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Biography

Lindsey McCarthy is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University, with research interests in the areas of housing and homelessness. Her recent project work has explored homelessness and mental health, the experience of homelessness for LGBT people, and tenants' experiences of conditions in the private rented sector. Lindsey's PhD exploring homeless women's constructions of home, homelessness and identity was completed in 2015 at Sheffield Hallam University.

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Abstract: There is a growing body of literature that attests that self-articulation is carried out through the building, decorating and arranging of home. This, for the most part, has tended to overly focus on inhabitants of private, secure and permanent housing. Addressing a gap in literature and theory, this article explores the possibilities of homemaking for the growing sections of society in insecure housing or homelessness situations – for whom housing is neither stable, secure, nor a necessarily positive entity. It does so by drawing on in-depth interviews and participant-produced photographs from women accessing homelessness services in the North of England. Of interest here is how homeless women relate to, engage with, and use material culture (objects, possessions, and the physical dwelling) to simultaneously make and unmake home. The article subsequently offers a new empirical focus for material culture studies which has so far largely neglected the experiences of marginalised groups.

Home, homelessness and material culture

Over the past three decades there has been burgeoning interest in the concepts of place, home and identity (Feldman 1990; Case 1996; Moore 2000; Holloway and Hubbard 2001; Holloway, Rice and Valentine 2003; Cresswell 2004; Hodgetts *et al*. 2010; Steiner and Veel 2017). The deconstruction of home has occurred within a geographical enquiry into the concept of place, no longer conceptualised as 'coherent, bounded and settled' (Massey 1995: 54) but in process.

Sitting within this body of work is a rich literature on the meanings of home (Gurney 1997; Somerville 1997; Moore 2000; Easthope 2004, 2014). Home has long been constructed as a refuge from the perils of the outside word (Peled and Muzicant 2008); a romanticised, idealised sanctuary; a paradise (Somerville 1992) and private space where one can relax and be oneself away from the gaze of others. This literature has presented a particular version of home, wrapped in positive values and associated with home ownership and the nuclear family (Saunders 1989; Rapoport 1995; Blunt and Dowling 2006), but has since been challenged from a variety of perspectives (Johnston and Valentine 1995; Hiscock *et al*. 2001), and a growing number of studies presenting alternative readings of home (Peled and Muzicant 2008; Sheehan 2010; Kidd and Evans 2011; Parsell 2011; Pilkey *et al*. 2015). The home is not always a refuge as feminist literature has established (Oakley 1976; Madigan *et al*. 1990; Gurney 1997; Meth 2003). Far from being private, the place of home has been opened up to wider relational and societal processes (Blunt and Dowling 2006). The home can never be truly private when subject to real and discursive intrusions (Bennett 2011; Burrell 2014). Scholars are now exploring how the boundaries of home are negotiated, both temporally and spatially (Steiner and Veel 2017).

There is also an extensive and growing literature on the relationship between housing, home and homelessness (Tomas and Dittmar 1995; Coolen and Meesters 2012; Parsell 2012; Author; Batterham 2018). Drawing on the geographical literature around place and meanings of home, this body of work recognises that both home and homelessness go beyond the physical dwelling (or lack of dwelling); that housing on its own is not sufficient to the attainment of home and that other signifiers are important (Somerville 1992). Home has been expanded to mean more than the bricks and mortar of the house, to a 'socio-spatial entity', a 'psycho-spatial entity' and an 'emotional warehouse' (Easthope 2004: 134). Home is a place imbued with deep feelings and vested with emotion (Cresswell 2004). Likewise, Somerville (2013) observes how homelessness denotes all kinds of deprivations: physiological (lack of bodily comfort), emotional (lack of love, connections), territorial (lack of privacy or space of one's own), ontological (lack of rootedness and belonging in the world), and spiritual (lack of hope, purpose, or self). Homelessness implies the loss of qualities associated with home: privacy, control, refuge, and sanctuary.

While these approaches are valuable in highlighting the symbolic and discursive meanings of home, a central argument of this article is that the materiality of loss affected through homelessness should not be underplayed. Home is relational, intangible, portable, psychosocial and emotional (Easthope 2004) but so is the roof over one's head, and all the things underneath it, of critical importance in affecting home – and by extension, homelessness. The meanings of home literature, by focusing on the immaterial quality of home, risks neglecting the role of physical components in the experience of home and homelessness. While defining homelessness by only the physical lack of adequate dwelling denies a diverse range of experiences, it should not lead to the concept of materiality being

dispensed with; nor to the assumption that materiality or physical artefacts cannot affect how home is experienced and felt. Home has been understood as a 'multisensory process' (Burrell 2014), and therefore something that can be sensed, perceived, felt, smelt, touched, and heard.

Connections between material and imaginary understandings of home have been explored in depth by Baxter and Brickell (2014) and Jacobs and Malpas (2013), whose work informs the theoretical underpinnings of this article. Baxter and Brickell's (2014) study enhances a growing body of work which appreciates home as a creative, ongoing and flexible process. Across the interdisciplinary literature on home, there has been a 'longstanding and primary focus […] on the productive making of the domestic world' (Baxter and Brickell 2014: 134). Whether achieved through relationships, identities or materialities, there is a common assumption that home is something that can be constructed, built, or made. Baxter and Brickell (2014: 134) define home unmaking as 'the precarious process by which material and/or imaginary components of home are unintentionally or deliberately, temporarily or permanently, divested, damaged or even destroyed.' Home unmaking should not be understood as a wholly negative erosion of home but an opportunity to recover it (Baxter and Brickell give the example of women leaving abusive marriages). The concept accounts for the complexity and porosity of the dwelling: that it can at once be experienced as home and un-home; constructed and unravelled both materially and emotionally; that home is a *process* rather than a fixed entity (Blunt and Varley 2004). Home unmaking is implicated in literatures on homelessness and domestic violence and relevant for the current focus on homeless women.

