to go into these levels of needs; the need for esteem and the need for self-actualization. These levels will not be applicable until the third phase and therefore I will further go into this in the relevant section of this thesis. The lower levels in the first phase are not satisfied and the highest levels are not perceived. What does it mean to those adolescents that their needs are not fulfilled? Do they undertake action to get these fulfilled? To what extent is that the reason for them to leave their homes for the street?

Exchange Home for the Street

Kombarakaran (2004:863-864) divides reasons for children abandoning their home into two categories: longstanding stressful conditions and acutely stressful events. She mentions reasons like extreme poverty, regular corporal punishment by family members, strenuous work in the field or at home, rejection by stepparents or guardians and family conflict as longstanding stressful conditions. Events such as death of a parent, parental divorce or failure at school are acutely stressful. The unfulfilled needs of the adolescents in Buenos Aires can all be seen as longstanding stressful conditions: poverty that leads to socially toxic neighborhoods (lack of safety) and neglect, abuse and absence in the family or home sphere (lack of belonging and love). The death of a parent was for none of them a reason to leave their home. It might have influenced their decision but was never decisive. The story of Manuel shows that in his case the longstanding stressful conditions of mainly family conflict but also strenuous work were reasons for him to leave his home.

The two categories of Kombarakaran (2004:863-864) however do not cover all the reasons for children making the change from home to the streets of Buenos Aires. Especially in the *villas* 31 and Puerta de Hierro the use of drugs by adolescents can also be a reason. Although the focus lies on physically leaving their home, drug use can also provide a psychological flight of the harsh reality of their home situation, before they actually move to the street. Drug addiction is often employed as a strategy to lessen the pain of emotional deprivation and social alienation (Rokach, 2005:72). The drug that is used in these cases is mostly *paco*. Many of the children living in the *villas* do have a home and a family but as a result of their drug use choose not to live there, as Gloria, Josua and Milton told me based on their own experiences and of those around them³⁴. According to them most

³³ Interview with Raquel -age 18- (13-05-2009)

³⁴ Interview with Gloria -age 25- (30-03-2009); Josua -age 20- (27-04-2009); Milton -age 16- (04-05-2009)

of the users develop a cycle of use and abstinence. During the period of use, which can be three or four days or even a week, they stay on the street. Throughout this period they do not eat, sleep and sometimes drink anything. Using *paco* is the only objective of that period. The following period of abstinence, is when they go home, eat, sleep and recuperate. Their bodies are worn out at that moment and need food and sleep to be capable to start the cycle over again. When they are 'recovered' they give into the need to use again. Although physical dependency and compulsive use are often mentioned by 'experts' in relation to *paco*, among users the stories differ (TNI, 2006:9), as we see here. Some cannot think about anything else and use constantly, while others use more regulated (Ibid). While they are not spending all of their time on the street, their lives are concentrated on their drug use, which is enacted on the street. Here we see a similar phenomenon as Kudrati et al. (2007:1531-1533) describe in their research on street children in Kenya. They found out that drug abuse seems to coincide with the transformation from working to living on the street. This research shows that drug use as well as the reasons mentioned by Kombarakaran (2004:863-864) make adolescents leave their house and spend a certain part of their time on the street, even when they have never been on the street at all.

Whether drug use is a cause or a consequence of homelessness, and to which degree, has been the subject of debate in the research and policy literature (Mallet et al., 2005:186). This research shows it can be both. At first sight, after reading the above, one would say that drug use is a cause of homelessness, while as a result of their drug use adolescents start living on the streets. However, this depends on the definition of homelessness that is used. As we have seen before, 'home' is not just about the physical space, but also about security and a context for close, caring relationships (Mallett, 2004:71). After hearing the stories of the adolescents in Buenos Aires and elaborating on the lack of safety needs and needs of belonging and love, I am inclined to conclude that they were already 'homeless' when they were still living with their families. Their homes were no places of security and close, caring relationships. Did the absence of these aspects of home, influence them in starting to use drugs? Then their drug use would be, at least partially, a consequence instead of a cause of their homelessness. Some of the adolescents started using drugs when they already left their homes and were living on the street. They see their drugs use as a consequence of leaving their homes. However, as stated before, some of them were already 'homeless' when still living at 'home'. I will further elaborate on reasons for drug use in the next section.

This section portrays the extremely difficult situation in which these children grow up. This is something they want to change. For them, the decision to leave their 'homes', is a part of their survival strategy and a way to escape the unbearable living situation. They chose to make this change and have the capacity to do so, which reveals agency. What their lives will be like on the streets of Buenos Aires is something the adolescents do not think about. As Raquel tells: "I had no idea what life would be like in the Federal Capital. I had never been outside of my city in the province. I had never even seen a train"³⁵. The most important thing for them is the change and the

³⁵ Interview with Raquel -age 18- (13-05-2009)

possibility of a better life. Is that what they find? What life on the street looks like and how they deal with this will be discussed next.

2. Coping with Life on the Street

“When I left my grandfather’s house I went to live with a friend. Three days after I moved, I went with my friend, my cousin and three of his friends to the central square of our neighborhood. That is when I started using drugs. I did this because all of them were using marihuana and offered me to try some. It changed my entire condition. When you consume, it is something psychological, it changes how you feel completely. When you feel bad and you consume, you feel good. When you are constantly thinking about something, the effect of the drugs makes you stop thinking about this. I liked this change and started needing it”, tells Manuel. After three months he left the house of his friend and started living on the street. His drug use increased in amount and variety. He used marihuana, cocaine, paco, different kinds of pills, and another drug of which he does not remember the name. Laughingly he says: “That is because of my marihuana use. I forget many things because of it.” During his time on the street he slept in different places, but always on the street. Mostly on benches in half covered squares in the Federal Capital. To be able to buy what he needed, he always tried to work on the street selling things like candy, clothes or anything he could get his hands on. He even had a job in an ice cream parlor for a while, but unfortunately lost this because of his drug use. Besides this, stealing was another way to obtain money. He did not like living on the street, though he was free. He says: “I knew how to survive on the street, but there is nothing nice about living there. You experience the cold, the heat and the hunger. But the worst off all is that you are all by yourself. You do not have anyone to talk to, most of all because it is very difficult to trust anyone on the street. The only one I saw and trusted was myself when looking in a mirror. Also no one ever told me whether it was right or wrong what I was doing. I had to find out everything all by myself.” He did not have dreams or wishes throughout this time, besides the wish for another dose of drugs. He was living day by day and not thinking about the future at all.

Manuel decided to leave the house of his grandfather and eventually to go live on the street. But this transition is not that obvious for all the (former) street children. As the first section shows, the boundary between home and the street (or homelessness) is very blurred in a number of cases in Buenos Aires. Some children really make a move from living at home to living at the street at some point in their lives, like Manuel, while others spend their time partly at home and partly on the street. The latter continue living like this and may never make a full transit to the street. Are they consequently no street children, or are they? Who is actually a street child? The United Nations (UN) defines a street youth as ‘any boy or girl... for whom the street (in the widest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland etc.) has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood; and who is inadequately protected, supervised, or directed by responsible adults (Raffaelli et al., 2000:1432). That the second part is applicable on the adolescents in Buenos

Aires has become clear in the first section. A lack of protection, supervision and direction by their parents is something all the adolescents in this research experienced. Some already have gone through this during the time the street was not yet their habitual abode and/or source of livelihood, which makes the change from home to the street not that big.

As any group, street children are not homogenous. Although there are some differences in the division of categories, the most common division in the literature on street children is the division between children 'of' the street and children 'on' the street. There are different definitions of these categories. Some definitions focus just on the difference of working (not sleeping) or living (also sleeping) on the street (e.g. Kudrati et al., 2007:1521; Kilbride et al., 2000:2) while others focus on the amount of family support (some or none) as well (e.g. UNICEF in Kombarakaran, 2004:854; Sabattini, 1996:8). Children 'of' the street are likely to have no family they can fall back upon. Although this distinction is made in the literature, the categories are not easy to apply in reality. Therefore, as Pare (2003:5) says, most authors criticize the rigid and artificial character of this distinction, e.g. Hecht (1998:103) who rightly asks the question whether a girl who sleeps on the street one or two nights a week is a child 'of' the street. Sabattini (1996:13) emphasizes that in practice, the borderline between the sub-groups is unclear. A little difference is enough for a child, to shift from one group to the other, she says.

