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**Engendering Homelessness: An Ethnographic Study of
Homeless Practices in a Post-Industrial City**

by

Helen Cramer

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Ph.D.,
Department of Urban Studies, Glasgow University May 2002

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by

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Engendering Homelessness: An Ethnographic Study of Homeless Practices in a Post-Industrial City

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine the extent to which homelessness is a gendered phenomenon. In the homelessness literature direct comparisons between men and women are rare, and the ability to compare is complicated by the tendency for research to be either on 'single homelessness' or 'family homelessness'. This thesis addresses this gap and systematically explores the ways in which homelessness is a gendered phenomenon. The research for this thesis focused on homelessness practices in a specific British city. The approach was an ethnographic one and included interviews with homeless people, homeless service providers, statutory housing officers and an observational element in specialist homeless person's assessment centres.

The research found that the services provided to homeless people are not neutral in respect to gender. There were found to be differences in the treatment of men and women while homeless and in the options available to them. There were gender differences in the staff and client approaches at the homeless person's assessment centres. The use of discretion in the provision of help and support for homeless people led to different treatment for women and men. Housing officers generally viewed homeless women as more vulnerable than men, and felt that reduced options for women in terms of service provision and accommodation meant that they deserved more favourable treatment as a result. There were also found to be gendered assumptions built into homelessness legislation. Although homeless women are often seen as more vulnerable than men this was not found to translate into better service provision or options for women. In general there was less emergency and supported accommodation for women although that which was available was smaller and often better quality than men's. There were some clear gaps in provision for homeless people, especially for people with children. The uptake of resettlement services was affected by staff perceptions that women were more able and willing to move into independent accommodation than men.

The research found that whilst relationship breakdown was important in contributing to many people's homelessness, there were different dimensions for men and women. The breakdown of relations with parents was more significant for young men and women, although the triggers appeared different. Women more often emphasised the breakdown of relationships with partners as an explanation of their homelessness and, for a high proportion of women, homelessness resulted from them getting away from abusive and violent relationships with men. Men were found to be more likely to deliberately leave relationships with partners, and a focus on the domestic abilities of men was useful in helping to explain the reasons why some men became and remained homeless. Gender roles and identities were also relevant to understanding addictions and some of the different barriers that men and women faced in resettlement.

The thesis concludes that the experiences of homelessness are patterned by gender and some experiences are gender specific. Our ideas and assumptions about gender do profoundly affect the experiences of homelessness.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	11
1.1. RESEARCH GAPS	11
1.2. RESEARCH AIMS	11
1.3. DISCIPLINARY ORIENTATION	12
1.4. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS	13
CHAPTER 2: GENDER AND HOMELESSNESS: LOCATING THE SUBJECT	15
2.1. INTRODUCTION	15
2.3.1. <i>Aims of the chapter</i>	15
2.2. WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?	16
2.2.1. <i>Definitions</i>	16
2.2.2. <i>Process and liminality in homelessness</i>	19
2.3. DEFINITIONS AND GENDER DIMENSIONS	20
2.3.1. <i>Are there gender dimensions to definitions of homelessness?</i>	20
2.3.2. <i>Gender and home</i>	22
2.4. GENDER TRENDS IN HOMELESSNESS.....	24
2.4.1. <i>Relative proportions of homeless men and women</i>	24
2.4.2. <i>Deconstructing the statistics in terms of gender</i>	26
2.5. GENDERED EXPERIENCES IN HOMELESSNESS.....	29
2.5.1. <i>Gendered bureaucracies</i>	29
2.5.2. <i>People processing</i>	31
2.5.3. <i>Gender and people processing</i>	33
2.5.4. <i>Gendered services</i>	34
2.6. GENDER AND THE CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS	35
2.6.1. <i>Identifying gender in individual causes</i>	36
2.6.2. <i>Criticism of the individual approach to homelessness</i>	40
2.6.3. <i>Structural causes of homelessness.</i>	40
2.7. INSIGHTS FROM GENDER THEORY	43
2.7.1. <i>Patriarchy</i>	43
2.7.2. <i>Hierarchies of dominance</i>	45
2.8. CONCLUSION.....	46
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCHING GENDER AND HOMELESSNESS: PROCESS, POLITICS, EPISTEMOLOGIES AND PRACTICE.....	48
3.1. INTRODUCTION: PROCESS AND DEMYSTIFICATION	48
3.2. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT	49
3.2.1. <i>Starting point</i>	49
3.3. THE POLITICS OF DOING SOCIAL RESEARCH: DEFINING THE PROBLEM AND REPRESENTATION	50
3.3.1. <i>Defining the problem</i>	50
3.3.2. <i>Representation</i>	51
3.3.3. <i>Anthropological answers: studying up</i>	52
3.4. RESEARCH APPROACH AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES	52
3.4.1. <i>Ontology, epistemology, reflexivity and ethnography</i>	52
3.4.2. <i>Gender and epistemological issues</i>	53
3.4.3. <i>Researching gender</i>	53
3.4.4. <i>Key questions</i>	55
3.5. FIELDWORK.....	56
3.5.1. <i>Fieldwork location</i>	56
3.5.2. <i>Fieldwork outline</i>	56
3.5.3. <i>Methods: participant observation</i>	60
3.5.4. <i>Methods: interviews</i>	61
3.6. FIELDWORK EXPERIENCES: ACCESS, INFORMED CONSENT AND RECRUITMENT	62
3.7. ANALYTICAL STEPS AND WRITING	64

3.8.	CONCLUSIONS	66
CHAPTER 4: HOMELESSNESS LEGISLATION: INTERPRETATION, ASSUMPTIONS AND IDEOLOGICAL WORK		
4.1.	INTRODUCTION	67
4.2.	THE HOMELESSNESS LEGISLATION: OUTLINE OF THE LEGISLATION	67
4.3.	FAVOURED GROUPS?	71
4.4.	UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS	73
4.5.	IDEOLOGICAL WORK.....	74
4.6.	CONCLUSIONS	76
CHAPTER 5: THE CITY AND ITS GENDERED INFRASTRUCTURE OF HOMELESS SERVICES.77		
5.1.	INTRODUCTION	77
5.2.	THE CITY: POVERTY, EMPLOYMENT AND HOMELESSNESS	78
5.3.	HOMELESS SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE.....	79
5.4.	EXPLAINING DIFFERENCES IN SERVICE PROVISION.....	81
5.4.1.	<i>Historical perspectives</i>	81
5.4.2.	<i>Single and family homelessness</i>	82
5.4.3.	<i>Provision for women fleeing violence</i>	84
5.4.4.	<i>Women only services</i>	85
5.4.5.	<i>Gendered ways of working in a service</i>	86
5.4.6.	<i>Conclusions</i>	87
5.5.	THE HOMELESS PERSONS UNIT: A GENDERED WORKPLACE?	87
5.5.1.	<i>Location, boundaries and security</i>	88
5.5.2.	<i>Gender roles at the HPU and SAC</i>	90
5.6.	CONCLUSIONS	93
CHAPTER 6: INFORMAL PRACTICES AND GENDERED NEGOTIATIONS.....94		
6.1.	INTRODUCTION	94
6.1.1.	<i>Aims of the chapter</i>	94
6.1.2.	<i>Fieldwork caveat</i>	95
6.2.	ARRANGEMENTS FOR PEOPLE PROCESSING.....	96
6.2.1.	<i>HPU, SAC and NHOs</i>	96
6.2.2.	<i>A positive view of discretion</i>	98
6.2.3.	<i>Changes</i>	99
6.3.	INFORMAL AND GENDERED PRACTICES	100
6.4.	WOMEN AS A SPECIAL GROUP	104
6.4.1.	<i>Effort, time and lifts</i>	104
6.4.2.	<i>Exceptions</i>	106
6.4.3.	<i>Fathers and suspicion</i>	107
6.4.4.	<i>Processing families</i>	109
6.4.5.	<i>Gendered experiences of violence</i>	110
6.4.6.	<i>Actively asserting gender</i>	112
6.5.	EXPLAINING THE SPECIAL TREATMENT OF WOMEN: MORAL COMMUNITIES AND JOB SATISFACTION	113
6.5.1.	<i>'Deserving women'</i>	113
6.5.2.	<i>Moral communities</i>	114
6.6.	HOW GENDER FAVOURITISM WAS MAINTAINED.....	116
6.6.1.	<i>Accumulative and collective favouritism</i>	116
6.6.2.	<i>Shared decisions and gender norms</i>	117
6.6.3.	<i>Men and gender conformity</i>	119
6.7.	GENDER NORMS AND BEHAVING 'BADLY'	121
6.7.1.	<i>Disruptive women</i>	121
6.7.2.	<i>Disruptive men</i>	122
CHAPTER 7: GENDERED PATTERNS IN BECOMING HOMELESS		
7.1.	INTRODUCTION	126

7.1.1.	<i>Aims of the chapter and methodological comment</i>	126
7.2.	FAMILY BACKGROUND	127
7.2.1.	<i>Parental losses</i>	127
7.2.2.	<i>Family conflict and younger people</i>	129
7.2.3.	<i>Parental alcoholism, care and large families</i>	131
7.2.4.	<i>Parental loss: discussion</i>	133
7.2.5.	<i>Consequences of paternal loss</i>	136
7.3.	GENDER AND COPING	138
7.3.1.	<i>Findings</i>	138
7.3.2.	<i>Gendered coping: 'domestic de-skilling'</i>	140
7.4.	RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN	144
7.4.1.	<i>Gender differences in relationship breakdown: findings</i>	144
7.4.2.	<i>Relationship breakdown: discussion: 'men jump, women are pushed'</i>	147
7.4.3.	<i>Relationship breakdown and domestic violence</i>	150
7.5.	ADDICTIONS AND GENDER PATTERNS.....	153
7.5.1.	<i>Findings</i>	153
7.5.2.	<i>Addictions and gender patterns: discussion</i>	157
7.6.	EMPLOYMENT	160
7.6.1.	<i>Findings</i>	160
7.6.2.	<i>Discussion</i>	162
7.7.	CONCLUSIONS	163
CHAPTER 8: BEING HOMELESS IN GENDERED WAYS: GENDERED INSTITUTIONALISATION.		165
8.1.	INTRODUCTION	165
8.1.1.	<i>Aims of the chapter</i>	165
8.2.	INSTITUTIONS AND GENDERED ACCOMMODATION	167
8.2.1.	<i>What is meant by the term 'institutionalisation'?</i>	167
8.2.2.	<i>Hostels as gendered environments</i>	168
8.2.3.	<i>Preferences for single sex hostels or 'love boats'?</i>	169
8.2.4.	<i>Gendered meanings of home</i>	171
8.3.	GENDER, HOSTELS AND INSTITUTIONALISATION.....	172
8.3.1.	<i>Long staying residents</i>	172
8.3.2.	<i>The function of hostels and total institutions</i>	178
8.4.	GENDERED HOMELESSNESS: WAYS OF BEING	179
8.4.1.	<i>'Training' for prostitution</i>	179
8.4.2.	<i>Masculine institutions and masculine ways of being homelessness</i>	181
8.4.3.	<i>Embodying public homelessness</i>	184
8.4.4.	<i>Gender, responsibility and dependence</i>	185
8.5.	CONCLUSIONS: GENDERED BARRIERS TO GETTING OUT OF HOMELESSNESS.....	187
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS		190
9.1.	CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS.....	190
9.1.1.	<i>Do men and women get treated differently by housing officers and, if so, how and why?</i>	191
9.1.2.	<i>Are homelessness services gendered services?</i>	193
9.1.3.	<i>Do men and women become homeless in gender specific ways?</i>	194
9.2.	CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE.....	196
9.2.1.	<i>Methodological reflection</i>	198
9.3.	FUTURE RESEARCH.....	199
REFERENCES		202
APPENDICES		222
APPENDIX 1: DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEWS WITH STAFF FROM HOMELESSNESS ORGANISATIONS		223
APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION GUIDE (WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN HOMELESS ASSESSMENTS).....		224
APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDES - HOUSING OFFICERS.....		225

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDES - HOMELESS PEOPLE228
APPENDIX 5: HOMELESS SERVICES230

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 3.1	Diagram to show the routes taken by single homeless people and families when accepted by the city council as homeless	59
Figure 4.1	Local authority assessment of the circumstances of the applicants and responsibility under the Homelessness Legislation	70
Table 3.1	Fieldwork outline	58
Table 3.2	Living circumstances of homeless people at the time of interview	62
Table 5.1	Numbers of homeless male and female applicants in three age groups, also family homelessness during 1998 -1999.	78
Table 7.1	The nature of young people's conflict with their parents	130
Table 7.2	Alcoholic parents and person's own addiction	132
Table 7.3	Gendered coping	139
Table 7.4	Relationship endings	145
Table 7.5	No significant relationships	147
Table 7.6	Current and past alcohol problem	154
Table 7.7	Gender, addiction and criminal behaviour	157
Table 8.1	Length of time homeless	174

Notes

All the names of the people interviewed for this research have been changed.

Key

HPU = Homeless Persons Unit

SAC = Secondary Assessment Centre

NHO = Neighbourhood Housing Office

A gap in interview or quote is represented like this ...()

City* / Region* indicates that the name of the city / region has been left out to preserve the anonymity of the research location.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Gaps

Whilst homelessness in Britain has been the subject of considerable research interest, there are still many areas about which very little is known. The subject of gender and homelessness is one such area. In a recent overview of research on single homelessness, Fitzpatrick *et al* (2000) identified twelve gaps in knowledge. These gaps included a need to further understand: the experience and scale of hidden homelessness; the structural processes underlying homelessness and their differential impact at the local level; the evaluation of preventative work; longitudinal research to trace the experiences of homeless people; drugs and homelessness; the friendship networks of single homeless people (2000:47) and finally, Fitzpatrick *et al* also stress the value of research that tries to overcome the single homelessness / family homelessness divide (2000:49). Although Fitzpatrick *et al* do not mention gender in their list of the most important gaps, elsewhere in their overview they do comment on the dearth of research that directly compares the experiences of homeless men and women (2000:27). A gendered analysis of homelessness touches on all of the above issues that Fitzpatrick *et al* highlight and, because of the scope and nature of the subject, can also address the basic theoretical poverty at the core of homelessness research (Neale 1997:36).

1.2. Research Aims

The aim of this thesis is to examine the extent to which homelessness is a gendered phenomenon. Underpinning the research are the following four questions:

1. Do men and women get treated differently by housing officers and, if so, how and why?
2. Are homelessness services gendered services?
3. Do men and women become homeless in gender specific ways?
4. Are men and women's experiences when homeless different from each other, and in what ways?

In the homelessness literature there is a scarcity of research that explicitly raises the subject of gender. What research there is tends to be small scale and narrowly focused, or consists of a brief section on women. Direct comparisons between men and women are rare, and the ability to compare is complicated by the tendency for research to be either on 'single homelessness' or 'family homelessness'. The literature, however, suggests that the experiences of homeless men and women are qualitatively different.

Looking at homelessness from a gendered perspective means to unpack the categories of 'men' and 'women' and to explore more fully the social and cultural creation of those categories. Not only may homelessness be experienced differently by men and women but also the experience of homelessness may be active in the very construction of what we mean when we talk about 'men' and 'women'. What a gendered perspective does not mean is simply to include or compare the experiences of homeless men and women.

A gendered perspective has profound implications for the approach that this research takes. For example, although the central research question may be summarised by asking if men and women have different experiences when homeless, such as the use of different services, a gendered perspective also asks if, and how, *ideas* of gender come to affect the provision of those services. This thesis therefore seeks to move beyond the scope of the majority of the existing homelessness literature by engaging with the subject of gender at a deeper theoretical level than has been previously attempted (see Chapter Three, section 3.4).

1.3. Disciplinary Orientation

An anthropological perspective is an important, if often implicit, orientation that explains much of the emphasis of this thesis. The main ideas of the thesis, the methods used, the process of analysis, reflexivity and the creation of a text are all informed from the author's disciplinary background in anthropology. For readers who are unfamiliar with this approach a brief resumé of anthropological principles will be outlined.

First, by taking an anthropological approach the reader should expect an emphasis on meaning and understanding, and a concern with everyday life. Quantification plays a subordinate role, although it may help to frame an analysis (Hammersley 1990). The comparative method is the second key characteristic of an anthropological approach to be considered here. The comparison is ultimately of a global nature, with the idea that through comparison, various aspects or taken-for-granted assumptions of a society will be revealed for their cultural specificity. In respect to this research, the comparison is between men and women. Third, an anthropological approach is one often concerned with the emic perspective, that is, a focus on the insider's point of view and which is a way of guarding against 'othering' the research subjects. The main 'insiders' in this research are homeless people and care has been taken to understand their situation as something with which they are actively engaged. Fourth and fifth are the related principles whereby anthropologists see fieldwork as the source of new knowledge and with an emphasis on the inductive process towards new theoretical insights as opposed to deduction. A sixth and final principle in an anthropological approach is one which places the researcher explicitly within the research process, especially with regard to power relations within the research. This principle has influenced a desire to look for answers by not just focusing on homeless people themselves, but also looking for answers amongst people who provide services to them.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

Before reading the chapters that follow, the reader may benefit from an explanation of the structure of this thesis. After this introduction, the next two chapters lay the ground for the research with an examination of existing literature (Chapter Two), followed by an explanation of the research method (Chapter Three). The rest of the thesis structure reflects a previously mentioned anthropological concern with power relations. The focus therefore initially looks 'up' in terms of relative power, examining homelessness legislation and policy (Chapter Four), and the provision of homeless services (Chapter Five). These two chapters are also intended to equip the reader with an understanding of some of the constraints that housing officers face

in their implementation of homelessness legislation. The 'interface' between housing officers and people who come to them for housing assistance (Chapter Six) serves as a pivot for the thesis before beginning to study 'down'. The final two chapters (Chapters Seven and Eight) restore the balance and flesh out the experience of homelessness from the homeless person's point of view. Chapter Seven looks for gender patterns in the reasons why people became homeless and Chapter Eight looks at people's experiences of homelessness and barriers to being rehoused. Chapter Nine concludes with the main findings of this thesis and suggests further areas of inquiry.

CHAPTER 2: GENDER AND HOMELESSNESS: LOCATING THE SUBJECT

2.1. Introduction

2.3.1. *Aims of the chapter*

The primary aim of this chapter is to provide the background in which to locate this research. To achieve this aim relevant literature will be scrutinised both for what it says on the subject of gender and homelessness and what it neglects to say, and avenues for further exploration will be suggested. Thus although the central purpose of this chapter is not a general review of homelessness literature, much of the key literature will be touched on in addition to the literature drawn from such broader fields as housing studies, social policy, gender studies, social exclusion, poverty, welfare and organisations.

The chapter begins with definitions in an attempt to answer the question: what is homelessness? Beyond definitions, the broader nature of homelessness is briefly considered in addition to the processual and liminal nature of homelessness. The chapter then moves on to ask the extent to which the previously considered definitions shed any light on a gendered perspective of homelessness, including an exploration of the relationship between the concept of homelessness and the concept of home. The following section looks at the differences in relative numbers of homeless men and women. This is an important issue, albeit unresolved, that continues to frame debates on gender and homelessness. Before going on to look at gendered issues in the individual and structural causes of homelessness, there is a section on people processing and gendered experiences of homeless services, especially men and women's treatment by welfare officials. Overarching theories of gender difference conclude this chapter and represent both an effort to unify an understanding of gender differences and a proposal of theoretical positioning.

2.2. What is Homelessness?

2.2.1. *Definitions*

The term 'homelessness' is popularly understood. Most people, if they were stopped in the street and asked to give an opinion on the causes of homelessness, would at least understand the question, if not readily feel able to comment. A popular understanding of homelessness does not however translate into a neat definition which academics, policy makers and service providers agree on. What can be agreed on is that homelessness, like poverty, is a relative concept (Watson and Austerberry 1986:10). By saying that homelessness is a relative concept several things are meant: first, homelessness means different things to different people; second, that it means different things in different societies (Hutson and Liddiard 1994, Glasser and Bridgman 1999); as a phenomenon homelessness can be traced over time (Greve 1997, Lowe 1997, Crane 1999, Watson and Austerberry 1986); and finally its meaning is not unrelated to an understanding of home (Wardhaugh 1999, Passaro 1996, Jahiel 1992, Watson and Austerberry 1986). An anthropological approach to a lack of consensus on definitions might normally be to suggest that the issue be resolved by letting the subjects themselves do the defining (a point also made by Glasser and Bridgman 1999:3). Unfortunately, in terms of research design, this is also problematic as people often do not recognise themselves as being homeless even though many other people might, which has been illustrated by a number of studies (Watson and Austerberry 1986, Jones 1999, Fitzpatrick 2000, Hutson and Liddiard 1994), including this one (see Chapter 8).

Definitions of homelessness range from the broad, encompassing a variety of situations, to the narrowly conceived. The narrowest definitions are probably ones held by many of the general public where a homeless person is one who is literally 'roofless' (Liddiard and Hutson 1998:61). Governments also define homelessness narrowly because of the subsequent responsibilities that stem from the definitions used (also Watson and Austerberry 1986:13, Carlen 1996:60). Aligned in critical opposition to the public and statutory definitions, campaigning groups probably embrace the broadest definitions of homelessness. Shelter's overall standpoint, for example, is quite simply that anyone is homeless if they do not have

decent, secure and affordable housing (Shelter 2002). The definition debate may also be said to reflect shifts in policy makers' perceptions of homelessness. For example, in British policy thinking homelessness was initially viewed as a social problem up to the 1970s, after which policy makers began to favour seeing it as a housing problem. More recently it has been understood as a combination of the two (Neale 1997).

To elaborate further on the UK statutory or administrative homelessness definitions¹, a person or household is regarded as homeless if they have no accommodation in England, Wales or Scotland that they are legally entitled to occupy. A person or household may also be regarded as homeless if the accommodation is not reasonable to occupy or if they are threatened with homelessness within 28 days. At the time of the fieldwork², the statutory definitions outlined certain groups as having priority need for housing such as: households containing pregnant women or dependent children; people with a vulnerability such as old age, or a physical or mental disability; or people who have been made homeless by an emergency such as a fire or flood. Whilst the statutory definitions are much criticised for their vagueness and for being open to interpretation (Neale 1997:47), they are significant in shaping academic ideas (Pleace *et al* 1997:1, Johnston *et al* 1991:2). A major drawback with the statutory definitions, however, lies in their function as rationing devices (Johnston *et al* 1991:3, Lidstone 1994:461, Neale 1997:47) which somewhat constrains their ability to explain. It is improbable that a definition meant to ration service provision will be able to explain the causes of homelessness because the purpose is different. Similarly, many single homeless people, whose circumstances do not fit the vulnerability criteria as specified by the legislation, will be left out of the definition, although their homelessness needs accounting for. Along these lines of argument Greve *et al* thus comment 'the definitions provided by the legislation are not alone sufficient to comprehend the nature of homelessness' (Greve *et al* 1986 in Johnston *et al* 1991:4).

¹ The English and Welsh legislation: Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 incorporated into the Housing Act 1985 Part III and then the Housing Act 1996 Part VI and VII. The Scottish legislation: Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 incorporated into the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, amended by the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1990. Since the fieldwork was completed there has also been a Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

² Since the fieldwork was completed the Government has proposed to extend the priority need categories through secondary legislation. This would include homeless people who are vulnerable because they have had an

As indicated by the above UK statutory example, definitions of homelessness are rights based, but also embody political statements and value judgements (Daly 1996:7). The definitions chosen have implications for understanding the scale of homelessness, who it affects (Glasser and Bridgman 1999:3, Crane 1999:9, Hutson and Liddiard 1994:30) and for the nature of provision and policy towards those defined, as well as those left out (Johnston *et al* 1991:2, Watson and Austerberry 1986:6-7). This point is a crucial one in terms of gender and will be returned to shortly.

In the wider academic community, several influential ideas around definition have emerged. Watson and Austerberry consider homelessness on a home-to-homeless continuum, with rough sleeping at one end and the absolute security of tenure at the other (1986:9). This continuum concept is useful because it allows for the possibility of a whole range of situations in between two poles, although one drawback lies in the difficulty of knowing where to draw a line between what is and what is not homelessness. Another drawback lies in its political and contested nature. A similar approach (in the sense that there are two poles) is to make a distinction between benign and malign homelessness (Jahiel 1987). Benign homelessness refers to a state of homelessness that causes little hardship, does not last very long, does not recur and where it is fairly easy to establish a stable home. Malign homelessness, by contrast, causes great hardship or permanent damage to the persons involved, lasts a long time, recurs and requires considerable effort to re-establish a stable home (Jahiel 1987:100). Fitzpatrick *et al* (2000) outline a comprehensive range of housing situations that may be included in definitions of homelessness and which, to an extent, can also be seen to embody Watson and Austerberry's (1986) continuum concept. Firstly, there is the most popularly recognisable 'rooflessness', where a person has no shelter at all, perhaps sleeps rough, is a victim of floods and fire, or is a newly arrived immigrant. Secondly, there is 'houselessness' where people may be living in emergency and temporary accommodation such as hostels, refuges, bed and breakfasts or psychiatric hospitals. The third group of situations is to do with insecure tenures such as staying with friends or squatting. The fourth group refers to those people

institutionalised or care background (such as care-leavers, those leaving prison and ex-servicemen). See DTLR 2001. In Wales a similar order has already been passed.

living in intolerable housing conditions; these conditions may involve overcrowding or be substandard or intolerable in terms of physical safety or mental health. Fifth and finally, households are included where affordability is the issue, such as where people have to share accommodation but who would otherwise prefer to live separately (Fitzpatrick *et al* 2000:8).

2.2.2. *Process and liminality in homelessness*

From the above discussion of definitions, we have so far established that homelessness can refer to a range of unacceptable or insecure accommodation situations. From certain definitions, such as Jahiel's distinction between malign and benign homelessness, we can also see that homelessness may have a temporal dimension. This emphasis is useful because it extends the idea of homelessness as a static situation to homelessness as a process. An emphasis on process is also important because it parallels the focus on gender: 'One is not born a woman; one becomes one' (De Beauvoir 1993). Several authors make this point about process implicitly through a focus on pathways into homelessness (Weitzman *et al* 1990, Anderson and Tulloch 2000, Fitzpatrick 2000) or more explicitly. Blasi (1990), for example, argues that homelessness should not be conceived of as some kind of 'end point' but rather as a recurring 'way-station' for the very poor, or a continuum of makeshift arrangements (1990:208).

The anthropological concept of liminality might also be useful to express and elaborate on a point about process. Liminality is a concept derived from Van Gennep's (1909) work on rites of passage. Liminality refers to a threshold state between a previous more stable state and a future stable state. Liminality can also be described as a process of transition. Turner (1974/9) applied the concept of liminality to acute sickness episodes that take a person out of their normal routines and into that of a sick role; Parsons (1951) and Frankenberg (1986/5) extended this idea of acute sickness periods to periods of chronic illness. Both acute and chronic sickness episodes may be seen as not too dissimilar to periods of homelessness. What Turner also suggested is that the concept of liminality can be understood within the idea of social drama, drama that brings into sharp relief tensions in a given society. Thus in a similar

way to ill health, homelessness may be experienced either as an acute crisis or as a long and drawn out crisis. This may bring to a head not only problematic issues for the individual but may also become symbolic of problems in wider society. Finally, because definitions of homeless as described so far, have largely emphasised homelessness as a physical loss of place, the concept of liminality alternatively emphasises changes in social roles and identity. Thus the conception of homelessness may be broadened to include the process of physical housing loss or erosion of identity or, for example, loss of self-confidence (see also Carlen 1996).

2.3 Definitions and Gender Dimensions

2.3.1. Are there gender dimensions to definitions of homelessness?

There are significant gender dimensions to definitions of homelessness. Starting with the statutory definitions, certain groups are immediately identifiable as gendered, such as pregnant women. Priority for having dependent children is also more likely to favour women as they form the majority of lone parent households (Mullins *et al* 1996:15, NCOPF 1996:2, Stone 1997:5). Watson (1999) and Watson and Austerberry (1986) argue that the distinction between family and single homelessness works against women as a whole. Watson (1999) asserts: '(t)hese definitions are gendered and have served to marginalise women's homelessness at the same time as operating with normative assumptions around the patriarchal family and women's place within it' (1999:81)³. What Watson and Austerberry seem to be arguing, then, is that women are assumed to be present within the category of 'family' so that women who fall outside this category are more likely to be ignored. Aside from a point about the confining roles of women in traditional family units, they see the lack of housing options of single women to have consequences for all women. As Watson (1999) extends an earlier point:

³ Although Watson (1999) claims that hers is a gendered analysis, she persists in seeing women as synonymous with the term gender.

There is a conundrum at the heart of analysing women's homelessness and that is the interlocking of three connected and almost inseparable layers: visibility / invisibility, estimated significance of the problem and its definitions. The crucial point is that each of these terms, if you like, determines the other. If homelessness is defined in terms of men's experiences and practices or men's subjectivities then women's homelessness becomes invisible. If it is invisible it is not counted and therefore it is underestimated (1999:86-87).

The theme of homeless women's greater invisibility has been extensively argued and can be illustrated by using Fitzpatrick *et al*'s (2000) range of housing situations as a template. Experiencing 'rooflessness' or rough sleeping, for example, is widely reported as something that men are more likely to do (Anderson *et al* 1993, Randall and Brown 1993, Neale 1996:8, Smith 1999:121) and women avoid or do in even more hidden ways (Passaro 1996:18-19). Being a fairly visible form of homelessness and certainly the most popularly recognised and extreme form of homelessness, rough sleeping thereby provides a strong basis for the association of men with homelessness. The recent focus of attention on rough sleeping through the Rough Sleepers Initiative (1990 in England, 1996 in Scotland) has been criticised on the grounds of its gender bias, in other words, helping largely men (Smith and Gilford 1998:71) and underlines a basic point here about definitions having gendered consequences.

Fitzpatrick *et al*'s second type of housing situation, 'houselessness' includes those living in hostel accommodation. Hostel accommodation is largely provided for and used by men (Harrison 1996:10, Neale 1996:8-9, Kemp 1997:72) and is again a fairly visible and quantifiable form of homelessness. The third type of housing situation as identified by Fitzpatrick *et al*, 'insecure housing', is something where women are thought to be in numbers at least as great as men (Webb 1989). Insecure housing is a much less visible type of homelessness, is therefore harder to quantify and could include staying 'care of'. 'Many women do not follow up their enquiries (to homeless agencies) or come forward to hostels, etc. They 'choose' instead to 'cope' with their homelessness in a different way – often by staying 'care of' or by returning to their unsatisfactory accommodation, hidden from view' (Webb 1989:4). In direct contrast to Webb, Fitzpatrick found that women were more likely

than men to use agencies (2000:140). Insecure housing may also include something that is experienced differently by men and women *within* a household and does not necessarily have to be due to staying with friends. In Watson and Austerberry's language, women may be located at different points from men in the home-to-homeless continuum 'where the male householder is the sole or major wage earner and controls the family income, the woman can find herself dependent on her partner for her housing security' (1986:21). The idea that within households women may be more likely to be homeless finds support from gender and poverty literature. May (1997), for example, expands on this point, arguing that women may experience greater poverty within households because of a differential access to family wealth, their position in the labour market and childcare responsibilities.

The final situation of homelessness that Fitzpatrick *et al* outline and that is particularly relevant in discussions of gender, are 'intolerable conditions at home'. Situations of physical or mental threats or harm are far more likely to happen to women at the hands of men than the other way around (Blackman 1998:52). The fact that women and men may have very different relationships and associations with their home has also been widely recognised. Gender and home is the focus of the following section, with implications for an understanding of homelessness.

2.3.2. *Gender and home*

Somerville has outlined seven dimensions to the meaning of home: shelter (physical structure, protection); hearth (emotional and physical well being); heart (loving and caring social relations); privacy; roots (source of identity and meaning); abode (possession of territory and ability to exclude others); and paradise (ideal home as distinct from everyday life) (Somerville 1992). Bunston and Breton (1992) delineate just four qualities of home as having; an embracing quality (protection, privacy and refuge); a situating property (continuity of life, context and rootedness); being the locus of social relationships (hub from which to branch out); and being the locus of self identity and personality development (belonging and being in

control). Saunders and Williams (1988) also emphasise the private as opposed to public nature of home and argue that it is one of the most basic units of society.

If it is accepted that the concept of home is in some way related to homelessness, it follows that the qualities associated with home may be relevant in understanding the meaning of homelessness. For example, in relation to the above definitions there may be implications for the meaning and experience of homelessness in terms of; mental and physical health ('hearth'); social relations being disrupted or negative ('heart'); feeling exposed, raw or too public (privacy); disrupted or fragmented identities, the adoption of alternatives ones, the loss of life's meaning (roots, self identity, personality development); alienation, outside of society, chaotic and out of control (self identity and belonging); disrupted continuity, being uprooted ('situating property'); feeling life as hellish, profane, purgatory (liminal?) (paradise).