At present, there is a small but significant body of literature which explores the materiality of homelessness: how objects, possessions and the physical environment function in

homelessness; and how they relate to home making and unmaking practices (Hill and Stamey 1990; Hill 1991; Liebow 1995; Moore *et al*. 1995; Wardhaugh 1999; Padgett 2007; Hurdley 2013; Lancione 2013, 2019; Gonyea and Melekis 2017). Yet, the importance of objects to homeless people is still an area requiring further investigation (Digby 2006). A focus on things and people's relationship to things has a special relevancy when the people in question are homeless: 'because belonging, including the home, hold such important meaning for individuals in our society, the loss of material possessions is often viewed as a violation of the self' (Hill and Stamey 1990: 319). Lancione (2013: 239) highlights the entanglement of homelessness with material culture, or the *fabric* of the city. He argues the centrality of objects to the everyday experience of homelessness: they 'change the condition of something' and 'contribute towards making a place what it is' (Lancione 2013: 240).

There are examples of work focusing on the nexus between home, material culture and identity amongst other diverse groups of people. The role played by possessions in securing memory has been explored widely in research on migration and exile (Parkin 1999; Marcoux 2001). Hurdley (2013), for example, looks at home materiality, memory and belonging for destitute asylum seekers. In the context of their current lives, the displaying of things as an exercise in identity or memory did not matter; 'the concept of keeping memories of home and persons invested in display objects was unthinkable' (Hurdley 2013: 208). But there were other homely practices that did: 'the smell of cakes in the oven, warm 'naked' gas/electric flames in a reproduction fireplace; meeting in a YMCA gym to share stories; the hospitality of just listening: hearth talk, even if the hearth is missing' (Hurdley 2013: 218).

Also, in a study of over 500 homeless people, Moore *et al*. (1995) found that participants attempted to create a sense of home through decorating their personal space. Hill and Stamey

(1990) found that homeless participants coped with a loss of possessions by foraging for and acquiring them elsewhere and through non-traditional, creative means (via bin-diving, bartering, or sharing). Hill (1991) found that residents at a homeless shelter kept possessions that held symbolic value, whether mementos, things acquired after becoming homeless or items that symbolised a better future, such as pictures of children from whom they were separated. Hill (1991) concluded that possessions helped shelter residents cope with current circumstances and restore and maintain their sense of self.

Following Digby's (2006: 185) suggestion that 'the importance of objects has to be examined further in terms of homelessness [and that] objects are crucial to the construction of home', this article attempts to address two gaps in the literature. Firstly, recognising the importance of the materiality of home and homelessness, it contributes to understandings of the meanings of material objects in the lives and identities of homeless women. Additionally, it contributes to work on home and place to argue that home is far from being a space or state that remains static or constant once constructed; it therefore focuses on both the construction and unravelling of home (home *unmaking*). This article draws on original data to explore the relationship between homeless women, their possessions and the experience of home through a relational material cultural approach outlined in the subsequent section (Miller 2008, 2010). As the following section outlines, there is a tendency within the material culture literature to focus empirically on the middle-classes and those with financial capital. Of interest here is how *homeless women* relate to, engage with, and use material culture (objects, possessions, the physical dwelling) to make and unmake home. Female-specific experiences of homelessness are still largely subsumed in larger samples of men when talking about homelessness in general (Watson and Austerberry 1986; Wardhaugh 1999; Klodawsky 2006). This research sought to address this imbalance by giving prominence to women's voices and

answering Klodawsky's (2006) critique that women experiencing homelessness have either been forgotten altogether as a category or have featured only as a reference to something else.

Relational material culture

The home is deemed the single most important site for material culture studies (Miller 2001: 3), which highlights the significance of the home, and its artefacts, as a route to social and cultural analysis. Key to this theoretical approach is the idea that material culture within the home appears as 'both our appropriation of the larger world and […] as the representation of that world within our private domain' (Miller 2001: 1). There are three broad approaches to understanding material culture: structuralist, agentic, and relational. This section explores each in turn, focusing on the relational approach given its appropriateness for the present study.

The structuralist approach to material culture is almost archaeological in its concern with studying the artefact itself for information about the society that produced it: 'artefacts […] can yield evidence of the patterns of mind of the society that fabricated them, [and] of our society as we interpret our responses (and non-responses)' (Prown 1982: 6). Bourdieu's (1990 [1970]) study of the Kabyle house is demonstrative of this type of approach in its formulaic deduction of a culture's belief systems based on symbolic oppositions in the house's material culture. For Bourdieu, the objects of the home are symbols of social values and mores. For instance, in 'Distinction' and 'The Field of Cultural Production', objects are seen as tools with which to display social status and the meaning of objects is formed in relation to values established in the productive economy (Jacobs and Malpas 2013). A focus on the symbolic, under this approach, has neglected the embodied use and material nature of the home to the

extent that the built form or dwelling has become 'a passive carrier of meaning' (Clapham 2011: 362). These earlier versions of material culture studies, which stem from structural analysis, can be seen as deterministic (Prown 1982; Bourdieu 1990 [1970]) in that they draw a direct correlation between the artefact and 'mental structures, or patterns of belief' (Prown 1982: 6).