I found the same complicatedness in Buenos Aires. Are the adolescents in Puerta de Hierro, who spend at least half of their time on the street due to their drug use, children 'of' or 'on' the street? Also because of the difficulty of making this distinction, I chose not to do this. For me, it is the most important that the adolescents in this research see themselves as former street children and the amount of time spent on the street is less significant. I use the term '(former) street children' in this thesis, to point out my research population. I put 'former' between brackets because this thesis explores the different phases of their lives. The division between street children and former street children is more obvious in the Federal Capital, than in the *villas*. The boys in the shelter make clear that they are no longer street children by saying: 'I used to live on the street'. They used to see the street as their 'home', but now it is the shelter. Also Diego sees the pension where he is living as his home. Their vision complies with the definition of the UN. In the *villas* the division is different. Children, who might not fit the definition of the UN, can see themselves as street children. As Diana, who is living in *villa* 31 and has a sixteen-year-old son who is addicted to *paco*, told me: "A lot of the adolescents say they are from the street, while they have a house and a family in the neighborhood. They see themselves as street children."³⁶ Them spending time on the street due to their drugs use, is what makes them see themselves as street children. Therefore quit using drugs would make them former street children.

When looking at the needs of children, it has become clear that societal factors, like their living conditions and their family influence the lives of street children. But which part do they play in their own lives? There are a lot of things they determine themselves. Many studies on children and poverty represent children as passive victims and barely include their perspectives and initiatives say van der Hoek (2005, cited in Bethlehem et al., 2009:74) and Conticini (2005:69). The

³⁶ Interview with Diana (13-03-2009)

literature tends to highlight the things children lost because of poverty, to leave out their positive experiences and to neglect their agency. A number of studies has shown that adult perceptions of what children do, think or need, possibly will differ from what children themselves do, think or need (Bethlehem et al., 2009:74). That is why I chose to focus on what these children declare about their own activities, thoughts and needs.

The way in which street children deal with their lives on the street can be regarded as coping. Lazarus and others (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984 and Lazarus & Launier 1978 cited in Carpenter, 1992:50) have made a differentiation between problem focused coping (efforts to act on the stressful situation) and emotion focused coping (efforts to regulate the emotional states associated with or resulting from the stressor). Studies from different angles on the relationship between poverty and coping strategies, have found that poverty endorses coping strategies that are passive (individuals hope the problem will simply be resolved by circumstances or by other persons), emotional (individuals are focused on the emotions produced by the situation, more than on assessing and coping with the situation in a rational way), and evasive (individuals avoid confronting the problem or situation that causes them stress) (Palomar et al., 2005:379). These three coping strategies are emotion focused. Plans or actions created to influence the situation, i.e. problem focused strategies, are not included in these researches. This categorization might imply there are no problem focused coping strategies related to poverty. However, we see this is not the case, if we take a look at former studies on street children. Living on the street causes daily stresses for them and they use several coping strategies to survive and to make life more pleasant for themselves. According to Kombarakaran (2004:853-869) most of the street children use positive, adaptive strategies as self-employment, negotiation with authorities to get out of difficult situations and creating friendship networks, which can be seen as problem focused. Whereas others use strategies such as using alcohol and drugs. These maladaptive strategies are emotion focused (emotional and perhaps evasive) coping strategies. In this section I will explore, on the basis of their activities, thoughts and necessities, how the adolescents I spoke to in Buenos Aires coped with their lives during the time on the street.

Activities on the street

First of all, by portraying the daily activities of street children, I will illustrate how they deal with their everyday life during this second phase. The central aspects, which are also present in Manuel's story, are consumption, overnight stay, social contacts, economic activities and criminality. As I investigate these activities I will use the abovementioned theories of Lazarus and others, on problem focused and emotion focused coping strategies, and Palomar et al., on passive, emotional and evasive coping strategies, as a starting point.

Consumption: Drugs over Food

“I spent much more money on drugs than on food. Millions!”, said Raquel laughingly³⁷. She is not the only one. The consumption of food plays a very small role in the lives of the street children in Buenos Aires. As soon as the conversation turns to consumption it therefore automatically turns to drugs. Of course they ate during their time on the street and sometimes experienced hunger, but their main focus was on drugs. That food is a necessary but subordinate supplement explains Alicia. She told me that she ate and took vitamins during her time on the street, when she was addicted to paco. She knew that without doing that, the drugs would destroy her body much faster³⁸.

Street children worldwide often develop addictions to glue and other substances (Kilbride et al., 2000:2). The conventional idea of an addiction is: a substance or activity can produce a compulsion to act that is beyond the individual's self control (Peele, 1985:xi). This conventional idea is biologically based. Conversely Peele (1985:2) states that addictions are an individual's adjustment, though a self-defeating one, to his or her environment and therefore not biologically, but rather socially based. People with strong social support can overcome their addiction, whilst others who lack this support may never overcome their need. Besides these two contrasting ideas there are theories on how addiction is partially biological and partially social (West, 2001:3). Some people are more susceptible of addictions than others and certain social developments can trigger this susceptibility. For street children this can be their unfulfilled needs or the stresses of their life on the street. I believe that only by taking into account the social as well as the biological aspect one can explain the variety of addictions and addicts throughout the world. However this thesis is concentrated on the use of drugs and the herewith related social effects, therefore other addictions as well as the biological aspect are left out of consideration. Not everybody who uses drugs is an addict. A distinction can be made between substance use and abuse and there are a couple of criteria to determine these categories. These include: the quantity of use, the frequency of use, the variety of substances used at the same time, the social context in which substances are used, the emotional state of the adolescent when using substances and the extent to which substance abuse has a harmful effect on the functioning of an adolescent (Essau, 2002:5).

The drugs that are mainly used on the street of Buenos Aires are paco, marihuana, cocaine and pills, but also LSD, XTC, heroine and glue are present. About five years ago street children in Buenos Aires mostly used glue, which corresponds with a number of other researches on street children worldwide (e.g. Sabattini, 1996; Hecht, 1998; Kilbride et al., 2000; Kudrati et al. 2007, 2008). However in recent years there has been an explosive increase in consumption of paco in Argentina (TNI, 2006:3). Diego says: “It has almost entirely taken over glue on the streets. Children used to start with glue when they took drugs for the first time. Nowadays it is paco, because it is much more addictive and the effect is more intense. It is comparable to the effect of cocaine, but much shorter. At first it makes you feel relaxed, than hyper and finally frightened and all that within approximately one minute.”

³⁷ Interview with Raquel -age 18- (13-05-2009)

³⁸ Informal conversation with Alicia -age 27- (28-05-2009)

In spite of that a lot of people think paco is very cheap, in fact it is not. One dose of paco costs about five pesos (one dollar and 35 cents), but because of the short effect addicts use many doses per day. According to Isabel, whose son used to be addicted, the minimum number of doses has risen from ten in 2008, to twenty in 2009³⁹. Milton and Josua, two addicted boys from Puerta de Hierro, said that they could use up eighty to a hundred doses of paco a day as long as they had the money to buy the drugs⁴⁰. A tube of glue costs about eight pesos (two dollars and 15 cents). The effect of sniffing a plastic bag filled with glue can last up to three hours, which makes this much cheaper, says Diego. Besides this, he says, you do not have to use the whole tube at once and can save it for another time⁴¹.

The drugs are bought with money. How the street children obtain this money is portrayed further on. Paco is bought on the street from '*transas*', who can be found all over the Federal Capital. In Puerta de Hierro they can be found on each corner or inside one out of three houses in almost each street. Pills you can buy in the pharmacy without a recipe, tells Diego, who still buys these once in a while. When I bring up that I think it is strange that anyone can buy these pills (in his case tranquilizers), he says that he would get a recipe from his doctor if he wanted to. Still these pills are available to everyone. When he used glue, he bought that in a hardware store in his neighborhood. He went to the same store daily, so the salesman surely knew for what purpose he used it. According to Diego: "People do not care if young children use the glue to get high. They only care about selling."⁴²

The drugs are mostly used on the street and sometimes in a friends' house. On the street the drugs are consumed in different places, like parks or just on the sidewalk. This can vary daily, while some have a fixed place where they use their drugs and meet their peers. Gloria always took her drugs on the same corner in Puerta de Hierro, never somewhere else⁴³. However, it is dangerous to do that because it is illegal, says Gael⁴⁴, but in Puerta de Hierro this is not a problem, since the police does not enter the *villa*.

In the literature it is often stated that street children use substances to protect themselves against hunger and cold. However, some researches show differently. The reason mentioned the most for using substances in Hecht's research among street children in the Northeast of Brazil is that they like using it (1998:62-63). In their research in Khartoum, Kudrati et al. (2008:446) heard positive and negative reasons for using substances, like the desire to experience pleasure (positive) and being dependent and to forget the harshness of life (negative). In Buenos Aires I also heard positive as well as negative motives for using drugs. Many of the adolescents said they liked using drugs, like Manuel. They like the feeling it gives them, which is positive. It makes life more fun and also easier to deal with. However the need to get this feeling can be based on a negative experience. As Javier said he also used drugs to escape from the street life, which is a negative reason. "It is very hard and you have all these questions in your head like: Why did they abandon us?"