The above list may be useful as a starting point for predicting the possible dimensions of homelessness. However, such oppositional values may obscure a muddier boundary. For example, as Johnston and Valentine (1995) have argued in relation to the concept of home: 'home is as much about conflict and oppression as it is about security' (attributable to Allan and Crow 1989, 1995:100). Thus for some who experience home as conflict and oppression, it is possible that being without a home may represent some sort of resolution (Tomas and Dittmar 1995). Another problem is in considering the point at which for example, a relationship breakdown becomes homelessness.

Women have traditionally been more strongly associated with the concept of home, through their role as child-bearers and primary carers (Moore 1988). As women's relation to home has also been an idealised one (Watson and Austerberry 1986:27), it is unsurprising that writers have drawn attention to situations in which home is not so rosy. For example, for some women home has been described as a prison not a haven (Wardhaugh 1999:91, Munro and Madigan 1999:108), a place of violence (Tomas and Dittmar 1995, William *et al* 1999) and a space subject to intrusion and violation (Johnston and Valentine 1995). Another suggestion has been that for women home is predominantly orientated around social relationships rather than place (Tomas and Dittmar 1995). It may then be supposed that if women are recognised

as having a different association with the concept of home, then they may also have a different experience of homelessness. Thus if for women even more than for men home is the locus of social relationships (Bunston and Breton 1992) then this may impact on them in homelessness.

In summary, if gender is the subject to be explored, then broader definitions of homelessness are useful. An emphasis on the process of homelessness and working with conceptions of home draw attention to dimensions of homelessness other than a loss of physical place. Men and women may be differently related to home and homelessness.

The following section explores whether there are differences between men and women in homelessness in relation to three main areas: whether there are more homeless men than women however homelessness is defined; whether men and women are thought to experience homelessness differently, such as being treated differently; and whether men and women are thought to become homeless in different ways.

2.4. Gender Trends in Homelessness

2.4.1. Relative proportions of homeless men and women

The relative proportions of homeless men and women represent an important aspect of the gender and homelessness debate. Although this thesis is based on qualitative methods and qualitative findings, statistical uncertainty haunts many of the key issues and as such is a crucial frame for this research.

When trying to establish the relative proportions of homeless men and women the issue of definition is again central. For example, in terms of statutory homelessness, more women than men are accepted by UK local authorities as being homeless. The higher proportion of women in the overall homelessness statistics reflects 'family homelessness' and households containing pregnant women, groups that are prioritised under the legislation (Evans *et al*

1996:2). Households containing children or pregnant women have been calculated to represent between 61 per cent (Evans *et al* 1996:15) and 80 / 85 per cent of the total (Greve 1991:12, Daly 1996:22). In the period 2000 - 2001, almost three quarters of the 114,000 households who were accepted as being in priority need were in categories which mainly affect women: 57 per cent were in priority need because of dependent children; 10 per cent due to being pregnant; and six per cent through domestic violence (DTLR 2002).

In relation to 'single' homelessness, research has consistently found that overall there are more homeless men than women (Anderson *et al* 1993, Kemp 1997:72). In the UK single homeless people are said to be in a ratio of roughly two to one, men to women (Smith 1999:112-113). Within this overall total, proportions of men and women are variously reported in different types of homeless situation. For example, in a large scale English survey in the early 1990s, men were found to account for 91 per cent of rough sleepers, 77 per cent of people staying in hostel accommodation or bed and breakfast accommodation, 93 per cent of people using day centres and 87 per cent of those using soup runs (Anderson *et al* 1993, Kemp 1997:72). In a Scottish survey 86 per cent of rough sleepers were found to be men (attributable to Shaw *et al* 1996 in Alexander 1998:17). Some studies also suggest there may be an observable gender difference in the length of time of being homeless. For example, Anderson *et al* (1993) found that women had spent a shorter time in their current accommodation than men with 75 per cent of women having spent less than a year there as compared to 64 per cent for men (1993:31). Similarly, an American study found that single men were homeless on average for longer than single women or women with children (43 months, 34 months and 15 months respectively, attributed to Burt and Cohen (1989) in Glasser and Bridgman 1999:18). Fitzpatrick (2000:76) also found, albeit on a small scale, that the young men in her study were more likely to be homeless than young women one year on. Finally the number of single homeless people overall is reported to be increasing (Deacon *et al* 1995 in Kemp 1997:69) and there is evidence that homelessness in women is also increasing, particular amongst young (especially black) women (Anderson *et al* 1993, Kemp 1997:75, Jones 1999:1, Carlin 2000:7).

2.4.2. *Deconstructing the statistics in terms of gender*

In attempting to account for the two to one gender ratio (of men to women) observed in single homelessness, several writers argue that women are homeless in more hidden ways. Webb (1989), for example, cites the high proportion of single women on a city council's waiting list as evidence that they are more likely than men to stay 'care of' other households. Webb reports that out of 23,000 applicants staying 'care of', 5,000 were single women with no dependants but only 147 women were accepted as homeless during the time of fieldwork (1989:5). Unfortunately Webb does not provide similar data for single men, nor explains what the other 18,000 people are doing; a comparison for the reader is therefore problematic. Webb is also to be criticised for trying to relate the 147 to the 23,000 (comparing a 'stock' figure with a 'flow').

With a claim similar to Webb's, Watson (1999) argues that in a previous study she found 'the extent of women's homelessness was at least as great as men's if not greater' (1999:87). Although Watson does not specify whether this claim relates to all women, single women or those without children, she supports this assertion by arguing that in two separate studies female inquiries about homelessness outnumbered male inquiries, by four to one in one study and by three to two in another (1999:87). Watson argues '(t)he point is that it is those statistics which register homelessness before it is institutionalised in hostels, on waiting lists or other forms of provision which are likely to give us the most accurate picture of homelessness' (1999:87). However, I do not think it necessarily follows that there are similar or greater numbers of homeless women on the grounds of women contacting agencies more. The problem with Watson's claims, and which she does not seem to consider, is that there may be gendered patterns in contacting agencies which may not necessarily mean that there are more homeless women. To take an example from health research, it is well recognised that women tend to report more ill health, especially psychological distress, and visit their general practitioners more than men but such information cannot be taken to conclude that women suffer greater ill health than men (Hillier and Scambler 1997:123-124).

Further support for the idea of gendered patterns of help seeking behaviour comes from Smith *et al* (1996) and Fitzpatrick (1999:14 & 2000). In relation to young people, they all argue that young women are more likely to contact agencies earlier than men and to contact different sorts of agencies. In Smith *et al*'s study, women tended to contact local authority housing departments and housing associations when they had a housing problem and men tended to contact hostels (1996:10). In Fitzpatrick's study too, young women were more likely to approach official agencies, which is explained as being because women were particularly anxious to avoid sleeping rough (2000:140). In relation to young people then, it is arguable that men are more likely to adopt a hidden route into homelessness.

An alternative approach to explaining gender differences in homelessness is put forward by Smith and Gilford (1998). They argue that in relation to young people, when the categories of single and family homelessness are merged, the gender difference disappears. '(T)he 'framing' of our understanding of youth homelessness by the provisions of homeless persons legislation, and the consequent separation of research into family homelessness and research into single homelessness... () has prevented the building of a comprehensive picture of youth homelessness across the whole generation, has obscured gender differences... () women are as likely to be homeless as young men but they present from a variety of domestic and parenting statuses unlike the vast majority of young men' (Smith and Gilford 1998:83). Whether or not this argument could be extended to adult homelessness as well is difficult to assess. To make direct gender comparisons it would perhaps require, as Smith and Gilford suggest, a new framing of the single / family distinction and certainly a revision of the current homelessness monitoring.

Finally, on the subject of homelessness statistics, several authors have pointed out numerous problems with the way statistics are collected which further contributes to the obscuring of gender differences. For example, accurate measurement of the extent of rough sleeping is widely recognised as problematic (Pleace *et al* 1997:9, DETR 1999:8) and so there is considerable scope for gender bias. Likewise, there are fewer women only hostels (Harrison 1996:10, Neale 1996:9), or spaces for women in mixed hostels (which might be off-putting in itself) (Hutson and Liddiard 1994:43). This may well affect the number of women recorded

as using hostels (Watson 1999:87). It has also been suggested that women in particular may be found intentionally homeless for leaving their partner (Watson 1999:92, Hutson and Liddiard 1994:43) and women temporarily without their children may be caught in a 'Catch 22' situation where they cannot get accommodation without their children and they cannot get their children until they have accommodation (Hutson and Liddiard 1994:43, Lowthian 2001). Finally Pleace *et al* (1997) point out that statutory statistics are unreliable because they focus on households and not individuals. Research by Hainer (1985) suggests that this may result in routine inaccuracies, in Hainer's case the routine underestimation of men. In Hainer's research, based on observations of collecting data for a census, men routinely got left out when counting involved households. This is because households themselves tried to present their relationships in a way that conformed to social norms and the census takers were also looking for standard relationship formations (reported in Glasser and Bridgman 1999:28-31).

In conclusion, there seems to be significant reason for caution with taking gender trends in homelessness at face value. There is much cause to mistrust the way the statistics have been collected and what conclusions can be drawn with regard to gender. This point is also made by Hutson and Liddiard (1994) and related to the issue of definition; 'homelessness statistics may say little about homelessness as such and much more about the way in which the statistics have been collected and how the problem has been defined' (1994:45). However, this does not mean that exploring gender differences numerically is not an important pursuit (also Watson and Austerberry 1986:56). To focus on gender, I would argue, is potentially to uncover more about the nature of homelessness (also May 1997 in relations to urban deprivation). The possibility that after accounting for different parenting statuses gender differences disappear (Smith and Gilford 1998), whilst a strong argument in favour of better gender monitoring, still leaves to be explained a significant body of evidence that indicates there are gender patterns in the various manifestations of homelessness. The problems involved with drawing conclusions about the relative numbers of homeless men and women commend the value of qualitative work.

2.5. Gendered Experiences in Homelessness

Before going on to look at gender and the causes of homelessness the following section seeks to examine the literature to establish whether men and women have been identified as having different experiences when they are homeless. More specifically the focus will firstly be looking at the idea that bureaucracies themselves are gendered and secondly, looking for research evidence that gender is important in the administration of homelessness (gender and 'people processing'). The focus then broadens to ask more generally if homeless services are gendered services, for example, in relation to hostel provision. As there is limited research on gender in the administration of homelessness this section will draw on wider literature.

2.5.1. *Gendered bureaucracies*

Weber is typically the starting point for organisational theory and for the study of bureaucracies. He stressed the formal rationality of organisations, underpinned by principles of office hierarchy, formally established rules, written documents and officials working at full capacity (Weber 1968).

'Bureaucratisation offers above all the optimum possibility for carrying through the principle of specialising administrative functions according to purely objective considerations. Individual performances are allocated to functionaries who have specialised training and who by constant practice increase their expertise. "Objective" discharge of business primarily means a discharge of business according to calculable rules and "without regard for persons". ... Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly, the more it is "dehumanised", the more it completely succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements' (Weber 1968:975).

Weber has subsequently been much criticised for neglecting the informal aspect of bureaucracies and it is now widely accepted that organisations need to be understood by

considering both the implicit informal ordering as well as the formal procedures (Roper 1994:88, Cullen and Howe 1991:1, Witz and Savage 1992:5).

Within the body of Weber's critics are writers addressing the issue of how bureaucracies are gendered. These critics argue that, far from being irrelevant, gender is central to understanding bureaucracies. Gender is at the heart of how jobs and hierarchies are imagined and infuses organisational structure (Acker 1990, and Acker 1992 in Roper 1994:88). For example, within the development of organisations and bureaucracies is the assumption of women's domestic labour and the division of labour within the family. Many positions of employment have been built on the premise that only men will fill them because it will only be men who can detach themselves from domestic responsibilities (Acker 1990:149, Witz and Savage 1992:5-6, and Roper 1994:89-90).

Secondly, women's work has a had a history of being mainly limited to roles which support, and are subordinated to, the male career. Acker writes: 'The concept of a "job" is thus implicitly a gendered concept, even though organisational logic presents it as gender neutral. "A job" already contains the gender-based division of labour and the separation between the public and private sphere'. It also follows that: 'Those who are committed to paid employment are "naturally" more suited to responsibility and authority; those who must divide their commitments are in the lower ranks' (Acker 1990:149-150). During the post-WW1 'white blouse revolution', women were recruited into very particular roles, such as into routine clerical jobs. The advantage of having female sections of a workforce was partly because they were cheap in comparison to the 'family' wages of men (Roper 1994:91).

Although the gendering of jobs has evolved significantly over the past century, these developments have still been restructured along gendered lines. Savage (1992) argues that although there are growing numbers of women now in managerial and professional jobs they are still largely jobs that do not hold significant organisational power. Acker (1990) supports this view: 'We know now that gender segregation is an amazingly persistent pattern and that the gender identity of jobs and occupations is repeatedly reproduced, often in new forms. The

reconstruction of gender segregation is an integral part of the dynamic of technological and organisational change' (1990:145).

2.5.2. *People processing*

There are several important texts on the administration of public policy, although only a few refer specifically to the administration of homelessness. One classic text is Lipsky's 'Street-Level Bureaucracy' (1980) in which he argues that public policies are best understood at the level of the individual workers whose collective actions add up to agency behaviour. Lipsky outlines some of the fundamental tensions within public service work, such as having inadequate resources, uncertain methods and unpredictable clients, which all combine to defeat the aspirations of service workers (1980:xii). The ideal of providing for clients' individual needs is lost in practice to the greater need to deal with clients as a mass. Mass people processing is associated by Lipsky with shorthand rules, stereotyping and categorising cases.

Howe (1989) and Cullen and Howe (1991) build on Lipsky's work and emphasise informal processes and office norms. They focus on staff practices in a Department of Social Security Benefit Office and argue that a basic categorisation of clients as either 'deserving or undeserving' is used and has significant implications for client's information and access to benefits. This distinction has also been observed to apply in specific relation to homeless people (Greve 1991:48, Lowe 1997:19, Neale 1997:36). Peer pressure, stories and jokes about clients all help to produce office norms, attitudes and informal practices undisrupted when new staff join. Further to Lipsky's explanations of the constraints and frustrations of public service workers, Cullen and Howe outline some of the features that are used in identifying the 'deserving' from the 'non-deserving clients' such as dress and demeanour. They further suggest that the continual adherence to 'special' or more 'deserving' groups reward workers with a greater sense of job satisfaction.

Although Lipsky (1980) and Cullen and Howe (1991) focus on the perspective of the service workers, none see the clients as passive in this process, although they do see them as being considerably constrained in their ability to influence what happens. Wright (1994) emphasises the active powers of negotiation that people have as clients within the bounds of their competence to understand the bureaucratic system (attributable to Tapp and Levine 1977, 1994:161). Thus in active attempts to positively influence the result of their encounter with officials, people may tailor their presentation in ways that they think are most likely to be received favourably. This literature therefore points to an understanding of the relationship between homeless people and welfare officials as a two-way process of negotiation, both parties operating within constraints, and from a perspective which informs the basis of Chapter Six.

Lidstone (1994) examines both the formal and informal rationing process encountered by homeless people. She emphasises the relatively unexplored aspects of informal rationing and identifies five ways in which this may be carried out; by withholding information, deterrence, delay, dilution and discretion, of which deterrence and discretion are of most interest here. For example, included in an understanding of deterrence, Lidstone argues that officials, official buildings, official forms, the poor condition of housing offered, plus the judgmental attitudes and / or staff rudeness may all act to deter an applicant (1994:464-465). The informal discretion of housing officers and receptionists is also understood by Lidstone to be a critical site of decision making and seems to fit well with Lipsky's (1980) description of 'street-level bureaucrats'. Drawing on Niner's (1989) research into the practices of nine local authorities examples of discretion include: deciding at what stage to accept homelessness; deciding on the nature and duration of investigations; and having informal working definitions of vulnerability. Lidstone concludes: 'there is a need for further research into the use of discretion in rationing housing to the homeless and for a greater focus upon the relationship between housing officers and applicants as this is a dimension that is often lost in the accounts of local authority response to homelessness' (Lidstone 1994:470).

2.5.3. *Gender and people processing*

None of the above studies consider that gender may be an important dimension to 'people processing'. However, both the clients' gender and the gender of the service workers administering the policies have been found to be important. For example, in relation to the criminal justice system, Pilcher (1999) found ample evidence to support the view that women were, on the whole, judged less harshly than men. Although she attributes this leniency mostly to the fact that women commit fewer crimes, less serious crimes and have greater domestic responsibilities, she also argues that these factors had a cumulative effect: women's demeanour was interpreted as being different from that of men and they were ascribed different motives for their behaviour. In one particular study by Gelsthorpe and Loucks (1997) the judges (mostly men) tended to see men as fully responsible for their actions and those actions as being selfishly motivated, whereas women were seen as having acted out of desperation and for the good of others. In short, men were seen as 'troublesome' in contrast to women who were merely 'troubled' (cited in Pilcher 1999:137).

Moving on from the gender of the clients to the gender of the administrators themselves, there is a wealth of literature on gender in organisations. This literature generally takes as its starting point the claim that organisations are not unaffected by gender issues. It argues that organisations are fundamentally gendered in ways such as gender inequalities in career opportunities (Witz and Savage 1992). Organisations are also identified as being gendered in the sense that there are gendered styles of working (Cullen 1994, Smith 1987 in Witz and Savage 1992) and that women's styles may be used for dealing with difficult clients (Cullen 1994) or as a management strategy (Kerfoot and Knights 1994), albeit in informal and unacknowledged ways.

In summary, existing research has drawn attention to the way welfare workers are key to understanding the implementation of policies (Lipsky 1980, Lidstone 1994). The nature of public service work is understood as encouraging informal methods of people processing. People may be informally positioned on a 'deserving' - 'non deserving' scale and staff discretion allows for this. Although the recipients of welfare are strongly affected by the

outcome of these informal processes they are not entirely passive. In the light of evidence that a client's gender affects official judgements about their behaviour, and that there are gendered styles of working, it is not unreasonable to suggest that informal methods of processing homeless people be examined more closely for evidence of the influence of gender.

2.5.4. Gendered services

Very little has been written on the subject of gendered homeless services, and what has been written seems to be confined to a few comments on differences in hostel accommodation. Single sex hostels for men are reportedly far more numerous and bigger in size (more bed spaces) than women's hostels (Watson and Austerberry 1986:62). Greve (1991) refers to this as a 'grotesque imbalance in provision' (1991:17). Some of these differences Watson and Austerberry (1986) attribute to the history of hostels. Many of the women's hostels or 'refuges' came out of the women's movement in the 1970s (1986:58), whilst men's hostels had previously been working men's hostels (Crane 1999:67). Neale (1997) also comments that the condition of women's refuges tends to be worse than men's accommodation (attributed to Berthoud and Casey 1988 in Neale 1997:208). (Women's refuges as a particular form of women's hostel have no equivalent for men that I am aware of).

Mixed, as opposed to single sex, accommodation is another aspect of hostels that is well documented. Whilst in theory mixed hostel accommodation is open to either men or women, many report that in practice it is often not accessible to women. This is either because managers are reluctant to let women in unless they fill all their spaces (Sexty 1990:52) or because women are reluctant to stay in a mainly male environment (Hutson and Liddiard 1994:43, Carlen 1996, Croft-White and Parry-Crooke 1996:6, Jones 1999). The assumption that single sex accommodation is appropriate for homeless people goes largely unquestioned and, if anything, it is mixed rather than single sex accommodation which is seen as problematic.

In regard to support services, information about gendered services is very sparse. The few examples include Morrish (1993:21), who mentions that there are less services for women who drink, that services are male dominated, and Randall and Brown (1999) who note in their recommendations that women need more specialist services. Hutson (1999) argues that support services for single people are usually discussed in reference to single people rather than families but disputes the assumption that families are any less needy of those services (1999:219). It is possible that assumptions about family coping conceals more specifically gendered beliefs about men and women's ability to cope (see Carlen and Worrall 1987:3). Whilst comments on gendered services are limited, they do seem to point to a shared assumption that women's needs are different from men's. Randall and Brown's (1999) recommendation that women need more specialist services is unconnected to the rest of their report and seems to have been tacked on at the end as a worthy afterthought. Thus it may be considered that women's needs are not only considered different, but somehow more special.

2.6. Gender and the Causes of Homelessness

Whilst there is ample empirical evidence that factors identified as helping to cause homelessness might affect men and women differently, most theories of homelessness overlook the possibility of gender dimensions⁴. This section begins by outlining the ways in which the causes of homelessness may affect men and women differently. Secondly, this section moves onto a fuller consideration of gender theory in an effort to unify the patchwork addition of gender to existing homelessness theories.

The causes of homelessness are largely explained in terms either of structural reasons or individual reasons. 'Structural' reasons refer to broad economic and social issues such as the availability of housing and the level of employment opportunities. 'Individual' reasons focus on such issues as personal behaviour and choices such as addictions, although they may also include abusive experiences or mental health problems. Historically, an understanding of homelessness has tended towards individual reasons and causes (Lowe 1997:24, Neale

⁴ Two notable exceptions are Passaro (1996) and Watson and Austerberry (1986).

1997:37, Watson and Austerberry 1986:70). Theoretical debates in homelessness have moved little beyond considering individual as opposed to structural causes (Neale 1997) although, as Fitzpatrick *et al* (2000) point out, the relationship between individual and structural causes is a close one (2000:19).

2.6.1. *Identifying gender in individual causes*

Individual-based causes of homelessness are grouped under various sub-headings ranging from 'personal characteristics', 'behavioural issues' and 'risk factors' to 'predictors' and 'individual experiences'. Individual causes generally fall into two camps: those that emphasise personal responsibility; and those that emphasise an inadequacy or failing that is not entirely an individual's responsibility (Neale 97:36). Substance abuse and crime may be said to characterise the former camp; physical or sexual abuse, and mental health problems the latter. Relationship breakdown may be found in either camp and gender dimensions are apparent in most of these issues.

Relationship breakdown is often a prominent explanation in people's own accounts and is seen both as a 'trigger' to homelessness and a more long-term contributing factor. Although relationship breakdown has been associated with gender differences, there are inconsistent reports as to how these differences manifest themselves. Anderson *et al* (1993) found that relationship breakdown was four times more likely to be given as a reason amongst men than women (1993:76) and in a smaller sample Morris (1998) found that homeless women were much more likely to have been previously married with children. This seeming contradiction is possibly better understood by exploring the meaning of relationship breakdown a little further and recognising the inherent difficulty of using statistics to illuminate the complexities of human relationships. Sullivan and Damrosch (1987) argue that men and women who become homeless due to relationship breakdown fail in those relationships for different reasons. They argue that whereas men tend to fail in their relationships in respect to their occupational roles, combined with an element of 'irresponsibility', women are more likely to have a crisis in their roles as wives or mothers. Golden (1992) and Tomas and Dittmar (1995)

lend support for this by arguing that loss of relationships is more central to women's homelessness because they are brought up to be dependent on them in ways that men are not. Therefore, it can be seen that the social roles that men and women perform are present in their relationships and the way those relationships break down.

This observed gender distinction is also central to the argument put forward by Passaro (1996), although she combines both individual and structural explanations. She argues that in times of high unemployment men are alienated from a role in the family when they no longer bring in any money. Outside of a family role, these men are not only in need of an independent shelter, but also more importantly, they are unable to recreate and sustain a home. Men's alienation from the family is therefore both the cause and the reason for the persistence of their homelessness. Women alternatively have the social role of being a mother through which they can sustain a home and without the presence of men can, to an extent, rely on the economic support of the state. Long term relationships and 'homemaking' with men may also be less attractive to women if their partners are violent. Thus in the event of relationship breakdown, Passaro argues, women with children can maintain a home whereas men tend to lose relationships, homes and children.

Relationship breakdown as caused by the domestic violence of men against women is consistently found to be a significant aspect of women's homelessness and highlights the gender inequalities experienced within many relationships. So having said earlier that statistics are unable to capture certain aspects of relationship breakdown, statistics on domestic violence may give considerable insight into gender inequalities. Anderson *et al* (1993) found that one in twenty homeless women reported domestic violence as one of main reasons for their homelessness (1993:104) and for the period 2000-2001 Government figures show that six per cent of women who were accepted as homeless cite domestic violence as the main reason (DTLR 2002).

Having considered relationship breakdown mainly from the perspective of marital type relationships, there is also the relationship breakdown of young people from the family. Smith *et al* (1998) have argued that the reasons why young men and young women may be

forced to leave home are different. Young men, for example, were found to be more likely to get into conflict with new partners of their mothers whereas young women tended to avoid this and were more accepting of new partners (1998:27-27). Young men were also more likely to be in conflict with their parent/s over their trouble with the police or issues of drink or drugs (1998:18). In contrast young women were more likely to come into conflict with their parents over the more restrictive rules placed on them; for example, the time they were allowed in at night (1998:27) or their choice of boyfriend⁵ (1998:18). Against the myth of the 1980s that young girls get pregnant to get a house (Hutson and Liddiard 1994:10), Smith *et al* found that some young women who had previously left home returned to their parents on becoming pregnant (1998:36).

Contributing to leaving home due to a breakdown in family relationships, may be physical, emotional and sexual abuse. A previous history of family abuse is reported as having happened to four in ten young women in hostels by Hendessi (1992 in Hutson and Liddiard 1994:61). Smith *et al* (1998) found that whereas both young men and women seemed equally to have experienced physical abuse, young women were more likely to have experienced sexual or verbal abuse (1998:25-26). Carlin (2000) also found that whereas 56 per cent of women reported involvement in prostitution when in care as a child or teenager, 12.5 per cent of men did (Carlin.2000:32). An experience of care was reported to be more likely for homeless women (Anderson *et al* 1993, Jones 1999:9) and may be related to previous abuse in the family (Smith *et al* 1998:32, Hutson and Liddiard 1994:62). Research on the greater likelihood of women experiencing the most types of childhood abuse seems fairly consistent. However, I would remain cautious about neglecting men's experiences; the under reporting of abuse is even more likely to be true of men.

The link between crime and homelessness is well established and highly gendered. That men are more likely to be involved in crime than women is reported by Anderson *et al* (1993) in terms of time spent in a prison or a remand centre (1993:32, also Jones 1999:9, Hutson and Liddiard 1994:65). Whilst recognising that women are imprisoned less than men, Lowthian

⁵ Choice of partner was usually heterosexual but Evans (1996) has noted that a significant minority of young people who are gay or lesbian are evicted by their parents when told about their sexuality (cited in Stone 1997:7).

(2001) argues that if a woman is imprisoned it is more likely that she will become homeless than would be the case for a man. This is because there are fewer women's prisons so the greater geographical distances would create a greater strain on her relationships (also Pilcher 1999:138). Women's previous relationships are also more likely to breakdown on going into prison than men, relationships that may help to maintain children and tenancies. Once a woman's children are no longer being taken care of within her family, she will find it harder to get housing on release (Lowthian 2001).

Homeless women are more likely to be diagnosed with mental health problems than are homeless men (Jones 1999:10, Pearson and George 1999:148). Anderson *et al* found that women were more likely previously to have spent time in a psychiatric unit than men (1993:32) and, in a report by Crane (1997) of homeless women over 55, two thirds of the women were reported as having a mental health problem (cited in Stone 1997:6). Bines found that homeless women from a variety of accommodation had more mental health problems than men (as is consistent in the wider population (1997:139)) and Marshall (1991) claims that the diagnosis of schizophrenia is particularly prevalent amongst homeless women (attributable to Herzberg 1987 in Marshall 1991:373, also Croft-white and Parry-Crooke 1996). The construction of mental health around ideas of gender is, however, also well established (Busfield 1996, Golden 1992).

Alcohol abuse is generally reported as a problem more likely to affect homeless men, especially older men (Marshall 1991). Anderson *et al* (1993) report that men are more likely to have spent time in an alcohol unit, while Daly, reporting on a study in the US, put the incidence of problematic alcohol use amongst men at three times that of women (1996:13). There are fewer reported gender differences in relation to drug addictions. However, the economic activities that men and women become involved in to support an expensive drug habit do have different housing consequences. For example, men are more likely to be involved in theft related activities that attract custodial sentences, whereas women are more likely to be involved in prostitution where there is a lower risk of imprisonment and, if they are imprisoned, the sentence is shorter (Pilcher 1999:138, Lowthian 2001). The gendered housing consequences of imprisonment have been outlined above.

2.6.2. *Criticism of the individual approach to homelessness*

Having established that relationship breakdown, abuse, mental health problems, crime and alcohol use may all affect men and women in different ways, it is important to note that although a link between such factors and homelessness is well established, asserting causation is more problematic.

Although individual causes of homelessness do aid an understanding of the processes of becoming homeless, they fall short of explaining homelessness adequately. For example, if a person is said to have become homeless because of an addiction, then it remains to be explained how that addiction arose. Part of this problem can be identified as being due to too much focus on homeless people themselves. Carlen (1996) argues that too much focus on the characteristics of homeless people is teleological and gains are limited when answers are sought amongst homeless people and explanations based on those attributes (Carlen 1996:27). There is therefore a need to look for explanations of homelessness at a wider level. Shinn and Weitzman state: 'if housing were cheap and abundant, employment high and benefits for those not employed generous, individuals who lacked social supports or those with severe mental disabilities would still have residencies; those who lost housing because of fire, eviction or domestic violence would be quickly rehoused. Such people have existed at other times, but few were homeless' (Shinn and Weitzman 1990:7).

2.6.3. *Structural causes of homelessness.*

The structural causes of homelessness can be grouped into several mutually reinforcing issues but are united by the underlying factor of poverty. With financial assistance most other problems can be overcome and homelessness avoided (Fitzpatrick *et al* 2000:28). The observed general increase in poverty and widening of inequality (Carlen 1996:28) is seen as a major determinant of homelessness. Other factors include an overall shortage of affordable housing, increased unemployment, benefit changes and the pressure of demographic changes.

The overall shortage of affordable housing and its effect on homelessness has been attributed to the decrease in the public rented stock available, due to the selling of council houses in the 1980s and the lack of new council house building (Greve 1991:18, Johnston *et al* 1991:14, Hutson and Liddiard 1994:47, Fitzpatrick *et al* 2000:20). The general decrease in the capacity of the private rented sector (Johnston *et al* 1991:14, Downing-Orr 1996:22, Hutson and Liddiard 1994:49, Greve 1991:19-20) and obstacles to its access (Rugg 1997) have also contributed to a housing shortfall, although this sector is now picking up again (Fitzpatrick *et al* 2000:20). The shortage of affordable housing has been associated with the still small capacity of housing associations (Johnston *et al* 1991:14, Hutson and Liddiard 1994:50, Fitzpatrick *et al* 2000:20) and the poor quality of housing available (Shinn and Weitzman 1990:6). An overall reliance on and belief in the ability of markets to provide housing has been the root of the housing shortage according to Greve (1991:21) and Johnston *et al* (1991:14).

In close connection to the decline in the supply of suitable and affordable accommodation, demand has reportedly gone up. There has been an overall increase in the number of households (Greve 1990:22, Johnston *et al* 1991:13), related to a growth in divorce rates, older people living longer, young people increasingly forming independent households (Hutson and Liddiard 1996:57, Fitzpatrick *et al* 2000:19-20) and a rise in lone parent households (Watson 1999:89). Unemployment had risen, (although is currently falling (Bailey *et al* 1999:11)), and for those in employment, wages relative to housing costs have declined (Greve 1991, Johnston *et al* 1991:13, Bramley 1993). The wage gap has reportedly affected young people's ability to afford housing (Downing-Orr 1996:24, Carlen 1996:28-29, Hutson and Liddiard 1996) and, for those out of work, Downing-Orr has calculated that there were at least 14 benefit cuts affecting people under twenty-five between 1980 and 1991 (1996:19).

Women may be particularly poorly located in respect to many of these macro or structural factors. Affordability is a key factor in access to housing and women on the whole can be said to have less financial resources. This is due to women's different position in the labour

market (Lister 1997:24, Millar 1997, Neale 1997:39), their greater childcare responsibilities (Marshall 1991:373), their lower wages, greater likelihood to be in part-time work and lower union power (Watson and Austerberry 1986:129, Watson 1999:88, May 1997). This may be especially true for black women and women from other ethnic minorities (Sexty 1990:18-19). Women's supported access to housing stock such as public housing has reportedly been better than that of men, especially for those women with children, but as supply in this sector has declined women will be disproportionately affected (attributed to Marsh and Mullins 1998, Watson 1999:90). Certain types of casual work were perhaps traditionally harder for women to get (Golden 1992). Although women's opportunities and position in the labour force may now be changing, the jobs they are able to get are still part-time and less well paid. By contrast, older men and younger poorly educated men are seen to be losing out disproportionately in the job market (May 1997:23, Turok and Edge 1999:18).

In terms of demographic patterns, divorced women are particularly likely to suffer financially, especially if they have any children from the marriage (Sullivan and Damrosch 1987:83). Lone parents, mostly women, are widely recognised as being amongst the poorest groups (Stone 1990:5, Daly 1996:21, May 1997:21). Older women outliving their partners, are doubly disadvantaged where older people are another of the poorest groups in Britain and older women are less likely to have employment related pensions (Sexty 1990:19&23, Watson 1999:90). Having said this, in an outline of the social distribution of homelessness, Burrows (1997) still found that the combination of characteristics that produced the highest odds of being homeless were: being young, being divorced or separated, living in housing association accommodation and being a single male who is currently economically inactive (1997:66). So whilst many of the structural factors can be identified as affecting women in particular ways, we know little about how men are being affected, other than the fact that they are apparently being affected in greater numbers. The issues of definition, visibility, and numerical uncertainty therefore continue to obscure gender dimensions to homelessness.