In the 1980s and 1990s, material culture studies moved from the structural to the agentic[i]: 'the home came to be seen less as a backdrop or reservoir of an almost unconscious habitus constructed out of order and relations […] [to] a mode of expression, a means by which people constructed themselves and their ideologies' (Miller 2001: 10). The home has been referred to as 'the externalisation of the self in its materialised articulation' (Jacobs and Malpas 2013: 285). This approach attests that self-formation and articulation is carried out through the way people build, decorate and arrange the home. Rapoport (1982, 2000), for instance, examined the relationship between people, house design and furnishing. However, this approach has come under scrutiny for its simplicity and one-dimensionality. The house and its material culture may have more of a restrictive influence than an expressive one (i.e. capacity to build, decorate and arrange the home is unequal); and the relationship that individuals have with the materiality of the house is not always comforting (Miller 2001). Any present occupant must contend not only with the agency of the previous inhabitants but the house itself as an agent (Miller 2001; Reeh 2017). The concept of the 'haunted house' encapsulates the personality that houses acquire through their histories. As such, 'the house comes to occupy us as we come to occupy it' (Miller 2001: 11).

King's (2008) approach to housing is also valuable in informing the theoretical approach here. King (2008: 22) uses the notion of dwelling as a way of conceptualising housing as 'more-

than-housing'. The term has been used elsewhere to replace 'house' which can be seen as restrictive to a certain Western-oriented dwelling (Coolen and Meesters 2012). 'Dwelling' connects housing to us; to a 'broader ontological condition' (King 2008: 22); it is about 'the very specificity engendered by enclosure, by what the object we call a dwelling brings with it for us in its singularity' (pp. 24). This approach takes seriously what happens *within* a dwelling and opens up housing to the role of human subjects and the personal. Central to King's (2008) approach are the concepts of individuality and implacability. King focuses on what makes dwelling *mine:* 'the place we live in becomes *mine* not because, or not only because, we own it, but because we are there, those we love are there and it is where we want to be' (2008: 3). Implacability, by which King means the outside world and its unpredictability, is a key feature of our relationship to dwelling. The house, he argues, offers protection and refuge at the cost of exclusion and insularity. While the ability to exclude others makes possible the personal relations we associate with home, it also cuts people off and divides us (Atkinson and Blandy 2016).

More recent interdisciplinary approaches offer a broader perspective on the home as material and symbolic, as well as structural and agentic. Miller (2001, 2008 and 2010) and Jacobs and Malpas (2013) offer a theoretical position that advances the 'either structural or agentic' debate. This revised approach moves from a focus on the symbolic aspects of the home, found in most structuralist accounts, to the material, or 'the ways in which home operates in *concrete* processes of human self-formation' (Jacobs and Malpas 2013: 284). Where this approach differs is in *how* it sees the material as being relational: that material objects give shape to the social world as well as being shaped by it. As Jacobs and Malpas (2013: 285), drawing on Miller, state 'just as objects have an impact on our lives even when unrecognised and unnoticed […] so too is the working out of self in and through the materiality of the

home.' The home and its objects exert an influence over our lives and selves just as the formation and articulation of self is carried out through the material culture of the home. Material culture has at once a determining (structuralist) force (on us) and we have an expressive (agentic) power through it. Jacobs and Malpas summarise their position below:

> […] given the relationality of the self, any form of understanding is never a form of understanding of the self alone, but always of the self in its relations with other selves, and with the material, worldly context in which it is located. Objects, on this account, become the repositories of meaning, memory, and identity […] to investigate our relation to objects is thus to investigate the very structure of self and identity (2013: 285-286).

The readings that we take from our relationship with objects should understand meaning as multiple. Jacobs and Malpas (2013) see objects as 'polysemic' and 'multivalent' - as generating a multiplicity of meanings and effects and implicating a range of engagement and response. This is in contrast to earlier attempts that assumed a direct relationship between material objects and behaviour, 'in that the one could be read off simply from the other' (Clapham 2011: 367). Jacobs and Malpas (2013) offer a revised theoretical lens through which to investigate the self in relation to its dwelling, and to interpret the home as a 'structure of self-formation, of self-articulation, and of self-remembrance' (Jacobs and Malpas 2013: 289). This approach sees identity and material culture as intertwined.

Much can be gained from the relational approach outlined above: it offers a corrective to past structuralist approaches which saw material culture and houses as simply passive, and an integrative framework that bridges both the structural and agentic as well as the symbolic and material aspects of home. The relational approach is inherently social in that it sees identity as being co-constructed between individuals, against structures and within a material context.

This approach provides a useful lens through which to begin to understand the relationship the women in this study had with home and its materiality.

However, the concept still needs developing in terms of who it has been applied to empirically. A narrow focus on people with secure and/or permanent housing permeates the material culture studies literature and risks becoming the normative positon on how people relate to their dwelling. Earlier material culture studies approaches are similar in their implicit assumptions that the dwellings people occupy - and are attached to - are private (Miller 2001); status symbols (Bourdieu 1990 [1970]); their 'own' (King 2008); and 'homely', 'refuges' (King 2008). They take as given that the subject within the dwelling is an active, relatively well-off owner-occupier with the ability to remain in the same property for a prolonged period with access to resources to decorate and make it their own. For growing sections of society this is not the norm - declines in homeownership and social housing mean that more people are homeless, renting privately in assured shorthold tenancies[ii], and living in temporary accommodation[iii]. A new empirical focus needs to reflect these changes by including the growing number of people for whom housing is not a stable, secure, or a necessarily positive entity (Croucher, Quilgars and Dyke 2018). The domestic space within which respondents in this study lived is not the private refuge (the house) featured in most studies of material culture (Miller 2001, 2010; Hurdley 2006; Burrell 2014); it is a flat in a housing project; a small hostel room on a noisy corridor; or a temporary couch in another person's house. These were truly porous spaces with thin walls and permeable boundaries where the outside could easily seep in. This focus speaks to the importance of revisiting the home and its objects within a newly precarious context.