³⁹ Informal conversation with Isabel (28-05-2009)

⁴⁰ Interview with Josua -age 20- (27-04-2009); Milton -age 16- (04-05-2009)

⁴¹ Interview with Diego -age 24- (12-05-2009)

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Interview with Gloria -age 25- (30-03-2009)

⁴⁴ Interview with Gael -age 15- (13-05-2009)

Why am I being beaten up? Why does no one care for me? Using drugs is a way of forgetting about this and escape these thoughts”, according to him. He also believes he was looking for a replacement of his (lost) family and found this in his ‘drug friends’⁴⁵. Interesting to note is that the use of drugs is often initiated by subgroups, like friends, gang members or neighborhood acquaintances (Moene in Elster & Skog, 1999:30). This is also evident in the history of Manuel. He was offered drugs for the first time by his friends who already used. After this experience he started to like it and his consumption increased. Manuel is not the only one who began using this way. Many of the adolescents were curious how it would be, because they saw it all around them. Unfortunately after the first time, for most of them, there was no way back.

The use of drugs has different effects on the street children. First of all the physical effect is very strong. Manuel, as well as Diego and Raquel, explained that nowadays they have problems with their concentration as a result of their drug use. In the case of Manuel and Diego this is mainly marihuana and for Raquel paco. As she says: “Paco wears out your body and makes you forget everything. A lot of nights I did not even remember where I lived. [...] It also makes you terribly thin and your face starts to deform. I know a lot of girls with a disfigured face. [...] But also glue is horrible. It burns your lungs and eventually you can die because your lungs become so small.”⁴⁶ Another physical effect of paco, which I saw on Milton, is burning wounds on the hands and lips. Because the metal pipe, with which they smoke the paco, becomes so hot it burns the fingers they hold the pipe with and their lips. According to Flora, who works with these children, these are the first and most obvious signs that someone indeed is using paco⁴⁷.

Drug use has also an impact on the financial situation of the user and often his or her family. Because they need a lot of money to fulfill their needs, drug users often sell anything they can to obtain this. “My sun sold all kinds of things from my house. Not until I started missing all these things, I knew that he was using drugs”, says Diana.⁴⁸ Also Rolando lost everything due to his addiction, his house, his clothes, everything except his children. His children did not even have a chair to sit on and suffered hunger many times⁴⁹. Being under influence makes it also harder to earn money. Diego is one of the top sellers of ‘Hecho in Buenos Aires’, which means he has no difficulties with making people buy the newspaper. However on the 16th of April he did. He had difficulties talking to people because of a dry mouth and a lack of concentration, he told me. With a bit of embarrassment he told me the truth. These were the consequences of smoking marihuana in the morning before coming to work⁵⁰.

Furthermore drug use has also social consequences. Drug addicts are very self-centered and can only think about their next dose. As Alicia enlightened: “When you are addicted you lose a lot: your dignity, your trust, your values. Nothing matters to you. I talked in a wrong way, I did not have respect for anything or anyone. I did not love myself, my family, not even my own child.”⁵¹ Diego

⁴⁵ Interview with Javier -age 17- (15-04-2009)

⁴⁶ Interview with Raquel -age 18- (13-05-2009)

⁴⁷ Informal group conversation with Flora, Juana, Carlos, Andres (February 5, 2009)

⁴⁸ Interview with Diana (13-03-2009)

⁴⁹ Interview with Rolando (09-03-2009)

⁵⁰ Informal conversation with Diego -age 24- (16-04-2009)

⁵¹ Informal conversation with Alicia -age 27- (28-05-2009)

blames his drug use for the separation of his family. His ex-wife suffered the most under his drug use, he says. He became a father when he was seventeen years old and thought about drugs instead of the responsibility for his family⁵².

Kombarakaran (2004:868) says that using drugs is a maladaptive coping strategy for street children, which implicates that it is not problem focused, because it would not be an effort to act on the stressful situation. Grover (2005: 532-533) argues that it may in fact be behavior that in one way is protective of the child's interests. She states that the use of drugs may help the child bond with other children on the street and maintain his or her position in a friendship network, which does make it problem focused. Despite the awareness of the inherent risks of their behavior, the benefits are critical to the child's survival, she says. In Buenos Aires I found both. Especially in Puerta de Hierro drug use is the basis for such networks. But also in the Federal Capital drug use can be a bonding factor and is certainly something that is done under the influence of peers. On the other hand this coping strategy is emotion focused as well, because drugs are used by the street children to make them feel better and to escape the harshness of the street life, which are both emotional coping strategies.

Overnight Stay

Street children in the Federal Capital sleep on the street. The places vary from inside train and metro stations or covered in porches of hotels or churches, to outside on one of the many squares of Buenos Aires, like Manuel⁵³. Most of the adolescents in Puerta de Hierro do not sleep, but do spend the night, on the street. They use drugs on the street and stay awake for several days before they return to their houses to get some sleep. Because of their drug use they spent so much time on the street. Interestingly, Gloria, Milton and Josua, who all live here and have drug problems, explicitly mentioned that they never sleep on the street⁵⁴. As Gloria said: "I know boys and girls that do sleep on the street, but I never do. It is horrible on the street." In this way these adolescents seem to control their living situation to a certain point, despite their addiction. By going home regularly they try to manage their drug use and do not completely submit to their addiction. The effect of paco is similar to cocaine, but stronger. Paco, which has a similar effect to cocaine, but stronger (TNI, 2006:9), is like cocaine not so much physically, but more psychologically dependent. This means physically the children can quit for a while and let their bodies 'recover', however during this time they are mostly down and apathetic, because they lack the boosting effect of paco. This is what makes them go back to the street to use again. Going home regularly is a problem focused coping strategy, because they act on the stressful situation (Lazarus and others, cited in Carpenter, 1992:50). By taking this control they make their lives more liveable for themselves, even if these measures are only taken to be able to use paco for a longer period.

⁵² Informal conversation with Diego -age 24- (19-3-2009)

⁵³ Interview with Diego -age 24- (12-3-2009); Emilio -age 17- (06-05-2009)

⁵⁴ Interview with Milton -age 16- (04-05-2009); Josua -age 20- (27-04-2009)

Social Contacts

The development of friendship networks, with others who have similar lifestyles, is one way of coping with street life (Kombarakaran, 2004: 876-868). This similar lifestyle can be drug use, as I saw in Buenos Aires, especially in Puerta de Hierro. There, the youth hangs about together and shares their drugs. "If someone had drugs, he or she shared this with the others. The next time it was the other way around", said Gloria, who was part of such a group⁵⁵. She sees this group as a group of friends. The question rises whether the basis of the network is friendship or a shared addiction. Other histories show that the use of drugs can also make it more difficult to develop or continue these friendship networks. Emilio says there are groups of children and adolescents living together on the streets of the Federal Capital, who are just together to use drugs. "Maybe they themselves see it differently, but to me they are no friends", he says. Javier agrees by saying that you always have to keep in mind that the people you use drugs with, are not your real friends. Another friendship network I came across in the Federal Capital is the group of female *travestis* Raquel was a member of. As soon as she arrived in Buenos Aires they took her in and helped her in every way possible. However when she started taking drugs and became addicted she left this group and continued street life and the prostitution on her own.

Many of the (former) street children chose to live by themselves, mainly because they do not trust anyone on the street. A lot of people told me that people, also children, living on the street cannot be trusted, especially those who use drugs. "If they think they can take something from someone else, money, drugs, anything, they will do it and won't hesitate to kill you for it", says Javier⁵⁶. Diego told me that he prefers to be alone on the street, because he does not trust anyone but himself⁵⁷. At the same time, the friendships and social contacts is something these children really miss, as we see in the story of Manuel. He had no one to talk to, nobody who put an arm around him and no one who told him whether what he was doing was right or wrong. The loneliness and lack of social contacts many of the adolescents felt in their homes are still present on the street.