These structural factors serve as more adequate explanations of homelessness than individual factors. Their weakness perhaps lies in their ability to illuminate the processes by which people become homeless, and for not adequately explaining homelessness in all

circumstances (Downing-Orr 1996:2). Although it has been possible to supplement observations of gender difference for individual factors (e.g. how alcohol is more likely to be abused by men) and anticipate gender differences for structural factors (such as women being individually poorer), an overall theory to explain gender differences in homelessness is required. Obviously, gender theory cannot hope to explain homelessness itself but it may be useful in addressing the gap in our understanding of gender differences observed in relation to many aspects of homelessness. Gender theory may also help to establish if differences are all to women's disadvantage or if, in respect to homelessness, we might expect gender differences to manifest in other ways.

2.7. Insights from Gender Theory

This final section examines some of the literature on gender theory. This literature is useful in helping to bring together all the qualifications that have been made so far in relation to gender and definitions of homelessness, differences in experiences, treatment and the causes of homelessness. This section is also important for the way it has problematised any taken-for-granted assumptions made about the differences between men and women.

2.7.1. *Patriarchy*

Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' (1990:20). Walby proposes six key structures of patriarchy: the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. Although relatively autonomous, these six structures reinforce and interconnect in a way necessary to capture the variation in gender relations.

By 'patriarchal mode of production', Walby is referring to the relations between men and women in the household in the context of a capitalist economy. Capitalism and patriarchy

both rely on women's unpaid labour in the home and women are thus constrained through lack of alternative options. Outside of the home, women are disadvantaged in paid work because of occupational segregation by sex rather than, for example, erosion of skills because of time spent caring for others. This segregation, Walby argues, was pushed through by (male) unions and the state, and supported by measures such as marriage bars and men's earning of 'family wages'. The state is seen as being systematically biased towards patriarchal interests despite there having been changes facilitating women's access to the public sphere. Male violence is a form of power that men have over women; only a minority of violent men are thought to be needed for women generally to feel intimidated. Walby sees male violence as social structure in the Durkheimian sense⁶ rather than as acts of individual aggression. The state supports male violence by ineffective intervention on women's behalf. Men are socialised into violence (machismo) and taught to use violence to settle disputes. Patriarchal relations in sexuality refer to traditional male sexual dominance and the sexual double standard that allows men more freedom than women. Patriarchal cultural institutions refer to the constructed notions of femininity and masculinity but remain fairly unelaborated beyond this.

The greatest appeal of Walby's theory of patriarchy lies in her attempt to explain gender disadvantage in a wide variety of settings. Without such an all-encompassing gender theory women's disadvantages as listed in relation to the possible causes of homelessness appear random and incomprehensible. Walby's theory helps to explain why women are economically at a disadvantage to men (occupational segregation in paid work and state support of this) and thus less able to finance housing independently. Walby's theory tries to account for why women are more likely to choose the constraints of marriage (restricted alternatives), why young women are constrained by stricter rules at home (sexual double standard) and why men might commit more crime and drink more (male violence and machismo). Finally Walby's theory of patriarchy allows for an understanding of how financial constraints, dependence, state support, sexual double standard and male sexual dominance all may come together to explain domestic violence, men's abuse of women more generally, and why, in the light of

⁶ Social structure, in the sense that Durkheim understood suicide to be a social, rather than an individual act. See Durkheim (1897).

such disadvantage, women might suffer from mental health problems more than men. As an all-encompassing theory of women's oppression and exploitation, Walby's theory is perhaps less able to account for why men, with all their advantages, may come to be homeless. Despite her assertion that she sees patriarchy operating at the level of social structures and practices, other major criticisms of Walby's theory is that the emphasis still falls too much on structures at the expense of human agency (Pilcher 1999:11).

2.7.2. *Hierarchies of dominance*

An alternative theory of gender disadvantage which places greater emphasis on practices of human agency is Connel's (1996) ideas of multiple and hegemonic masculinity. Connel regards male dominance in terms of individuals, each with their own gender project, actively negotiating a place within gender hierarchies in multiple settings. Within his system of gender hierarchies, masculinity is always dominant to femininity although some masculinities are higher than others. 'Hegemonic masculinity' for example is at the top of the hierarchy and is the culturally dominant ideal centred on authority, strength, paid work and heterosexuality. Although this is an ideal that few men can live up to, many men are seen as gaining advantage from it and thus are involved in 'complicit masculinity'. 'Subordinate masculinity' is below 'complicit masculinity' and is exemplified by gay men. 'Marginalised masculinity' is also below 'complicit masculinity' and is exemplified by men from ethnic minorities. Women's femininities may similarly take a variety of forms such as 'emphasised' (or compliant) or 'resistant' (e.g. feminist). Despite the central role of agency, Connel sees men and women as working within the constraints of a gender order especially through labour constraints, power constraints and sexual and emotional relationships. Because Connell sees these hierarchies of gender relation as processes of individual practices, they are completely open to change and challenge and have already been significantly challenged by the feminist movement.

Although Connel's theory seems to be currently favoured (Pilcher 1999), I remain sceptical about the idea of hierarchies where all femininities are subordinate to all masculinities.

Connell's work is also generally less applicable in accounting for the gender differences in homelessness. What Connell's theory is successful at demonstrating though is how gender relations are in continual flux and constantly require maintenance. Gender relations are also open to change and there is an intimate relationship between people's practices and the institutions they constitute.

The premise on which both Walby and Connell's theories are based is that men and women exist in some sort of *a priori* way. A challenge to this position comes from the post-structuralists. This argument holds that biological differences are also culturally defined and thus any distinction between sex and gender becomes meaningless (Butler 1990, also Gatens 1983 in Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995:143). Butler (1990) for example, argues that gender categories are inherently unstable and only sustained through re-enacted and repeated social performance (plurality and diversity). The benefit of using such theories comes from the emphasis they bring to the idea of social performance and identities. Thus it follows that if men and women do not independently exist outside of our cultural perceptions of what it is to be a man or woman, then it is even more vital to look for where gender is being constructed, for example, in practices such as becoming homeless. Strathern (1988) argues that gender ideologies are less reflections of reality than systems for producing differences and inequalities. We need instead to explore how people assert their own representations of biology and sociality and of the "natures" of people (1988:65).

2.8. Conclusion

In conclusion it would seem that there have been various insights on the subject of gender and homelessness, but little systematic analysis. Many of the insights have remained limited in scope because of a lack of engagement with gender theory. Thus, while most of the homelessness literature ignores gender issues altogether, those studies that do consider gender tend to do so only in terms of adding in the experiences of homeless women. What is needed, therefore, is an examination of gender in various aspects of homelessness which both directly compares the experiences of men and women and which remains cautious about the nature of

those comparisons because of an understanding of, and greater engagement with, gender theory. These latter concerns are also addressed in the following chapter (Chapter Three).

In respect to both gender theory and homelessness theory, the issue of approaching the subject through either a structural approach or individual agency approach is still prominent in discussions. The most recent resolution of this tension in gender theory is seen as focusing on individual agents, negotiating their gender identities or projects in a variety of social contexts, constrained by wider social structures (Connell 1996). This resolution may provide the template for a similar approach in homelessness theory, such that the focus is on individuals negotiating their homelessness as gendered agents in a variety of social contexts within the constraints of social structures.

Furthermore the creative combination of literature on gender and homelessness satisfies Strathern's (1988, also in Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995:149) call that we should examine processes whereby gender differences are created in different settings. Homelessness can provide just such an appropriate setting. In particular, this emphasis could lead to exploring how men and women are constructed through the texts and everyday practices of homeless policies. Other areas that could be examined could include the nature and extent of the homelessness problem, the services provided to address the homelessness problem and the accounts of the aetiology of homelessness. Sex differences, as West *et al* (1997) point out, are not seen as the explanation but as the analytical point of departure.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCHING GENDER AND HOMELESSNESS: PROCESS, POLITICS, EPISTEMOLOGIES AND PRACTICE

3.1. Introduction: Process and Demystification

The focus in this chapter is on the process of doing research. The development of ideas is shown from an initial starting point towards the formulation of key research questions, a fieldwork strategy to address those questions, subsequent experiences in the field and the continual processes of analysis and writing up. Demystifying the research process is also a recognised aim for good research (Ellen 1984:1) and situating knowledge avoids false claims to objectivity, as challenged by feminist and post-modern critiques (May 1997, Waugh 1998). Knowledge is instead understood to be subjectively created by the researcher's interaction with his or her subjects. The intertwining of knowledge creation, research process and the researcher herself is acknowledged, and particularly pertinent to the subject of gender and homelessness, as will be demonstrated.

The research approach taken here is an ethnographic one. By 'ethnographic approach', following Silverman (1993), is meant: a preference for a range of methods of data collection; an emphasis on everyday contexts rather than experimental conditions; a preference for less structured data collection; a desire to start without prior hypotheses; a concern with the micro features of social life; a concern with the meaning and function of social action; and an assumption that quantification plays a subordinate role (adapted from Hammersley 1990, Silverman 1993:25). An ethnographic approach is particularly appropriate to this study, because its flexibility suits the broadly exploratory nature of enquiry taken here, looking at whether or not homelessness is different for men and women, and if it is, how it is different. With its eclectic use of a range of methods for data collection, the ethnographic approach is also useful when investigating gender. For example, as an important aspect of ethnography, participant observation can be used to contrast what people say in interviews with how they are observed to behave in everyday situations.

To illustrate the processual nature of research, the sections of this chapter will examine the stages of research in chronological order. The section starts by introducing the topic area

from which the research focus was initially approached, and then locates this focus within wider academic and political debates. This wider focus includes issues of representation and the researcher's role. Epistemological issues that are raised by the examination of gender are also considered, as are how the research sought to overcome some of these difficulties. The following section shows how initial ideas and concerns were operationalised into practical fieldwork plans, and outlines the key questions as they stood at the beginning of the fieldwork. Attention is given to the use of participant observation and interviews, leading onto a discussion of experiences in the field. Problems with access, informed consent, confidentiality, researcher role, recruitment and interviewee motivation are all considered. A brief comment on analysis and the writing process conclude this chapter.

3.2. The Research Context

3.2.1. Starting point

The working title provided for this Ph.D. was 'Aspects of Social Exclusion and Integration in Women's Homelessness'. This title, in addition to some suggested project aims and objectives, was devised jointly by the Department of Urban Studies and the 'Case Award' sponsors, Shelter. Initially I was happy to work with the themes of 'social exclusion' and 'integration' but, having explored the literature, I decided against keeping either. With its European policy origins, the concept of 'social exclusion' seems too 'top down' (Room 1995, Bergman 1995, Silver 1994, and Pleace 1998), with limited popular understanding (Golding 1995) and explanatory powers (Walker 1995).

A second point of departure from the original project theme and title was a desire to shift the focus from one of 'women' to one of 'gender'. I was already aware of the substantial criticisms levelled at doing research 'on women' (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995, Connel 1996) and agreed that just adding knowledge about women's experiences misses a crucial point. Gender is an inherently relational concept requiring an understanding of *both* men and women's experiences. It is also something *greater* than the sum of differences between 'men' and 'women' (McDonald 1994, Strathern 1988 see also Chapter Two, section 2.7). Thus, whilst sympathetic to feminist thinkers who wish to promote the

concerns of women (Stanley and Wise 1990), I prefer to extend a political awareness to all marginalised people, irrespective of gender or other social grouping.

Having established two major changes away from the original suggested title, attention was turned to the body of homelessness literature with respect to what it said, or did not say, about gender and homelessness. Within this homelessness literature it was found that gender as an issue has been largely ignored. There are a few notable exceptions (Passaro 1996, Smith and Gilford 1998) in addition to a number of 'add on' pieces of research about women's experiences (Watson and Austerberry 1986, Webb 1989, Golden 1992, Tomas and Dittmar 1995, Jones 1999, Croft-White and Parry-Crooke 2000, Edgar and Doherty 2001⁷). At this initial stage therefore, I was confident that a significant knowledge gap existed around gender and homelessness and that there was a consequent need for research to address it.

3.3. The Politics of Doing Social Research: Defining the Problem and Representation

3.3.1. Defining the problem

Having established that the new research focus was on gender and homelessness, I was interested in looking at previous types of homelessness research. Blasi (1990), and Shinn and Weitzman (1990) are critical of the way many research projects look for answers to homelessness within homeless populations. This focus, they argue, is too narrow and limits a wider understanding of homelessness within society. A focus on homeless people also frames the issue of homelessness in a way that blames people in this situation (Blasi 1990: 208-210, Shinn and Weitzman 1990: 1).

In their ethical critique of existing homelessness research, Blasi (1990) and Shinn and Weitzman (1990) touch on issues of power and knowledge, issues central to anthropology. For example, a key step in anthropological understanding was taken when it was realised that up until then anthropologists had been studying and writing about tribal societies

⁷ The last two references have been published since the initial stages of research but persist with the focus on just women.

without any reference to the constraints of the governing colonial powers (Gough 1968, Asad 1973, Said 1978, Kuper 1996). Anthropologists were belatedly recognised to be inextricably linked to colonial domination because of the value of the knowledge that they helped to produce for colonial administrations. More recently, and from debates outside anthropology, research critiques continue to be relevant for contemporary homelessness research. For example Oliver (1992) has argued that disability research tends to mirror society's view of disability. The perspective that views disability as an individual's problem and not society's, he asserts, serves to perpetuate the oppression of disabled people by alienating them and making research irrelevant to their lives. Similarly, there has been criticism of HIV research for the identification of high-risk categories that wrongly focused attention on particular kinds of *people* rather than particular kinds of *behaviour* (Treichler 1988:44).

3.3.2. Representation

Recognising some of the ethical dilemmas of the research process also introduces the wider question of representation. For example, if we are to be concerned that the research process should not exploit research subjects, perhaps greater allowance should be made for self-definition, or even emancipatory research? Relying on self-definition has practical difficulties where research has shown that many people who may be recognised as statutorily homeless may not necessarily perceive themselves in the same way (Watson and Austerberry 1986, Jones 1999, Hutson and Liddiard 1994). 'Emancipatory research', where research subjects carry out their own research and control the research agenda (Zarb 1992), is similarly problematic and, whilst this strategy may work well with some subject groups, it was felt to be an inappropriate aim for a doctoral thesis. I would argue that you do not have to be a woman / black / homeless to study these experiences and that researchers have not only a right, but a duty, to comment on social issues as their training enables them (also Frankenberg 1993:2).

3.3.3. *Anthropological answers: studying up*

A practical way forward to some of the issues around power and research is addressed in anthropology by attempting to 'study up' as well as 'study down'. These terms were first used by Nader (1972) and represent recognition that anthropologists have tended to research the less powerful (study down), because of difficulties in accessing those with greater power. With such issues in mind, I was concerned not to reproduce in my own work research that focused exclusively on homeless people, only 'studying down'. Consequently, in order to incorporate some aspect of 'studying up', I decided to include an examination of the homelessness policy framework and how those policies were administered on a day-to-day basis. This proposed approach, was supported by existing research on the informal aspects of policy administration (Lipsky 1980, Howe 1989, Cullen and Howe 1991, Lidstone 1994), research on gender and organisations (Witz and Savage 1992, Roper 1994) and the recognition that policy was a new field of study for anthropologists (Shore and Wright 1997).

3.4. Research Approach and Epistemological Issues

3.4.1. *Ontology, epistemology, reflexivity and ethnography*

Ethnography has long been engaged with the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Ellen 1984:26), especially so in relation to participant observation. It has been argued, for example, that participant observation seriously violates the traditional scientific relationship, which sees a separation between subject and object, the researcher and the researched (Okely 1996). On the other hand, it is seen as naïve to believe that the researcher and the researched are separate. According to Hammersley and Atkinson, '(t)he first and most important step... () is to recognise the reflexive character of social research: that is to recognise that we are part of the social world in which we study... ()'. This is not a matter of methodological commitment, it is an existential fact' (1983:15). This is not, of course, to promote a post-structuralist position whereby the boundary between subject and object disappears and social research is no longer a valid enterprise. Avoiding the extremes of reflexivity, it is assumed that there is a social world external to our knowing of it, and second, that this social world is knowable (Davies 1999:17).

3.4.2. *Gender and epistemological issues*

Feminist critiques have introduced the idea that gender relations are central to discussions of subjectivity and reflexivity (Harding 1986, Back 1993). Aside from a view that the whole research and scientific enterprise is a male construction (Harding 1986, Oakley 1990), a key breakthrough in anthropology came from Ardner (1975). He suggested that what had previously been researched in anthropology was fundamentally biased towards men. Male anthropologists had been asking only male informants for their views of the world and thought this practice perfectly acceptable. Various conclusions to Ardner's insight could be drawn and an initial one was that more women researchers were needed to study women and their views (the problems of which have already been discussed above in section 3.3.1). An alternative conclusion is captured by 'standpoint' feminism where women's oppression and disadvantage is recognised and used to the researcher's advantage (Hartsock 1990, Stanley and Wise 1990). Whilst both conclusions are understandable I would prefer a position where all researchers see their gender (not just women) as a source of knowledge and creativity. Morgan (1981) writes: 'It is not a matter of trying to "overcome" the effects which the gender of the researcher has on a particular field situation, but to explore how the participant observer's gender identity becomes entwined with the process of knowing' (cited in Back 1993:218).

3.4.3. *Researching gender*

If gender was simply understood as the differences between men and women, then homeless people could be asked to comment on their situation, in addition to others, and the comments would reinforce any observed differences and the results written up. If, however, a more complex understanding of gender is held then a more complicated strategy to address this is required.

To recap, in Chapter 2 it was suggested that gender is one of many possible identities that people may assert at different times and in different situations (Strathern 1988). In this sense, gender can be talked about in terms of performance (Butler 1990) or an individual's identity project (Connell 1996 / 1995) which may change throughout their life course

(Morgan 1992). Caution was given against the dangers of thinking about gender as being something inherent in a person but instead it was argued to exist at the level of social relations, social structures and practices. One of the challenges of this research was, therefore, not only to show how gender affects homelessness, but how the experience of homelessness affects or is active in the construction of gender.

Following the discussion above, what remains is how practically to address this approach in a fieldwork plan that enables this research to say something meaningful about gender and homelessness. First, a decision was taken to disregard the categories of 'single', 'family' or 'youth' homelessness and look at gender from all 'types' of homelessness. To have confined the focus to single people, for example, would have obscured the fact that many 'single' homeless people are also parents (see Chapter Five, section 5.4.2). Second, the desire for a practical research plan necessitated a common language and I settled for using the terms 'men' and 'women' even if they are contested categories (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1995:141). The third main point was to try not to presume that men and women would have different perspectives or needs, but to identify what and where differences in perspective or needs were thought to occur. This is an important, if subtle, shift in emphasis and links back to the debate raised in Chapter Two (section 2.7.2) about *a priori* categories. This approach to gender, through unpacking assumptions, is commonly employed by anthropologists when attempting to do ethnography 'at home'⁸. Unlike doing ethnography in a distant country where the struggle is to understand strange ideas, habits and behaviours, doing ethnography 'at home' means to understand all the *familiar* ideas, habits and behaviours. The goal is then to unpack assumptions and to make the familiar strange; a tricky task likened to 'pushing a bus in which you are sitting'.

The following list represents a summary of how gender was addressed from multiple perspectives.

Gender was investigated by:

- Understanding that gender is socially constructed whilst also believing that gender can be researched empirically; using the comparative method wherein beliefs and

⁸ The distinction between what is 'home' and what is 'not home' is also unclear (Strathern 1987, Okely 1996) and may be doubly so, given the research subject of homelessness.

observations about men and women are compared; disregarding categories of single homelessness, family homelessness and youth homelessness (this chapter).

- Examining the literature, especially on homelessness research, for what it can tell us about gender and homelessness (Chapter Two).
- Examining homelessness legislation and Codes of Guidance for what they may reveal in terms of underlying assumptions and beliefs about men and women who become homeless (Chapter Four).
- Observing the implementation of homelessness legislation and Codes. Formally observing homeless assessments and the interaction between homeless people and housing officers (Chapter Six); informally observing the work of housing officers and interviewing the housing officers about their work (Chapters Five and Six).
- Describing and evaluating the nature, type and availability of support services and accommodation for homeless men and women. Examining what the provision services reveal about the presumed needs of homeless men and women (Chapter Five).
- Exploring what homeless men and women say directly about their experiences of being homeless, how they came to be homeless and my interpretation of this in terms of gender. Also exploring what homeless people and service providers say about any differences in homeless experiences for men and women and my interpretation of this (Chapters Seven and Eight).

3.4.4. Key questions

The fieldwork was based around three key research questions. These key questions however, evolved during the course of the research and the modified three questions are re-presented as four in section 3.7 of this chapter (also in Chapter One, section 1.2). Such refining is not seen as a flaw but intrinsic to the anthropological research process (Ellen 1984:220). The original key research questions presented below are also to be read with an awareness of the preceding qualifications and explanations. Especially noteworthy is the attempt to both 'study up' and 'down' reflected by questions 1 and 3 respectively.

1. How are homelessness policies, and bureaucratic organisations which administer them, gendered? And, in what ways does gender play a role in the construction of clients?

2. What is the role of gender in the relationships between bureaucrats and homeless people? And how does gender affect the claims being negotiated?
3. To what extent is homelessness understood (by homeless and non-homeless people) as a gendered experience?

3.5. Fieldwork

3.5.1. Fieldwork location

Before introducing the fieldwork itself, the decision to use a single fieldwork location needs to be clarified and explained. This decision was seen as appropriate because the comparison in question was between men and women in terms of homelessness and service provision, not between gender in different cities. Comparing two cities may have been interesting but was thought to be too ambitious and a distraction from the main point. A city location was chosen because of the attraction of a dedicated Homeless Persons Unit where many observations could be done within time constraints. Anonymity of the fieldwork location is maintained to try and preserve confidentiality and as a condition of acceptance by the city council that allowed me to observe their staff.

3.5.2. Fieldwork outline

The key components of this fieldwork are given as an indication of the methods used and number of interviews and assessments accomplished. The main areas included:

- Participant Observation (informal); fieldwork diary kept for six months
- Participant Observation (formal); observing homelessness assessments
- Interviews with homeless people
- Interviews with homeless service providers

Table 3.1 breaks down the fieldwork into greater detail according to the fieldwork location, the people targeted, their gender and whether they were single or had children. The working definition of homelessness for this research was constrained through practical necessity to people who were in contact with homeless agencies (although it was recognised that some people in such as group would not necessarily see themselves as homeless). A total of 46 assessments were formally observed and interviews carried out with 37 homeless people and 31 homeless service providers. The need for assessments in three different locations refers to the bureaucratic arrangements for homelessness in the city so that observing or 'sitting-in' on homelessness assessments involved homeless people and housing staff in a Homeless Persons Unit (HPU), a Secondary Assessment Centre (SAC), and Neighbourhood Housing Offices (NHO) around the city (see figure 3.1 which shows the routes taken by single homeless people and families when accepted by the city council as homeless). These three sites for observing formal assessments were deemed necessary in order to include both single people and people with children and reflected the decentralised nature of the assessment procedure.

Single people who were homeless had to present themselves for assessment at the HPU. If their situation was judged to be straightforward they were sometimes accommodated elsewhere immediately. If their situation was thought to require further time to follow up issues, they were moved on to the SAC, which had both housing office and hostel facilities. People with children who presented as homeless during office hours were dealt with at their NHO and out of office hours at the HPU. If they had to go to the HPU first, families were given emergency accommodation and then taken out to their local NHO the following morning. Out of a possible 43 NHOs, a total of nine were visited during the fieldwork.

Table 3.1: Fieldwork outline

Method	People targeted	Fieldwork location	Description	Gender and significant others							
				Total nos.	Single Woman	Single man	Couple	Single woman with children	Single man with children	Couple with children	Pregnant woman
Participant observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Everyone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HPU SAC NHO Hostels Everywhere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal and informal situations recorded in fieldwork diary 	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Participant observation of homelessness assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homeless people and housing staff; housing officers, team managers and receptionists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HPU SAC NHOs around the city 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IIPU - single homelessness - initial assessments. Also initial family assessments out of office hours SAC - single homelessness - secondary assessments NHO - family homelessness - initial and secondary assessments 	19	7	11	x	x	x	x	1
				17	4	12	x	x	x	x	x
				10	x	x	x	3	2	5	x
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homeless people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hostels Day Centres Supported houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviewed as 'homeless' if using a homeless service 	37	15	15	1M*	3	1	1P*	1
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing staff Staff from voluntary sector homeless organisations and statutory sector (see Appendix 1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HPU Hostels Various homelessness organisations and service providers 		31	21	9	1 mixed interview	x	x	x	x

*Single person interviewed but living as a couple

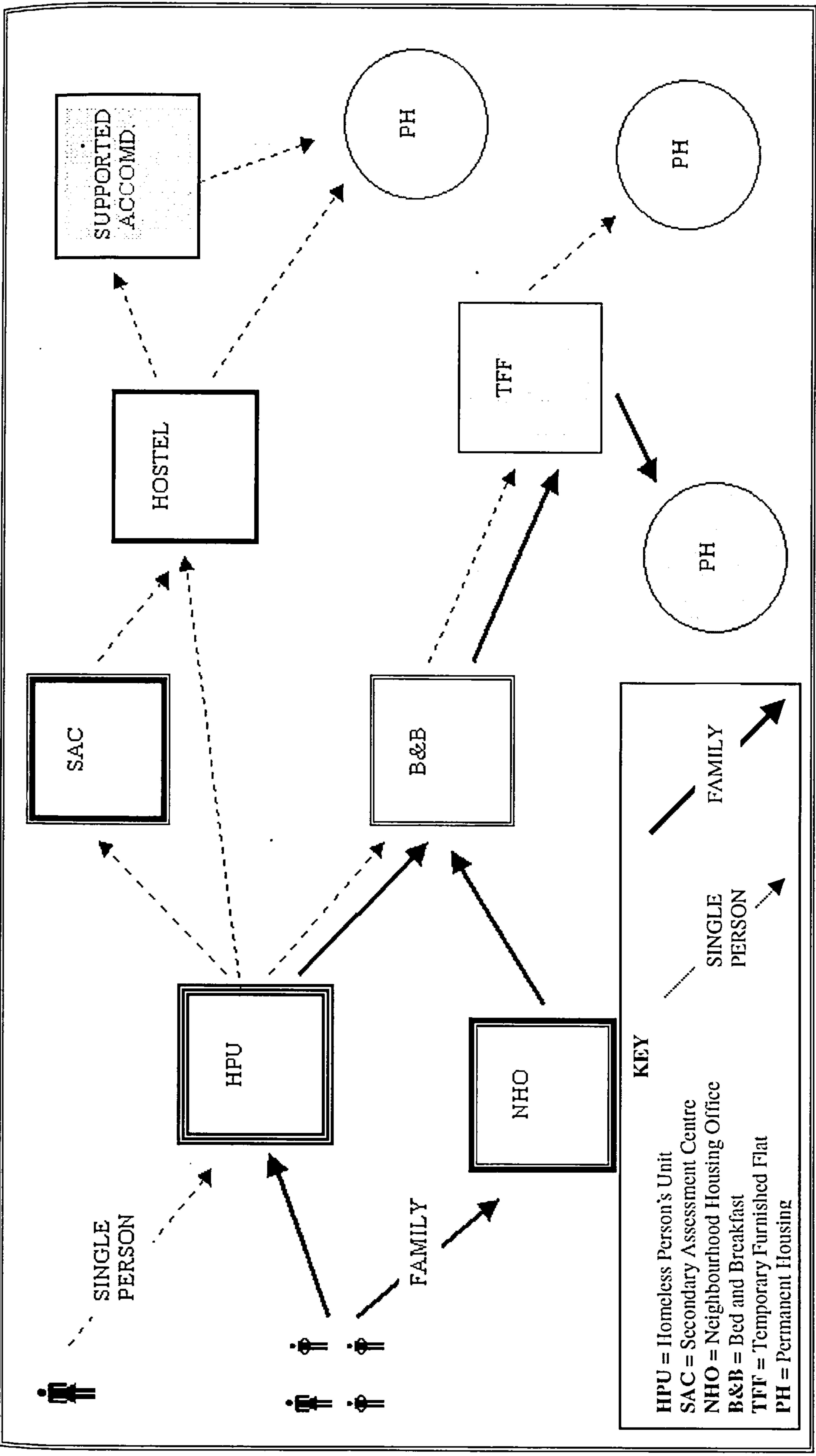


Figure 3.1: Diagram to show the routes taken by single homeless people and families when accepted by the city council as homeless

3.5.3. *Methods: participant observation*

Participant observation is the method most readily associated with the ethnographic approach and, like the ethnographic approach, is both method and perspective (Wallman 1982, in Franklin 1990:93). Participant observation was first used as a research tool by Malinowski who recognised its potential in cross-checking his observations with people's descriptions and explanations (Malinowski 1922:24). Following Malinowski, I felt that participant observation would be particularly useful when trying to understand aspects of gender, such as exploring the gap between what housing staff say about homeless men and women in interviews and what they say and do informally in their everyday work. It was also helpful to be able to observe gender in negotiations between the two parties when it was being established if a person were homeless or not. Participant observation therefore combines well with the use of interviews, in the sense that it can investigate beyond the restrictions of the formal interview (Bastin 1983), giving context and fuller understanding. A guide was developed for use during the formal observation sessions and can be found in Appendix 2.

In terms of sampling, there was a deliberate intention to observe assessments representing both family and single homelessness but, further than this, there was no design in the assessment observations to cover a range of different issues, as the specific circumstances of each case were not known about before observation. Cases were therefore observed randomly as they came up from the receptionist's list of people waiting and, because the numbers were quite large, it was possible to sit in with a range of housing officers. The 46 assessments observed were conducted by 34 different housing officers and although a gender balance in housing officers was sought, more female than male housing officers were observed (27 women to seven men). At the end of the fieldwork period it was possible to gain access to the records of all the people whom I had observed or interviewed and who had made a homelessness claim to the city council. This had not been a planned aspect of the fieldwork but advantage was taken of the opportunity and the records of all people who had been observed or interviewed were checked. Unfortunately, not all the people could be found in the computer records (81% of names checked were found) but, of those who were, any additional information about their case was added including any claims made since the one observed. In retrospect, the ethics of carrying out a computer check without people's prior permission was questionable.

Clarification may be needed to remind the reader that in this research 'participant observation' is referring to two slightly different things. On the one hand, participant observation is used to refer to the researcher 'sitting in' or shadowing homelessness interviews between housing staff and homeless people; these are generally referred to as 'assessments'. The second meaning refers to the use of participant observation to capture and contextualise all the bits of information that seemed relevant to the topic and were systematically recorded in a fieldwork diary. Examples include; how I recruited informants for interviews, details about the organisational structures, what forms housing officers filled in, what housing officers said about their work and their clients, and how they behaved towards me. Overall, I felt I was able to observe some interesting interactions and gain some insight into staff attitudes and gendered negotiations. The success of the combined methods is an important finding of Chapter Six.

3.5.4. Methods: interviews

For this research I wanted to interview a range of homeless people and service providers that would illuminate the issues of gender. For the interviews with homeless people a balance of men and women was sought, younger and older people, people with and without children and people from a range of accommodation (see Table 3.2)⁹. For the interviews with service providers, a range of people from both statutory and voluntary organisations were represented (see Appendix 1).

⁹ Only one person out of the 37 interviewed was from an ethnic minority. The city had a very low ethnic minority population, therefore it was not deemed to be essential to try and represent this in the sample, as might have been the case in many other British cities.

Table 3.2: Living circumstances of homeless people at the time of interview

Living circumstances	Men	Women
Direct access hostel	5	8
Young person's hostel	4	1
Supported accommodation	2	2
'Dry' hostel	1	1
Rough sleeping	1	0
Own tenancy	2	0
Temporary furnished flat	2	8
Total	17	20

I chose to carry out interviews that were semi-structured because they allow for greater flexibility in the interview both for the informant and the interviewer. I wanted to give the informants the opportunity to tell me what they thought was important. I developed several versions of a topic guide to use with the three main groups of people that I was aiming to interview (homeless people, staff from the HPU and staff from other homeless organisations) although the topic guide for the latter two groups was broadly similar (for both versions see Appendix 3). For the topic guide to use with homeless people (see Appendix 4), I was advised that some homeless people might feel intimidated by this style of questioning and therefore modified a topic guide focusing more on their experiences of service use and homelessness. After piloting the interviews, some rewording and clarification was necessary although the questions remained largely the same.