Researching the salience of things

Methodology

This article stems from a three-year doctoral research project exploring homeless women's constructions of home, homelessness and identity. Its task was to understand the ways in which women negotiated their identities as homeless − how they related to their dwellings; what they saw as home; and how a loss of home impacted them. The responses to these enquiries required an engagement with the realities of other people's lives (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 1991).

The methodological approach emerged as a result of critical engagement with literature exploring place (Young and Barrett 2001; Johnsen *et al*. 2008) and identity (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006; Noland 2006). Several debates have been had about the best way to research the 'uncharted territory' (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 1991: 206) of home and the challenge of accessing it through interviews alone (Strathern 1987). Baxter and Brickell (2014: 138) note that 'unmakings in the domestic […] can be especially 'hidden' and therefore more challenging to research and identify.' This is even more challenging when the domestic space is temporary (hostels, supported accommodation, friends' sofas). Traditional approaches have tended to rely on language and verbal methods as the principal means of accessing interpretations, while recent years have witnessed the increasing use of visual research methodologies as reflective methods, allowing researchers to access what might be difficult to reach through words *alone* (Dodman 2003; Knowles and Sweetman 2004; Bukowski and Buetow 2011).

Visual methods − auto-photography especially − are deemed particularly suitable for exploring participants' observations of place that may be difficult to access solely through techniques such as interviews. They are arguably a means of exploring and capturing the

heterogeneity and phenomenological meanings of place (how it can hold multiple and shifting meanings and is multi-sensory, emotional and embodied) (Bijoux and Myers 2006). Photography was used here as an attempt to reveal the 'everyday', 'hidden', 'uncharted territory' of the domestic (Dodman 2003). Used alongside other techniques, such as interviewing, walking methods, or drawing, photography can help triangulate the data and facilitate a nuanced understanding of the complexity of the places and relationships being explored. Martin phrases this as 'a second glance at that which might otherwise be overlooked […] photography offers this opportunity, to confront in isolation elements of lived experience, made strange by their sudden removal from the continuum of day-to-day living' (1999: [online]). Martin emphasises the ability of photographs to tap into memory, 'a point of entry into a labyrinth of reminiscences.' Objects, themselves, are another route to human biographies (Hoskins 1998). As argued in the previous section, the premise of material culture studies is that objects in the home are tied to wider narratives of self; 'things are relations and dwelling […] they have biographies, threading in with human biographies (Hurdley 2013: 219). Artefacts (or photographs of artefacts) become a site through which discussion about identity and everyday life can take place.

There are also advantages in employing visual methods with this participant group. Self-directed photography is a portable method (Bijoux and Myers 2006) that can move with the participant; it is flexible; 'fun'; and potentially de-centring of power relations in the research process (as much as any method can be). It is a means of allowing participants to reflect on things they may not usually contemplate, or of 'making the familiar strange' (Mannay 2010); inclusive of groups that traditional research methods tend to exclude (Aldridge 2007); a useful stimulus in the research interview (Bukowski and Buetow 2011); participatory and enabling of participants to define their lives as they see them (Wang *et al*. 2000; Phoenix

2010; Richards 2011); a way of recruiting 'hard-to-reach' groups (Emmel *et al*. 2007); and a way of going beyond language which can be constraining for some (Dodman 2003). The rest of this section describes in detail the methods used: how they were carried out; their successes and challenges.

Methods

The research on which this article is based was undertaken with twelve women accessing housing (and related support) services (including hostels, supported housing projects, and a women's centre) across three local authority areas (two post-industrial cities and one large market town) in the North of England. It was mainly through trusted gatekeepers that participants came to take part. Established services provided a key contact able to signpost participants capable of giving informed consent and offering support or aftercare following interviews. The study involved twelve women to allow time to understand each woman's biography in depth. Women were of varying ages (between 18 and 49) and backgrounds so that a diversity of homelessness experiences could be captured. Seven women were staying in a hostel (Katie, Jo, Danni, Jenny, Gretel, Tori and Becky), four were staying in supported accommodation attached to housing projects (Bella, Lucy, Leah and Frankie) and one was temporarily sleeping on a relative's couch and accessing support through a women's centre (Jules). All of the women in this study were competing with or recovering from multiple disadvantages in addition to their homelessness: agoraphobia, physical and mental health issues, alcohol and drug dependencies, past and present domestic abuse and violence, traumatic childhoods, and a lack of family support.

A particular challenge was who to involve in this project through definitional issues around the term 'homeless'. The legal definition in England and Wales (as contained within the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, Housing Act 1996, and the Homelessness Act 2002) is relatively broad in international standards, in that everybody without permanent housing is considered homeless, including those who are 'roofless' as well as those who cannot be 'reasonably expected' to live in their current accommodation (this may be those living with friends or family members, 'sofa surfing', 'rough sleeping', or squatting). Nevertheless, the use of the term 'homeless' for convenience when recruiting participants was problematic, and this was questioned in subsequent interactions and interviews with women who did not have consistent residence in a dwelling but at the same time did not recognise themselves as 'homeless'. To ensure inclusivity of experience and to avoid misrepresentation, language in recruitment materials was revised to 'women experiencing issues around housing or home'.