Whether the street child stays in touch with their family depends on the situation. The adolescents that just part of the week live on the street, stay in contact with their families by going back home to recover from their drug use. Most of their families are very worried and go looking for them to take them home. Diana, the mother of an addicted sixteen-year-old in *villa* 31, does this every time her son disappears to the other side of the *villa* to use drugs. Although for her it is dangerous to go there she cannot leave her son there alone. Sometimes she manages to take him home and if not she goes back the next day to try again⁵⁸. If the adolescents have left their homes as a result of family issues neither the adolescent nor the family try to stay in touch with each other. Diego said that his family could not care less about him living on the street and due to the many difficulties in his childhood he neither felt the need to stay in touch⁵⁹. Some of the

⁵⁵ Interview with Gloria -age 25- (30-03-2009)

⁵⁶ Interview with Javier -age 17- (15-04-2009)

⁵⁷ Interview with Diego -age 24- (12-03-2009)

⁵⁸ Interview with Diana (13-01-2009)

⁵⁹ Interview with Diego -age 24- (12-03-2009)

adolescents did stay in contact with their family, but merely with their brothers or sisters, like Gael who said that taking care of his sister was his reason to live. While he did not have much on the street, his sister had even less while living with their grandmother⁶⁰.

The way the street children organize their social contacts, is an effort to act on the stressful situation of living on the street, which makes it according to Lazarus and others (cited in Carpenter, 1992:50) a problem focuses coping strategy. Whether they choose to live in a group or prefer to be by themselves, is a way of dealing with their live in the best possible way for them. Looking at the different stories it seems that the use of drugs has a negative influence on the development of friendship networks. It is very hard, if not impossible, for addicted street children because the lack of trust and self-centeredness get in the way. Not creating peer networks as contrasted with (non-addicted) street children in other researches (e.g. Kombarakaran, 2004; Kudrati et al. 2008, Kidd, 2003, Conticini, 2005) is also a result of their drug use. As Akerlind & Hornquist (1992, cited in Rokach, 2005:72) say: "Dependence on drugs is an actual substitute for dependence on others." All this affects the need for belonging of these children on which I will elaborate further on in this section.

Economic Activities

It is of vital importance that the street children find some way to generate income to fulfill their basic need of food and to satisfy their need for drugs. According to Diego, it is very difficult for anyone in Buenos Aires to get a job since the economic crisis of 2001, but even more so for people, especially children, living on the street. Most of the street children in Buenos Aires work in the informal sector, which is similar to street children in other cities (Kombarakaran, 2004: 863; Conticini, 2005: 76-77; Kudrati et al, 2008: 441-442). Some of them are self-employed. They sell candy in busses, trains or on the street or wash the windows of cars along the road, like Diego and Emilio. Occasionally they also beg for money from passers-by on the street⁶¹. Others, in particular in the Federal Capital, work as *cartoneros*, which is under patronage. The streets of the city are divided and assigned to groups of *cartoneros*, by middlemen in warehouses who in their turn are supervised by executives of large corporate mills⁶². At night the *cartoneros* collect cardboard in the streets of Buenos Aires, with which they start the paper recycling process of the city. When the sun sets, they occupy the streets of Buenos Aires and at sunrise they have all disappeared again, almost like they do not exist.

In Puerta de Hierro most of the adolescents on the street search the garbage to find things they can sell, for example glass, cardboard or metal. This is not large scale like the *cartoneros* in the Federal Capital. These children search until they have collected enough to buy one dose of paco and then buy and use it. When the effect wears out, the search between the garbage starts all over again. In this way they are busy with their drugs use all day. If they are not enjoying the rush of a dose and hanging around, they are looking through the garbage to find things to sell and buy a new dose.

⁶⁰ Interview with Gael -age 15- (13-05-2009)

⁶¹ Interview with Diego -age 24- (12-03-2009); Emilio -age 17- (06-05-2009)

⁶² <http://www.cartonerosdoc.com/Carboneros.html>

In a few cases children living on the street manage to get a formal job. Although it is very difficult for adolescents under the age of sixteen to obtain a contract, Manuel found a job in an ice cream parlor. Diego worked at a clothing factory for a while and Javier at a butcher's shop. Unfortunately none of them succeeded in keeping the job for a long time, mainly because of their drug use. It is also very difficult to follow orders, when you are used to living in freedom on the street, says Diego⁶³. Income-yielding activities are a way of coping with the street life. However, drug use hinders this strategy, because it makes it more difficult to work, like in the case of Diego. Moreover drug use can cause the loss of a job and make it necessary to make more money to fulfill this extra need. These economic activities are clearly problem focused. By finding a job, informal or formal, self employed or under patronage, they can deal with the lack of income and fulfill some of their physiological needs, primarily drugs.

Criminality

Street children do not make all their money by legal economic activities. Many adolescents who are or have been addicted use illegal methods. The most occurring answer to the question how they got their money to buy food or drugs, was steeling. The most important aspect is that the adolescents never steel in their own neighborhood. "If you steel in your own neighborhood, you are rubbish", says Javier⁶⁴. The adolescents do not see the steeling as something bad, but more as something necessary. "Steeling is the easiest way out of a needy situation", says Gael. It is very difficult to find a job and he had no mind to work. That is why he had no problem with steeling⁶⁵. Some of the street children are embittered and frustrated over the fact that other people have more than they do. They think it is fair to steel from them, according to Diego. Besides this it is the quickest way to get money, if you need it immediately to buy drugs, he says⁶⁶.

Diego and Raquel are the only ones who have stated very firmly that they have never stolen a dime to buy drugs. Diego never stole because his father had told him so. He has said to him that he could do anything in his life, but stealing. Out of respect for his father he has never done this. He knows some more people on the street that do not steel, but he does not know their reasons for not doing so⁶⁷. Raquel was too afraid to steal. She was only fourteen when she came to the Federal Capital and had no idea how to live on the street, leave alone steel. It is surprising that she was not afraid to make her money in another illegitimate way, namely prostitution⁶⁸.

As soon as Raquel arrived in the Federal Capital, she began transforming herself from a boy to a girl, by taking hormones. She joined a group of female *travestis* who all worked as prostitutes and started doing the same. That was the easiest way for her to make a living. She says: "What would you do if you would end up on the street today and you have no food, no house, nothing? You walk to the corner of a street and a guy asks you how much you want and he takes you with him. It is like that, do you understand?" But this does not mean she liked it. As she says: "It is horrible,

⁶³ Interview with Diego -age 24- (12-03-2009)

⁶⁴ Interview with Javier -age 17- (15-04-2009)

⁶⁵ Interview with Gael -age 15- (13-05-2009)

⁶⁶ Interview with Diego -age 24- (12-03-2009)

⁶⁷ Informal conversation with Diego -age 24- (12-05-2009)

⁶⁸ Interview with Raquel -age 18- (13-05-2009)

because you have to be with all different types of men, who ask you to do whatever they want.”⁶⁹ According to Maria and Manuela, both working in Puerta de Hierro, many young girls and adult women there also offer their bodies to men in exchange for drugs. Their bodies have little value to them. The only thing that matters is their next dose of paco, they say⁷⁰. Only girls are mentioned in relation to prostitution in Buenos Aires which is consistent with the finding of Kudrati et al. (2008:441-442) that sex work is mostly an important source of income for the majority of girls ‘of’ the street.

One more illegal activity that is seen a lot, at least in Puerta de Hierro, is selling drugs. In one house out of three, someone sells drugs and often adolescents are involved in doing this, tells Maria. The adolescents are not only involved in selling drugs, but also in producing, according to her. They are being paid for doing this in drugs⁷¹. This situation in Puerta de Hierro seems more extreme than in other parts of Buenos Aires. Here also exist *paquerias*, tells Isabel, who is one of the volunteer mothers of the nearest ‘Centro de Prevencion de Adicciones’⁷² (CPA) to the *villa* and whose son used to be a paco-addict. These are houses where children and adolescents are locked up and where they are given drugs. In return they have to steal for the owner to pay off their ‘drug debt’. The entire day they are locked in the house and they are only let out to steal. Children as young as ten are kept in these houses, she says⁷³. The use of drugs and criminality are strongly connected, because it is for many of the children the easiest approach to obtain money. Although these are illegal ways to make a living, it is a problem focused coping strategy. The children undertake these activities to fulfill their needs of food and most of all drugs. At the same time stealing as a reaction to embitterment and frustration is emotion focused coping.

Thoughts about Street Life and the Future

‘It is horrible’, is how most of the adolescents I spoke to describe street life. Although their lives before were not how they liked them to be, life on the street is not either. While freedom is one of the big differences between their former lives and now, Manuel says that this freedom is not fulfilling. “What do you do with so much freedom? You start doing things that have something bad as a result”, he says. Street life is dreadful because of the cold, the heat, the hunger, but most of all because of the loneliness. Like Manuel says: ‘To have no one to talk to, who puts an arm around you or wants to help you. To be constantly alone, that is the worst.’