3.6. Fieldwork Experiences: Access, Informed Consent and Recruitment

Gaining the city council's permission for observations of their housing staff was the initial and crucial barrier of the fieldwork. Permission was granted in principle after a formal letter had been sent to the Director of Housing and after an interview with the Chief Housing Officer. The only objection that was raised regarded tape recording, where it was felt this might be objected to by housing staff and their trade unions. It was agreed to try to pilot the research without taping but, when permission was sought a second time after the piloting, permission was granted. Reluctance on the part of housing officers for

homeless assessments to be tape-recorded was regularly raised and at one time seriously threatened the continuation of the fieldwork. This incident arose out of the suspicion that I might support a claimant for a wrongful decision against the city council.

The permission of homeless people to tape record their homeless assessment was rarely refused although whether this decision was based on *informed* consent is debatable. In most cases I was able to give out a letter in advance of the assessment and tried to briefly explain my research, although most people did not read the letter (or perhaps could not), and frequently seemed to think I was a trainee housing officer. On the other hand some people may have felt that my presence supported their claim or alternatively that a refusal to my request would jeopardise their claim. This lack of objection on the part of homeless people illustrates the point made earlier about research on the less powerful (see section 3.3.2).

Recruitment success for interviews with homeless people varied. Some people's willingness to be interviewed seems to have been negotiated before I arrived and was due to the individual effort of the contact person. Snowballing and timing were sometimes involved when, for example, a succession of young people agreed to be interviewed after the first interviewee announced that the interview was 'OK'. Bargaining characterised the securing of another interview with a man who slept rough and in another, a male hostel, people seemed to be recruited on the basis that they were sober, not 'under the influence' (of drugs) and 'sensible enough' to answer questions (not hindered by mental health problems or learning difficulties). In this case I was also advised by the hostel staff to interview on the day before residents got their 'giros' so that the likelihood of sobriety and clear-headedness was increased. Finally, although I had decided against payment for interviews, in a women only hostel I was advised by staff to pay ten pounds per interview. This was apparently because none of the younger women, especially those involved in prostitution, would be willing to speak to me without some recompense. Although in one respect these are just recruitment stories, they also point to a degree of screening and possible bias of the research process; gatekeepers' views constrain and influence the research process, not necessarily positively. Certain issues in homelessness may therefore be over-represented and some under represented, such that I probably tended to interview those who had good relationships with staff and fewer social problems.

3.7. Analytical Steps and Writing

Whilst analysis had been occurring since the start of the research process (Silverman 1997:2) a more formal stage of analysis began at the end of the fieldwork period. An initial step was to transcribe the taped interviews. Due to the volume of material, an agency was used for a proportion (about half) of the transcriptions. However, each interview transcript was carefully checked through afterwards to make sure the transcriber had captured the interviewee's words as fully and as accurately as possible. Even with agency help, it was felt that there was not enough time to fully transcribe every interview and assessment observation, and some selection and prioritising was necessary. Therefore, whereas all the interviews with homeless people and housing officers were fully transcribed, most of the interviews with other service providers were not, nor were the assessment observations. The material from these interviews and observations was written up in summary form instead.

The next step was to summarise the main areas of data collection to get a feel of the whole. For example, the basic details of homeless people's life histories were lifted from the transcripts, such as their age, whether or not they had any children, how long they had been living where they were and a brief resumé of how they came to be homeless. These summaries proved invaluable as a resource on which to check back for clarification during the process of writing. The interviews with homeless people and housing officers were then split up into chunks by question area. For example, all the responses relevant to questions such as: 'Would you describe yourself as being homeless?' or 'What are the main reasons for homelessness given by the people that you work with?' (See Appendix 3 and 4) were identified and pooled together. This was physically done either using NUD*IST¹⁰ or by cutting and pasting in Microsoft Word. The responses to each question area were then examined for analytical categories, these would be highlighted with fluorescent pens and / or summary words or themes would be noted in the margins. These themes would then be looked for elsewhere in the responses of other people in the process of coding.

¹⁰ Although some of the interviews were initially analysed with the support of NUD*IST, the lack of familiarity with this software made the work extremely cumbersome and excessive repetition meant that the software was abandoned for quicker cutting and pasting in Microsoft Word, and pen and paper methods.

Themes from the question responses were further explored and compared by gender, age and other significant patterns, often using a type of 'data matrix' (Fielding 1993:221) to help identify patterns. These data matrices usually consisted of an A4 piece of paper with all the (summarised) responses to a particular question or theme and were also useful in helping to assess the extent to which a finding was typical in the data. For example, the number of women who said that they had slept rough was compared with that of men, and the former analysed to assess if they were clustered in one particular age group. Themes, conclusions and theories would then be drawn from, and tested against, the findings. For assessment observation interviews the process was slightly different as categories and themes that were drawn from reviewing the data were developed and tested at an earlier stage, rather than first breaking down the observations into separate chunks by question.

Themes identified as 'gender issues' (as informed by gender theory and previous research) were highlighted throughout the process described above. For example, issues around dependency or violence were specifically looked for and compared for men and women. The process of abstraction where theoretical headings were elaborated from the highlighted themes, a core process of ethnographic analysis, is described by Davies (1999) as 'involving a constant and hopefully creative tension between the necessary, if risky, process of generalising and explaining, and the ethnographic knowledge of real people, their actions and interactions gleaned through the experiences of field research' (1999:193-194). Finally, the interviews with service providers and the fieldwork diary were both read and reread for themes and points, but remained resources rather than core analytical material. A certain saturation point was reached with the data when it was felt that the same issues were being reinforced, but no new ones had arisen. Having said this, the analysis stage does not seem to have been exhausted, and hopefully the data will be returned to in the future as a resource for new insights.

During the process of analysis and writing, the key questions were altered. The original set of questions in retrospect seemed to be overly complicated and heavily worded and the third question particularly confused and vague. A simplified and more straightforward set of four questions emerged in part from the development of a thesis structure and seemed better to represent the focus of this study. The new questions were:

1. Do men and women get treated differently by housing officers and, if so, how and why?
2. Are homelessness services gendered services?
3. Do men and women become homeless in gender specific ways?
4. Are men and women's experiences when homeless different from each other and in what ways?

Finally, the (ethnographic) writing process has been characterised as a process of 'invention' rather than representation (Clifford 1986). With a certain type of audience in mind, the text is written to be plausible, coherent and authoritative, and is shaped by the author's own biography and literary style (Geertz 1988 in Eriksen 1995:23). Examples of textual persuasion and authority can be seen in research texts by the use of informant quotes, references to other pieces of research, methodological reflexivity, selective use of the first person (such as in this chapter), care taken over language (such as an avoidance of the use of phrases like 'the' homeless) and a general effort to present a non-judgmental attitude towards the research subjects. The more conscious aspects of text construction also seemed particularly challenged by a thesis engaged in gender theory where findings are often not neatly separable from interpretation. Such admissions to textual creation are not intended to undermine the thesis but in the words of Atkinson (1990): 'A recognition of the rhetorical forms that run through *all* scholarly and scientific discourse can only strengthen the awareness and *discipline* of our academic endeavours' (Atkinson 1990:1).

3.8. Conclusions

In conclusion, a gendered understanding and analysis of homelessness has been identified as a difficult subject to research. An engagement with gender theory has implications for the way in which the research was conducted, analysed and written up. An ethnographic approach suited the exploratory aims of this research. The approach was both flexible and the triangulation of methods allowed for gender to be examined from a variety of angles. An anthropological approach informed key decisions of the research, including the appropriate focus of study and the problematisation of gender.

CHAPTER 4: HOMELESSNESS LEGISLATION: INTERPRETATION, ASSUMPTIONS AND IDEOLOGICAL WORK

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a gendered analysis of homelessness legislation. Establishing whether or not homelessness legislation is gendered, and in what ways, is important for understanding how legislation is implemented in everyday practices (Chapter Six) and is not unrelated to the provision of homeless services (Chapter Five). The legislative framework for England and Wales differs from that of Scotland. However, they will be considered together, as the points being made about gender are equally relevant to both. Following Shore and Wright (1997), homelessness legislation will be analysed as a cultural text containing classificatory devices, rhetorical devices and discursive formations that function to empower some people and silence others (1997:7).

This short chapter is broken down into three main sections. The first section outlines the main rights and duties of the homelessness legislation. The second section looks in greater detail at the legislation, identifying aspects that may have implications for particular groups of men and women. The third section explores the suggestion that ideological work is achieved through the use of gender in the homelessness legislation.

4.2. The Homelessness Legislation: Outline of the legislation

During the period of fieldwork (December 1998 - July 1999) the relevant homelessness legislation was part II of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, amended by the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1990¹¹ and in England and Wales part VII of the Housing Act 1996. In addition to legislation there are statutory instruments¹², case law and Codes of Guidance that have to be regularly amended and updated (there are separate

¹¹ Northern Ireland is covered under a separate legislation. The Scottish legislation has since been amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

¹² Statutory instruments cover areas where an Act allows for the discretion of the secretary of state to make regulations without the need for primary legislation. They are referred to in Codes and deal, for example, with review procedures, suitability of accommodation and priority groups (Gellner 1998).

ones for England and Wales, and Scotland). Although the Codes are not legally binding, local authorities must 'have regard' to their interpretation (Himsworth 1994:152, Hughes and Lowe 1995:248). Having specific homelessness legislation is unusual in Europe (Johnson *et al* 1991:2).

A person is said to be homeless if he¹³, (or persons recognised as normally residing with him), has no accommodation in Scotland, or England or Wales. There is a statutory obligation to secure suitable accommodation for a person who is believed to be homeless or threatened with homelessness (if it is likely he will become homeless within 28 days¹⁴). The applicant must be eligible for assistance¹⁵, in priority need, not intentionally homeless and have a local connection (see figure 4.1). There are four categories of people deemed to be in priority need: pregnant women; households with dependent children; anyone who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap¹⁶, physical disability or other special reasons (which include domestic violence, care leavers and young people of 16 or 17); and people who have lost accommodation through an emergency (such as a fire or flood). In Scottish legislation, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 also means that young people under the age of 21 and who have been 'looked after' by the local authority are usually also considered as a priority need group¹⁷. A person is intentionally homeless if he deliberately did, or failed to do, something that led to the loss of accommodation which it was reasonable for him to continue to occupy. It is not deemed reasonable for a person to continue to occupy where there is a threat of violence. A local connection with an authority means that the applicant normally resides in that area because of employment, family association or other special reason.

Under the homelessness legislation, when a person applies to the local authority, the authority has to make inquiries into their application in a specific order, as illustrated diagrammatically by figure 4.1. Once a decision has been made, the authority must take appropriate action. This action may be the provision of permanent accommodation,

¹³ The legalistic language where the applicant is referred to as 'he' has been reproduced here as an indication of how it appears in the legislation.

¹⁴ The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 extends this time period to two months. (See Thain 2001.)

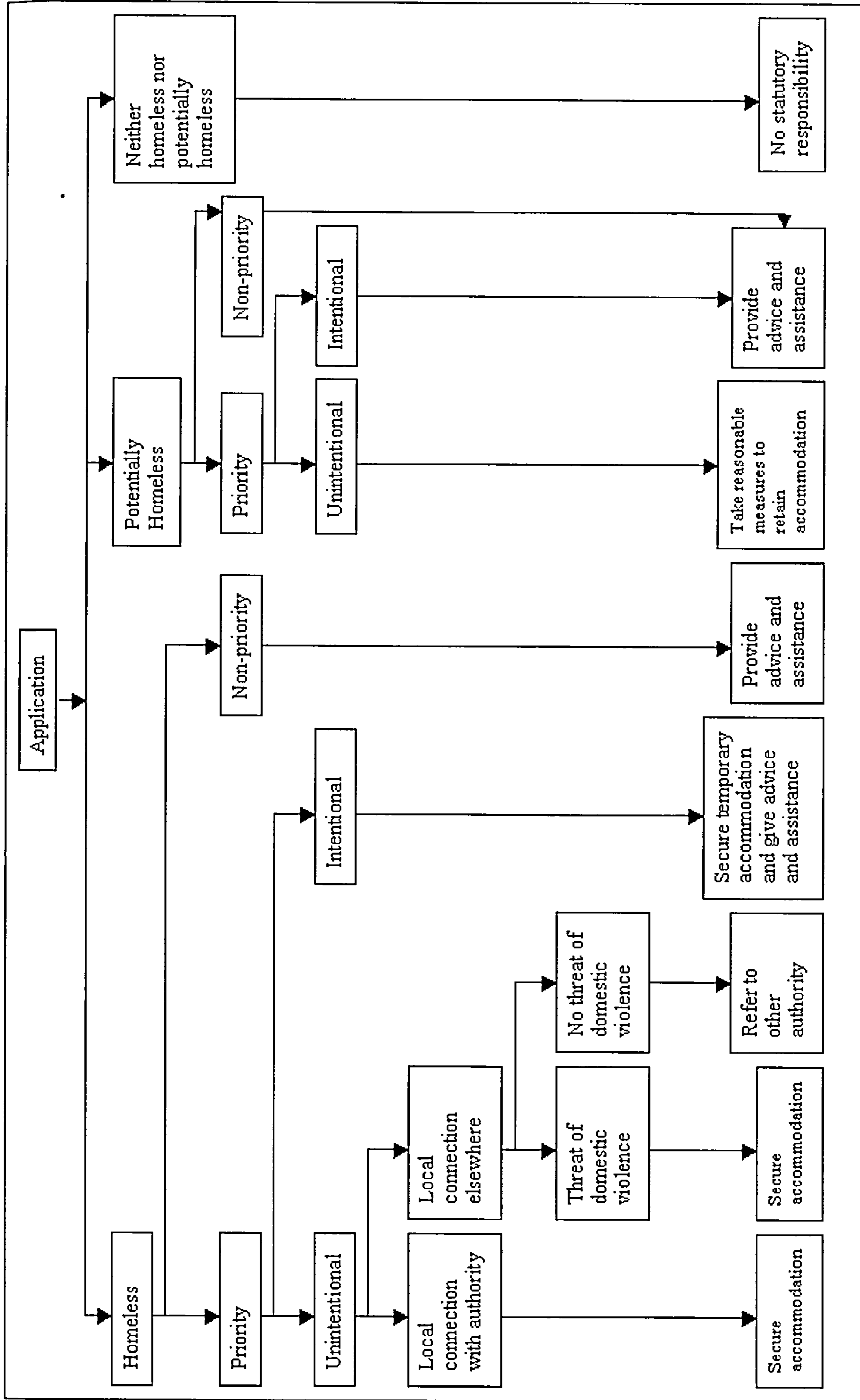
¹⁵ Certain categories of people such as 'persons subject to immigration control' are not eligible to apply as homeless to a local authority in the first place.

¹⁶ Again, the use of the term 'handicap' has been retained here and is how it appears in the legislation. It is not a term that would be favoured now.

¹⁷ See the Scottish Code of Guidance 1997, para 3.38. The final report of the Scottish Executive Homelessness Task Force also proposes to abolish priority need incrementally over the next ten years.

temporary accommodation or advice and assistance, depending on which of the criteria the applicant fills.

Figure 4.1: Local authority assessment of the circumstances of the applicants and responsibility under the Homelessness Legislation (Regional Government Office* 1999:6)



4.3. Favoured Groups?

It may be apparent from the outline of the legislation that there are a number of terms that require further clarification. For example, what exactly does it mean not to be 'intentionally' homeless, or 'vulnerable' and what counts as 'reasonable to continue to occupy'? Areas can be identified where particular groups of men or women may be favoured or adversely affected in the detail of the legislation and in the decisions made through case law. There is evidence that applications by women fleeing domestic violence¹⁸ have been turned down due to certain ambiguities in the legislation. For example, the definition of domestic violence has only recently (1996 Housing Act (England and Wales)) come to recognise that domestic violence may occur outside a domestic setting (SFHA 1997). The Scottish Code of Guidance states that 'a victim of domestic violence who has left home should *never* be regarded as having become intentionally homeless' (para 8.8) although the Code is not law and there is evidence that doubt over intentionality has gone against some women's cases of domestic violence. For example in *R v Tynedale District Council, exp McCabe* (1991) 24 HLR 384 (Hughes and Lowe 1995:263) a woman was found to have abandoned her home intentionally after it was ransacked by a violent partner and in *R v Wandsworth London Borough Council, exp Nimako-Boateng* [1984] Fam Law 117, 11 HLR 95 (in Hughes and Lowe 1995:263) it was thought reasonable for a woman to continue to occupy accommodation because she could apply for a court restraining order. Ambiguities also remain over whether or not women living in refuges are still to be considered homeless if they subsequently apply to an authority (Hughes and Lowe 1995:242)¹⁹.

Forms of violence that men are more likely to suffer from, referred to as 'external violence'²⁰ (Dobash and Dobash 1980 cited in Hutson and Liddiard 1994:170) are not recognised by homelessness legislation in the same way that domestic violence is. In the 1997 Scottish Code of Guidance (para 7.3) for example whereas 'women suffering, or in fear of violence' are listed amongst those who may be vulnerable for a special reason, other forms of violence are only recognised 'on account of either race, colour, illness,

¹⁸ Although not all domestic violence is by male partners on women (it can also be female partners on men, or parents against children), for the purposes of this chapter, this is all that is considered.

¹⁹ This situation is further complicated by the *Awua* case law (*R v Brent exp Awua* 1995 27 HLR 453) where authorities can refer to both previously settled and temporary accommodation to make their decision on intentionality.

sexuality, or ethnic or national origins'. According to Hughes and Lowe (1995), cases of external violence are more likely to be considered on an individual basis (1995:264) so that there is less precedence for people fleeing this sort of violence and it is therefore potentially harder for their cases to be accepted.

Parents who live separately from their children are disadvantaged because priority need is only granted to the parent where dependent children 'actually reside' or 'might reasonably be expected to reside' (English and Welsh Code para 14.3), which in most cases will be the mother. In three out of the four following test cases the courts rejected each of the fathers' applications. In the first case *R v Port Talbot BC exp McCarthy* 1990 23 HLR 207 CA it was decided that the father had 'staying access' rather than residence. In a second case *R v Westminster exp Bishop* 29 HLR 546 HL it was decided that the children must not only spend significant amounts of time with their father but must also be financially dependent for him to qualify for rehousing as a family unit. In a third case, *R v Oxford exp Doyle* 30 HLR 546 HL, it was decided that the children 'could not be reasonably expected to reside' with the father because of his homeless circumstances. In the one positive case for fathers *R v Leeds exp Collier* LAG June 97 a decision was quashed because it was decided that it was more important to consider that the children actually resided with the father than if they had any 'greater residency' with another adult (Gellner 1998).

It has been demonstrated above that certain groups of men and women may be at a disadvantage in the law such as fathers or those fleeing domestic or external violence. Although Codes may be more sympathetic, legislative interpretation and case law is given more weight. Homelessness legislation may therefore appear to be gender neutral, but under closer examination can be seen to work to the disadvantage of certain groups: 'Underneath the surface of objective process for determining access to resources, concepts and linguistic symbols are operating to the disadvantage of particular sets of people... (and although) clients are adept at monitoring and negotiating meaning in interactions, they are also disempowered when conceptual and symbolic grounds for negotiation are obscured by an appearance of bureaucratic neutrality' (partly attributed to Gumperz 1982 in Wright 1994:163).

²⁰ Violence by other men outside the home.

4.4. Underlying Assumptions

Social policies are shaped by normative assumptions about gender roles, especially regarding the division of labour and social responsibility (Lewis 1991:73, Thane 1991:93). Social policies contain implicit models of society and codify social norms (Shore and Wright 1997:7) and policy making 'reflects an understanding of the problem which is a mixture of presumptions and research findings' (Crane 1999:146). Homelessness legislation is not exceptional and assumptions about family make up and roles within these families are retained from the original drafting of the 1977 Act (see footnote 1): The family is a nuclear one (Watson 1984:65) and the head of household is male. The man's family consists of a dependent wife²¹ and children as indicated by 'any other person who normally resides with *him* as a member of *his* family' (English and Welsh Legislation para 176). Support for this interpretation comes from Fraser (1989) who characterises gender differentiation within welfare policies in terms of needs and identities; men are positioned as 'rights-bearing beneficiaries' and 'possessive individuals' whereas women are positioned as 'dependent clients' or the 'negatives of possessive individuals' (cited in Hearn 1998:16, also O'Connor 1996:8). Rabo makes a similar point in relation to Sweden where some economists draw a distinction between (male) 'feeders' and (female) 'eaters' (1997:111). However, Hearn *et al* (1998) and O'Connor (1996:1) point out that although male breadwinners and female carers no longer reflects the dominant pattern of households or labour markets, this sort of model continues to appear in the rhetoric of social policy and public administration (1998:3). Similarly, as Hague notes, the endemic nature of violence in the home by men against women runs counter to the assumption that the heterosexual nuclear family is the best environment for all. Domestic violence presents a contradiction to policies bolstering the traditional family (1999:139).

Homelessness legislation is also not peculiar among social policies in that it retains a private / public distinction. Hearn (1998:21) describes social policy as the public organisation of reproduction, where parents are supported in a way that relies on the distinction between the private and the domestic, against the public. This distinction assumes that women occupy a private domain and men the public one (although this

²¹ Gay and lesbian relationships are not legally recognised as 'family relationships' within which applicants might 'normally be expected to reside' (Hoath 1989:70-71, Sexty 1990:58).

association has been extensively criticised by feminists (Duncan 1996:127, Lister 1997)). As a policy primarily concerned with protecting the rights of eligible applicants to be rehoused, homelessness legislation perhaps provides a unique opportunity to examine assumptions about gender in public and private spheres. Following Hearn's (1998) argument that social policy reproduces gendered public and private domains, so too does homelessness legislation in its favouring of families, pregnant women (Watson and Austerberry 1986, Sexty 1990: 24, Johnson *et al* 1991:3, Burrows *et al* 1997:5) and, to an extent, women fleeing male violence (Walby 1990:135-136, Hague 1999:144, see also Chapter Five, section 5.4.3). In other words, women who are living in 'typical' family circumstances (with men and / or children), in an assumed private domain, are given support and protection by the legislation in the form of rehousing (return to the private sphere). Reading the legislation in this way it also follows that outside these family roles, (single) homeless people go unrecognised unless they are 'vulnerable for some other special reason' (a point also made by Watson and Austerberry (1986) but specifically in relation to single women). Within this unrecognised group of single people, men are at least accorded greater (albeit hidden) agency as they are elsewhere identified as the primary applicants (Fraser's 1989 'possessive individuals') within families; the fathers and heads of households and the perpetrators of domestic violence.

Finally, whilst policies themselves may be shaped by normative assumptions, they may also impinge on many areas of people's lives (Shore and Wright 1997) and in particular shape, reinforce, perpetuate (Thane 1991:93) and construct (West *et al* 1997) gender roles. Connel (1996), for example, argues that states and state policies have significant influence in constructing and regulating gender and gender relations especially through the areas of housing, education, criminal justice and the military (attributed to Franzway *et al* 1989 in Connel 1996:165).

4.5. Ideological Work

This final section considers the ways that gender ideology may be used as a persuasive and legitimising force in homelessness legislation. Shore and Wright (1997) point out that policies have to be persuasive in their authority in order to lessen the likelihood of a challenge. They therefore tend to fix their course of action within wider frameworks and

goals (1997:11). Drawing on Foucault's idea of 'political technologies' they argue that: 'policies are most obviously political phenomenon, yet it is a feature of policies that their political nature is disguised by the objective, neutral, legal-rational idioms in which they are portrayed. In this guise, policies appear to be mere instruments for promoting efficiency and effectiveness. This masking of the political under the cloak of neutrality is a key feature of modern power' (Shore and Wright 1997:8).

Following Shore and Wright (1997), it is argued that homelessness legislation partly receives its authority and legitimacy through the use of gender. In the first instance this can be seen in the adoption of the masculine pronoun, common legal terminology, but language that research has shown to be specific to men (West *et al* 1997:121, Cameron 1992). 'Language does not merely reflect a pre-existing sexist world; instead, it actively constructs gender asymmetries within specific sociohistorical contexts' (West *et al* 1997:120, see also Cameron 1998). Secondly, it is argued that homelessness legislation draws some of its legitimacy through its references to women, primarily pregnant women and women fleeing domestic violence. For example, innocent as a reference to 'pregnant women' may seem (English and Welsh legislation section 177, Scottish legislation section 33), its inclusion may also function in an ideological sense, and by specifying such (pregnant) women, the idea of 'natural' is invoked. Douglas points out that social classifications strongly associated with nature are often relied on because they create a sense of 'rightness in reason' (Douglas 1987 in Wright 1994:22). Although Douglas is primarily referring to the way institutions gain stability, this argument can also be extended to the way social policies have to be persuasive of their legitimacy. Similarly, the homelessness legislative use of the term 'domestic violence', by including the word 'domestic', has clear associations with women, which is reinforced by its positioning in the context of 'vulnerable as a result of other special reason' (or in the Scottish Code as 'women suffering, or in fear of, violence' (section 7.3). Thus, despite hiding women behind its male language the legislation in fact exposes them more pointedly and exposes, or creates them, as victims of violence. Furthermore, just as the category of 'pregnant persons' invokes the 'natural', so there is something 'natural' in men being violent (Hearn *et al* 1998). Policies are, of course, many things besides examples of gender rhetoric, but that they do necessarily persuade is a crucial aspect.

4.6. Conclusions

In conclusion, although homelessness legislation appears initially to be gender neutral it can be shown potentially to disadvantage certain groups of men and women, especially in the detail of the law for women fleeing domestic violence, men fleeing external violence, and fathers. The legislation has also been shown to be premised on assumptions of gender such as the nuclear family and draws on gender for some of its ideological work. Having looked at the legislation it remains to be seen how the legislation is interpreted and used in practice and whether, and to what extent, gender is involved.

CHAPTER 5: THE CITY AND ITS GENDERED INFRASTRUCTURE OF HOMELESS SERVICES

5.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a context for the research. The city, its homelessness problem at the time of fieldwork and the accommodation and support services available to men and women are all explored. The homeless infrastructure is examined in two parts: firstly, by looking at the different opportunities and access to services that men and women have; and secondly, by focusing on the city's specialist Homeless Persons Unit (HPU) as a case study of gendered practices.

The city context is introduced in terms of its employment and local authority housing stock, in addition to the basic figures on homelessness. An outline of homeless services is given in summary form, and in more detail in Appendix 5. Discussion of gendered differences in provision follows, including a preliminary attempt to explain some of those differences from a historical perspective. The difference in levels of provision for single people and families is considered, as is the provision for women fleeing domestic violence and the existence of women only services. This section concludes by exploring the gendered ways in which services may be operating. The second part of this chapter describes the HPU and Secondary Assessment Centre (SAC) in terms of their environments, before examining how some of the staff practices are gendered.

By immediately following the chapter on legislation, the close relationship between homeless policies and provision is suggested (Crane 1999:146). It is also hoped that by building up a picture of the available services, the reader is in a better position to understand the gendered experiences which form the basis of Chapter Eight. This chapter is based largely on discussions with service providers and on my own analysis of the local services. The emphasis in this chapter is on the providers' perspective rather than that of the users of services (user's perspectives are present in Chapters Seven, Eight and, to a lesser extent, Chapter Six).

5.2. The City: Poverty, Employment and Homelessness

The city has experienced high levels of poverty and unemployment and, despite some success in centre regeneration, it has experienced uninterrupted economic decline since the early 1970s (Bailey *et al* 1999). The city came first in a national study of poverty in 1994 (Green 1994 in Fitzpatrick 2000:15) and unemployment in the city is double the national average (C*ISGH 2000:15). As its manufacturing base has been weakened over the past decade a large proportion of skilled and semi-skilled jobs have been lost (Turok and Edge 1999:44). Full time male employment has been particularly hit by the decline in manufacturing (Turok and Edge 1999:18) and, whereas in other cities there has been an increase in part-time female employment, this city is one of the exceptions (1999:49).

There are high levels of homelessness in the city. In 1998-1999 there were over 13,000 homeless applications (all household types) and single homelessness represents an unusually large proportion (Regional Government Office* 2000). Amongst single people (see Table 5.1), the proportion of men to women presenting as homeless in 1998-1999 was roughly equal in the youngest age group (16/17), almost five times more men in the under 25's age group (18 to 25) and over six times more men in the over 26's age group (HPU statistics). Statistics on family homelessness were not broken down by adults' gender, but women would head a significant proportion of these. However, even if women headed all the 1,469 families the gender balance would not be equal, as may be the case if only homeless young people are considered (Smith *et al* 1996).

Table 5.1: Numbers of homeless male and female applicants in three age groups, also family homelessness during 1998 -1999.

16/17(single)		18-25 (single)		26+ (single)		families	total
men	women	men	women	men	women		
400*	300	2,500	600	4,500	700	1,500	10,600

*Figures have been rounded to the nearest 50 to help preserve the anonymity of the fieldwork location. (HPU statistics)

During the same period 1998-1999, 1,231 single people were on the homeless person's waiting list, made up of 800 men and 400 women. This list is part of the council's

rehousing list and lists people who wish to be rehoused in mainstream accommodation usually due to either relationship breakdown or friends and family no longer willing to accommodate. Not all people presenting as homeless or living in hostels will be entered on it (C*ISGH 2000:11). At the city's Housing Aid Centre the proportion of enquiries made by women 1997-1998 was double that of men (60% women, 35% men, 5.5% man and woman, 0.5% other), the reverse of the pattern shown in Table 5.1 (see Chapter Two for a discussion of gendered statistics).

Unlike London, the city has a significant proportion of public sector housing (Fitzpatrick 2000) although much of it is in poor condition (Wilcox 1998). The city's high unemployment is thought to explain the housing surplus as people's search for jobs takes them out of the city (DETR 1999 in C*ISGH 2000:16). In its interpretation of the homelessness legislation the city council is reputedly liberal and this seems to be related to its surplus housing stock (Evans 1999:149). In practice, the council's liberal approach meant that many single people without priority were taken on by the city council where they otherwise might not have been, had they applied to another council. One housing officer commented:

I like to think it's council policy to tend to hold doors open rather than keep them shut, unlike other councils. That's the way this centre hopefully operates. My personal opinion is that some other councils tend not to work with other people, 'lets find any excuse not to deal with this person'. We work in a way – if we can get people to fill the criteria, then we will. (Bob, HPU)

5.3. Homeless Service Infrastructure

Information about homeless services that were available during the period of fieldwork (December 1998 – July 1999) was derived from fieldwork and a local directory of homeless services (C*CSH 2000). Place (1995) has identified five types of homeless services for single people including housing, support needs including health care and welfare rights services, daily living skills, financial needs and social needs (for relationships and activities) (cited in Fitzpatrick *et al* 2000). This chapter covers all of

these but looks at services for both single people and homeless families and only specifies the type of service where relevant.

- . In terms of emergency accommodation, there were over 1000 bed spaces for adult men in direct access council run hostels, in comparison to 100 for women. (If commercial hostels are included, the total number of beds for men is 1300 and for women it remains at 100). For young people (hostels variously defined as for under 25s, 21s or 18s) there were 55 mixed bed spaces in council run hostels. The occupancy rate for adult council hostels was 89 per cent in June 1999. The relative proportion of adult bed spaces for men and women based on these figures in council accommodation was therefore 91 per cent men to 9 per cent women. This figure may be an underestimate of the numbers of women's bed spaces as, in previous years, the proportions were estimated at 85 per cent men and 15 per cent women in council hostels, 79 per cent men and 21 per cent women in voluntary hostels (Social Work Homelessness Group 1996 cited in C*ISGH 2000:5). In addition to direct access accommodation the local authority had access to 2000 permanent furnished flats, 500 temporary furnished flats, 300 supported furnished flats (including 35 emergency furnished flats for families and 17 bed-sit style flats for young people) and the use of 10 bed and breakfast facilities (100 bed spaces).

Supported accommodation in the voluntary sector consisted of a further 500 bed spaces for men, 150 spaces for women and over 600 mixed²². For men there were specialist projects for those who were long term homeless or who had long term alcohol problems. For women there were specialist support projects for those who were long term homeless (but none for women with drug or alcohol problems) in addition to projects for pregnant women, women with young children, abused young women, women fleeing domestic violence and women from black and ethnic minorities. There were also mixed projects for those with mental health problems, drugs, and alcohol problems, ex-offenders, asylum seekers and people who were black or from an ethnic minority. In addition to accommodation projects there were further specialist projects for women including a women's drug project, a prostitutes' support centre, a women's safety centre, a rape crisis centre, a women's support project, a black and ethnic minority women's project and a

²² Fitzpatrick comments that the council hostels are the 'least bad', but drab with little support; the voluntary hostels poor quality, although there have been some improvements; and the commercial hostels of extremely poor quality (2000:45).

homeless women's action group. The main day centre for homeless people had up until recently been a male-only centre but had begun admitting women 1998. However, it still barred women from using it in the evening.

5.4. Explaining Differences in Service Provision

5.4.1. Historical perspectives

By taking a historical perspective, in addition to a purely numerical one (see Chapter Two, section 2.4), it is possible to explain further some of the patterns of homeless service provision: for example, the vast difference in the number of hostel bed spaces may be partly explained by the different employment opportunities for men and women in the city. The dominance of the manufacturing (heavy) industry would have meant a greater opportunity for male employment in the area (Turok and Edge 1999), jobs that would also have attracted male migrants from elsewhere. The large city hostels were originally built to accommodate working men, rather than unemployed men²³, and partial evidence for this can be seen in the history of the city's main day centre which was originally set up to minister to the spiritual needs of Irish immigrant workers.