The research consisted of in-depth life history interviews, participant-led photography and follow-up photo-elicitation interviews. All in all, 29 interviews were undertaken which in most cases consisted of one life history interview and one photo-elicitation interview (per participant) but varied (Frankie wanted to take her time telling her story so this was spread over three life history interviews).

The in-depth interviews explored participants' personal histories and routes into homelessness: their current housing situations; daily aspects of present life and routines; homeless pathways and experiences; meanings of home and homelessness; and feelings towards becoming homeless. The closing section left space for women to discuss anything that had not been asked, and importantly, to introduce the photography exercise.

Auto-photography is based on a principle of co-production between researchers and participants, allowing active engagement of people as 'meaning-producing beings' (Holloway and Valentine 2000). Participants were invited to generate images utilising disposable cameras and/or their mobile phone cameras after being given a pre-prepared camera pack containing a disposable camera and guidance sheet. Guidance was left relatively loose – so as not to impose the researcher's own ideas on the choice of photographs – but detailed enough to provide an adequate steer. Participants were asked to think about 'what it means to be me', 'how I see myself', and 'how I would like to tell my story'.

A photo-elicitation interview took place after photographs were developed and returned to discuss the images, and for the participant to further articulate their meanings. The method of looking through the photographs was left open to the participants – some went through them one-by-one, others spread them out on the table and picked random photographs to talk about, often grouping similar ones and talking about them together. One of the strengths of this method was that it enabled participants to become the 'documenters' which 'shift[ed] the focus of the study…towards [participants'] cares and concerns' (Goessling and Doyle 2009: 346). Visual methods offered portrayals of participants' lives that deepened understandings from the verbal interviews.

The use of visual methods posed several new ethical dilemmas. Anonymity is a taken-for-granted ethical norm in research, embedded in various codes of ethical conduct. But there are circumstances when the need for anonymity is less clear and may require considerable review; by the researcher whose research aims conflict with the principle of anonymity; whose research participants want to be identified; or whose research uses participatory visual methodologies who may encounter difficulties in anonymising photographic data. It is not

surprising then, that in recent years, a growing number of researchers have questioned the prevailing orthodoxy of anonymity (Grinyer 2002; Piper and Simons 2005; Tilley and Woodthorpe 2011).

The approach here entailed seeking consent for anonymity from each participant, and respecting their right to make an informed decision. While this solution might have been sufficient, there was unease about causing harm to participants by revealing their identity while at the same time, being aware that anonymity might lead to a loss of ownership of stories and a contradiction of research aims to make homeless women's experiences and identities more visible. In the end, it was decided the best option was to negotiate anonymity with the women, following a thorough explanation of the issues involved. Most of the women wished to remain anonymous and for their photographs to be distorted. The women who did not mind 'either way' did not happen to take any photographs where their face was identifiable (which was perhaps their own way of remaining anonymous without having to explicitly say so). When the photographs were examined, it was explained that any undesirable ones could be removed from the pack and either given back or destroyed. To ensure the safety of the participant, in their practice of auto-photography, it was necessary to abide by UK law when taking photographs, and to ensure the participant was aware of this via discussion, and an information sheet. Concerning images of people, the general rule was to seek verbal consent wherever possible. Where this was not possible, participants were informed of the extent to which the researcher would have to adapt/distort the visual data.

It was never the intention at the outset of the study to explore materiality; rather it emerged vividly and organically through the auto-photography and photo-elicitation methods. Indeed, had it not been for the use of visual methods it is probable that materiality would not have

emerged so significantly as a theme. The prominence that participants gave to objects was just one finding to emerge; others are explored elsewhere (Author). The next section explores the different categories of relationships to the materiality of home emerging as salient in the lives of the women in this study, namely 'anchoring' and 'salvaging'. Anchoring refers to the sense of home and solace women found in meaningful possessions. Salvaging is adopted from Snow and Anderson's (1993) term, 'salvaging the self', used originally to refer to the attempt made to hold on to core aspects of being placed at risk due to the adversity of homelessness. Here it is modified to denote the pro-active and creative strategies engaged in by the women to establish home.

Homeless women, material objects and homemaking/unmaking

Anchoring

> Since time and space are intangible and dauntingly infinite, we cling […] emotionally to our experiences and memories of the material world that is so reassuringly solid (Adams *et al*. 2001: xiii).

This exploration of things in the lives of homeless women begins with a focus on their absence or loss (Somerville 1992). For a multitude of reasons[iv], the women in this study were forced to make quick exits from their former dwellings, leaving behind not only their homes, but their possessions, roots (in that community, for instance), friends and families, and subsequently, their former selves. Common across all participant interviews was a sense of fleeing from crisis, trauma or an unhappy life, leaving everything behind and starting again.