There is one positive thing of the life on the street brought forward by the adolescents, which is gathering knowledge, especially insight into human characters. Manuel has learned whether he can trust someone or not. According to him, on the street you find this out really fast. “The way someone looks at you or the sound of someone’s voice are ways to notice whether someone wants to put you in danger”, he says. Now he is glad he has learned this, but the many disadvantages

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Group interview with Maria, Celia and Yolanda (05-03-2009); Informal conversation with Manuela (17-02-2009)

⁷¹ Group interview with Maria, Celia and Yolanda (05-03-2009)

⁷² Centre for the Prevention of Addictions (CPA). The CPA in San Justo is the centre where adolescents from Puerta de Hierro can go if they want help in the process of quitting drugs.

⁷³ Informal conversation with Isabel (30-03-2009)

overrule this positive side in the end. "There is nothing nice about being on the street", he concludes. The thoughts about street life are indissolubly connected to the emotions produced by these circumstances, particularly loneliness and lack of trust. The children reside in the fact that their lives are like this at the moment and do not try to change the situation. They still prefer these living conditions over their 'home' situation. By accepting the situation, they cope with it. This makes it an emotional, and therefore emotion focused coping strategy, according to Palomar et al. (2005:379).

Children have their whole futures ahead. But what if the circumstances are miserable, like the ones on the street? "Living on the street, you have no future", says Emilio⁷⁴. Future perspectives of street children is part of several researches on street children throughout the world (e.g. Hecht, 1998; Raffaelli & Koller, 2005). In these studies having a family, a job and an own house are dreams of the children for their futures. Under the influence of their drug use, the street children in my research, claimed never to think about their futures during this period of their lives. They do not have any dreams. The next dose of drugs is the only thing that matters. As Raquel said: "I drugged myself day and night, day and night. I could not think about anything else."⁷⁵ Not yesterday, nor tomorrow, but living in the moment and just getting through today is their only concern. This illustrates what Palomar et al. (2005:379) call an evasive coping strategy. By not thinking about their futures or even the next day, the children avoid confronting the problem or situation that causes them stress.

Fulfillment of Basic Needs

As explained at the beginning of this section, the borders between home and the street are very blurred in the stories of the adolescents in Buenos Aires. Most of them were already homeless when living with their families, if we take into account that 'home' is more than a physical place. When comparing the fulfillment of the needs of these children during the first two phases of their lives on the basis of the pyramid of Maslow, similarity is observed. The lack of physiological needs has become a somewhat larger concern during their time on the street for the children. They experience hunger and many of them do not have a fixed place to sleep, however as mentioned before this is not their main concern.

The lack of safety they experienced during their time at home, is still present. The situation on the streets of Puerta de Hierro as well as the Federal Capital influence their lives as much, if not more, in this second period of their lives. Moreover they experience more dangers because of the use of drugs on the streets, by themselves and their peers, which make their living conditions even more precarious, as is explained earlier. Concluding the safety needs of street children are, just as throughout the first phase, not met on the street.

The needs one step further in the hierarchy of Maslow, needs of love and belonging, are equally to their time at home, not realized. Loneliness is one of the most difficult aspects of street life. This loneliness can be a consequence of their drug use, while substance abuse is related to

⁷⁴ Interview with Emilio -age 17- (06-05-2009)

⁷⁵ Interview with Raquel -age 18- (13-05-2009)

loneliness and drug users are lonely to a greater extent than the regular population (Rokach, 2005:78). Some of the adolescents found some kind of surrogate family in friends, like Javier did in his two friends and their father with whom he used drugs and Raquel in her fellow *travestis*. However they still did not have a feeling of belonging on the street. In the second phase of the lives of the adolescents, the fulfillment of the pyramid of Maslow is almost similar to the situation when living at home. This is not very surprising, while the border between these two phases is often blurred in Buenos Aires. The living conditions in Puerta de Hierro and the Federal Capital, with regard to safety and love and belonging, as discussed in section one, are still present during the second phase of their lives. Besides the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy (1970) are still not perceived.

The street children in Buenos Aires use several coping strategies, problem focused as well as emotion focused, to deal with their lives on the street. However, the problem focused strategies are used to survive on a day to day basis (short-term). The stressor which is acted on is (daily) street life. The underlying problems as loneliness and the lack of love and belonging are not addressed (long-term). Moreover, using drugs, as a coping strategy, can push them into other stressful situations, like addiction and criminality. Although they can cope with street life in this way, their needs are not fulfilled and they identify street life as horrible. This asks for action. But in what way? In the next section I will explore how the adolescents I spoke to found help and especially what was their own role in this. What are the necessary tools for change and to what extend are they capable to influence this alteration?

3. Change and the Role of Agency

“I went to ‘Niñez’⁷⁶ because I knew they could help me with finding a place in a shelter. They could not help me right away, but gave me a phone number I could call if I needed anything. It would take about two weeks to arrange all the paperwork and to find a vacant space in a shelter. Three days after that, I was arrested on the street because of the possession of drugs. The police treated me horribly and intended to send me to an institution because I had no one who was responsible for me. Just on time I realized I had the phone number of Niñez and the police called them. Fortunately they took me to this shelter. [...] Here they give me a lot of opportunities, but I do not make the most of it”, says Manuel. The biggest problem for him is his drug use. He still has difficulties staying clean and has started a rehabilitation therapy at the beginning of April. He wants to finish the last year of primary school and after that get his diploma of secondary school. “If I do not study today, it will not serve me tomorrow”, he says. Nowadays he dreams about living with his girlfriend, having a job and being happy in the future. “To create a family is my dream, a quiet family”, he told me. He already has changed a lot, but still has a lot of work to do, to achieve his goals. He has received a lot of help from the people working at the shelter, but also he has himself to thank for the things he already accomplished. As he says: “Everyone can decide for himself whether he wants to change or not. I decided to do so.”

Manuel is one of the adolescents who wanted to leave the streets of Buenos Aires and decided to do so. But why? Motivation is a necessary component of leaving the streets, yet it is very difficult to articulate how young people become motivated to leave while others do not according to Garrett et al. (2008: 442). The majority of the participants of their research on homeless youths’ perceptions of services and transitions to stable housing, says that a gradual accumulation of conditions, events and feelings associated with street culture propelled them to consider leaving the streets. But still it is difficult to determine why this stimulates them and not others (Ibid). The adolescents represented in my research all left the street to improve their lives. They did not want to continue the lives they were living on the street, since they did not like them (see section two). In Buenos Aires as well the transition off the street was a gradual process for the majority of the adolescents. It is difficult to define a given moment or occurrence which actuated this alteration. Getting off the street and quit using drugs are two coping strategies with regard to the daily life and the future perspectives of (former) street children. They do not settle for life on the street and pursue something else. In this section I will explore how they do this.

⁷⁶ ‘Niñez’ is short for ‘*Dirección General de Niñez y Adolescencia*’ (Directorate General of Childhood and Adolescence).

Offered Help vs. Self-Action

“No, by yourself you cannot, you need the help of someone human”, says Raquel about getting off the street⁷⁷, hereby confirming that “our survival depends on others’ support, acceptance and love” (Ornish, 1998, cited in Rokach, 2005:80). In her research on street children in Bombay, Kombarakaran (2004:862) found that one way of coping with street life was the use from non-governmental organizations (NGO). This is a problem focused way of coping while it is an effort to act on the stressful situation. All the participants in my research made use of an NGO in one way or another, to get off the street and quit using drugs. Looking at the stories of these adolescents it becomes clear that help can be offered to you or you can look for it yourself, but without it, it seems impossible to succeed. This is not surprising, because how do you find a place to live and buy your necessities if you do not have money or a job, or a completed education and are under age?

In the Federal Capital a mobile team of *Niñez* drives through the streets to look for street children that need and want help to get off the street. They ask these children whether they are interested in living in one of the shelters in Buenos Aires. If these children are willing the team tries to find a vacant place. Several boys in the shelter came there in that manner. It is also possible to contact this organization to ask for help. Like Emilio told: “I was sleeping in the porch of one of the hotels in Buenos Aires. After a while the porter asked me whether I was interested in living in a shelter and told me about the mobile team of *Niñez*. I knew they existed but did not think it would help me. However, I did not want to live on the street anymore. I wanted a better life. Therefore I consented in the porter calling *Niñez*. They came to pick me up and brought me here [the shelter].”⁷⁸ The reservedness can be an emotion focused coping strategy, and passive in particular, as described by Palomar et al. (2005:379). While the child is focused on the emotions of the stressful situation (street life is awful), he or she does not take action but hopes and waits until someone else takes the initiative. On the other hand the crucial acceptance of the help *Niñez* wants to offer, is an effort to act on the stressful situation. This makes it a problem focused coping strategy.