Watson and Austerberry (1986) explore a history of women lacking 'independent' accommodation such as hostel accommodation. The main thrust of their argument is that women have historically been expected to live within the confines of family units and that this continuing expectation is reflected in a lack of alternative accommodation for single women. Their historical explanation includes the ever-pertinent point that women's wages relative to men's are much lower and so they have traditionally been less able to afford independent accommodation (1986:27). Attitudes towards independently housed women were also seen to play a role and lodging houses reportedly barred women in the fear that they would compromise respectability (1986:30). Women's employment, such as the drapery industry and the domestic service industry, was also often tied to accommodation (1986:31).

²³ Amongst hostel and bed and breakfast users, nine out of ten had not been in employment in the week prior to a major survey (Kemp 1997:77).

In 1948 the National Assistance Act succeeded the Poor Law and provided statutory help in the form of accommodation for women and dependent children (1986:52) although husbands or male partners were excluded from the accommodation (Crane 1999:148). From the 1960s there was an increasing public interest in homelessness and an increase in projects in the voluntary sector. Specialist projects for women were set up in the recognition that women may be put off by male dominated general provision (1986:58), a point that correspond with the history of voluntary organisations in the city. For example three of the main accommodation providers were set up between the late 1960s and mid 1970s and the local Women's Aid group was set up in 1973. Watson and Austerberry's work (1986) is useful in that it attempts to chart some of the differences in provision for women and the reasons why this was so, and they do attempt to address historically gendered provision when most accounts only cover general (i.e. male) provision and largely fail to mention the issue of gendered provision. Unfortunately, because men's housing situation and family homelessness are both mentioned only sporadically, it is hard fully to assess quite how single women's provision was historically different.

5.4.2. Single and family homelessness

Although people with dependent children (more women than men) are in a privileged position to be rehoused if they qualify under the homeless legislation, they were not equally advantaged in terms of support services. Unlike single people, for whom there were a number of support projects in the city, there was little support for families who became homeless. This would seem to be a major oversight, not just in terms of support for those families, but also because there is evidence that a significant proportion of the so-called 'single' people were also parents. For example, in a survey carried out 1997-1998 at the city day centre for young people (under 25's) of 570 users it was found that one third of them were parents although only a third of those parents lived with their children.

The services that were provided for homeless families amounted to one support group for homeless families with children under five²⁴, and a home visit by both housing officers

²⁴ There was also a small group (less than ten members) of previously homeless women with young children who met regularly, but this group was run on a self-supportive and fairly exclusive basis.

and the homeless families' health care team. The housing officers and health care team were meant to act as a link to relevant services, but these services seemed to be more mainstream; few specifically homeless services for families existed. Most homeless support services were aimed at single people and only one charity, in addition to Women's Aid, was said to welcome children. Hutson (1999) has also recognised that support services are usually discussed with reference to single people rather than families, and questions the underlying assumption that families can cope better (1999:219). That services for homeless families were provided in the form of a home visiting service would additionally seem to suggest a model of parenting that makes it a primarily domestic and private affair. However, a home-based visiting service would seem out of step with the finding mentioned earlier that a high proportion of single homeless people are also parents and so presumably having to do their parenting on an 'external' or non home basis.

Finally, it is suggested that the unequal access to services for certain groups, such as families, is one of the consequences of categorising types of homelessness and types of homeless people. In the first instance, that there are 'homeless services' as opposed to non-homeless services could be said to be an initial step in marginalisation. Secondly, the conceptual distinctions made between young homeless people and adults²⁵, or single homeless people and families, may be a further obstacle to access. For example, services conceived with single people in mind may exclude people with children either by design or in practice by not having appropriate facilities to make them accessible for people with children, such as a crèche²⁶. Excluding children from services could only make it even harder for some of the already part time parents to continue meeting up with and caring for their children. This was precisely the case in the large male only hostels for 'single' men, environments that were extremely hostile to visiting children (also Pleace 1995 in Hutson 1999:213).

²⁵ One of the major problems faced by users and staff at the day centre for homeless young people was the age restriction of 25. Staff were not supposed to work with young people over this age, but this was found to be particularly problematic when young people who they had been working with reached this age and they were then supposed to stop their support.

²⁶ Women's Aid was the only service that provided a crèche with their counselling service.

5.4.3. Provision for women fleeing violence

Local authority provision and support for people fleeing domestic violence, a situation which overwhelmingly affects women (90% Regional* Police), was limited. For single women a bed in a mixed hostel was all that was initially provided until the women-only hostel, which was generally always full, could provide a place. Bed and breakfast accommodation was used on an informal basis at the discretion of a housing officer. There seemed to be no support for women accommodated in bed and breakfast other than being given the phone number of Women's Aid. In the hostels there were staff on hand but women with children would be accommodated either in bed and breakfast, followed by a place in a temporary furnished flat, or sent straight to a temporary furnished flat. Once in bed and breakfast, women with children could be expected to wait for several days to several weeks before being moved on to a temporary furnished flat, where again there was no support in place except the Women's Aid number and a visit from the homeless families' health team (as mentioned earlier). The temporary furnished flats, which families were moved on to, were located anywhere in the city so women with children of school age could have the added difficulty of placing their children in a new school, only to be moved again on obtaining a permanent flat. Bed and breakfast accommodation is considered to be the 'accommodation of last resort' (Carter 1997, also Hutson 1999) and, according to Hague, all temporary accommodation is particularly unsuitable for women fleeing violence (1999:144).

From the HPU's statistics for 1998-1999, 460 people were in priority need fleeing violence from a partner including 300 families, 150 single women and 15 single men. From local police sources, the figures of domestic violence were even higher and, in a two-year period from February 1998 to January 2000, 22,400 disputes were recorded including 9,000 involving physical violence.

Alternative accommodation for women fleeing violence was in one of the Women's Aid refuges. Women's Aid in the city had around 1,200 requests for refuge in 1998-1999 although they only had 60 places. Their annual report states that in 1998-1999 they only managed to accommodate 230 women in their own refuges and 150 in refuges elsewhere (figures for women only, not children) so that presumably many women had no choice but to use council accommodation. These figures reflect the national situation where half or

more of women seeking refuge are not able to be accommodated (Hague 1999:133). Women with either alcohol or drug problems could not be accommodated by Women's Aid, the reason given as being due to their communal refuge facilities²⁷. The funding of Women's Aid was not secure but largely based on income from housing benefit (80.5%), plus social work division (9%), children's grants and fundraising. This lack of core funding for essential services is seen by some as indicative of state support for women. Walby (1990) for example argues that through a lack of basic welfare provision (such as refuges) in addition to the difficulties that women face in the criminal justice system (when they take a case of rape to court) the state is implicit in supporting male violence against women (1990:135-136).

5.4.4. Women only services

There were a number of specialist services that only women could use. The number of specialist services, however, obscures the limited scope of the projects and the small number of people that they could support. For example, the project for abused young women could only accommodate eight women and the black and ethnic minority women's project only 12 women. Larger projects included the prostitute support centre which had 1,150 (November 1999) women registered as using its services and the women's drug diversion project. The women's drug project was originally set up in the belief that their estimated target group was 100 to 200 women a year. However, in the first 10-month period after the start of the project, the service had actually seen nearly 500 women, over double their highest estimate.

Many of the support services were linked to hostel accommodation and, in this regard, it would be single men in the large hostels who would have greater access to support services. However, from reports by the staff there, it seemed that men's actual uptake of those services was limited (and this was also found to be the case in this research see Chapter Eight, section 8.5). Staff thought that men's access to support services was hindered because, firstly, the services were not based on the premises, secondly, that their residents found it difficult to ask for support, and thirdly, that the large size of the men's

²⁷ Men fleeing violence would similarly find themselves unwelcome in a Women's Aid refuge.

hostels (all over 200 residents) made it impossible for staff informally to support their residents. Little appears to have been done institutionally to address this situation. By contrast, the women's hostel staff spoke proudly of all the services that their hostel was linked to and which their residents reportedly used, something that was also confirmed by this research (see Chapter Eight). They also recognised that many of the women also had problems asking for support but the small-scale nature (over 60 residents) of the women's only council hostel meant that informal support was possible. Therefore it would seem that, although in theory it may have been supposed that single men in hostels had a better access to support services, in practice women seemed to be better able to benefit from them.

5.4.5. Gendered ways of working in a service

That a service is open to both men and women does not necessarily mean that in practice men and women have equal access. The environment of a service and the attitudes of its staff and / or users are all thought to be important in a service being fully accessible to all. For example, one youth development worker outlined her struggle with her colleagues to set up some outreach work that specifically targeted young women. She felt that the way the service had previously worked excluded women and 50 per cent of the female users where she worked were found to be involved in prostitution. This development worker argued that accessing and supporting women through outreach work could only be brought about by using women-only teams in the recognition that building up trusting relationships would take time (see also Flemen 1997 and Horgan *et al* 1992 both in Willis 1999). She was finally able to convince her colleagues of the benefits of her proposal and, after about a year of women's shift work, she felt the increased number of disclosures about sexual abuse were a sign of the strength of relationships that were being built up.

Another example that explores the issue of gendered working is the conversion of the male day centre into a mixed day centre. The majority of the staff at the day centre (mostly male) were said to be initially hostile to the introduction of women, expressed their fears about working with women and expected that their presence would mean increased conflict amongst the men. The development worker responsible for implementing the changes felt strongly that there was a profound lack of awareness about what providing a

women friendly service actually meant and that it was more than just 'opening the doors' or adding some female toilets. Three months after the introduction of women, only six to seven women were coming in on a daily basis as compared to about 100 men. The development worker, in trying to explain this lack of interest, identified (male) staff attitudes on the door, the confined premises and the numerical dominance of men as being particularly discouraging to women. This lack of awareness about women friendly services and the deterrence of male dominated environments are also recognised by Morrish (1993:22).

5.4.6. Conclusions

In conclusion to the first half of this chapter, it has been shown that provision for homeless men and women varies considerably. There are far more direct access bed spaces for men than women, single people are provided for much better than people with children, and there are more specialist support projects for women although many of these are very small. Of the support services that are apparently open to both men and women, both men and women are variously reported to find it difficult accessing that support. Whereas men may find it harder to accept and access the support services that are available, women may find it harder to enter male dominated environments or services staffed by men. However, it is also apparent that, whereas the barriers that women may face are being recognised and accepted (albeit slowly), a similar recognition about the barriers that men face is not apparent. Assumptions about gender, such as men or families not needing support, seem to play a significant part in the delivery of services.

5.5. The Homeless Persons Unit: A Gendered Workplace?

This section is in the style of a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973)²⁸. The physical buildings and layout of the Homeless Persons Unit (HPU) and Secondary Assessment Centre (SAC) will be touched on, in addition to the gendered aspects of the management structures, staff roles and the gendered metaphors of the workplace.

²⁸ By this is meant that the description which follows will be infused with interpretation and meaning in a manner that is characteristically 'anthropological'.

5.5.1. Location, boundaries and security

The location of the HPU was central to the city but discretely just south of the central business district in a partly decaying industrial area. The unit was in a fine old building which had been converted from its original municipal purpose. The conversion seemed to have been carefully planned for its new purpose. The interior was modern, with an open-plan reception hall combining a waiting area and an interviewing area. The reception desk, and behind this the housing officers' main office, were to the left of the reception area, the managers' offices and private interviewing rooms off to the right. The reception area was freshly painted and gave an initial impression of a leisure centre complex. A row of hot and cold drinks and snack machines covered one wall. Potted plants, chairs and tables, a couple of comfortable sofas and some scalloped raised flooring added to the informal 'lounging' effect. Other than the toilets, however, all areas leading from the reception space were forbidden. Electronic cards and heavy doors with security glass severely restricted freedom of movement between rooms. Security cameras were trained on the reception areas and also covered all the entrances from the outside. An architectural feature of a round window between the reception desk and the housing officers' back office doubled as a peephole for the housing officers to view their clients. The reception desk was also purposely just too high and too deep to jump or reach across for an effective assault. The interviewing area consisted of three large kidney shaped interviewing tables, deep enough to restrict some attacks with panic buttons underneath and internal phones (although these were not working).

In the HPU the movement of staff and restriction of non-staff, between different parts of the building was strictly policed. The level of security at each door, even within the staff back offices, contradicted the initial impression of the open-plan 'leisure centre' reception space. Fitzpatrick (2000) notes that the young people in her study found their relatively new HPU a physically comfortable and pleasant environment, in contrast to the (homeless) people there who they felt were extremely horrid and intimidating (2000:118). Housing officers themselves mentioned their physical unease in the open-plan environment and, although they understood the reasons for it, felt that it also put both staff and clients at risk of assault. Housing officers also indicated their unhappiness at the arrangements from an

interviewing perspective as they felt that their interviews were often of a personal nature and it was unfair for these interviews to be overheard.

- . The Secondary Assessment Centre comprised both office space for housing officers and a hostel for homeless people awaiting further investigation of their cases. In a similar way to the HPU, the SAC was armed with all-round security cameras but was in a much less purpose built or designed space. The buildings consisted of a cluster of prefabricated huts looking like a shabby primary school on the outside, apart from the barbed wire and cameras trained on the exits. Unlike the glass and open front entrance of the HPU, the SAC's entrance door needed a special card to enter. However, there were usually residents milling about the inside of the door to let people in without having to ring. Inside the door was a small lobby space and an unfriendly reception cubicle, all perspex with a voice grill. The housing officers' office was along a corridor on the way to the canteen. The windows of the housing officers' room looked out onto the front where they could observe some of the exits and entrances of the residents. Unlike the HPU there was easier access around most of the building for card holding residents, except into the staff offices and staff toilets. However, as the door to the office was not working properly, residents would sometimes unexpectedly walk in. A see-through panel of the main housing office door had been painted over, presumably to keep out prying eyes, but in effect made it impossible for the housing officers to know who they would meet when they opened their door. Two cramped interview booths with a perspex separating panel represented the official space for communication between housing officers and homeless applicants. However the geography of the building, combining residency and office facilities, meant that meetings occurred spontaneously around the building, somewhat blurring the boundary system between residents and officers. Forthcoming plans to remove the separating panel of the interviewing booths were not welcomed by the staff, although an internal camera trained on their office door to see who was outside was seen as a good idea. The housing officers at the SAC did not wear any uniform unlike those at the HPU who wore a 'school' type uniform.

From these descriptions of the HPU and SAC buildings there is some indication of the perceived need for security measures to protect staff from their client group, combined with a contradictory push towards a user friendly environment. Such ambiguities seemed consistent with other views held by housing officers about their clients. On the one hand,

the staff saw their client group as worthy of help, 'just people like us' but without so many options to choose from. 'If I was homeless I wouldn't come here, but I've got options, the folk that come here don't' (Bob, HPU). In times of frustration, however, staff referred to their clients metaphorically as 'black holes', requiring endless help and effort²⁹. Unlike the reports of Cullen and Howe (1991) in relation to benefit workers, or Passaro (1996) in relation to homeless refuge workers, the housing officers did not seem to need ideologically to distance themselves from their clients. This perhaps was due to the fact that their clients were overwhelmingly unemployed, which is an important and distinguishing difference.

5.5.2. *Gender roles at the HPU and SAC*

At the HPU many of the posts within the organisational structure were identifiably gendered, which Callender refers to as 'horizontal segregation' (attributed to Hakim 1979 in Callender 1996:38, see also Chapter Two, section 2.5.1). The receptionists were women, the drivers were men, the Chief Housing Officer was a man and all the secretarial staff were women although just under half of the lower management positions were filled by women. There were more women on the teams of housing officers (six housing officers per team plus one senior housing officer, six teams altogether) at the HPU although at the SAC there were significantly more women. The lower wages for the housing officers at the SAC may have influenced there being only one man and five women.

Within the teams of male and female housing officers, there was some evidence that the jobs were being performed along gendered lines. The differences seemed to be based on the length of time that was seen as appropriate to do an interview and the detail that was sought. With many housing officers stating that the people they saw were generally in crisis, the extra time taken by some women was justified on the grounds that it provided an important listening and supportive aspect.

²⁹ This bears similarities to criminal discourse as identified by Cowan (1997) such as between those criminals who are 'just like us' (rational consumers) and 'someone other' (the excluded, embittered threatening outcast or fearsome stranger).

HO: (M)ost people want to give you more info than you actually need, they'll give you their life story. It depends on time. If you've got time you do, but if you've got 20 people waiting you just get the bare bones. I've got set questions I use, and anything after that is a bonus. If it's relevant and if I've got time I'll do a proper in-depth interview with them.

Q: So you don't mind the life history if you've got time?

HO: Aye that's probably what they should be getting, but it's impractical a lot of the time so.... I don't know if it's just I used to do casework so ... you were supposed to do an in-depth interview then. So I've still probably got that in my head and I probably do a longer interview than one or other of my colleagues. (Lydia, HPU)

Another female housing officer, whilst denying that there was any gendered way of working, said that she did try and build up a rapport with people,

'you've got to...you'll get far more information off them and be able to help them more if you know the person' (Kirsty, HPU).

In contrast to the women, some male staff identified a male style as being quicker, and associated this with a greater ability for efficiency or 'experience'.

HO: I can do an interview quicker, without the hassle, ways that you learn just through experience... () But there's some folk in here who can do that in half an hour what will take others to do in an hour and that's no a reflection that the person's lazier or whatever it's just experience and being able to dismiss what is irrelevant and take what's relevant. And some people come in and they want to give you their life story, fine, but you need to detach the important parts relevant to the application and you probe certain areas too...() the guys will...() there's maybe 20 people sitting there, and the females will maybe go through about, err, a fair section of the queue, fairly quickly, they'll be working hard doing what they are doing. But you know, there's a difference in the numbers that we can go through...() and maybe the customers relate a wee bit differently as well, maybe they chat to the females a wee bit longer... (and with) some guys it's just 'Hi, how you doing? Just out of prison? OK. (Bob, housing officer at the HPU)

Another male housing officer pointed out after finishing an extremely brief interview:

Some of the housing officers make a meal out of these presentations and drag it out. But if it's just basic information then why bother, it's just more paperwork? (Adam, HPU)

Whilst it is not being suggested here that there is a definite 'women's' or 'men's' way of working, it is argued that people may conform to certain observable gender roles. There were, of course, exceptions to these roles embodied in patient and encouraging men, and brusque women who just wanted the person's details and the case passed on. These findings are supported by Cullen's (1994) study of three types of gender roles in British welfare benefit services. She found similarly different strategies in the way men and women related to clients with women spending longer, especially with clients with difficult problems, and men more likely to work through a greater number of clients, avoiding emotional displays where possible.

Cullen (1994) concludes that women's slower work, albeit often with the more difficult clients, was valued less by managers than that of their male colleagues, although findings by Evans (1999) would suggest that sympathetic staff attitude was a major factor in the positive evaluation of treatment amongst homeless applicants (1999:151). It is difficult to conclude, as Cullen does, on the relative value given by managers to male and female colleagues' work, despite the hint of this view in the above quote by Bob. However, as also suggested by Cullen, there did seem to be some evidence that there was a conscious recruitment at the HPU of equal numbers of men and women for the gendered qualities or skills that they were thought to possess. For example, Cullen (1994) argues that in job centres women were being specifically recruited for their mediating qualities between the clients and managers, unacknowledged emotional work (or 'emotional labour' see James 1989) and some quality of non assertive femininity for dealing with the public. At the HPU, and perhaps more so at the SAC, the recruitment of more women could have been part of a deliberate plan for dealing with clients as the emotional work of women was overtly referred to with respect to the number of people fleeing domestic violence. Similarly a strategy acknowledged by housing officers for diffusing aggression and confrontation was to approach clients in mixed couples. The recruitment of men in contrast to women, could have been in terms of a bodily deterrent in addition to the male

security guards. Interestingly, there was significant rhetorical evidence for the idea of male staff protecting their female colleagues, although in practice female housing officers were expected to take an equal turn at dealing with aggressive clients.

Finally, the overall 'atmosphere' of the HPU and SAC was referred to in typically 'masculine' terms. For example, war metaphors were prevalent amongst housing officers and references to the 'front line' and being 'under siege' were not uncommon (similar to the 'Dunkirk spirit' as identified by Cullen and Howe in relation to welfare benefit workers (1991:21)). It was thought necessary by housing officers to be hardened, cynical and worldly in order to cope with the client group 'hassle is part of the job' (Kirsty, HPU) and 'aggression is common here' (Tom, HPU). A hostel manager, (under the same manager as the housing officers) also identified a 'masculine' attitude coming from the top. He said: 'we don't get the support we need and our management is saying "tough, you deal with it"'. One person got a dislocated shoulder and one woman got her face beaten up. What has to happen!?' (Duncan, all male council hostel).

5.6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the second part of this chapter has continued the theme of gendered styles of working and environment and suggested that the Homeless Persons Unit and Secondary Assessment Centre were gendered workplaces. The organisational structure with staff recruitment practices, styles of working by male and female housing officers and the 'tough' working atmosphere all contributed to this conclusion.

CHAPTER 6: INFORMAL PRACTICES AND GENDERED NEGOTIATIONS

. 6.1. Introduction

6.1.1. *Aims of the chapter*

This chapter addresses two of the original three research questions (see Chapter Three, section 3.4.4). First, it looks at how homeless policies, administration and applicants are gendered in practice; second, it considers how gender affects the relationships and claims being negotiated between housing officials and homeless people. The central concern of this chapter is with policy as practice, 'embedded in the institutional mechanisms of decision making and service delivery' (Shore and Wright 1997:5). It is an emphasis that is consistent with Lipsky's (1980) assertions that policy is what people experience in their interactions with 'street-level bureaucrats'.

Building on Chapter Five, this chapter shows that the nature and type of services available had an important effect on the decisions that housing officers could make. However, where previous chapters have also largely focused on the 'structures' which surround homeless people (legislative structures, services available), this chapter concentrates on the individual agency of homeless people, and the individual and collective agency of housing officers. For although homeless people and housing officers are both constrained by official structures, people also seek to act within those limitations (Lipsky 1980). Homeless people and housing officers are not merely the 'passive beneficiaries' of welfare policies but are also creative, reflexive beings (Williams, Popay and Oakley 1999) in the process of homelessness. Finally, in terms of the gendered perspective taken here, the reader is reminded that gender is not a 'given', but something which is actively constructed through institutions, people who work in them (Roper 1994) and people who apply to them for assistance. Gender and gender relations can both partly help to explain organisational processes, and organisational processes can help to explain what gender is (Witz and Savage 1992:3).

This chapter functions as a focal pivot which tries to bring together many of the essential elements and *raison d'être* for this research. For example, the chapter can be explained by

its central part in the overall attempt to 'study up', addressing the organisations and people more powerfully positioned relative to homeless people. On the other hand, using an expression introduced by Reinhold (1994, in Shore and Wright 1997:14), the chapter is also an example of 'studying through' in that it attempts to explore the meeting point where the less powerful interact with the relatively more powerful, tracing relations between actors, institutions and discourses. In other words, this chapter can be understood as addressing the need to examine the relationships between the following: clients and bureaucrats; providers and users (Williams, Popay and Oakley 1999); housing officers and homeless applicants (Lidstone 1994:470); and the gap between official policy and grass roots practice (Lipsky 1980, Cullen and Howe 1991). It has also taken an anthropological approach, the strength of which lies in trying to get away from 'tidy ideal-types' to exploring the 'characteristic complexity and messiness' of policy processes (attributed to Czarniawska-Joerges 1992 in Shore and Wright 1997:16).

This chapter starts by recapping on the local arrangements for homeless applicants at the Homeless Persons Unit (HPU), Secondary Assessment Centre (SAC) and also Neighbourhood Housing Offices (NHOs). Clarification of the roles of housing officers in these locations is made, and there is a brief look at the role of discretion in applying the legislation. The chapter then goes on to examine the informal practices of the housing officers, initially focusing on the category of 'first-timers', and then going on to examine how women are singled out as a particular group requiring special treatment. Justification as to why women are singled out for special treatment follows alongside a consideration of how this attitude is maintained. The favouritism afforded women is however not without qualifications or exceptions, and these are discussed. The chapter concludes by exploring gendered expectations which are held regarding the behaviour of homeless men and women.

6.1.2. *Fieldwork caveat*

This chapter is based on participant observation work in the HPU, SAC and NHOs and from interviews with housing officers³⁰. However, a major caveat with the participant

³⁰ Although as many as 38 housing officers were observed only four (two men and two women) were interviewed. Quotes from these four housing officers therefore appear frequently; they were key informants.

observation data from sitting in on homelessness assessments between housing officers and homeless people is that they only represent a partial 'snapshot' in a fairly continuous process of homelessness assessment. This qualification has an important bearing on understanding the context of the data and the extent to which conclusions (or generalisations) can be drawn from observations at a single point in an extended process.

6.2. Arrangements for People Processing

6.2.1. HPU, SAC and NHOs

As has previously been mentioned in Chapter Three (see section 3.5.2 and figure 3.1), the housing authority's processing of homeless applicants was based around three linked arrangements: the HPU (single homelessness and family homelessness out-of-hours), SAC (second stage investigations for single homelessness, both hostel and offices) and NHOs (for homeless families during office hours). Therefore, in terms of people processing, people who were homeless were immediately categorised into those with dependants living with them ('families') and those without ('singles')³¹. The HPU and SAC were located in two different locations in the city and both were staffed by housing officers who specialised in homelessness. In contrast, the staff in the NHOs, located all over the city, were not homelessness specialists but were more used to dealing with 'mainstream' housing issues³².

Staff at the HPU worked one of three shifts, each of eight hours' duration, adding up to twenty-four hour cover³³. Each shift had a core team of seven housing officers in addition to one senior housing officer for each team (and three managers above the senior housing officer level). There was receptionist cover during normal office hours and security guard cover from four p.m. until two a.m. The SAC had only six housing officers, one manager and an administrative support worker; they all worked from nine to five, five days a week.

³¹ No couples (without children) were observed during the fieldwork period. The housing authority did have a policy of considering 'separated spouses' (without children) as in priority need for housing and, according to Yanetta and Third (1999), this policy operated for married, unmarried, gay and lesbian couples (1999:11). In terms of accommodation for couples in hostels, there were very few spaces.

³² Saying that the HPU and SAC staff specialised in homelessness does not necessarily mean that they all had extensive formal homelessness training, as training seemed to be very much done 'on-the-job'.

³³ The shifts ran from 6am - 2pm, 2pm - 10pm and 10pm - 6am.

There was also a hostel manager and hostel staff at the SAC who monitored residents and passed on any information of relevance to housing officers.

The HPU was the main hub of homelessness services and administration³⁴. For example, the Chief Housing Officer had his office at the HPU and, during the fieldwork period, one of the extra tasks of the housing officers was to keep an up-to-date record of all hostel bed space availability in the city. The functional distinction made by housing officers between the HPU and the SAC was that the HPU was for emergency accommodation and addressed people's 'rooflessness' whereas the SAC tried to more fully establish people's 'homelessness' as outlined in the legislation. The distinction then was also a matter of case complexity, so that if a person's application was straightforward a decision could be made at the HPU. If, however, a person's application was more complicated, then the (single) person would be accommodated at the SAC whilst their case was investigated further. All uncertainties in decision making were checked with colleagues and, if there were still any doubts, discussed with the team senior housing officers (or manager at the SAC). This teamwork was generally seen as an essential safeguard, a pooling of expertise or sharing of responsibility. At the SAC³⁵ relevant professionals were contacted who might have already been working with the person, or were deemed useful for the person's future support. After a decision had been made as to a person's homelessness situation they would be sent on to either temporary or permanent³⁶ accommodation intended to be more appropriate to their needs³⁷. The SAC was envisaged as being a place where people being investigated and monitored stayed for no more than six to eight weeks.

³⁴ Other than being the 24-hour centre for homeless people in the city, the HPU was the main co-ordination point for hostels and temporary furnished flats located around the city. Within the HPU complex there was also specialist young persons' accommodation, offices for management and a section called 'alarms' that was a 24-hour support system for council tenants. Sensors were fitted inside flats; if tenants needed emergency assistance, HPU staff could be contacted and would go out to the flat. The service seemed to be set up for supporting older people's independence but also alerted housing officers to empty properties. Housing officers at the HPU rotated their shift work in the homelessness 'emergencies' section with the 'alarms' section.

³⁵ The SAC was an adult hostel for over 18's. Young people under this age (or under 21 if considered particularly vulnerable) would usually be referred from the HPU to either the HPU's 'bedsit' accommodation (on the premises) or the young persons' hostel. If a person was under 16, social work would be contacted.

³⁶ Hostels were not intended as permanent accommodation, although in practice people stayed there on a permanent basis (Carlen 1996:61, Crane 1999:99).

³⁷ Housing application forms (HAFs) would be routinely filled in with homeless applicants at the HPU, SAC and hostels. Having an early date of entry was important because housing points would be awarded after a certain length of time. HAFs could be suspended whilst a person was not immediately interested in housing but could be 'reactivated' when they did want housing, retaining the initial application date. Staying in a hostel also gave an applicant additional housing points. This process touches on the link between the homelessness system and the wider housing allocations systems.

Despite the city council reputedly being liberal, and having extensive hostel provision for single people with no priority (see Chapter Five, section 5.2), there was still an important process of investigating both families and single people's applications. The HAC, SAC and NHOs therefore all had important gatekeeping roles, although the housing officers didn't necessarily see themselves in this way³⁸ (see also this chapter section 6.4.3). For example, housing officers at the SAC, on the receiving end of the HPU's decisions, frequently criticised the number of people HPU staff initially accepted, which was more than the SAC staff claimed they would. On the other hand the HPU staff saw their own role as somewhat superficial, and said it was the SAC staff that had the final say:

I don't normally allocate accommodation...you really need to see a caseworker (at the SAC) to move on. They are the gatekeepers here, they are the ones that let them into the system, and then there are people who follow it up. They see folk the next day and if you don't see a caseworker your case won't get progressed, if you are willing to stay a night in the hostel then you can see a caseworker in the morning. (Bob, housing officer HPU)

This description of decision making power between the HAC and SAC would seem to be classically Foucauldian. According to Foucault, power is something that circulates and is never localised in particular people's hands. It is employed and exercised through netlike organisation. Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application, always simultaneously undergoing and exercising power (in Gordon 1980).

6.2.2. A positive view of discretion

All the housing officers viewed positively their individual powers of discretion to interpret the homelessness legislation. If anything, housing officers felt that their powers of discretion did not go far enough. The literature on discretion suggests that too much discretion leads to inconsistency (and at its worst is prejudice) and too little requires detailed and complex rules (and tends to be too rigid). The art of effective welfare

³⁸ There was less opportunity to observe housing officers in the NHOs because of the way homeless families were recruited for observation whereby the researcher was only present during the time of interview.

administration therefore is finding the correct balance between the two extremes (attributable to Lister 1980 in Cullen and Howe 1991:7). However, the housing officers did not refer to these debates as I had initially assumed, something that Lidstone regards as an area requiring training (1994:470).

The housing officers' positive view of discretion is perhaps best understood in a context where most housing officers seemed to think that significant numbers of the people that they saw were in some way or another 'trying it on'. Thus, although they saw their clients as being in need, this was overridden by their view that only partial truths were routinely given (see also later this chapter, section 6.5.1). One housing officer spoke of her frustration (and interestingly uses a gendered example where the applicant is male and uses female partners for housing):

'The legislation is OK, it's not bad. But there's always some people get round it, maybe someone can present as single and say for one reason or another you are not going to accommodate them, say violence or something. The following week they appear with a pregnant partner, right? And suddenly it's a different ball game altogether. Sometimes its dead frustrating, you know people are working the system, it's queue jumping, but you've got a statutory obligation to deal with them as a family unit or whatever. (Lydia, HPU).

The consequence of discretion is the wide variation in outcomes for individuals or, as shall be argued later, for certain groups. Discretion in homelessness legislation can be found in the ways of assessing vulnerability, the stage at which homelessness is accepted, the nature and duration of the investigation (Niner 1989 in Lidstone 1994:468), the selective collection of information and decisions over how much help and advice would be available to a claimant (Cullen and Howe 1991:7).

6.2.3. Changes

The overall homelessness administration, as described here at the time of fieldwork, was being constantly adjusted and sometimes completely reorganised. A system based at the HPU of individual casework and specialisms (young people, older people, families) had

fairly recently been dropped in favour of a decentralised system where the decision-making process went on between the HPU, SAC, NHOs and hostels. Lydia, a housing officer at the HPU who had worked with both systems, commented:

(Before) you saw a pattern in somebody's behaviour, you saw if they were coping or not coping, you saw their weaknesses and strengths whereas now... () its more of a conveyor belt just now – its people coming in the door and “lets get them out to something for tonight at least”... () I mean I'll see maybe 10 people today and if you ask me to describe the first person I saw I probably wouldn't remember... () and they (the homeless person) knew who to go to if they need to ask anything.