I just got up and walked out of my house, left everything, got up and went. Just took some clothes (Katie)

Got together, got up duff[v]. He was a drug dealer. I just laid there one morning thinking 'I don't want this', just packed while he was asleep, left… (Tori)

Loss, particularly under circumstances whereby the severing was sudden and impromptu, may have devastating impacts (Hill 1991). A sense of this effect is present in the women's responses. Some found it difficult to look back on what they had lost, and only recently had found the courage to do so:

I can reminisce now without getting upset about the homes that I used to have when I was married. And I think, well, it was nice but obviously you have to re-build your life and move on, don't you? (Frankie)

An absence or loss of possessions often stood in for a lack of feeling at home, or feelings of homelessness itself, so that home was unmade. While lost possessions had a significant impact, participants in this study and similar ones (Hill 1991; Hodgetts *et al*. 2010) engaged in strategies of restoration. Objects also made home. One such technique included keeping and displaying mementos to anchor the self in the past.

Participants maintained possessions that held symbolic or sentimental value, the most prominent being photographs of family members and loved ones (Figures 1 and 2). As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981: 67-69) state, 'photographs are the prime vehicle for preserving the memory of one's close relations…and serve the purpose of preserving the memory of personal ties.'

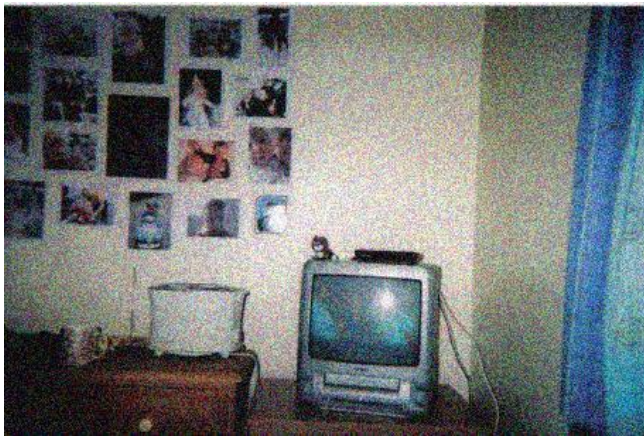*Figure 1: Photographs by Frankie*

Figure 2: Photograph by Katie

When the photograph depicts close relations that are deceased or separated from the individual, it can bear even more vivid emotions. Frankie's photographs portray her departed mother, surrounded by displays of flowers and candles; as well as a picture from her mother and father's wedding day. Echoing Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's (1981: 69) assertion, Frankie's photographs of her late mother seemed to 'acquire an almost mystical identification with the deceased person.' Describing the photograph of her mother and father's wedding day, Frankie said:

I always like to see my mum and dad together. So when I get up in a morning, I say "Morning mum, morning dad!" "I hope you're looking after my dad, mum." I always say that, I always talk to my mum.

Frankie's photographs of her mother resembled a kind of shrine, surrounded by items symbolising her mother's past existence. Photographs, for Frankie, perhaps helped to preserve a tenuous immortality to her mother and maintain her identity as a daughter. They may also have helped with the grieving process, mourning not only the loss of her mother, but the loss of her self (considering her mother to be an integral part of that self). They may have made this separation more bearable by acting as a symbolic representation of an absent loved one (Gulerce 1991). It is important to note that Frankie was divorced and lived on her own in a one-bedroom flat and was recovering from agoraphobia. Before becoming homeless she had always lived with family.

Katie's photograph depicts the wall of her room, in the hostel, decorated with photographs of her children who she has little contact with now. Referring to this picture, Katie said:

> …other than my kids' pictures, 'owt [anything] else can come and go.

In a similar vein, Jo expressed how she kept photographs of her niece and nephew on her walls, which produced an almost cathartic effect when she was feeling low:

> I have pictures of my niece and nephew, and pictures that my niece and nephew have done for me. And they're my... like when I'm feeling a bit down and I think 'oh I could do summat stupid'... I look at them and that fetches me round.

As well as linking to present and non-present beloved family members, photographs also acted as a means of upholding a sense of self and stability in unfamiliar and new surroundings and situations. In Frankie's case, it transported her back to a past when her

mother was alive and well; and for Katie, an imagined future when her children might be back with her. For Jo, photographs of family were particularly helpful in times of emotional distress, to escape and relieve negative feelings. Photographs or possessions that extend the family (the familiar/comforting) into the institutional-like hostel or short-term temporary accommodation helped to stabilise the self in the face of unsettled and transitory life periods.

Figure 3: Photographs by Frankie

Other mementos included possessions which had come with the women from past homes, or had been given to them by someone close. Frankie described a candle, from her father, a gift from Lourdes and a poppy that belonged to her mother:

> The candle's always precious. My dad gave me that, that's from Lourdes… I didn't want to burn it anymore because I didn't want to ruin it.

> The poppy… that's always been my mum's, that's always been on there.

The candle and poppy were precious objects from the past, which would be kept indefinitely by Frankie: she no longer burns the candle to hang on to it for as long as possible, just as the poppy has 'always been on there'. Following Belk (1988), possessions of the deceased are powerful remains of the deceased person's extended self. As Belk (1988: 148) contends, a

sense of past is vital in managing identities, and 'possessions are a convenient means of storing the memories and feelings that attach our sense of past.' Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) argue that as we age, possessions that people cite as 'special' tend to be those that symbolise other people, such as gifts or photographs, suggesting that boundaries of what constitutes the self widen as we get older.

Jenny described a poster brought from home which she had stuck on her bedroom wall at the hostel. Looking at the poster brought back memories of past family home life and acted as a representation of a loved one, her younger sister:

> It's the poster I have on my wall. I wake up every day and it's facing me and I just read it every day. It's: 'when you get to the top of the mountain, keep on climbing' […] I took a picture of that, because I feel like that's a part of me, I do like to... I think it's uplifting and I use that and it helps me... I use it to help other people as well, you know. But there, it's been cut a little bit... my little sister did it. So I look at that as well and I think, 'aww, little bugger'. She did that when I was back at home.