Family can also play a big role in the initiative taking for the transition off the street, away from the drugs and in the rehabilitation process. Maria, the pastor of the Puerta de Hierro, says that mostly mothers come to her church to ask for help. Fathers are often absent and children themselves seldom take the initiative⁷⁹. As described in the first section most of the addicted street children in the *villa* stay in contact with their families by returning to their ‘homes’ regularly. The family members see the deterioration of the physical and mental health of their relative, due to their drug addiction. Also because the *villa* is a closed neighborhood, children living on the street and their drug use become a problem that affects the whole community. Not only family, but also neighbors are caught up in the problems, because they experience inconvenience or are concerned about the wellbeing of these children. These are reasons for reaching out for help. On March 30th I met a sixteen year old addicted boy in Maria’s church. His sister and two friends took him there to ask for help. His sister had locked him up in his room the entire weekend because she did not know

⁷⁷ Interview with Raquel -age 18- (13-05-2009)

⁷⁸ Interview with Emilio -age 17- (06-05-2009)

⁷⁹ Group interview with Maria, Celia and Yolanda (05-03-2009)

what to do anymore. He fled the house constantly to buy and use drugs and had stolen from his neighbors innumerable times to be able to buy his drugs.

The children living on the street in the Federal Capital in general do not stay in contact with their families and neither are closely related to a neighborhood. Nevertheless sometimes there are others, like the porter in the story of Emilio, who take the initiative to ask for help. Many rehabilitation centers (like CPA, Remar and Casa Flores (a rehabilitation clinic in the Federal Capital)) emphasize that familial support is crucial throughout the treatment and afterwards. This confirms the statement of Peele (1985:2) that people with strong social support can overcome their addiction, whilst others who lack this support have more difficulty to overcome their need.

The initiative of seeking help can also come from the child itself, like in the case of Manuel. The adolescents have the capacity to act themselves, i.e. agency is present. They are convinced that if you want to find help, you can go look for it and you will find it. They join the perspectives of van der Hoek (2005, cited in Bethlehem et al., 2009:74) and Conticini (2005:69) that street children are not just passive victims and people should certainly not neglect their agency. Also Slesnick et al. (2007:1239) say that individuals have choices in how they respond to influences and whether to even remain within a sphere of influence. My research confirms that there are possibilities and children *do* use them. Although a critical observation is added that circumstances can make this more difficult (Ibid). In Buenos Aires the living situation, mostly the area, influences the access to help. In Puerta de Hierro is less help available in comparison with the Federal Capital, e.g. the mobile team of Niñez does not work there and there are no shelters. Some of the people living there believe there are no possibilities, sometimes due to ignorance, and resign themselves in their fate. Manuel says that although it is more difficult in Puerta de Hierro, he would search for opportunities and leave the *villa*. "If the help does not come to me, I go to them. It is a choice to live on the street and use drugs, for everyone. I could be doing that now. Even the most addicted person can leave the street and quit using drugs, but it has to be his decision. You cannot let a bag of marijuana or a few grams of cocaine control your life", he says. According to Gleisvik (in Elster & Skog, 1999:60) willpower is essential for being able to quit an addiction.

Although there are several ways in which help is offered to street children, not all the help is accepted. This depends on the willingness of the child to be helped. Choosing not to use services that are available to them, is also a matter of autonomy and agency (Garrett et al., 2008:439). Remarkably difficulties are observed with adolescents who reject help, especially in quitting drugs. Diego told me he managed to quit using alcohol and drugs all by himself. He refused to be helped and is very proud he succeeded on his own. But did Diego actually succeed? No he did not, because after being clean for six months he started using pills again, because these make his work (selling newspapers) more pleasant. Besides this he is still using marijuana on an almost daily basis, even in the morning before coming to work. Gloria, Josua and Milton find themselves in the same situation. They have all visited the CPA, but did not complete the treatment or better said hardly started. They did not like the therapy and all claimed they were able to quit by themselves⁸⁰. Unfortunately,

⁸⁰ Interview with Gloria -age 25- (30-03-2009); Josua -age 20- (27-04-2009); Milton -age 16- (04-05-2009)

after a conversation with Maria and Isabel, who work with them, I found out the three of them did not tell the truth and are still using paco.

Only when change comes from 'within the person', people are going to experience lasting change and get off the street (Kidd, 2003:252). Whether the initiative comes from the mobile team of Niñez, their family, a random person or themselves, the decision to change lies with the child itself. If help is offered but not accepted the alteration is not likely to be successful. I.e. personal decision-making can be the key to success, depending on whether it is the decision to accept help or the decision not to do so. Agency, therefore, plays a significant role in the transition process and this is used in abundance by the adolescents. This makes the culturalist view of poverty, as described by Palomar et al (2005:376), also applicable in Buenos Aires.

Difficulties Related to Drug Use

The primary goal of any intervention needs to be removing the adolescent from dangerous settings, making sure they make better decisions about their activities in difficult settings, and replacing settings that promote deviant behavior (e.g. the street) with more positive settings that promote healthy and safe behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 cited in Slesnick et al., 2007:1239). Slesnick et al. (2007:1239) confirm this by saying that there are two possibilities for changing the drive of an individual's activity: first, change the settings in which individuals engage in everyday activities and second, change the way individuals respond to influences in particular settings (e.g. decision making). This implicates that moving children from the street, e.g. to a shelter, can help them quit using drugs and hereby confirms what Moene says: "Drug using habits may change when someone abandons a sub-group" (cited in Elster & Skog, 1999:30). Does reality prove this right?

In the Federal Capital a lot of the adolescents have been able to quit using drugs during their first period in the shelter. It is prohibited to use drugs there or to come 'home' under the influence of drugs. The penalty is staying inside for a certain period (three or four months), which means the adolescent in question is only allowed to go to school and cannot participate in any other activity. For most of the adolescents living in the shelter this kind of penalty is reason enough to quit using drugs and many were able to without any further (professional) help. However it is not that easy for all of them. Raquel tells: "When I came to the shelter I thought I was going crazy without my drugs. If you want something so bad, you go crazy if you do not have it. I kept walking circles in the house and when the urge was really bad I asked Marta [the manager] for a cigarette and we smoked together until I calmed down. I am not going to lie to you, now and then I still smoke marihuana, but that is it. Nothing else."⁸¹ Manuel is the only one living in the shelter who is in therapy to stop using drugs. It requires perseverance and determination to succeed. Emilio, who has been living here for three years, says that for addicted children it is more difficult to live in a shelter. He has seen a lot of children come and go because of their addiction⁸². For them it is not just the transition off the street, but there is also an addiction to overcome.

⁸¹ Interview with Raquel -age 18- (13-05-2009)

⁸² Interview with Emilio -age 17- (06-05-2009)

Paco makes the process of help even more difficult. Isabel says that paco-children are not admitted in many places. Most shelters do not accept children who use paco and there are just a few rehabilitation centers, which makes it difficult to find a vacant place. If a place is found, the addicts escape after a few days, because most of the centers work according to the Minnesota method, which means with an open gate policy. Their addiction and dependency overrule their will to become clean⁸³. Andrea, the director of Casa Flores, says that treatment of street children is very difficult because when they leave the clinic they go back to their old situation, to the place where they consumed and to the people they consumed with. According to her, that is why rehabilitation is more difficult for people living in *villas*. Not because they use more drugs, but because their surroundings are less stable, e.g. bad housing, less possibilities, little help and interest from others and often family members who use as well⁸⁴. All these aspects are present in Puerta de Hierro as has become clear in the course of this thesis. The housing leaves much to be desired, less help is offered compared to the Federal Capital, nobody outside the *villa* is interested in what happens there, and drug use is also a shared problem in many families (e.g. all four of Gloria's brothers are drug addicts).

Another complexity is that drug use can pull adolescents back to the street. Most of the adolescents in the shelter have had a fall-back and went back to the street, where they used drugs again. Eight months ago Raquel left the shelter to go back to the neighborhood she used to live and prostitute herself on the street. She drugged herself there for a period of three months before she decided to come back to the shelter. Still she is afraid of a relapse if she would ever go back to that neighborhood. She is certainly not the only one with this fear. Gloria and Alicia have to live with that fear every day. They still live in the *villa* where they used drugs and see other users and drug dealers on a daily basis. Despite these difficulties most of the adolescents managed to get off the street and quit using drugs. What effect this has on their lives is discussed next.