And:

We have lost the continuity and trust... () You need somebody to pool all the knowledge together and make a sensitive assessment with all the facts. It is a fragmented responsibility (now). (Jim housing officer, HPU)

The lack of continuity in the current system had implications for the (re)construction of people into clients or applicants. Although even with a casework approach homeless people would probably still be referred to as 'clients', as the first quote above (Lydia, HPU) points out, there would be more opportunities for relationships to build up. Cullen and Howe (1991) argue that bureaucracies can not deal with complete and integrated persons, only aspects of them (attributed to Lipsky 1980, 1991:2). Similarly, on becoming homeless, people were transformed into 'claimants', 'presentations', 'family' or 'single' homeless, 'male' or 'female'.

6.3. Informal and Gendered Practices

Following Lipsky (1980), Cullen and Howe (1991) argue that in order to deal with demanding workloads, staff in bureaucracies use methods of informal processing alongside the officially sanctioned formal processes. Accuracy is often sacrificed in favour of simplicity and, in an effort to secure certain basic items of information with which they can advance the case, welfare officers listen for key words and phrases (Cullen and Howe

1991:4). Informal processes involve value-laden categories applied to claimants and are influential in terms of the time and effort officers are prepared to devote to a case. The allocation to particular categories is often rapid, based on partial information and involves processes of stereotyping (Cullen and Howe 1991:8). Housing officers at the HPU, SAC and NHOs were not exceptional in this respect, and Cullen and Howe's (1991) description of informal practices seems to represent a good overall picture of their work. Categories that were found to be important to housing officers are outlined below and gender was also seen to play a significant part in this people processing.

6.3.1. *'First-timers', 'regulars' and the 'genuine'*

An important and initial judgement that housing officers made about homeless applicants was whether or not they had been through the homelessness system before. Establishing that someone was a 'first-timer' was an important, initial category that housing officers sought. Although it was an informal category with no recognition in the homelessness legislation, 'first time presentations' were counted in the HPU's monitoring system.

When a housing officer in the HPU picked up a new person's name from the list of people waiting³⁹, before interviewing them, they would return to their office to check if any information was held on the computers about that person. If the person had been in the HPU before, information should have been available about that visit on the computer, in addition to filed paperwork (fat files were regarded by housing officers as indicating 'difficult' cases⁴⁰). If a housing officer could not find a person's name on the computer then they were possibly going to be a 'first-timer'⁴¹, although housing officers would usually seek to confirm this verbally early on in an interview. Once confirmed, having a

³⁹ Waiting times to see a housing officer were frequently three to four hours in the evenings, although less in the daytime. Lidstone (1994) argues that long waiting times are used as a deliberate deterrence device by housing authorities based on the assumption that the 'less genuine' applicants will go away whilst the most 'needy' will stay on. (1994:466). Whether or not those in most need are actually the most likely to be able to wait the longest is not known. Lidstone's assertion was not contradicted by my own research and was backed up by the following deterrence strategy openly used on young people: housing officers explicitly mentioned using threats in conjunction with a period of waiting to try to deter young people whom they thought might be applying 'too lightly'.

⁴⁰ For example, an 'alert' on a person's file or computer record, meant that the person was either barred from council accommodation, or had been previously been barred.

⁴¹ Wrongly spelt names frequently hindered name searches, so housing officers were usually cautious about finite conclusions from the computer check alone.

'first-timer' status would generally gain that person greater attention and efforts on the part of a housing officer.

. A 'contagion' model seemed to apply to homeless applicants whereby once a person had been in the HPU a few times (or even once), something about their claim was sullied in the eyes of housing officers:

(I)f someone's been in a hostel before, they can cope with it, we'll let them have a hostel bed. If someone's coming through for the first time, they are an unknown quantity and you don't know if they will survive...() I hate to see people go into the system for the first time because the fear is they'll end up staying there (Bob, HPU)

And:

HO: (S)ingle people with vulnerabilities or who have never experienced hostel life, who have come from a settled home environment, you'll try and gain access to a small flat somewhere to allow them to continue living a life that is familiar to them...()

Q: So you choose people who you think would be the most successful?

HO: Well, it's a balancing act between those who you think will be the most successful and whether they would simply not survive in a hostel (Tom, HPU).

The logic here seems to be something of a 'catch 22' situation where being able to cope in for example, a hostel, is considered 'proof' that a person could cope again. A third quote also illustrates this point, but here the housing officer also suggests that there might be a gendered aspect to the first-timer distinction. In other words, the point being made seems not to be that women actually are more vulnerable than men, but that women seem more vulnerable because men *hide* their vulnerability, or 'tough it out':

In some ways you do look at people a wee bit differently, you see...single guys are maybe more likely to survive in single male hostels, particularly if he's been in the system a while...() if I see a female come through for the first time, it worries me you know, it worries me whether she'll actually be able to handle it ...() whereas with guys they may be more likely to be tough about it ...() you might think, you daft boy, you'll be OK (Bob, HPU)

When asked, housing officers suggested that emergency homeless services should really be for the 'first-timers', and those that used the service only occasionally. 'Regulars', another term frequently used, were by implication somehow less eligible for the service precisely because of the extent to which they used it, despite being in the majority. The exception to this were women fleeing domestic violence who did not necessarily have to be a first-timer to also be considered 'genuine'.

There definitely are two patterns really, there's people who perpetually come through every night, or every other week. Now don't get me wrong, some of them are genuine, you know like women fleeing violence who end up going back to their partner but come back again, I'm not saying they are not genuine and they are repeating and coming through, but there are huge numbers of single males and females who see this as their...their second home (Lydia, housing officer HPU)

It's good when you get genuine cases. There was a teacher once from (wealthy local neighbourhood) fleeing violence. Her pupils told her about the HPU. Her Metro was packed full of things. A genuine case. She was all over the place, having just plucked up the courage to leave her husband (Louise, receptionist HPU)

Sometimes the label 'genuine person' would also refer to someone who was simply 'up front' about their own problems⁴² and did not obviously try to deceive the housing officer:

If someone portrays themselves as genuine then you would do your best for them. If someone sits down, is up front and has an honest appraisal of their scenario and situation and isn't trying to cover up their drink or drug problems or excuses... () you respond better to that. It's almost automatic...() If you've got you (talking to female researcher) sitting there saying "this has happened to me, I'm really upset, I don't

⁴² Interestingly, housing officers also made a ranked distinction between older and younger rough sleepers. Older people who had slept rough for a long time were referred to as 'genuine rough sleepers', whereas young people were not. Being a 'genuine rough sleeper' also seemed to afford that person some extra help. For example one man in his 50s was recognised as being a 'genuine rough sleeper' and was given special treatment immediately by being seen by the senior housing officer on duty. He was looking for accommodation for himself and his dog because he was feeling ill. There was, however, no accommodation that also took dogs in the city, nor any service that would look after a dog for a short period of time. The senior housing officer gently tried to suggest that the man put his own health before his dog but the man, clearly upset by the suggestion that he would have to choose, eventually left with his dog.

know where to go” and someone else sitting beside you; the guy has just thrown his needle out of the window because he’s just had a fix before he came in, your response is going to be different (Tom, HPU)

This example is infused with ideas of gender. Tears and looking upset, characteristically female displays of distress, are being described here as indicative of a ‘genuine person’, whilst the drug addict is referred to in the masculine.

6.4. Women as a Special Group

6.4.1. Effort, time and lifts

It has already been suggested in the examples above that women were being looked on favourably and that women fleeing violence were especially likely to be thought of as ‘genuine’. However, in addition to this, there was substantial evidence that housing officers on the whole treated women as a special group. When directly asked⁴³, housing officers generally stated that they treated men and women just the same, although in almost the next breath they detailed the informal ways in which they favoured women:

It’s easier to turn a man away. I think we do treat men and women differently, we do more to help a woman be safe. (Theresa, HPU)

HO: I’ve seen women with no priority get a B&B, if everywhere else is full. You wouldn’t see a guy getting that and the normal procedure should be “sorry, there’s nothing I can do for you tonight”.... A guy will go away and sleep up a close and I’ve seen females accommodated in a B&B when there seems to be no other reason for that other than they are female, which you wonder what an equal opps’ council would make of that? ... () without a doubt, that’s how the policy operates

Q: Officially, unofficially?

HO: Just habit, that’s just practice in here. (Bob, HPU)

⁴³ The triangulation of research methods (characteristic of an ethnographic study) made it easier to investigate such contradictory findings more fully.

(W)e'll accommodate a woman, but then why shouldn't men be getting the same treatment? We do tend to be more sympathetic towards women...() no women should be asked to look for their own accommodation.

Q: So this is an informal agreement?

HO: I would think so, or maybe my interpretation was wrong but...I have seen things in memo forms. (Kirsty, HPU)

The favouring of women was widely and informally acknowledged by housing officers and, in addition to admitting favouritism, there were other special arrangements for women. For example there was an informal agreement within the HPU that after dark all women would get a lift to their accommodation whereas men would not (unless they happened to be going to the same place at the same time as a woman). Not everyone seemed to think this practice was fair but, as suggested in the quote below, they seemed to relate it to wider societal pressures.

I do think it is unfair at night if a woman comes in, she will get a lift out to (the SAC) because she is a single female and it's pretty dangerous asking her to walk to (the SAC) whereas, if a man comes in nine times out of ten he does have to walk to (the SAC). Again it's just a personal point of view but I think it's equally risky asking a fellow to walk out that way at night... () (B)ut not everybody agrees with me...() Part of the reason is people wanting to cover their own backs. I mean you imagine if that hit the papers the next day – female attacked on the way, having to walk from the HPU to (the SAC), whereas if Joe Bloggs is attacked you just take it as, that's just what happens every day of the week... ()(W)omen are seen as defenceless and whatnot. (Kirsty, HPU)

Other than public opinion, further reasons given for the favourable treatment of women were because many of the women they saw were either responsible for children or fleeing domestic violence. Other reasons given referred to the differences in accommodation available for men and women. Two things seemed to be said: firstly, that there was simply less for women; and, secondly, that women are more sensitive to bad accommodation. The following quote illustrate these points:

I would say, accommodation-wise women are definitely at a disadvantage; we've got far less to offer women...() We would try absolutely everything under the sun (for women). We've only got (the SAC) which is meant to be emergency accommodation and (women only council hostel) which rarely has spaces. If you're a bloke walking in the door you've got (four adult men's hostels and SAC) right away (Kirsty, HPU).

I think men are happier staying in a hostel environment than women. Women I think tend to want to move on quicker...() Women are perhaps more able to manage a tenancy where men I think just get lazy in the hostel environment...() (Older men) seem quite happy and say the hostel is their home...() there's very few women that choose to go to a hostel. I've seen women, when offered hostel accommodation say: "oh no, I don't want that, I'd rather not'. (Lydia, HPU)

Other than accommodation, the belief that women are generally more vulnerable than men was frequently referred to as a reason why housing officers made more of an effort with women:

Depending on the circumstances, you are more likely to be sympathetic and lenient on a woman, not so much lenient, that's the wrong word, you are more likely to use your discretion for what you could offer a woman than you would a man...() There is a sympathy vote for women, they are more vulnerable and the hostel provision is worse for them (Tom, HPU).

6.4.2. Exceptions

Although a general trend by housing staff towards favouring homeless women was apparent, there were individual and managerial attempts to challenge this. Some examples of objections to only women getting lifts have already been apparent from housing officers' quotes. Another example comes from a written reminder on the HPU office notice board to the effect that men and women should receive absolutely equal treatment. It said, 'homeless women not to use B&Bs if hostels full – priority cases only to B&B's' and was signed and dated by the senior manager, and this seems to indicate that the manager thought this had been happening too much. Another example came after the

assessment interview of a young woman fleeing external violence from her neighbours. She was only nineteen but had been in the HPU six times before in the past two years. Not a 'first-timer', 'so she'll cope OK' (Adam, HPU); she was sent to the SAC. Explaining the judgement to me afterwards the senior housing officer (James, HPU) asserted, 'if there's no priority, then that's it for females'. Finally there were individual members of staff who said that they disagreed with the general trend of greater sympathy towards women and stated instead a greater sympathy for men or boys. For example, one housing officer commented, 'boys are more vulnerable, they are more naïve. My heart goes out to them. I feel I want to protect them. Whereas girls are more mature, more able to look after themselves' (Grace, SAC)⁴⁴.

6.4.3. *Fathers and suspicion*

The evidence so far for the favourable treatment of women has mostly centred around the treatment of homeless single women. However, there was also evidence of the favourable treatment of women with children as compared to men with children, as only lone fathers were suspected of 'using' their children (see also Chapter Four, section 4.3 for difficulties faced in case law by fathers). For example, out of the ten families where assessments were observed, the two lone fathers were both scrutinised closely by the housing officers over the care of their children and specifically asked for proof of custody. In contrast, the three lone mothers whose assessments I observed were not asked any questions about their care role or asked for proof of custody (see also Bull 1993). Out of the remaining five couples with children, another man was suspected of 'using' his partner and children, and a very young couple were both suspected of 'using' the child⁴⁵ (or having invented a child). Housing officers openly acknowledged that they questioned men more closely about their

⁴⁴ There was some slight evidence such as this that may have supported the idea that housing officers might see the opposite sex as being the more vulnerable, but not enough to make a strong case for it.

⁴⁵ In the case of the first couple, after talking with social work, the housing officer told me that, as they saw it, the man was heavily into drugs and was jeopardising the woman and her children's accommodation. It was thought that the woman was too weak to leave the man and that his influence affected her ability to look after her children properly. The housing officer informed me that they were going to try to suggest that the woman be accommodated without her partner. Regarding the second young couple, (17 and 18 years old), their young baby was not with them but with the young woman's mother. The housing officer questioned them to try to ascertain if they did intend to have the child with them if they got a flat. Out of their presence, she said she had to check that the baby existed as some people invented children in order to get a flat. However, after checking with a colleague she realised that because the young man was only 17 years old, his age gave them priority and so she did not need to pursue their parenting too much.

children, as men were widely suspected of using their children to avoid hostel accommodation and get a flat. The underlying assumption here is therefore about women's greater role in parenting, which may serve to reinforce ideas of women's responsibility for children and men's lack of responsibility.

Whilst the research findings seem to confirm housing officers' suspicions about men 'using' children, they also found that women, as well as men, were 'using' their children for housing purposes too. For example, out of the two lone fathers who were observed in interviews with housing officers, there was evidence that both of them, to an extent, could be said to be 'using' their children⁴⁶. For example one man admitted as much when the housing officer was out of the interviewing room. He had two children by an ex-partner and was currently living with his girlfriend, with whom he had another baby. He had recently fallen out with this current girlfriend and wanted the extra space of another flat. Thinking aloud, he said he did intend to get back together with his girlfriend when he started his new job as he would need her to collect his children from school. The second father had been charged with assault and gave no such confidences. When checking up on his name afterwards, however, the computer records showed that he had initially been accommodated in a single men's hostel, but reapplied four days later with one of his two children. Nevertheless, both men seemed to satisfy the housing officers over his custody of their children⁴⁷. One of the three lone mothers was also found by the housing officer to have been 'using' her children. Her teenage twin daughters usually lived with their father but they had temporarily joined their mother to support her homeless application, a situation that soon became apparent. She was subsequently accommodated in the women's hostel.

Passaro (1996) argues that because of the state's 'celestialisation' of the family, where people with children get treated much better both by law and by custom, children are one of the few resources that poor people can strategize with (1996:2). Women are seen as being much more likely to benefit directly from having a child, whereas men are more

⁴⁶ Whether or not it can be said that these men were 'using their children' is unclear, especially when hostel accommodation for single men was found to be so inappropriate for visiting children (see Chapter Five, section 5.4.2).

⁴⁷ It must be noted that in both these cases my presence may have affected their outcome. This was because in both cases the neighbourhood housing offices and officers seemed to be very disturbed by my arrival and said that they had been given little warning. In one case, the manager also sat in on the proceedings (second

likely to benefit only indirectly either by fathering a child and applying with the mother for a house, or using the child as a lever to move in with the mother. Whilst Passaro's argument may seem rather crude and narrowly focused on the reasons why people may have children (not to mention being reminiscent of the Conservative Government's arguments that young women get pregnant just to jump housing waiting lists⁴⁸), the above examples did seem to constitute some evidence of people 'strategizing' with their children.

6.4.4. *Processing families*

Due to the bureaucratic arrangements for homeless families and single people, it could be seen that on several counts stricter procedures governed the processing of families. These different procedures therefore would affect women to a greater extent, as the greater proportion of lone parents are women. For example, in contrast to the dedicated HPU, SAC and specialist homelessness staff at these centres, relatively untrained staff in local neighbourhood offices assessed families. The Chief Housing Officer himself commented that in practice families were the more rigorously assessed, even though in theory they had more rights under the homelessness legislation. He pointed out that because the housing authority was able to offer hostel accommodation to most single people and because this accommodation was all of a similar standard, the staff at the HPU and SAC were not under so much pressure to accurately establish a single person's priority status. Another housing officer also pointed out the difference in standards of behaviour that arose from this difference in assessment. He commented: 'Families have to behave better, they have to be more responsible. A 'discharge of duty'⁴⁹ letter has more severe consequences, since a single man with a discharge letter will still be accommodated in hostels until nowhere will take him. But the same behaviour over a long time is worse for a family'. (Jim, HPU. See also this chapter 6.7.2)

example) and in the other the housing officer who had originally planned to do the interview was replaced by a second who said he was more confident about my presence.

⁴⁸ See Consultation Document (DoE 1994, cited in Smith 1999:18)

⁴⁹ 'Discharge of duty' was the phrase used by housing officers when they felt they could reasonably defend a decision to stop working with a person who was no longer co-operating.

6.4.5. *Gendered experiences of violence*

From the observations of interview assessments, women fleeing violence seemed to be reasonably treated, at least in terms of sensitive and sympathetic interviewing. Out of the eight assessments where domestic violence was part of the assessment, none were asked for proof of violence, as recommended in the Codes of Guidance (e.g. Scottish Code, para 9.7). However, this does not necessarily mean that housing officers subsequently sought no evidence, as Tagg (1997) found that although proof of violence was not asked of the women in interviews, their neighbours were generally contacted afterwards to confirm the woman's story. In respect of the overall treatment of women fleeing domestic violence (as argued in Chapter Five, section 5.4.3), the follow-on accommodation for women fleeing violence usually consisted, for single women, of mixed hostel accommodation or, for women with children, bed and breakfast accommodation until a flat could be found but little extra support.

During the period of fieldwork, whilst the observed treatment of women fleeing domestic violence seemed to be satisfactory, the 'external' violence that men were more likely to suffer from was responded to less well by housing officers. This argument extends a point made in Chapter Four (section 4.3) about men's experience of violence. For example, considerable confusion existed around what the council's practice was meant to be regarding 'external' violence and whereas some housing officers said that external and domestic violence were treated in the same way, observations lead to the conclusion that they were not.

Homelessness legislation and Codes, (see also Chapter Four, section 4.3) show that the distinctions made between external and internal violence are minimal and that by inference, cases should receive similar treatment. In practice, it seemed that no case of external violence was accepted without considerable questioning, asking for proof and often suspicion that the person had been the cause of the violence. Out of the seven assessments where external violence was mentioned, only the four couples with children were accepted (without proof) and none of the single people (two single men and one single woman).

Trying to clarify the current practices around domestic and external violence, the answers given below by a housing officer show a real confusion of issues:

HO: (F)leeing violence, that gets abused all the time as well.

Q: Do you mean by women as well?

HO: Yeah, and men as well. Bearing in mind fleeing violence can be just saying someone's coming up to your door every night and kicking your door, or you are getting harassed in the street or whatever, which is fair enough, but sometimes you are sitting with someone who you've dealt with over the years, who's been a total wahoo in the hostels, winding everybody up, stealing, doing this, doing that, doing the next thing and they are saying "I can't stay at such and such an address because people are after me". And you say "why are they after you?" And they say "I don't know, I don't know them" and you are thinking, it's you, you're not being picked out at random and being victimised here, this is you that's brought this about. But at the same time you have to accept violence and you can't ignore it but you think, 'God, when are some people gonna take responsibility for their own action?'

Q: Do people need evidence for external violence?

HO: Used to need evidence, but that got stopped, not altogether, but if you provide police reports all the better for your case but the argument we had before was you can't realistically expect a woman to produce reports against her husband, you have to take their word for it, fair enough. I can understand that there is no way you could ask the husband, but sometimes you know people are at it. In the last few years, we used to be really sticky on police reports. Not right for those who are the genuine folk.

Q: Do you mean those suffering domestic violence or external violence?

HO: External violence taken on word. (Kirsty, HPU).

There were also reports by two other housing staff about the victimisation that men, especially young men, face (see also quote made earlier in connection with women and transport section 6.4.1). For example, staff at the young persons' council hostel talked about the territorial nature of the city and described how their young male residents were frequently harassed by local young people (see also Fitzpatrick 2000:53 on the territorial nature of cities for young men, also Daly 1998:122 for adult men). Housing officers in charge of furnished flats also talked about this problem, and how young men they rehoused were often harassed on estates when women were not. They felt it was hard for

young men in a new area to avoid being picked on; they would find themselves in the centre of trouble and it was assumed that they had played an equal hand in causing it. Finally, relevant to this argument is the study by Gelsthorpe and Loucks (1997) of gendered practices in courts. They found that whereas women tended to be perceived as 'troubled' and, for example, having got caught up in shoplifting for survival reasons, men were seen as having deliberately intended to do something: they were 'troublesome' (cited in Pilcher 1999:137). This argument would seem to be relevant in explaining the finding that housing officers treated men fleeing violence with suspicion and requested proof.

6.4.6. Actively asserting gender

Another important point to clarify, and which has not been particularly stressed until now is that the judgements made on the part of the housing officers were not only a one-way process, and it is important to clarify that homeless people were also actively involved in the management of their homeless application. Whilst the actions of housing officers were very important, that it was also a negotiation between two parties is crucial (Lipsky 1980, Williams, Popay and Oakley 1999). Thus, although homeless people were generally in a less powerful position in the interviews, it must be seen that although they were constrained they were not completely passive in the process. It must also be stressed that when it is said that homeless people actively asserted a particular gendered presentation (or 'performance': Butler 1990), it is meant that gender was a resource that some people drew on to enhance their homeless application. For example, a young man of 25 admitted having been aggressive in the hostel where he had been evicted but stressed that it had been on behalf of a young woman who was being offered drugs. He said that he preferred to be outside the city boundaries near his ailing mum and dad so that he could look after them, but later asked for another location. He also said that he had recently been suffering from depression, having lost his first baby and then split up with his partner during the grieving. So in this case it is suggested that this man was actively asserting himself as a protector of innocent young women, a caring son and a grieving father. The housing officer, (Grace, SAC) however, was not convinced by this man and stated after the interview that she was suspicious: 'he was too double wide' or knowledgeable about what the 'right' sort of things to say were. The housing officer followed up this man's application by phoning the hostel and found out that there were two witnesses to his

assault. Although this man was set up with an appointment for some new flats, the housing officer said that she would not write a glowing recommendation in his paperwork or say as much if asked. A second example could be given of the case already mentioned where a woman temporarily borrowed her twin daughters.

6.5. Explaining the Special Treatment of Women: Moral Communities and Job Satisfaction

6.5.1. 'Deserving women'

Informal judgements made about the relative 'deservingness' of welfare recipients is widely recognised (Howe 1989, Lidstone 1994, Neale 1997, Fitzpatrick and Stephens 1999), although not as a gendered phenomenon. The use of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' categories by housing officers was clearly discernible, as they sympathised or were suspicious of individual cases, and gender seemed to be an important factor in allocating cases to one or the other categories.

Cullen and Howe (1991) argue that scales of deservingness persist because they are so useful: 'They are the means whereby staff are able to cope with claimant tactics and yet retain a degree of job satisfaction' (1991:23). In their own study of a Department of Social Security (DSS) office, Cullen and Howe (1991) found that older people were informally considered to be the special group who 'deserved' more attention by staff. The 'deservingness' of older people was recognised as being because they were sometimes disqualified from benefits although they may have 'saved all their lives', as opposed to other people who might qualify but may have 'squandered all their money' (Cullen and Howe 1991:9). During the fieldwork period of this research, few older people were observed to be applying as homeless, although those that did seemed to have been treated well. It is possible that because HPU and SAC staff dealt with far fewer⁵⁰ older people than may have been the case in a DSS office, they were not so likely a group to be singled

⁵⁰ Out of all the cases on which I sat in, only one man was over 65 (aged 66). The second oldest group could be classed as the over 55s; there were only two men and two women in this group.

out for special treatment⁵¹. By contrast, other than the 'first-timer' distinction⁵², the group singled out for special treatment at the HPU and SAC, who were therefore also being recognised as more deserving than others was women, something which neither Cullen and Howe (1991), nor Lipsky (1980) mention at all.

6.5.2. *Moral communities*

Hazel Flett (1979) observed staff in a city housing department and identified what she called a 'moral community' amongst staff. By 'moral community' she meant holding a collection of values such as the Work Ethic, self-reliance, respectfulness, responsibility and ideas about what constitutes a good (stable) family life. This 'moral community' amongst housing staff was contrasted to a 'professional' viewpoint as exemplified by social workers. Whereas the 'moral community' accepted the need for welfare provision, they saw it only as a last resort and not as a universal right. 'Professionals', on the other hand, were characterised as thinking that all those in need, regardless of blame, have equal right to welfare benefits. Using Flett's (1979) characterisation of a 'moral community', Cullen and Howe (1991) argue that informal judgements are made about the deservingness of claimants by comparing claimants' values to those of the 'moral community' (1991:9). Cullen and Howe develop criteria that welfare officers may be looking out for as part of the informal classificatory system of the 'moral community', thereby producing positive and sympathetic treatment. The first criterion is that claimants are naïve about the system and not too knowledgeable; second, that they treat officers with respect and are not abusive or demanding; third, that although they may be vulnerable, they show some evidence of self-reliance; and fourth, that they have not caused problems in the past (1991:11).

Building on Flett's (1979) work, Cullen and Howe's (1991) list does seem to capture much of the informal category system that the housing officers used in relation to homeless people, although ideas about gender were also found to be included in this system. For example, as was suggested in section 6.3.1, naivety about the homelessness system, and

⁵¹ Also unlike Cullen and Howe's (1991) DSS study, a significant proportion of older homeless people have alcohol problems, (Crane 1999:127) which may also have made it less likely that they were singled out as a special group in the same way.

not having caused problems in the past was definitely in evidence through the special treatment of 'first-timers'; there were several indications that women in general were assumed to have a greater naivety. There were also examples where housing officers were positively charmed to come across someone who didn't know all the 'right' things to say (i.e. not too knowledgeable) such as a young man who admitted to a housing officer (Barbara, NHO) that to prove his age (he was 17) they could phone officers at his local police station.

Behaving respectfully towards housing officers was observed to be important: 'It's the cheeky ones that I don't like' (Grace, SAC). Gelsthorpe and Loucks (1997) argue that (white) women's 'body language' was more likely to be interpreted as 'deferential' by magistrates than men's, contributing to women's more favourable impression overall (cited in Pilcher 1999:137). An example in this research was of a young woman who behaved demurely in the interview and told the housing officer (Grace, SAC) that she had an interview in a good supported flat scheme. The housing officer was impressed by her success and pleased to hear that she was clean of drugs now. However, after the interview, a colleague was incredulous that this woman had got even an interview for the flats because she was a notorious bully in the women's hostel.

Finally, allowances made for showing some vulnerability alongside attempts at self-reliance (Cullen and Howe 1991:11) were also in evidence. For example, there was a case of a young man who was being investigated to establish whether or not he was intentionally homeless. The young man said that he had given up his flat primarily because of violence from other boys on the estate (external violence). The housing officer had interviewed him and told him that he needed proof of the harassment. It then appeared that the man's inability to sort out his bills which had been piling up had been because he was illiterate and because he had fallen out with his mum and brother on whom he depended for help with such things. Realising that he was not coping when he had relinquished his tenancy, the housing officer felt that the young man's actions had been quite responsible under the circumstances. Although she concluded that he had become homeless intentionally, she was recommending him to a private young persons' supported

⁵² Young people did not seem to be treated as a special group by housing officers.

hostel, where he could have the chance to learn some basic skills and wait for the ‘intentionality’ status to become irrelevant⁵³ (Eleanor, SAC).

. Picking up on the association frequently drawn between women and vulnerability, Passaro (1996) argues that homeless women are treated better because they are the apotheosis of women: dependent, vulnerable and frightened. She suggests that women’s dependence poses no threat to dominant beliefs and that homeless women are only individual failures, not gender failures. By contrast, homeless men are seen as gender failures in that they cannot provide for either themselves or a family in terms of money to pay for shelter (1996:2). Whilst I would agree with Passaro that in some ways it is more acceptable for women to be dependent on welfare than men because women are disadvantaged in the labour market (also Hearn 1998), I would argue that this does not necessarily extend to emotional vulnerability or that they are not also gender failures. Overlooked by Passaro are equally prevalent beliefs about women being expected to cope and to struggle and sacrifice everything for the good of the family (Carlen and Worrall 1987:3). Thus to become homeless, a woman, especially a mother, would also be a gender failure of sorts, even if it is more acceptable for a woman to be economically more dependent than a man.

6.6. How Gender Favouritism was Maintained

6.6.1. Accumulative and collective favouritism

Cullen and Howe (1991) argue that the considerable discretion at the disposal of welfare officers enables individuals and groups to benefit significantly. Without having done a longitudinal piece of research, it is impossible to draw finite conclusions about the gender favouritism observed amongst housing officers⁵⁴, however, it was possible to see how individual acts of discretion added up. Favouritism towards women could be seen as operating in two ways: firstly, from the discretion of housing officers that could be indicated in paperwork and passed from one office to another such as from the HPU to

⁵³ Rules about intentionality and how long before intentionality ‘wears off’ are complex. See the Awua case (Chapter Four, footnote 19).

⁵⁴ A longitudinal (cohort) study could have allowed for the applications of homeless individuals to be followed over a longer period of time and through several interview sessions rather than just the one. It may

SAC; secondly, favouritism towards women could be seen in the way housing officers working together in one office shared decisions about applications, in addition to the wider values they shared (such as the moral community), including values about men and women's 'office norms'.

The passing on of (gendered) favouritism along the homelessness application process, enabled by the discretion of housing officers, was captured in the words of the following quote (see also Tom, HPU, section 6.3.1):

*You'd maybe send (a woman) to (the SAC) initially, but you'd be looking for the caseworker (housing officer at the SAC) to pick it up the next day... () And the paperwork should be, kind of looking at stuff like that, the report should be very clear to the caseworker, who's going to see this person the next day, that there's some doubt about their ability to survive in a hostel and maybe they should be looking at some other supported project as another option and get them out of the system as quickly as possible. And the caseworker should be skilled enough to be picking that up ... ()
Hmm, maybe it's a bit dodgy, but you can, if you like, bring out sections you feel are the crucial issues in (the HPU's paperwork). (Bob, HPU)*

6.6.2. Shared decisions and gender norms

Cullen and Howe argued that office camaraderie, chat, storytelling and stereotyping was part of an overall process of socialising new staff and helped to perpetuate the welfare officers' informal classification system (1991:21). Additionally, according to Collinson (1989) and Guteck (1989), an important aspect of the office banter or 'office culture'⁵⁵ is the way that welfare officers are active in asserting norms for gendered behaviour of clients (cited in Witz and Savage 1992:51-52). Such gendered 'office culture' was apparent amongst housing officers. Therefore, because of the way staff were trained (on the job) and worked (by consensus), in addition to 'socialising' new staff it is argued that decisions

also have been possible to see at a later date (six months / one year), the accommodation that individuals were in, or had been offered. (See also Chapter Nine, section 9.3)

⁵⁵ 'Office culture' is the preferred term of Cullen and Howe (1991) although following Wright (1994), I feel this is a misuse of the term 'culture'. 'Culture' is not the informal concepts, attitudes and values of a work

about homeless applications were made collectively, based on gender norms established by housing officers in their 'office culture'.

- . The following incidents were observed that suggest how gender norms (ideas about how men and women are supposed to behave) were being reinforced in a collective environment. For example a female housing officer came back to her colleagues after an interview saying that the young man she had interviewed had been really upset and 'crying real tears'. Her male colleagues ridiculed her and said she was being taken in by this man and that he had 'an onion in his pocket' (Geraldine, HPU, fieldwork diary 26/4/99). Here the implication was that men should not cry; this was not congruent with normal male behaviour and she should not have been sympathetic. By contrast, there was an example where a woman left the HPU in tears telling housing officers that as she was a decent person, she could not stay in the filthy flat that she had been offered. The approval and sympathy at the housing officer's recounting of this story to their colleagues was clearly apparent (Isabel, HPU, fieldwork diary 22/7/99). A final example was the discussion of a 16-year-old girl who came into the HPU but, because her parents did not have a phone, a visit was arranged. Visiting the parents of young people was unusual, but apparently without any grounds for suspicion, the housing officers justified their actions by saying that they would be looking for signs of violence (Greg and Adam, HPU, fieldwork diary 26/4/99). In other words, their extra caution about the girl's reasons for leaving home allowed for the opportunity that she may have been vulnerable to abuse. This sort of extra care was not observed to be extended in any young man's case. Therefore, to return to Cullen and Howe's (1991) outline of the sorts of 'deserving' behaviour that welfare officers are looking for, they crucially overlook the fact that 'deserving' behaviour has to be congruent with the behaviour expected of one's gender. In terms of Cullen and Howe's list of 'deserving behaviour' (see section 6.5.1), whilst it would be appropriate behaviour for a woman to cry (and be considered vulnerable yet self-reliant), a man behaving in a similar way might be less sympathetically treated (*too* dependent, or crying 'false' tears, of which the man described above was suspected).

force (as Cullen and Howe seem to suggest); it is not something which an organisation *has*, but something an organisation *is*.