When asked which possession she had kept with her throughout moving, Leah replied:

> My teddy bear [laughs]… That and I've got like a memory box with all my pictures, like things that meant a lot to me, like tickets and stuff… It's like a Prada box from perfume… it's full of all my stuff.

As Belk (1988) notes, we are more likely to hang on to possessions associated with pleasant memories, such as 'things that mean a lot to us'. Anchors of the self in the past might be especially important to homeless women where moving from place to place is common; this

anchorage can be found in material objects which represent a link to an imagined better time and place ('home'). Objects were mobilised to strive for a sense of home in unfamiliar surroundings and to counter feelings of dislocation (Digby 2006).

Rogers' term, 'repository of memories', also comes in use here (2013). Rogers uses this term with reference to social housing tenants to describe the way that urban developments changed their daily lives - they talked about the home as an assemblage of memories that had been collected and were now stored in material objects. In this present study, home and a sense of self were imbued in a variety of possessions: mementos, or objects, with a relation to the past that had travelled with the women through their housing pathways. Such possessions helped homeless women cope with current circumstances and restore and maintain their sense of self in environments that were often not home.

Salvaging

Relocation to temporary accommodation was fraught with apprehension and strangeness for many of the participants. This unfamiliarity was felt and described, by Frankie, as not recognising herself in her new surroundings, new life, or new (depersonalised) identity as 'homeless'. Residing in temporary accommodation made the process of homemaking almost impossible. The exterior of the hostel buildings - with their signs above the door, keypads, and secure gates - brashly distinguished them as homeless accommodation.

Other physical characteristics of supported accommodation unmade home, including the lack of space and privacy, as well as the shared facilities and communal areas. As Tori said, 'in a little squatty room, you're not gonna get nothing. You can't really make it nice and homely';

and similarly, Jules: 'my home is somewhere where I've got my stuff in, it's… decorated as how I want it.' Women's possessions were often lost to theft or a lack of security in the shared facilities of the hostel and residents' spaces were subject to varying levels of control, invasions and interventions through hostel rules, staff, and other residents. There was also much more about hostel life that prevented any sense of hominess, including 'the smell of drugs', the 'racket' which interrupted sleep, the tensions between clashing personalities, and the intrusions of strangers: 'They just come 'ere and make loads of noise and then they end up doing one [leaving] when time's up' (Bella). When talking about what home meant to them, many of the women referred to bricks and mortar and physical walls, akin to King's (2008) 'implacable' house. Women harboured longings for the kind of home that the rest of society was afforded: the 'house', referred to as the 'real home':

I suppose a house like I had before with my kids… (Katie)

I think 'home' is a house (Jo)

If people weren't meant to have homes then I would say I am a complete person […] but I think, in general, because I've not got anywhere to live I don't feel a complete person (Jules)

Despite these restrictions, women engaged in a 'process of negotiations, contracts, [and] renegotiations' (Brickell 2012: 226) to *make* some semblance of home. Interrelated with this notion of 'making home' was the theme of control: over making accommodation feel like a place of their own, negotiating the limitations placed on them to do so.

As soon as Frankie moved in, she re-arranged the furniture in the living-room, and made changes to the decorative order (Figure 4), elsewhere termed a 'possession ritual' (McCracken 1988):

> I've re-arranged it, yeah. The chair there, the settee there, the table there, and then the TV over there, and nothing here… I thought "what's going on?" And that table wasn't in the middle, that table… I think it was here. So I do like that one. I like things like that, 'cause they're homely. And it looks cosy (Frankie).

Figure 4: Photograph by Frankie

Figure 5: Photographs by Danni

Since the majority of furnishings in Frankie's flat 'belonged' to the housing project, re-arranging their layout may have helped to exercise a form of control over them, for them to

be viewed as possessions. Danni had personalised the blank walls of her hostel room with butterflies, pictures of Marilyn Monroe, James Dean and Rihanna (Figure 5). This activity may be a means of managing, or excising completely, the otherness of previous and future tenants (Hurdley 2006). In Frankie's living room, lace curtains, trimmed with bows, backed, and renovated the plain blue curtains belonging to the housing project. Objects had been brought in from other rooms to act as stand-ins for traditional living-room furniture: a bath mat had been moved into the living room where it was transformed into a rug (also serving the purpose of hiding a threadbare patch of carpet); a pedestal mat had been turned upside-down and converted into a doily for the arm chair (Figure 4).

'Salvaging the self' is a term coined by Snow and Anderson (1993) to refer to the attempt made to hold on to core aspects of being that are placed at risk due to the adversity of homelessness. As Miller (1988: 362) suggests, objects may be used to personalise properties which do not belong to the occupant, 'to cover over and draw attention away from what the occupants clearly [see] as the intrusive signifiers of their housing status' [in this case, homelessness]. In Miller's (1988: 366) study with council housing tenants, 'alien forms were themselves expelled or thoroughly transformed and replaced with either purchased or built constructions by the tenants.'

In all the aforementioned cases, participants entered into creative strategies to appropriate that which they did not themselves own in a formal sense, whether material objects or the dwelling itself. This was more proactive than what Snow and Anderson describe in their original use of the term 'salvaging'. Rather than simply 'holding on' to what they could, the women actively engaged in strategies to recreate home. Objects were utilised, altered, moved around, adapted for a different use altogether to personalise the space and to reclaim it.