Change & Continuity

"My life used to be a disaster. I was a disaster. I did not think about the future, but now I do", says Gloria⁸⁵. This shows that quitting drugs and therefore getting off the street resulted in an enormous change in her life. She most certainly is not the only one. Many of the adolescents declare to be a different person after leaving the street and stop using drugs. But how do they manage to change? Here I will explore what has and has not changed during what I call the third phase of the lives of the (former) street children in Buenos Aires.

Love and belonging

All of the adolescents who participated in my research have made a change in the settings of their everyday live, what Bronfenbrenner (cited in Slesnick et al., 2007:1239) and Slesnick et al. (2007:1239) perceive as essential in the process of change. A shelter or rehabilitation clinic has replaced the most prominent setting, namely the street. This change affects the social contacts of

⁸³ Informal conversation with Isabel (28-05-2009)

⁸⁴ Informal conversation with Andrea (14-05-2009)

⁸⁵ Interview with Gloria -age 25- (30-03-2009)

the adolescents. By deciding to stay at a shelter or clinic they become part of a group. This is not always easy. Javier explains: ‘When I first came to the shelter I thought I could not trust anyone. All the boys have lived on the street and that is something you cannot take out of us. There is a saying: You can take a man off the street, but never the street out of a man. We have different habits, expressions and a way of talking and that endures, also here in the shelter. That is why there are so many conflicts here. [...] Now we live here and we have to make the most of it. Here there are people that care about us’⁸⁶. These people who care about them are the people who work there, but also the other adolescents who live there, explains Raquel. “I really love the guys here, despite the fact that we fight, we love each other. We are together the whole time; we eat together, we drink together and we go out together”, she says⁸⁷.

Some of the adolescents, mainly the members of Remar, have been able to get off the street and quit using drugs due to religion. In the Remar centers the addicts receive physical (detoxification) as well as spiritual help (the gospel). “Through affiliating with religious groups and practicing their faith, individuals gain strength, inner peace and a sense of community and belonging.” (Rokach, 2005:81) Gabriela says: “Before I came to Remar I felt very lonely. But now as a result of the love and the word of God I do not anymore”. All the activities at the centers are concentrated on religion, inner change and taking care of each other, which makes the group sentiment very strong. Still perseverance and willpower are very important. Gabriela has been there for over two years and has seen a lot of people come and go. According to her there are very few people that actually want to change. Gabriela does choose to stay with Remar and help other people with her own experience⁸⁸.

The change of settings for the adolescents in Puerta de Hierro is not so obvious. However they state that due to them giving up drugs they are less self-centered, which has a positive influence on their social contacts. Gloria tells that she never took her children anywhere when she was addicted, not to the movies, the theater, not even to school. She even physically abused them. Now her children are the center of her live and she wants to change because of them⁸⁹. At the end of our interview she realized she was running late to pick her children up from school. She apologized and ran to their school. Also Josua confirms this change in social relations by saying he did not have friends when he was using drugs. The ‘friends’ he used drugs with, were no real friends to him. Now he does have true friends and that makes him feel good⁹⁰.

Sense of Worth

All people in our society (with a few pathological exceptions) have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, usually high evaluation of themselves (self-respect, or self-esteem) and for the esteem of others (Maslow 1970:45). Developing self-worth by valuing the self and being less reactive to the negative judgments of others is a coping strategy (Kidd, 2003:255). Valuing the self is

⁸⁶ Interview with Javier -age 17- (15-04-2009)

⁸⁷ Interview with Raquel -age 18- (13-05-2009)

⁸⁸ Interview with Gabriela -age 25- (21-03-2009)

⁸⁹ Interview with Gloria -age 25- (30-03-2009)

⁹⁰ Interview with Josua -age 20- (27-04-2009)

connected to the opportunity to do something that will give street youth a sense of worth, e.g. going to school or finding work (Ibid:252). In the shelter all adolescents are obliged to go to school. Although studying is not their favorite activity and they all realize (some more than others) this is important for their futures, like Manuel. In the shelter is a separate room where the adolescents can do their home work. It takes some endeavor of the staff to get the boys away from the computer games and the table tennis to make them do their home work. They all do want to finish their school, but with as little effort as possible. In Puerta de Hierro this is a bit more complicated. Most of the (former) street children have not finished primary school. To complete and extend their education they have to go to a school for adults (for people over sixteen), but these are all very far away from the *villa*. This makes it impossible for these adolescents to travel there and get home at night⁹¹. Unfortunately, without a diploma it is difficult to find a job, says Josua⁹².

Many of the adolescents try to gain esteem from others, the desire for reputation, status and dignity, by presenting themselves in a certain way. In the literature this is called performance. "A performance may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way, any of the other participants." (Goffman, 1959:26, cited in de Wildt, 2009:213) Some of the adolescents in Buenos Aires leave out certain parts of their life history or lie about it. Ghorashi (2003:34, cited in de Wildt 2009:214) says that the way in which people tell their stories is an important instrument in the agency of individuals: "When people tell their stories they identify themselves with one or another group or reject some external identification made of them by a dominant society." Gloria, Josua and Milton all wanted to be identified as former street children who have quitted using drugs. They all told me their success stories about how they were able to quit using *paco* by themselves, which in the end appeared to be untrue. According to Maria, the pastor of the *villa*, they are all still using *paco*. Maybe less than before, but indisputably they are still using. If you want to quit, you can and you will, is their motto. Probably they actually want to quit, but, like stated by Slesnick et al. (2007:1239), circumstances can make the choice of an individual in how to respond to influences more difficult. Although Maslow (1970:46) indicates that the most stable self-esteem is based on *deserved* respect from others rather than on external fame or celebrity and unwarranted adulation, holding on to a positive idea about themselves shows a certain belief of the adolescents in themselves. For them, this presentation is a way to cope with their lives now and might give them the strength to eventually make this reality.

Future perspectives

Something else that has changed tremendously during this phase of their lives is their perception of the future. Whereas this was not an issue in the past, the future hopes and dreams of the adolescents in Buenos Aires are now mostly concentrated on having a job, a family and a place of their own. These are exactly the things Hecht (1998:184) describes based on his research in the Northeast of Brazil. His description of street children as 'holding a dream of eventually marrying,

⁹¹ Meeting with the Minister of Social Development in Puerta de Hierro (20-02-2009)

⁹² Interview with Josua -age 20- (27-04-2009)

working, becoming a homeowner, and having a couple of children' is something that has come across during conversations with the adolescents in Buenos Aires.

Although most of the street children in Buenos Aires lack a good example, they are still hoping for a family future. This contradicts the findings of Raffaelli and Koller (2005:258), who found that survival, which leads to work-related expectations, was the main goal of street children. They suggest that it might be difficult for street children to envision a family future, because of the lack of an example. The difference between their findings and mine might be explained by the fact that most of the adolescents participating in my research are not living on the street anymore. The positive experiences related to security, love and belonging they had after living on the street (e.g. in the shelter), might have influenced these thoughts.

The futures of street children are very uncertain according to Raffaelli and Koller (2005:250) and they found a lack of optimism in their research on future expectations of street children (Ibid:257-258). In Buenos Aires I did not find this. The adolescents believe that their hopes and dreams in life are reachable, which shows a certain amount of self-esteem. It might be possible that these adolescents already are somewhat further in their development in life and even have achieved some things compared to their past in contrast to the children in the research of Raffaelli and Koller. Most of the adolescents I spoke to already quitted using drugs and received some help of an NGO (e.g. the shelter, 'Hecho en Buenos Aires') or other people (e.g. Maria, the pastor in Puerta de Hierro). Even the ones I spoke to who are still using drugs, Gloria, Milton and Josua showed optimism about their futures, which might be related to the pursued esteem by others as explained above. They believe they *can* be and *will* be what they want. As Kidd (2003:248) describes along with the need to value and be secure in oneself, is the need for a person to an impression of agency, or the ability to act within the world. This comprises self-sufficiency, belief in personal ability, and the ability to see and create options (Ibid). The need to look to a positive future is also a coping strategy (Ibid:255). Whether their hopes and dreams will come true and they actually will be what they want and can be, the future will show.

Looking back at the hierarchy of Maslow we see that all of the levels of needs Maslow describes (1970: 35-47) are a part of the lives of the adolescents during the third phase. The first level of needs, physiological needs, is fulfilled. The shelter, their families or the adolescents themselves provide a shelter, food, water and clothing. Drugs are, for most of them, no longer a physiological need. Safety needs, living in a shelter or not, are much more difficult to fulfill due to the societal factors that play a role in this as explored in section one. The adolescents living in Puerta de Hierro are still living under the same conditions. To escape these conditions, means leaving the *villa*. Unfortunately the lack of money is a reason why this is often impossible. In the Federal Capital, these needs are somewhat more fulfilled. Because the adolescents are not spending their time on the streets, nor are using drugs, they do not come into touch with the corrupt police and influential drug dealers. During the first two phases most of the adolescents experienced loneliness and a lack of love, which made the third level, needs for love and belonging, unfulfilled. As we have seen, this has changed a great deal in the course of the third phase. Unlike before also the two highest levels of Maslow's pyramid of needs are perceived by the (former) street children.