6.6.3. *Men and gender conformity*

Passaro (1996) argues that women must conform to gender stereotypes. She states: '(i)n general, the homeless people who are most likely to get help are those who appear to be exemplars of traditional gender ideals'(1996:11). However, Passaro's argument is confined to saying that women's conformity to gender norms is rewarded whereas men's is not: 'Homeless women quickly learn that to work their way through the system, from emergency shelter through transitional housing to, ultimately, an apartment – they need to behave in such a way as to appear "worthy". Many, therefore, act meek, don't cause trouble, and are grateful for help while in the sight of the shelter officials or others who may decide their fates. The homeless women who don't play this game often find themselves having as few options as men. For homeless men, there is no similar game to be played' (1996:2). However, in Passaro's North American case the situation is also complicated by racism and the fact that an overwhelming proportion of the homeless men she is talking about are black. Pilcher (1999) also argues that gender stereotypes held by criminal justice professionals influenced the treatment of offenders with the result that women were often treated more leniently as long as they conformed to gender norms. According to Pilcher, these gender norms, (or as Pilcher calls it - 'traditional' or 'conventional femininity') included women presenting themselves as passive, unassertive and remorseful, but further qualifies her argument by pointing out that this was only the case with white middle class women (1999: 138).

In contrast to Passaro, the evidence in this research seemed to be that, although homeless men were on the whole treated less sympathetically than women, they were also, to a lesser extent, rewarded for displaying gender conformity. Examples of gendered 'deserving' behaviour in men included an older man (aged 66) who proudly stated that he could look after himself perfectly well, was an army man, had never had a cold in his life and was determined not to accept any offers of transport: 'I'll walk, I need the fresh air'. This assertion that he could look after himself was somewhat contradicted by his having tuberculosis, and that his face was streaked with blood from a nasty cut from that morning's shave (a masculine example of vulnerability alongside self-reliance). The housing officer (Simon, HPU) treated him very courteously and a temporary place was found for him in one of the better men's hostels where many older men were also resident. He therefore can be seen as exemplifying a man who was vulnerable yet self-reliant.

Another example of men behaving in a 'deserving way' that conformed to masculine norms was of a young man who greatly charmed a young female housing officer (Amanda, SAC). The young man was handsome, smartly dressed, had been evicted from his parents' house and said he had recently lost both his marriage and his job. Despite the fact that he had no local connection to the area⁵⁶, despite his gold BMW car (which under normal circumstances housing officers strongly associated with drug dealing), and despite a note in his paperwork about his National Insurance number possibly being a fake, the young housing officer stated that she thought this man was a 'genuine guy'⁵⁷. The housing officer's colleagues supported her wish to believe in him and reassured her that it was possible to get round the need to have a local connection and that he could quickly get a difficult-to-let flat⁵⁸ (fieldwork diary 25/2/99). This young man could be seen as 'deserving' in the way he was charming (using his heterosexual powers of attraction), respectful, naïve of the system, vulnerable (lost his job / wife) and self-reliant (still got his car⁵⁹, well dressed).

So, to qualify the argument made so far that all women are treated as a special group, a slightly more complex picture is being suggested whereby gender conformity is rewarded and the gender conformity of women especially so. This picture also somewhat resembles an inverted version of Connel's (1996) gender theory (as outlined in Chapter Two, section 2.7). Thus, whereas Connel argues for multiple and hegemonic masculinity; where femininity is always subordinated to masculinity but negotiations within this structure are constant and ongoing, so too ideas of the 'deservingness' of men and women could be seen within hierarchical terms but that individual cases can negotiate around.

⁵⁶ Not having a local connection was one of the few obstacles that prevented single homeless people from being accommodated by the city council. This was also found by Fitzpatrick and Kennedy (2000) in the city they were studying and was attributed to the dominant role of the council in direct access provision (2000:3). A 'local connection' with an authority means that the person normally resides in that area because of employment, family association or other special reason.

⁵⁷ This young man did not seem to have any previous record of making a homeless application and so at least did qualify under the informal category of 'first-timer'.

⁵⁸ Difficult-to-let flats were a category of flats usually located in areas where nobody wished to move. Once assigned informally as difficult-to-let, it was possible to get one of these very quickly.

⁵⁹ Although he told the housing officer that his car was about to be repossessed.

6.7. Gender Norms and Behaving 'Badly'

This final section considers further evidence for the suggestion about gender conformity by examining how the women who did not conform to the norms of feminine behaviour were treated. This section also considers a related argument about the treatment of violent men, where violence is understood as being within the norms of masculine behaviour. Therefore it is an argument about the double standards of behaviour for men and women.

6.7.1. *Disruptive women*

One example of the contravening of gender norms was where a mother was deemed a 'bad' mother. The woman had three children and was fleeing external violence. The violence seemed also to have been aimed at her husband, who had recently left the household. From neighbours, the housing officer had informally heard that the family owed money. The woman told the housing officer that she had been keeping her children out of school and, in front of the children, spoke about the difficulties of her elder son's violent behaviour. After the interview the housing officer (Patricia, NHO) stated that she had been very much angered by the way the woman was keeping her children out of school, that she had discussed her son's violence in front of him and that she had left her previous flat in a state of disrepair. The housing officer stated that she was largely unsympathetic to the case. However, she also stated that my presence as an observer was affecting her actions. Therefore, rather than keeping the family in bed and breakfast accommodation as she usually would have done whilst she investigated their case further⁶⁰, she would find them a temporary furnished flat. Although the woman was eventually accepted as unintentionally homeless and transferred to another authority for rehousing, in the absence of an observer her case may not have gone so well.

A second example of a woman who did not conform to gender norms was that of a 37-year-old who sometimes behaved aggressively. This woman had an alcohol problem and

⁶⁰ Several housing officers said that they strategically used bed and breakfast accommodation whilst investigating difficult cases because it was easier to evict people from this accommodation than from flats.

recognisable learning difficulties⁶¹, and had recently been evicted from a hostel for verbally abusing staff. Staff had anticipated her arrival at the HPU and the seniors had made an agreement in partnership with staff from a voluntary homelessness organisation that also knew her. The agreement was that if she turned up at the HPU sober and was not abusive, she would be given emergency accommodation until the following Monday, by which time the charity hoped to have found a place for her. Having slept the previous night on seats outside a hospital, the woman did turn up sober and apologetic and was given bed and breakfast accommodation. Afterwards, looking at this woman's records on the HPU database⁶², she did seem to have been dealt with quite harshly in comparison to other disruptive men. The records showed that like many men, she had regularly been given no accommodation, (usually following evictions from other hostels), but unlike most of the men she also had learning difficulties, which only sporadically seemed to be recognised and taken into account. Therefore it is suggested that these two examples of non-conforming women show evidence of unfavourable treatment. Pilcher (1999) argues that women who worked as prostitutes were examples of women who did not conform (1999:138, also Carlen and Worrall 1987:20). From the observations in this research, women who worked as prostitutes did not seem to be treated particularly badly, but also never met the criteria for being a 'first-timer' (i.e. they were always regulars). However, following Pilcher, what could be argued is that the single homelessness system was primarily developed for and dealt with men and disadvantaged women in other ways (attributed to Hedderman and Hough 1994 in Pilcher 1999:138) as shall be argued further in the final section.

6.7.2. *Disruptive men*

The case of the woman with learning difficulties illustrates a fairly low level of disruption by a woman which could be contrasted with cases of extremely violent men. Cases of violence amongst men seemed to occur with some frequency; violent behaviour was routinely dealt with and accommodated. For example, housing officers voiced their

⁶¹ Interestingly, looking back over the computer record of this woman's presentations, her learning difficulties had not been consistently recorded and sometimes recorded instead as mental health problems. The categories were also rather antiquated and the HPU's term for learning difficulties was 'mentally handicapped'. (See also footnote 16 and Chapter Nine, section 9.3.)

⁶² She was recorded as having been to the HPU 27 times previously.

frustrations at the situation whereby violent men were barred from council accommodation, only to have those bans routinely overturned by their managers. Several housing officers expressed their extreme concern about the safety of themselves, their colleagues and other residents in council hostels. During the fieldwork period I was present when the decision was made to overturn bans imposed on two violent men (both men had physically attacked hostel staff, one by putting a knife to a hostel worker's throat). The procedure of appeal after a violent incident was apparently straightforward and all that was needed was a 'demonstrable change of behaviour'. One manager of a male hostel located the problems of accommodating violent men within the context of wider society, in which he felt that governments would prioritise the safety of the general public (if these people were not accommodated) over the safety of other hostel residents. In the following quote the manager also mentions the issue of accommodating and dealing with sex offenders, another group of men who behaved in a disruptive and antisocial manner but who were routinely dealt with:

We've highlighted the increase in abuse and threats to staff, staff assaults and that staff feel intimidated...() Lots of the residents have got weapons...() Quite a lot (of violent evictions) get overturned at head office...() We (also) don't know if people are violent sex offenders or paedophiles. Only the managers know and they deal with them. We are not told even if there is a risk of violence or an outburst...() (It's not) their fault, we try and help out, should be things in place for them... () I think there is a political motivation to keep people off the streets...() If homeless people are not on the street then people don't care. It's safer on the streets than in the hostels (Duncan, male council hostel)

Hostel managers had to deal directly with the consequences of violent residents and, although accurate numbers could not be obtained, in this second quote an estimation is made contrasting the eviction rates for men and women from council hostels:

If you have somebody who repeatedly is violent then I think there has to come a point when you say 'you're putting your accommodation at risk' and staff's lives are at risk and therefore, in my view, they're putting themselves intentionally homeless ... () In the last six months we (women only hostel, over 60 spaces)... () had six people put out. Compared to a big (all male) hostel, where it's something like, I don't know, 50 or

something... () Now certainly we have a new eviction policy that (director of housing) has put in place and we're all following that whereby you're not trying to do that, you're not trying to put anybody out (Irene, manager at women's hostel)

Despite the difficulties of comparing the evidence on disruptive men and women, it still seems reasonable to suggest that men's violence and disruption was accepted almost routinely in a way that it was not for women; certainly the consequences for women seemed more severe. Women, who were more rarely disruptive, were treated either as harshly as men, or more harshly due to their behaviour seeming more exceptional. In addition, whereas disruptive men could be moved around the different male hostels, women had much more limited accommodation options and so hostel eviction had more serious consequences for women (see also Chapter Five).

Violent men are behaving within the norms of male behaviour by being violent and society, to an extent, accepts this (Hearn *et al* 1998:3). Thus although this does not necessarily mean that society likes male aggression, it is something that is expected and routinely accommodated in a way that would not be tolerated in women who behaved similarly. On the informal scales used by housing officers, violent men who injured council staff would surely be the ultimate 'undeserving cases'. However, at this level of disruption, such cases were routinely taken away from housing officers' remit and justifications for their treatment dealt with at a higher level of seniority with different values, concerns and principles.

6.8. Conclusions

It has been argued in this chapter that the homelessness system was a highly gendered arena. Far from being a gender neutral process where men and women are treated 'exactly the same', gender was an important factor in deciding the treatment of those who applied as homeless. Women were seen as the more vulnerable and thus 'deserving' gender by most, but not all, of the housing officers. The officers' view of women as more vulnerable was sustained by informal office discussion and a staff 'culture' reinforcing stereotypical preconceptions. Lone-parent men, in particular, were treated with some suspicion when assessed, and in most cases were asked for evidence of custody of children whilst lone-

parent women were not. The housing officers generally viewed homeless people who conformed to gender roles more favourably. In some cases, homeless applicants were not completely passive in this process and were also observed actively to emphasise their masculine or feminine qualities.

Some difficulties remain due to the fact that the focus here has been on those homeless people who are 'visibly homeless' in that they have presented themselves at either the HPU, SAC or NHOs. People presenting as homeless to local authorities do not necessarily adequately represent all those people who could be said to be homeless (Fitzpatrick 2000). There is much speculation about who is and isn't seen in the HPUs and these arguments are often articulated along gender lines. The following chapter attempts to address some of these issues by looking at the gendered lives and backgrounds of homeless men and women. Again, this focus is not without its limitations, but it does help to illuminate some of the gendered pathways to homelessness. Finally, the next chapter seeks to complement this chapter through its focus on the previous lives and situations of homeless people because, in some ways, the sorts of stories that men and women tell the housing officers must in part influence those officers' differential treatment of men and women.

CHAPTER 7: GENDERED PATTERNS IN BECOMING HOMELESS

7.1. Introduction

7.1.1. *Aims of the chapter and methodological comment*

This chapter seeks to establish whether or not there are gendered patterns in becoming homeless and, if there are patterns, how they can be explained. In a sense then, this chapter tends to follow a more 'traditional' research approach to homelessness in that answers to the question of how and why people become homeless are sought by looking at people's lives prior to becoming homeless (Blasi *et al* 1990, Neale 1997, Marsh and Kennet 1999). Despite being 'traditional', such questions remain central to this thesis and, to balance the inevitably teleological and individualistic focus (Carlen 1996:34), wider structural and socio-economic aspects will be considered.

The original research question that underpinned this chapter was: to what extent is homelessness understood (by homeless and non-homeless people) as a gendered experience? This question represents a somewhat clumsy attempt to emphasise informant reflexivity, aiming to give informants the space to narrate their own experiences, hopefully including some gendered comment. However, as Giddens (1993:20, also Franklin 1990:101) points out, very few people view their own experiences in terms of sociological categories and it should, therefore, not be surprising that very few people made any explicit reference to their gender. This chapter therefore imposes a gendered interpretation of the experiences of homeless people although, perhaps more than in any other, this chapter also pays attention to the 'situatedness of knowledge'. By 'the situatedness of knowledge' it is meant that the way people spoke, understood and communicated details of their lives was shaped in gendered ways and was strongly affected by what was knowable to them. For example, in relation to relationship breakdown men, to a much greater degree than women, spoke of actively having left their partners, whereas women either spoke of being left or of having escaped. Whether or not this 'accurately' reflects a dynamic in relationship breakdown between men and women

is unclear; it may alternatively reflect a difference in the way men and women *talk* about their relationships (see also Chapter Three, sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.3).

The data for this chapter is mainly based on the interviews with homeless people (20 women and 17 men), but also includes some interview material from service providers. All of the homeless people interviewed were defined as being 'homeless' because of their contact with homeless services and a broad range of accommodation types were represented (see Chapter Three, Table 3.2). Many of the people interviewed lived in either a direct access hostel or supported accommodation. One person slept rough, two had secure tenancies (but still used homeless services) and quite a few (mostly families) were living in temporary flats.

The body of this chapter is divided into five sections that represent the main issues that emerged as gendered pathways into homelessness: Family background, coping, relationship breakdown, addiction and employment. Each section presents 'findings', which are followed in most cases by a broader discussion drawing on the relevant literature. The sequencing of the previous chapters took a logical route from the legislative context and case study context to the interplay between legislation and practice. This chapter, however, represents something of a pause in this sequence and returns to consider the so far neglected area of homeless people's lives and issues that they bring to interactions with housing officers. Likewise, Chapter Eight 'Being Homeless' continues the focus on homeless individuals and looks at their present homeless and gendered circumstances.

7.2. Family Background

7.2.1. *Parental losses*

Most people interviewed talked about their childhood, with older people especially reflecting at length about experiences that had been particularly troubling. The loss of a mother, either through death, lack of contact or emotional estrangement, was a significant factor in both

men's and women's explanations of their later homelessness and more so than the loss of a father:

My ma died when I was eight. My dad had worked in the shipyards. He was a country boy, a farmer's son. He couldn't cope well on his own in the city. I spent some time in an orphanage. (Jerry 55)

When I was born my mother got a thrombosis and she was left paralysed on the left side. I was taken in by an aunt and I lived with my aunt and my granny till I was nearly five years of age. Then my mother decided she wanted me back. My mother – I will use the word hated - I think my mother did hate me. She made me stand with my face in a corner and things like that. My mother, father, and sister could eat in the living room, but I had to eat at the sink in the kitchen because I wasn't good enough to sit with them at the table (Jean 56).

Fathers tended to be talked about indirectly when people referred to their mothers struggles as single parents, their mothers' behaviour, or times when they did not get on with their mothers' new partners:

But when I went back to my own home ... my father – I get on with my father – he is dead now but I got on with him but my mother and I don't get along. And she went to the Social Work Department to get rid of me out of the house. She wasn't getting enough money from the Social for rent...() and they put me in the (psychiatric) hospital...() but my father couldn't do very much about it because he has got an amputated leg and he was in a wheelchair and he was dependent on her to take care of him. But he died shortly after that (May 62)

X: *Are you in touch with your dad anymore?*

R: *No.*

X: *So you don't want to see him?*

R: *Aye, I would like to see him again, aye, but it wouldnae be the same. I don't know him, not really, I wouldnae know what to say. I know where he lives but I wouldnae go up and chap on his door or that. (Richard 27)*

The loss of both parents was thought to be directly relevant to the homelessness of some older men, and several hostel managers remarked on the significant numbers of older men living in hostels for the simple reason that their parents had died and they 'had nowhere to go'. They did not recognise a similar group of older women.

7.2.2. *Family conflict and younger people*

Mothers continued to be the significant parent in young people's explanations of their homelessness and, even where there was conflict with fathers or stepfathers, it was the mother's attitude that seemed to determine whether the young person left home. There were, however, differences in the sorts of things young men and women were in conflict over (see Table 7.1). Young men tended to be hostile to their mother's new boyfriends, in trouble with police and involved in theft and drugs; one young man commented:

Eighty per cent of the boys that are in here [hostel] are in the same boat, stealing off their mothers, getting into trouble and kicked out of the house. They've all got the same story (Richard 27).

For young women the conflict was focused around unsuitable boyfriends, standards of behaviour (e.g. the hour to be home by at night), drugs and in some cases prostitution:

We hit a point (she and her mother) and I was stubborn...() I didnae want to gie it up (heroin), didn't think I was ready so I moved out. And been homeless ever since...() it was mare like saying, 'you'd better stop that stuff, it's gonna kill ye'. And I'm saying, 'Aye', but at the same time, and the craving in my head was strong that day...and then I regretted

it...that was the final warning...() She was really hurt, so she was. She said she cannae understand why ye're sort of degrading yerself, selling yerself short (Dee 27).

Table 7.1: The nature of young people's conflict with their parents

Nature of Conflict:	Women	Men
Conflict with parents over trouble with the police		Richard 27 (prison), Shaun 16 (housebreaking), Jeremy 17 (fighting)
Conflict with parents over stealing at home		Richard 27, Shaun 16
Conflict with parents over prostitution	Dee 27, Sandra 34	
Conflict with parents over choice of boyfriend	Jane 18	
Conflict with parents over drink or drugs	Dee 27 (drugs), Andrea 34 (drugs)	Richard 27 (drugs), Shaun 16 (drink and drugs), Keith 27 (drugs), David 27 (foster parents – drink)
Conflict with mother's new partner/boyfriend	Anna 16	Shaun 16, Jeremy 16, Keith 27
Conflict with parents over choice of friends	Anna 16, Sarah 20	Wayne 18

Using data from the observations of homeless interview assessments, a further five young men specified the nature of the conflict with their parents that led to their homelessness⁶³.

Their views support the findings in the Table above. These included one man in trouble with the police, two in trouble for stealing from their parents, one for drug taking and one who was not getting on with his mother's new boyfriend.

⁶³ Five young men specified the reasons for their conflict whereas no young women did, other than that they had 'fallen out'. (These five men were drawn from a possible pool of 24 young people who were under 25 years old, over half of the 46 assessments observed overall).

The following two case studies further illustrate the differences between young men and young women's stories:

Jeremy, aged 16, was forced to leave his family home, where he lived with his two brothers and sister following arguments with his mother and her boyfriend. He had been in trouble with the police. He felt that his mother always sided with her boyfriend, which had also led to arguments between Jeremy and his older brothers. One brother was now in the army, the other staying in a hostel. Jeremy is now staying in a different hostel especially for young people and hopes to get a home of his own in the future.

Jane, now 18, left home initially when she was 16 because her parents objected to her relationship with an older man. This relationship soon broke down and Jane moved in with a new partner who was abusive and used to lock her in the flat; she said she was only able literally to escape six months later. After living with friends for a while, and then living in a hostel, she became pregnant and returned to her parental home. The following year, she began her current relationship with a man, with whom she and her son now live in a temporary flat.

7.2.3. Parental alcoholism, care and large families

A small but significant number of men and women reported having had parents with an alcohol problem and these men and women seemed to have been equally affected (see Table 7.2). All but the two youngest women went on to have an addiction problem of their own, although many more people interviewed reported that they had an addiction problem without mentioning alcoholic parents (see section 7.5).

Table 7.2: Alcoholic parents and person's own addiction

Parent(s) with an Alcohol Problem:	Women	Men
Both parents had an alcohol problem	Lily 41(alcohol)	Danny 30s (alcohol), Richard 27 (drugs)
Father had an alcohol problem	Dee 27 (drugs)	Malcolm 52 (alcohol)
Mother had an alcohol problem	Lucy 16, Sarah 20	

Both men and women (four men and four women) reported having been in care. Sexual, physical or emotional abuse, which may have resulted in care during childhood was only disclosed by one man⁶⁴ (sexual abuse) although the description of childhood given by at least one other woman was considered to be emotional abuse (see Jean 7.2.1).

Finally, being brought up in a large family seemed to be more common amongst homeless women. For example, from information about siblings, eight women had three or more siblings (four with over five siblings and one with 11 siblings), whereas only two men did (although one man had seven siblings). One woman commented on the stress that her mother must have been under with a large family:

I don't think any less of my own mother because circumstances led her to give me up as a child of ten. And she is not to blame because she had a lot of children underneath her... () She couldn't cope. She wasnae a bad mother. She just couldn't cope. I mean she was falling pregnant every year. One wean after another. By the time I was ten she had seven, six weans underneath me and two pregnancies. I mean she – by the time she was 32 years of age she had seven weans. And lost two. That is a lot for a 32-year-old lassie tae dae. (Martha 40)

⁶⁴ The fact that there was only one person who disclosed that they had been abused lends support to the argument made earlier about gendered ways of working in a service such that relationships of trust take time (see Chapter Five, section 5.4.5). The fact that the only disclosure was from a man also supports the concluding caution that just because men tend to disclose childhood abuse far less than women, this does not necessarily mean that significant numbers of men have not suffered abuse.

Despite the difficulties that some people had faced during their childhood, such as alcoholic parents, a small but significant minority (five women and one man) said that they had come from 'good backgrounds'.

I had a normal childhood upbringing and things and I know it was all down to myself, me taking the drugs. Naebody forced me and things. It was al' don to me. (Dee 27)

I had a good upbringing until I was married, so I can't blame my early days for anything, ye know. I had a trade and everything. (Duncan 48)

7.2.4. Parental loss: discussion

As mothers continue to be the primary carers of children (SPIU 1998) it should not be surprising that the loss of a mother (through death or emotional estrangement) was seen as the more central and significant childhood experience as compared to the loss of a father. Crane (1999) cites two studies that lend some support to an association of maternal loss with homelessness, especially among older men, and as reported by hostel managers. For example, Walker *et al* found (1993) that there was an association of maternal deaths with immediate homelessness of men in their thirties or forties and a study by the National Assistance Board (1966) stated that many middle-aged men 'went to pieces' when their mothers died (in Crane 1999:44) (see also section 7.3.2). Neither of these two studies however, help to explain the more long-term effects of maternal loss, which were in evidence in this research, or the differential effects that maternal loss might have on men and women.

In a classic study by Brown on depression amongst women (1978), the death of a mother before the age of 13, in addition to having three or more children in a family and being working class were all strongly associated with depression (Brown 1978). Furthermore, having a depressed parent is thought to increase the offspring's own risk of depression and alcohol dependence (Faraone and Biederman 1998). Although there was no mention in the Brown study of the effects of the above factors on men, these two pieces of research could be

considered revealing for the connections suggested between maternal loss, child rearing, poverty and decreased ability to function. In other words, in the context of poverty and in the absence of alternative career opportunities, the differential effects that parental loss may have on men and women lie in women's capacity to reproduce their own family in a way that men cannot, but having a family is not necessarily a long term solution to their problems.

Support for this argument comes from Wardhaugh (1999) who suggests that an earlier experience of being 'homeless at home' (which could include being in care, parental loss, emotional estrangement or family conflict) may lead in some way to later homelessness to which women may be especially vulnerable. Tomas and Dittmar (1995), and Golden (1992) also emphasise women's greater commitment to relationships in the home. Hooper (1996) argues that women are brought up to believe that they are judged by their ability to sustain a relationship and to care for other people rather than themselves. This may mean that a disruption in family relationships may have a more significant effect on women. As Smith *et al* (1998) suggest, this effect may result in women deciding to start their own family either in compensation for the family life they feel they missed or to cement relationships with their own parents (1998:36).

Looking at the ages at which women interviewed for this research had children, the findings would seem to confirm a connection between early childbearing, family disruption and later homelessness. For example, out of the 20 women interviewed, 12 had children at a young age (five at the age of 17 or younger, three at the age of 19 or younger, four in their early 20s). In addition, out of these 12 women, seven described difficult circumstances in their own upbringing including parental bereavement, having been in care, emotional estrangement, alcoholic parents, taking drugs from an early age, or general family conflict. By contrast, only two men reported fathering or living with children in their early 20s (although one of these men had been in care himself as a child).

The life history of Elsie (61 at the time of interview) illustrates the close connection in some women's lives between bereavement, early marriage and childbearing. It also indicates how other problems (that may also be associated with later homelessness) do not necessarily go

away. Elise's mother had died when she was seven. Her father, who also died quite young, used to work night shifts; she explained how she and her five brothers and sisters had had to bring themselves up. Elsie first married at the age of 18, and had three husbands in total and six children, although she had her first child when she was 17 and felt that she had to give the child up for adoption. Elsie suffered years of domestic violence from all her husbands and a further two of her six children were taken into care. She said that she had worked most of her life at various jobs including working as a butcher and bus conductor, but had also been in prison for alcohol-related crimes and property damage. She said that she had spent some time sleeping rough although she now lived in a small supported house specifically for older women who had experienced homelessness. Elise's life history encompasses multiple known risk factors for homelessness: coming from a large family (Grieve 1997:xv-xvi, Burrows *et al* 1997); experiencing domestic violence (Anderson *et al* 1993); and having a drinking problem. One of the major underlying known risk factors for homelessness (Fitzpatrick *et al* 2000:28) is poverty; poverty tends to reoccur through generations (Blane 1997), and there is evidence that homelessness may too (Crane 1999 and Weitzman *et al* 1990). Therefore, what is also suggested by Elsie's life history is the particular roles that women may play in reproducing generations who also experience poverty and possibly homelessness.

In conclusion, it has been suggested here that parental loss, especially maternal loss, may be a risk factor in either immediate homelessness or later homelessness, but that this may impact in different ways on men and women. For some men, homelessness may follow immediately upon parental death (and the reasons for this are explored further in section 7.3). For women, the effect of parental loss may be associated more indirectly with homelessness. Women who have experienced loss may initially try to compensate for this loss by starting their own families at a young age. However, parental loss, in association with other difficulties, may lead to later homelessness. In addition these problems may be reproduced through subsequent generations. Poverty is the context and the underlying risk factor that combines with parental loss and other difficulties leading to homelessness.

7.2.5. Consequences of paternal loss

Whilst there is strong support for the idea that a disruptive family background is a general risk factor in homelessness (Fitzpatrick *et al* 2000:28) and, as was indicated above, women may react to this in specific ways, little homelessness research seems to comment on the psychological problems that might arise from the loss of a father, or how men might be specifically affected. However, from research on family conflict that young homeless people experience, some specific effects of family disruption on young men (often involving the loss or replacement⁶⁵ of a father) can be discerned.

The findings of this research are very similar to a larger study of homeless young people by Smith *et al* (1998) and both found that young men tended to be in conflict with their parents over their trouble with the police, their drinking, drug taking and theft. Young men in disrupted families were also found to be in greater conflict with their mother's new partners than young women were. The extract below from this research vividly illustrates one young man's feelings towards his mother's new boyfriend:

- S: *I'd want her tae get rid o' her boyfriend afore she took us back an' a', know what I mean. He's just a grassed up, fat drunken bastard.*
- X: *So you don't get on with her boyfriend at all?*
- S: *No. Do I fuck. Cheeky, fat, baldy, specky, bastard.*
- X: *So, I mean, does he really hassle you?*
- S: *He doesnae hassle ye, he's just a cheeky bastard, know what I mean.*
- X: *Does he like try and tell you what to do?*
- S: *That'll be fuckin' right. I winnae let him tell me what tae dae. I'll fuckin' tell him what tae dae before he tells me what tae dae, know what I mean. I cannae wait till the day he fucks ma ma aboot cos I'm gonna bash the fuck oot him when he does, man. Prick. (Shaun 16)*

⁶⁵ None of the interviewees spoke of having a stepmother, whereas stepfathers and new partners of mothers were frequently mentioned.

Smith *et al* (1998) suggest that the higher level of conflict between young men and stepfathers was because young men were less accepting than women that their mothers would want a new relationship (1998:26). According to Smith *et al*, the young men tended to think that it was 'wrong' for their mothers to put a relationship before their children, whereas the women just wanted a share of their mothers' attention (1998:26-27). For young women, both this study and Smith *et al*'s found that family conflict was more likely to centre around their choice of boyfriend, or time to come in at night. Additionally, Smith *et al* found that more young women than men were expected to pay their way in the family home and that there was a stricter code of behaviour for young women (1998:22-23); this research also found that prostitution was sometimes a problem between young women and parents⁶⁶. That young people *do not choose* to leave, but that household conflict forces them to leave (Jones 1995 in Smith *et al* 1998:10) is also an important point and was not contradicted by the explanations of young informants in this study.

Therefore it could be concluded that in evaluating the effect of the absence of fathers, the findings of this research and Smith *et al*'s (1998) suggest that young men's role in the family is more affected than perhaps the roles of young women. Whereas in reaction to a disrupted family, young women have an alternative option to recreate their own family, men have this option only indirectly. Young men also generally seemed to be taking greater risks in the activities that they were engaged in (fighting, trouble with police) but this observed difference applies to men in society more generally (Hillier and Scambler 1997)⁶⁷. A stronger argument is perhaps a socio-economic one where, if the mother is on her own for any period of time, the economic effects of lone parenthood may increase the likelihood of homelessness (Sexty 1990:35, Burrows 1997:57, Grieve 1997:xv, Webster 2000). Finally, and also in relation to poverty, it is possible that young men may react less to the disruption of their family and more to the lack of alternative opportunities that good prospects in employment might have given.

⁶⁶ Conflict with parents over involvement in prostitution was talked about retrospectively by women in their late 20s and early 30s.

⁶⁷ Prostitution would seem to be the exception to this claim.

In conclusion to this section on family background, it would seem that a childhood which was difficult in some way was a common experience amongst many, but not all, of the informants and that this had different implications for the lives of homeless men and women.

7.3. Gender and Coping

7.3.1. Findings

From the explanations of people's homelessness, the inability to cope seemed to have a gendered dimension. By 'inability to cope' it is meant that a person described is no longer able to manage such things as the everyday running of their accommodation, domestic and financial affairs, which may also include parental responsibilities. The gender pattern was that whereas men tended to report drink, drugs or mental health problems as having exacerbated their homelessness, women tended to report having drink, drug or mental health problems *in addition* to having parental responsibilities and / or experiencing a traumatic event.

Table 7.3 details the people interviewed who explained their current homeless situation in terms of not having been able to cope. It includes further information about those people and describes some key factors that they said affected their lives.