'Salvaging', then, is less about holding on to core aspects of being placed at risk due to homelessness, and more to do with a conscious, agentic practice of creating home through personalisation, control, and boundary-making.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to explore, via in-depth qualitative interviews and visual methods, how homeless women relate to and use material culture to accomplish home. So far, studies of material culture and home have largely worked from a relatively narrow empirical base, of the middle classes in stable, permanent and owner-occupied houses (Martin 1999; Miller 2001, 2008, 2010; Hurdley 2006; King 2008). The focus in this article represents a departure from these past accounts to acknowledge the increasingly precarious (Joyce, Mitchell and Keiller 2017), unaffordable [vi] (ONS 2018), unequal and dysfunctional (Fitzpatrick *et al*. 2018) housing system in the UK. This article focused on one group on the margins of this system - homeless women - and their ability to make a home in the constraints of their housing situations. This was a depth study with a small number of women about how material culture is used in respect to home, and does not claim to be representative. However, the process of homemaking is one in which we are all engaged – homeless and marginalised people included (Bachelard 1969).

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from this research. First is that homeless women use material culture in an attempt to make home. Within insecure spaces such as the hostel and throughout transitory housing pathways, it is perhaps more remarkable that participants had managed to keep cherished possessions with them - but hints at their importance. Homeless women used material culture to cope in unfamiliar spaces and through

transitional experiences. In the midst of dislocation, participants utilised objects as 'personal anchorage points' (Hodgetts *et al*. 2010: 296) to conjure up more comfortable past worlds or more hopeful future ones ('anchoring'). The homeless women in this study used material culture to negotiate a sense of ownership, personalisation and control in otherwise alienating, temporary and hostile spaces ('salvaging').

This desire for home is no different from anyone else in different class, financial, or social positions. As well as contributing to an empirical blind-spot in material culture theory, this article suggests that homelessness does not deter the desire to make home; that home is something people strive for and attempt to create regardless of circumstances. This reinforces the agentic approach of material culture studies: that we use material culture to establish and reflect a sense of home, comfort and self. Contrary to past assumptions homeless people should not be thought to be excluded from such endeavours. The use of material culture was more active than previous studies have found. This raises the question of whether – far from simply 'holding on' – homeless women have to try harder to create what they see as a resemblance of home, almost always from a starting point of loss.

Secondly, this article builds on Baxter and Brickell's (2014) concept of home unmaking in recognising home as a process and a practice (Petridou 2001) rather than a static entity. As such, it is important not only to place emphasis on the construction of home but also its unravelling and loss. This emerged in participants' wavering sense of home, and that despite their efforts to make their accommodation appear homely, it was still seen as a resolutely poor substitute for a permanent 'real' home (usually a house). In line with a relational approach, this article also re-emphasises the agency of material culture (the dwelling, objects) in the sense that it too can affect the subject. The physical dwelling did not always feel like

home for the women when looking back to what they had previously, before they became homeless; now lost or in storage. This article adds to the body of literature which recognises home as a dynamic and porous space. It could be made and unmade and switch between home and not home simultaneously. This article supports the idea that home is made and unmade through everyday practice and memory.

Finally, this article demonstrates the close relationship between home, homelessness and materiality and the need for further study into what have so far largely been separate spheres in academic work. It therefore contributes to recent calls to consider the physicality of housing and the meanings of home as a single question (Cook *et al*. 2016). Materiality affects how home and homelessness is experienced and lived and should therefore be a principal concern for future studies in housing and homelessness. In a context of increasing housing precarity, it is important to capture the dynamic nature of how home is made and unmade, which could be a fertile source of future academic enquiry in this field. More broadly, future work might seek to explore narratives of home making and unmaking within contemporary neoliberal contexts: how homeless women's responses and coping strategies draw upon processes of constructing and reconstructing an effective sense of 'self', for instance. Still more work is needed which looks at home and homelessness as gendered. This research focused solely on women's experiences since they have been left out of homelessness research for the most part, but a study which explores home-making practices among homeless women and men and how they might be gendered, would be a logical next step.

The findings here emphasise the importance of possessions in relation to creating home in unhomely spaces and contribute to the call (Shelter 2004) to make life better for people living in temporary accommodation in the short-term (while working towards a lack of need for its

use in the long-term). This may be through improving space standards to allow hostel residents to bring and adequately store their possessions safely in their own rooms (rather than in lockers in communal areas); supporting homeless people to keep hold of their possessions for longer (i.e. more flexible time limits on how long hostels can store people's items after they move out); taking a more flexible approach to decoration so that residents or tenants can better personalise and 'own' their space; and paying attention to how the overall environment can be made more like a home.

Notes

[i] This partly reflects a wider trend in sociology and cultural studies (Hall 1985; Sewell 1992; Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

[ii] The overall proportion of the population of Great Britain who live in rented accommodation has risen to 35%, up from 29% in the mid 1990s (Joyce, Mitchell and Keiller 2017: 1).

[iii] There has been a 60% increase in households in temporary accommodation since March 2011 (National Audit Office 2017).

[iv] These reasons included fleeing abusive relationships, serving time in prison, or just want of a better life/a 'fresh start'.

[v] "Up the duff' is a colloquial phrase for being pregnant.

[vi] Housing affordability has worsened significantly in 69 local authorities in England and Wales over the last five years, with over three-quarters of these being in London, the South East and the East (ONS 2018).

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