Self-esteem plays a role now by doing things that give the adolescents a sense of worth, e.g. going to school, as well as presenting themselves in a certain way and looking positive at their future. However, this level seems to be fulfilled easier in the Federal Capital as a result of the existing opportunities. The last level is self-actualization. What a man *can* be, he *must* be (Maslow, 1970:46). “In one individual it may take form of the desire to be an ideal mother, in another it may be expressed athletically, and in still another it may be expressed in painting pictures or in inventions. At this level, individual differences are greatest.” (Ibid) Most of the adolescents already have determined their desires, however whether this level will ever be fulfilled remains a question for the future, as stated above.

In conclusion, while the lower levels are not completely satisfied, the higher levels seem to be perceived by the adolescents in Buenos Aires in this phase. This inclines me to associate with some of the critiques on Maslow’s hierarchy (e.g. Frame, 1996; Rennie, 2008) that although the portrayal of the basic needs is accurate, the hierarchy might not be that definite. It is not necessary for one level to be fulfilled, to make the next (higher) level appear. Due to changes, which not necessarily (completely) fulfill lower levels of needs, higher levels do emerge. Leaving the street and quit using drugs results in a tremendous change, which allows the adolescents to think about and perceive other objectives. We see here the interaction between agency and societal structures in the lives of (former) street children. Agency is the key aspect of change, however circumstances, as societal factors and drug addiction, can make this change more difficult.

Conclusion

Although street children are victims of their living conditions, at home as well as on the street, they most certainly are no passive victims. In many positive, and some less positive ways they try to deal with their lives and their future perspectives. Children decide to leave their homes because of their difficult living conditions that do not provide what they need. However, the situation on the street is not much different. Many of these children have grown up in extreme poverty (Rizzini & Lusk, 1995:392) and continue to live in poverty. Although, in the literature the accent often lies on the financial aspect of poverty, it is clear that the lack of security, which is a facet of poverty as well according to the UNDP (2008), is a more prominent aspect in the lives of the street children. The surroundings, in which these children live as well as the family situation, provide many difficulties concerning the fulfillment of the basic needs of these children.

Kudrati et al. (2007:1531-1533) found out that drug abuse seems to coincide with the transformation from working to living on the street. My research shows that also drug use makes adolescents leave their house and spend a certain part of their time on the street. Drug use can be a cause and a consequence of homelessness, as it depends on the definition of 'home' and the derived 'homelessness' that is used. As Mallett (2004:63) says home is more than just a physical space; home is also about security and close caring relationships. This is what often lacks in the physical place these children call 'home'. By taking this into consideration many street children were already homeless when still living with their families. It makes the border between home and street very blurred.

Although the children are looking for a better life, the second phase of their lives, their time on the street, shows a decline in fulfillment of the basic human needs of Maslow's hierarchy, mainly on the first level. Nevertheless, these children choose to make the transition from 'home' to the street, which shows agency. They want to get out of a situation they cannot handle anymore. This choice shows that their needs are not so much focused on food and shelter, as on change and freedom or self-determination. They are looking for love, belonging and respect, i.e. a life in which they are no longer neglected, abused or discriminated. Though, just as living at 'home', street life is not easy.

Street children use a lot of different coping strategies, emotion focused as well as problem focused, to deal with their daily lives and future perspectives. Palomar et al. (2005:399) state there is a strong relationship between poverty and the use of passive, evasive and emotional (all emotion focused) coping strategies. I found that it is not just poverty, but also drug use that generates emotion focused coping in the lives of street children. Thinking negatively about their lives, not thinking about the future at all and residing in their situation are clear examples of emotion focused coping. Addicted children are just focused on their next dose of drugs. Not yesterday, nor tomorrow, but living in the moment and just getting through today is the only concern of street children, which is reinforced by an addiction. The children avoid confronting their problems which makes it difficult to get out of the stressful situation of street life. As Lazarus & Folkman (1984 cited in Kidd, 2003:255) already said, problem focused strategies are seen as more effective,

because they are more likely to get an individual out of the stressful situation. That is also true for street children in Buenos Aires.

Poverty is not just connected to emotion focused coping strategies. One of the most prominent strategies in this research is using drugs, which is problem as well as emotion focused. Drug use can be a bonding factor with peers, and creating peer networks a strategy to survive the street (problem focused). However drug use can also be a way of escaping the harshness of life (emotion focused). Besides the fact that using drugs is a coping strategy and it generates emotion focused coping, it influences problem focused coping strategies as well. While drug use can be a bonding factor, it makes it also more difficult to build social contacts. "Dependence on drugs is an actual substitute for dependence on others." (Akerlind & Hornquist, 1992, cited in Rokach, 2005:72) This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that these drug peer networks are often not based on friendship but on better accessibility to drugs. Moreover, drug use makes economic activities more difficult and can push street children into other stressful situations, like addiction and criminality, which make getting out of the stressful situation more complicated. Consequently street children *do* use problem focused coping strategies, but these are focused on short-term coping. Long-term underlying problems as loneliness and the lack of love and belonging are not addressed by these strategies.

Based on the hierarchy of Maslow on basic human needs, only the first three levels of basic human needs are present in the lives of the street children during the time at home and on the street. The need for safety and love and belonging are not satisfied, due to the living conditions and the family situation. In spite of crossing the blurred border between home and street, these needs remain unfulfilled on the street. The lack of love and belonging is central in the lives of street children. This might be related to their drug use, while substance abuse is related to loneliness and drug users are lonely to a greater extent than the regular population (Rokach, 2005:78). Based on my research I believe that higher levels are perceived, while lower ones are not (entirely) fulfilled. The hierarchy is therefore not that definite as Maslow (1970:38) states. However, to perceive the two highest levels of this hierarchy a change was needed in Buenos Aires. To motivate change, choice is essential (Selekman, 2005, cited in Bender et al, 2007:26). The ability to make a choice, is agency.

Throughout the lives of the (former) street children agency is a key aspect. Street children decide to make the transition from 'home' to the street. On the street they use agency (problem focused coping strategies) next to emotion focused strategies and again in the transition off the street agency is essential. First of all these children search for help themselves or accept help offered by others. Regardless of who takes the initiative to make a change, acceptance of this help and therefore personal decision-making is crucial. Developing self-worth is another coping strategy that is carried out by the adolescents by doing something that makes them value themselves, e.g. going to school, but also by presenting themselves in a certain way, to gain esteem from others. Agency is again present, since the way in which people tell their stories is an important instrument in the agency of individuals (Ghorashi, 2003:34, cited in de Wildt 2009:214). Having a positive

mindset is another important strategy in the process of change. The adolescents in Buenos Aires choose to believe in themselves.

Although agency is undoubtedly present, drug use does affect its exertion. Not only need addicted street children to get off the street, but also quit using drugs. Because of limited opportunities for addicted street children, the use of drugs makes it more difficult to get off the street. Besides, for a street child it is harder to quit using drugs, because they often lack social relations. These are essential in overcoming an addiction, according to Peele (1985:2). Based on my research I believe that two approaches of Yaffe (2001:179-181), on how an addiction influences agency, are applicable. First, an addiction makes people act different from how they would do without the addiction. Street children might not have left their homes without their addiction or would invest more in peer friendships networks. Second, an addiction can make people not use their capacity for rational conduct. Street children, especially those addicted, do not think about their futures, live only for the next dose of drugs and often end up conducting criminal behavior. However, the eventual decision to get off the street and quit using drugs undeniably speaks of agency.

In conclusion, all of the above confirms that 'the way of life' poverty is called in the literature, is constructed by context factors as well as agency. This 'way of life' is a combination of the structuralist and culturalist view of poverty Palomar et al. (2005:376) describe. The stories of the (former) street children in Buenos Aires confirm that one is not just subjected to societal structures, nor can agency of the poor be the entire solution to the poverty problem. Agency is the key aspect for change, however an addiction makes it more complicated to exert this 'capacity for self-action'. It is important for development practitioners to take this agency into account and not approach street children as passive victims. Moreover, this research confirms that they should not just focus on material poverty, like Conticini (2005:81) already stated. Love and belonging should be central aspects in development programs.

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