Table 7.3: Gendered coping

Nature of Coping:	Women	Men
Failure to cope domestically	Lily 41, Elsie 61, Aida 54 May 62, Martha 40, Gillian 24, Nancy 35, Andrea 34, Maria 33	James 55, Alan 54, Duncan 27, Graham 48, Richard 27
Had drink or drug problem	Lily 41 (drink), Elsie 61 (drink), Aida 54 (drink), Nancy 35 (drugs), Andrea 34 (drugs), Maria 33 (drugs)	Alan 54 (alcohol), Duncan 27 (alcohol), Graham 48 (alcohol), Richard 27 (drugs)
Had mental health problem (MH) or learning disability (LD)	May 62 (MH), Martha 40 (MH), Gillian 24 (LD)	James 55 (MH) Alan 54 (MH)
Other significant factor in life history: domestic violence (DV), rape (R), abuse (A), undisclosed trauma (T)	Lily 41 (R), Elsie 61 (DV), Aida 54 (DV), Martha 40 (T), Andrea 34 (R)	Danny, 30s (A)
Also had children	Lily 41, Elsie 61, Aida 54, Gillian 24, Nancy 35, Andrea 34, Maria 33	
Lived with parents up until homeless / hostel		Graham 48, Richard 27

Trying to summarise and present people's life histories around a single concept such as 'inability to cope' is necessarily difficult. Therefore, in order to give the reader a little more information about the gender patterns in people's lives, the Table is supplemented and contextualised through the following case histories: Lily (41) had a father and mother who

had both been alcoholics. She had five siblings including one brother who was also homeless with an alcohol problem, a sister with an alcohol problem and another brother who was murdered. She had been married and had three children. Her husband had gambled and she said he had controlled the finances. An incident of rape (not by her husband) contributed to the breakdown of her marriage and soon after she was drinking heavily and left both her husband and her children. In the past she had worked as a cleaner and a shop assistant and had been in prison for alcohol related offences. She said she drank to forget her worries and to cope with boredom. She stayed in a city council hostel for women and had slept rough for many years. Alan (54) had started off as a painter and decorator. He married in his early 20s to a woman who already had a child by another man. The marriage broke down and he does not see either of them now. He first began drinking socially at 15, but by 27 was beginning to lose jobs through his alcohol problem. He had slept rough for a while and spent time in jail for alcohol related offences. He had his own house the previous year but had lost it again through his drinking and feeling isolated. He felt more supported now and liked where he was living, although he hoped to be successful in getting and keeping another flat.

7.3.2. *Gendered coping: 'domestic de-skilling'*

The two life histories and Table 7.3 indicate that homelessness in women seems to have been precipitated by additional life events, in addition to parenting. This gender difference builds on the previous observations that there are older men who are homeless simply because their parents died, and that women who lost their parents young seemed to marry and have children at a very young age. Consistent with these earlier observations, the evidence in Table 7.3 and the case histories, one hostel manager suggested that women who become homeless have experienced greater problems than men and that their problems are of an emotional nature. Therefore whereas men either became homeless because they lost their parents or lost their marriage through an addiction problem, women became homeless for a multitude of complex reasons:

*it seems to me you have older men who don't really have any problems, who are in the hostels because either they've never married and stayed with their mother, their mother and father both died and maybe even 20 or 15 years ago, they didn't know where to go, what to do, and in those days they could just, you know, go to a hostel and they then had companionship, they had a roof over their head and they were quite happy and we have a lot of older men who have ended up staying in these places because it was safe for them. Then you've also got the men who are just down and out, the alcies, who have blown it completely. They've maybe had a family but because of an addiction, and they're in the hostel. Now that is very different from the women and I'm talking particularly the older client group here because with the women...() The women, it's very different. The women don't tend to become homeless because of one simple thing, i.e. losing their partner or having an alcohol problem. The women seem to have a multiple of problems and it's all emotional based and they could present with one problem, i.e. their partner's thrown them out and by the time they come here we've discovered that they've been abused, they've got mental health problems because of the abuse, so that the one reason for presentation can end up in almost six or seven different types of counsellors
(Irene, manager at women's hostel)*

Within this quote one of the differences in the process of how men and women become homeless can be drawn out and summarised by the term 'domestic de-skilling' (Kemp 1997:75). Thus, it is suggested that an important factor in men's homelessness is that, compared to women, they lack certain 'domestic' skills that could have helped to sustain their independent living. Thus, rather than just saying that women who become homeless experience more problems than men, it is suggested that women's greater domestic abilities may have helped prevent their earlier homelessness.

Support for this theory comes from Burgoyne and Clarke (1983) who found that after divorce or separation men's parents often took back the role of preparing the meals for their sons, whom they saw as being incapable in this respect (1983:156). In addition in a study of homeless people over the age of 55, Crane (1999) found that out of 73 subjects, 17 men and one

woman were described as having become homeless for the first time after the death of their spouse (Crane 1999:49). Where there were no wives, Crane additionally observed that landladies played a key domestic role: 'wives and landladies seemed to have acted as a 'safety net' for men' (1999:57). Although Crane was not especially interested in the gender differences of older homeless people, the findings of her research lend support to the suggestion that men and women have different gender roles that may include domestic skills and abilities, and that these are consequential for homelessness outcomes.

Crane's own explanation of her findings outlines a theory of undersocialisation where 'dysfunctional' or problematic family experiences result in offspring who have not been adequately taught the skills for independence. Homelessness may occur when family relationships break down, or homelessness may be delayed through an intermediate institutional living arrangement, such as military life - sought for its supportive environment (Crane 1999:19). However, whilst Crane's explanation emphasises the individual and the psychological and seems to suggest that families are in some ways to blame for their children's homelessness, it is being suggested here that men's lack of domestic skills are due to social and cultural norms in this society where women are taught to value domestic abilities and men are not. Thus boys are not taught to be as domestically independent as girls, to 'keep house', cook and clean in the same way and this has a direct bearing on their ability to sustain secure accommodation, including an impact on men's and women's ability to get out of homelessness (see Chapter Eight). This social trend, that has in effect deskilled men domestically, seemed to be especially true of older generations, but may not be uncommon in the raising of younger men. This was supported by the reports of managers at the young people's hostels and in the following excerpt:

R: Aye. It's fine in here, so it is. I'll probably stay here for the rest of ma days if I could. Get yer washes done ... () Aye, ye get well-looked efter in here.

X: You got flung out by your mum?

R: Aye. Aye.

X: Was that at sixteen, eighteen.

R: *No, that was four years ago. 23 I was... () I was into heroin then, smokin' it but wance I left ma mothers I ended up injectin' and I only got the jail wance when I was stayin' with ma mother. That's when I was 16. And since I left ma mother's, I've had all sorts of charges. Ten charges or somethin'. Mastely a' for shopliftin'.*

X: *So, did you argue with your mum?*

R: *Aye, a' the time. I can see her view, know what I mean, wi' me stealing aff her and stealing oot the house and stealing aff anybody to feed ma habit. Ye know, ye realise noo what ye've done. But at the time ye don't really care as long as ye're gettin' yer next hit, know what I mean? (Richard 27)*

Thus, to an extent, it is suggested that the domestic care of sons is still being passed from mothers to wives or partners and that men may be more vulnerable to homelessness when these women are absent.

From the interviews with homeless people, several men fitted the description of domestic dependence. For example Tim (51) said he lost his wife of 21 years, and family, through drink. After splitting up with his wife, he initially went to stay with his son's family but for the last four years had been in hostels. Another example is of Graham (48) who had been living in a hostel for the last 17-18 years. He had never married, but lived with his mum and dad until his 30s when he had been put out for being aggressive and drinking. During his younger years, he had initially worked in the steel works, then worked in a store, and then in security but had lost all his jobs through his drinking. He had spent some time rough sleeping and had also temporarily had a flat but lost it through excessive drinking. In both these cases it could be argued that the alcohol problem they both had explained their need to stay in a supported hostel, but domestic dependence on wife or mother would also seem to be an underlying factor.

7.4. Relationship Breakdown

7.4.1. *Gender differences in relationship breakdown: findings*

The interviews found that more women cited relationship breakdown as a significant factor in their homelessness than did men (12 women as opposed to five men). There were also noticeable gender differences between men and women in regard to what they said about relationship breakdown⁶⁸. The main difference was in the way relationship endings were described; men attributed a much more proactive role to themselves. Men said they were much more likely to end their relationships, including 'walking out' and finishing it because of (their) alcohol problems (see Table 7.4).

⁶⁸ All relationships that were talked about were heterosexual relationships. Only one woman mentioned a same-sex relationship that was currently ongoing. All the discussions about relationship breakdown therefore refer to heterosexual relationships.

Table 7.4: Relationship endings

Relationship Endings:	Women	Men
Finished the relationship / 'left'	Lily 41 (but after being raped by another man)	Duncan 48, Tim 51, Danny 30s.
Finished relationship which became intolerable	Jane 18 x2	Keith 27*
'Got away' from partner	Elsie 61* x3, Iris 33*, Jean 56*, Aida 54*, Jane 18*, Paula 30, Frances 21*	
Only 'got away' when partner went to prison	Dorothy 60*, Dee 27	
Was left by partner	Nancy 35	
Mutual decisions	Dorothy 60, Maria 33, Andrea 34	
Partner died		Alan 54

*Indicates those who experienced some form of domestic violence

Note: several people spoke of more than one relationship

The following two quotes illustrate the way men tended to speak about the end of their relationships:

I had to leave. My ex said to me, "stop drinking, go and get some help". I just left because I knew myself if I stayed on, well somethin' was goin' to come out of it. So I just left. (Danny 30s)

D: See the girl I got married to, I was engaged to another girl for three years before that and I had a wee argument with her and my best friend got married. I said "oh dear" and I just met this girl and I got married. I hardly knew her. I knew from the start off I knew I'd made a boob, ye know.

X: *You wish you'd got married to the other one?*

D: *The other one, yes, oh aye, without a doubt.*

X: *Were you married long?*

D: *Two years but I was away for about ten months o' these two years. I left and went to stay with my mum. (Duncan 48)*

For their part, women were more likely to speak of having managed to 'get away' from relationships, or of being left. Seven women in this research out of the total 20 women interviewed and six of the 16 single women observed in homeless assessments had experienced domestic violence. Only one man of the 17 interviewed had also been the victim of domestic violence and two men admitted being violent or abusive to female partners. One woman explained:

We stayed together for six months an' I couldn't get out...() He used to lock the door and obviously I couldn't get out the windows an' em ...() He used tae come home and expect his dinner five, any later an' I was locked in the cupboard. I used to get locked in the hall cupboard. It was a walk-in cupboard an' I used to get put in there. Eventually, he went out one day an' he never locked the door because his sister was supposed tae be comin' up that day. She was supposed tae be comin' up. I can't remember why she was supposed to be comin' up. An' I packed ma bags as much as I could an' just, I ran out and went to ma friend's (Jane 18).

A few women had had more active roles in the ending of some relationships and they ended by mutual agreement. One older woman had experienced three unhappy and violent marriages, but despite this, said that she had been the one to walk out on one of her boyfriends after finding him in bed with another woman:

It was never third time lucky for me cause they were all bad boys, ahh some awful fights and some sore faces and even when I was pregnant I got them and eventually I had to throw myself out of a three story window, oh he had been battering the hell out of me, it was terrible, I could na handle it. (Elsie 61)

A substantial number of people did not mention having had any significant relationship in their lives and this seemed to be equally common amongst men and women of all age groups (see Table 7.5).

Table 7.5: No significant relationships

Age Group and No Significant Relationship:	Women	Men
Over 40 and no significant relationship spoken of	May 62, Martha 40	Malcolm 52, Graham 48, Jerry 55
25's to 40's and no significant relationship spoken of		Douglas, 27, Richard 27
Under 25 and no significant relationship spoken of	Anna 16, Lucy 16, Sarah 20, Eleanor 16	Shaun 16, Wayne 18

Malcolm (52) specifically explained his homelessness in terms of the relationships he never had and lack of opportunities to meet a partner, opportunities that he felt his sisters had enjoyed. He explained this as being due to having to go out and earn from an early age; his limited education (which meant that he could only be employed for casual work); the low wages of casual work; and hostel life, which afforded him few opportunities to form a stable relationship.

7.4.2. Relationship breakdown: discussion: 'men jump, women are pushed'

Whilst the breakdown of relationships is considered to be one of the major and immediate causes of homelessness (Burrows *et al* 1997, Grieve 1997, Fitzpatrick *et al* 2000:28) only a few studies have attempted to examine or explain it in gendered terms. One large-scale study by Anderson *et al* (1993) found that men were four times more likely than women to give

relationship breakdown as a reason for their homelessness although Morris (1998) found that homeless women were much more likely to have been previously married with children. However, it is improbable that large-scale methods of data collection can tell us about the dynamics of relationship breakdown. The interviews for this research found that more women cited relationship breakdown as a significant factor in their homelessness than men and that they explained their breakdowns in different ways to men. In addition, Passaro (1996), and Sullivan and Damrosch (1987) argue that men and women who become homeless due to relationship breakdown fail in those relationships for different reasons. Men tend to fail in their relationships due to occupational roles (Sullivan and Damrosch 1987) or economic roles in the family (Passaro 1996). Expanding on this point, Passaro argues that many men leave their relationships in the context of chronic unemployment and where some men thought that their role and position in a family extended little beyond the economic, 'love lasts only as long as the paycheque' (1996:3). In contrast, Passaro, and Sullivan and Damrosch argue that women are more likely to have a crisis in their roles as wives or mothers. Further support for this explanation comes from Golden (1992) and Tomas and Dittmar (1995) who argue that relationships are more central to a woman's identity than a man's, because women are brought up to be dependent on men in ways that men are not. Finally, as May (1997) points out, whilst men may indeed be losing out through a diminished economic role in the family through chronic unemployment, the opportunity to take up a greater domestic role is rarely taken (1997:23).

Differences in the way that men and women ended relationships prior to becoming homeless were commented on by housing officers in the HPU. Three male housing officers (Bob, Tom and Adam) all suggested that the differences could be summed up in the phrase 'men jump, women are pushed' (and which implies that this idea might have been part of housing officers gender norms see Chapter Six, section 6.6). Women were thought to be more reluctant to disrupt their children's lives, but also seen as lacking the confidence to believe that they could cope on their own. By contrast the housing officers perceived men as being less focused on their children's welfare (if they had children), less dependent on relationships and more confident in their ability to cope on their own:

My own feeling is that women are far more dependent on stable relationships...() they genuinely don't believe that they can cope without a partner to back them up...() it always appears a lot easier for a man to get up and walk out, a woman is usually not the dominant one in these scenarios it's the male that is dominant, therefore if she doesn't have the confidence to feel "I can leave here and make a go of it with the children on my own, I am better off staying where I am"...() when the man leaves, he doesn't have that emotional tie, "I've been right all along, I've ruled the roost, I will be OK"... () I think that is why some (women) go back too, you hear them say "Better a man that beats you than no man at all", which is an atrocious scenario but a realistic one, from what we see anyway. (Tom, Housing Officer)

The observations and explanations of gender differences suggested by the housing officers were not contradicted by some of the life histories described by homeless men and women; this is illustrated in the following two examples:

Tim (51) had been married for 21 years and had three children. He had left his wife four years previously and had been in hostels ever since. He said that he lost his marriage through his drinking and was fired from his gardening job a week after he had left his wife. After the breakdown of his marriage, he had initially stayed with friends and then his son. He had slept rough a couple of times and spent time in several alcohol rehabilitation units.

Gladys (60) had married very young at 17 and had two children. She split up with her first husband on amicable terms, but after the children had grown up, married again. This second husband was violent, but she had stayed with him for years. She said that she had been in and out of women's refuges but had only finally been free of her second husband when he was jailed. She had worked as a hotel manager and now did voluntary work to keep herself occupied.

7.4.3. *Relationship breakdown and domestic violence*

Relationship breakdown caused by the domestic violence of men against women is consistently found to be a significant aspect of women's homelessness and may give considerable insight into gender inequalities within relationships. Anderson *et al* (1993) found that one in 20 homeless women reported domestic violence as one of the main reasons for their homelessness and, in a much smaller study by Jones (1999), out of 77 women interviewed, domestic violence was the single most quoted reason for becoming homeless, especially amongst women over 30. The numbers in this research were also very small and the finding that seven out of 20 women had experienced domestic violence was, therefore, much higher than Anderson *et al*'s (1993) statistically representative finding.

Economic barriers may represent serious obstacles to women leaving relationships that turn violent, including their marginalisation and low pay in the labour market, and their economic dependence, especially when caring for children (Hooper 1996, May 1997, SPIU 1998). Without economic backing, securing alternative housing was found to be a major difficulty for women leaving violent situations (Watson and Austerberry 1986, Bull 1993), in addition to the difficulties that they either fear or may face if they apply to be rehoused (Bull 1993, Hooper 1996, Tagg 1997). In addition to economic and housing barriers to fleeing domestic violence, it has also already been suggested that social and cultural barriers exist. For example, relationships were suggested as being more central to women's lives than men's (Tomas and Dittmar 1995, Golden 1992), that women are brought up to believe that they are judged by their ability to sustain a relationship and to care for other people, not themselves (Hooper 1996) and that women may lack the confidence of men to cope outside of relationships. Hooper (1996) outlines further issues which may stem from women's lack of confidence and which may hinder women from leaving violent relationships, such as fears of violent repercussions and the breaking of family loyalties. The latter point has particular resonance with the following quote:

I find it very hard to talk about it...() I couldn't have told my mother...() people say, "why is she so stupid ..." so you're just tempted to keep it to yourself because people just don't believe

you half the time. People think you are stupid...() his family would not want to believe me, although they knew, they know what kind of person he's been. He's got records for violence. They just don't want to believe you...() there were some very disgusting things that I couldn't tell anyone...() you think, "it must be me". (Dorothy 60)

The life history of Jean (56) also brings together many factors known to contribute to domestic violence such as lack of confidence, dependent children and economic vulnerability. Jean's life history also adds on another potential aspect to the association made earlier between women who have lost parents (including through estrangement), early childbearing and later difficulties. Jean for example had an unloved childhood and said her mother hated her. She describes the poverty of her childhood by the way she was sent out to steal coal and milk from people's doors before school. Her father had eventually put her mother out of the house when Jean was about 14/15, after years of humiliation and hurt. She had married young, at 18, but suffered domestic violence in silence for years. Her husband had misused alcohol and she had turned to drink herself to cope with the extreme violence. She said she waited until her four children were grown up before she was able to leave her husband. She had used Women's Aid and went back to her husband once, before she left for good. During her marriage, she had worked as a secretary, but was now too arthritic to work.

Elaborating further on the social and cultural reasons why men are violent in relationships, Hooper cites Goldner *et al* (1990) who suggest that men who are abusive may be doing it because they do not feel different enough from women and that aggression restores this difference (1996:149). Hooper (1996) further asserts that it is the underlying patriarchal society that maintains women's powerlessness in familial relationship, policy and law. 'Male dominated institutions make it (domestic violence) acceptable by implicitly or explicitly condoning it, failing to intervene effectively to protect women from men's violence in the name of preserving 'family privacy' and perpetuating a construction of male authority and female dependence within families which allows men a sense of entitlement to behave in a proprietary fashion towards 'their' women' (1996:149). This patriarchal theory of domestic violence including cultural norms and institutional bias is captured by the following extract:

Well, men are selfish, childish. They portray themselves as the ones that look after you type of thing, but its not like this at all, it's the other way around that's my experience with them anyway. They've never left their mother's bosom. As long as everything's going their way, it's fine. I think they're inclined to "don't you speak to me like that, you're only a woman", you know. That kind of attitude about them...() And I think there's far too much cruelty to women that men get away with. I mean, I don't know how many times that I've had blood running out of me and the police have been sitting there and seen the blood coming out me and they turn round and say, "we can't charge them, we haven't got a witness". Who done this to my face, you know, myself? They get away with it too often. (Dorothy 60)

Therefore, domestic violence is thought to occur so frequently because of women's lack of economic independence, their lack of confidence outside relationships and the social and institutional promotion of men's dominance that can be summarised under the umbrella of patriarchy. Homelessness after fleeing domestic violence may therefore represent something of a short-term solution (Tomas and Dittmar 1995).

In conclusion, the evidence is that relationships between many men and women are unequal, especially so in situations of domestic violence; that when these relationships break down, they are differently experienced and viewed. Despite the evidence that women experience greater privations within their relationships than men, for social, cultural and economic reasons women also seem the most reluctant to leave them. As has also been argued in previous sections, there are different consequences for men and women in terms of housing. Whereas women may generally possess greater domestic skills, after an abusive relationship their ability to cope may be hindered by lack of confidence, or additional difficulties such as an alcohol problem, and therefore homelessness is possible. Especially in situations of domestic violence, it is possible that from a certain perspective, homelessness may seem like a solution rather than the problem (Tomas and Dittmar 1995). Although often in a seemingly stronger position in their relationships with women, after a relationship breaks down, men may also suffer additional consequences such as an increased alcohol problem and difficulties with employment, both issues that are examined further in the following sections.

7.5. Addictions and Gender Patterns

7.5.1. *Findings*

There were gender differences in terms of addictions. In relation to alcohol, there were significantly more, mostly older men, with current alcohol problems (eight men to one woman), as seen in Table 7.6. Roughly similar numbers of men and women had an alcohol problem in their past (three women and two men).

Table 7.6: Current and past alcohol problem

Type of Alcohol Problem:	Women	Men
Current alcohol problem	Lily 41	Alan 54, Frank 50, Tim 51, Duncan 48, Sam 40s, Danny 30s, Douglas 27, Shaun 16
Past alcohol problem	Aida 54, Elsie 61, Jean 56	Malcolm 52, Graham 48
Own alcohol problem had affected relationship with partner	Lily 41 (and family)	Danny 30s, Tim 51, Frank 50
Partner's alcohol problem had affected relationship	Jean 56, Elsie 61, Lily 41, Iris 33,	
Own alcohol problem affected relationship with parents		Shaun 16, Douglas 27, Graham 48.
Alcohol problem affected employment		Frank 50, Danny 30s, Tim 51, Malcolm 52, Graham 48, Alan 54, Douglas 27
Parents had an alcohol problem	Lily 41, Dee 27, Lucy 16, Sarah 20	Danny 30s, Richard 27, Malcolm 52

Another gender difference that was noted between men and women's accounts was the role that drinking was given in their later homelessness. For example, men spoke about alcohol as being more of an instrumental factor in their homelessness than women did, emphasising their active role in its uptake. Therefore, whereas three men spoke about their alcohol problem as affecting the breakdown of their relationships and six as affecting their employment, only one woman said that her drinking had affected her relationship (and this was exacerbated by an

incidence of rape); no women said that their drinking affected their employment⁶⁹. The following excerpts further illustrate a gender difference in the role of alcohol in people's homelessness:

T: It was through the drink that I left my wife. I cannae say I drank more after that, I didna. I just continued what I was drinking.

X: So you think the marriage broke down over the drinking?

T: Oh aye, that was the whole reason.

X: And did it affect your work as well?

T: Aye I was losing time off work and getting demoted. Till eventually I got fired.

X: And did losing your work put a real pressure on your marriage?

T: Well, I lost ma job a week after I left ma wife. (Tim 51)

By contrast, two of the women described how alcohol helped them cope with the violence that they had experienced:

L: I was raped Helen. Probably got me drinkin' heavier, probably. I did go for the rape thing (counselling) and all that but I couldnae keep up with it, I couldnae handle it. I went to the bottle then. That's what caused all the skippering and that.

X: And that put the pressure on your family life as well?

L: It did. We split up. I never - I havenae saw ma family for a long time...() Last time I saw ma kids, James is 20 now, he was seven. That was the last time I saw him. (Lily 41)

The marriage was violent, you know, through my husband...() my life was a hell anyway but it didnae matter. I did turn to alcohol. I suppose you could call me an alcoholic, no that I drink everyday, you know... () It was after I was married the alcohol – but I don't mean I have been daein it then, after I was married. I would take a small drop, sort of if I was in company ... () But it was, when I started – when I was being hurt you see, I was

⁶⁹ One man (Duncan 48) also reported that he had started to drink because of an unsightly skin problem that he had developed.

under the impression that everything in the garden was going to be rosy which obviously it isnae – even yourself you know that. Erm... but I say, about fourteen years intae the marriage, I then decided if you can't beat them, join them... () I think it was just something that sort of grew on you, more or less and all as I say, is if you have got alcohol in you it is easier to take a slap than if you have not got alcohol in you. Can I put it that way? That was – or a punch or whatever you know – it is easier if you have got drink in you. You can take it more (Jean 56).

On the issue of drugs⁷⁰ and gender differences, similar numbers of men and women had a drug problem. All drug problems were amongst under 35-year-olds at the time of the research and included four women and three men. The differences around drugs were that three out of the four women also had children, whereas only one of the men did⁷¹, as has already been discussed in section 7.3. All of those with children had, at some point, transferred the responsibility of the child or children to immediate kin, usually their own mothers, as in the following account:

ma mum knew I worked on the streets an' she knew I took drugs an' things like that but maybe clients where I stayed were chappin' on the door an' she got a wee bit annoyed wi' that. An' I mean, it wasnae right for the kids, like if I was takin' men intae the house, for like, business-wise, ye know, wonderin' who he was, or ... () she never pushed me out, I left o' ma own accord an' I gave the kids over tae her. I agreed, just between the two o' us, no through a social worker or anythin' like that, for her tae take the kids so I would send ma book an' bla bla. I couldnae look after masel' so I couldnae look after ma kids (Andrea 34)

Finally, most of those with either a drink or drug problem also reported having been in trouble with the police or in prison (see Table 7.7) and these offences had a gendered pattern.

Whereas women tended to be in trouble over prostitution or shoplifting, men were more likely

⁷⁰ Drug problem' refers primarily to opiate use.

⁷¹ The man with a child had originally left his relationship and his partner brought up their child. However at the time of interview, he was the primary carer of his son, although he hoped that his own mother would look after the child when he got a place in a rehabilitation clinic for his methadone addiction.

to be in trouble over breaches of the peace, shoplifting, housebreaking and, in one case, attempted murder.

Table 7.7: Gender, addiction and criminal behaviour

'Criminal Behaviour'/ Trouble with the Police:	Women	Men
Breach of the peace	Lily 40 (drink)	Danny 30s (drink), Alan 54 (drink), Sam 40s (drink)
Breach of the peace and criminal damage	Elsie 61 (drink)	
Prostitution	Andrea 34 (drugs), Nancy 35 (drugs), Maria 33 (drugs), Dee 27 (drugs), Aida 54 (drink)	
Shoplifting	Maria 33 (drugs), Aida 54 (drink)	Richard 27 (drugs)
Housebreaking		Shaun 16 (drink and drugs)
Malicious damage and assault		Frank 50 (drink)
Attempted murder		Keith 27 (drugs)

7.5.2. Addictions and gender patterns: discussion

Trying to unravel the role of addiction in homelessness is particularly difficult. The addiction may have been the cause of, for example, a relationship breakdown, or, the result of one, or, may contain elements of both. There may also be conflicting perspectives on the role of the addiction, according to who is asked. That there is a link between homelessness and addiction is well-established (Crane 1999). Hutson and Liddiard (1994) suggest that the strong link between addiction and homelessness amongst older people is less clear with younger people.

They argue that a vicious circle of drugs and homelessness can be quickly set up through the stress of experiencing homelessness (1994:66-67), and Klee and Reid (1998) additionally suggest that taking drugs may actually be a form of stress management for young homeless people.

Although the role of addiction in homelessness is unclear, the findings suggest that men and women themselves described their addictions as playing key roles in their homelessness, but that these addictions had gendered patterns. In relation to alcohol, for example, more men than women had a drinking problem overall (past and current). Additionally, whereas men seemed to talk about their drinking as something they had actively engaged in, women tended to talk about their lives as being out of control and that drinking both contributed to this and helped them cope.

In an effort to explain these gender differences, it is suggested that both the difference in numbers and the more proactive way that men talked about addiction lie in the cultural encouragement and acceptability of drinking for men in particular, whereas women's drinking is more likely to be seen as a mental health problem (Morrish 1993:22). This differential encouragement to drink for men and women was mentioned by one informant as she described her and her husband's different reasons for drinking:

J: *When I got married eh, when I was ... as we call it these days, courting. We would sit you know friends and I, we would sit and have a coffee cup in the café at (street), we would sit in there and have coke and records and the guys were going to the pubs and having their pints you know the similar sort of thing. Alcohol never entered my head at that point. It was after I was married the alcohol ... () I would take a small drop, sort of ... if I was in company ... () But ... () when I was being hurt you see ... () I then decided if you can't beat them, join them...*

X: *Was your husband drinking as well?*

J: *Oh he was always a drinker. (Jean 56)*

From this study, there was only one woman who associated her relationship breakdown with her own drinking, but four women attributed it to their partner's drinking and violence. Alternatively, three men saw their drinking as having affected their relationships and none mentioned that it was their partner's drinking, a gender difference that was also noted by Crane (1999:52). The association between alcohol drinking and male violence is a cultural phenomenon and not found in all cultures. McDonald (1994) argues 'this link is made because it is men who drink and it is often men, in their cultural manliness, who are allowed or expected to be violent. The association of alcohol or drunkenness with violence is not at all universal... () riotous bouts of drinking regularly occur in some cultures without any violence. The connection of violence and drink and drunkenness seems to have been learnt' (1994:14). Meagher and Murray (1997) lends further support to this argument but point out that whereas in this society men are encouraged to express their distress through alcohol, by comparison, the accepted cultural mode of expression for women is depression (1997:71). In the following quote, a hostel manager (women's hostel) seems to support the idea of a learnt and gendered cultural attitude to drinking where women use alcohol to cope by individually retreating from their problems and men see it as an essential medium for socialising and coping:

I think the women use it as a retreat so as to get away from their problems and it doesn't solve anything. I think the men, it's come about, not as a retreat, the exact opposite. I think it's come about because they've been in mixed company, they've gone into pubs, they want be part of this group, so they - like if you had a man and a woman - right, say you had a wee woman in a house and a wee man in a house and the wee woman loses her hubby, the man loses his wife, right? I think the man would go to the pub, be seen with people, would go out for company and they drink to be sociable and get involved with everybody. I think the woman would withdraw into herself because she couldn't cope and she would see this as a release (Irene).

Finally, although drugs seemed to be being used equally by homeless men and women, the types of criminal activity that men and women get involved in show gender patterns. These criminal activities have gendered implications for men and women. For example spending

time in prison may have a greater impact on mothers (Lowthian 2001), and involvement in prostitution, as opposed to shoplifting or housebreaking, may have greater implications on women's self worth and therefore have further implications for their ability to get out of homelessness (see Chapter Eight).

7.6. Employment

7.6.1. *Findings*

There were differences in the sorts of employment that men and women reported having been engaged in. For example, whereas women worked in hotel management and nursing ('intermediate' employment), men worked as plumbers, chefs or cutting designers (skilled manual) (in Registrar General's social class classification⁷² in Blane 1997). Women were also employed in secretarial work and shop work (skilled non manual), butchering, and factory work but also included cleaning, erotic dancing and bus conducting. The jobs that men were employed in tended towards the manual, including working in the ship yards⁷³, casual labour on building sites, security work, employed in the army, gardening and hairdressing. At the more illicit end of earning an income (see Table 7.5), women reported being involved in prostitution, whereas men reported their activities as either being shoplifting or theft.

People who did not mention having worked included three men and five women, although four of the women and two of the men were under the age of 20. The remaining man (27) said that he had not worked because he had been an alcoholic all of his adult life and the woman (30) had four children. For many of the women, having children was clearly a significant factor in relation to the sort of employment they had engaged in. Eight women had children and were the primary carer for those children, whereas only one man was. A further

⁷² The Registrar General's classification of social class is also widely criticised for its inadequate treatment of women's occupation (Blane 1997:110).

⁷³ Many of these jobs are hard to assess without a further detailed description of the work. 'Shipyard work', for example, may have been either skilled manual or unskilled manual.

six women had children, but had not necessarily been the primary carers, although their period of pregnancy at least may have affected their employment opportunities.

Although the evidence was limited, men seemed to indicate that the loss of their employment was more significant to them and had contributed to their current situation. For example, one man talked extensively about his life in the army, still wore army fatigues and directly attributed his current circumstances to his being dismissed:

Left the army in 1987. Got a bad leg (shows scar). Lost my wife and weans in 1986. The army parped me oot. 'A disgrace to the government'...() Took my whole life away from me. But the army done worse. They took away my job. Shooting bastards. Took to drink. Been living on the streets ever since⁷⁴ (Sam 40s).

Seven men (see Table 7.4) reported that their worsening addiction directly or indirectly led to their loss or lack of employment, whereas none of the women mentioned this. The following two examples illustrate the sort of relationship that men had with addiction. Malcolm (52) initially trained and worked as a cloth and cutting designer. After four or five years, however, he stopped working as a cloth cutter and worked first as a scaffolder and then on the oilrigs. He felt that working on the oilrigs was a great life, travelling around different European countries, although on his home leave he said that he drank a lot because there was nothing else to do. Whilst drinking and during one of these home leaves, he suffered a serious head injury and had to spend many months afterwards in hospital. Malcolm said that he still suffered memory loss from his injury and no longer worked. He had never married and had no children.

Although it was not clear from Malcolm's account if he had been forced to leave his initial job as a cloth cutter because of his drinking, he implied that this might have been the case and certainly said that the job on the oil rigs was good precisely because it did allow him to drink. The following excerpt also describes a process of worsening addiction and job loss:

⁷⁴ This interview extract was developed from written notes. It attempts to represent the informant's words as closely as possible.

D: I was workin' in a Christian Bookshop down in () and I was workin' in a slaughterhouse doon in (). And I was workin' in quite a few farms down in () as well, I worked in a butcher's shop and that's about it.

X: Were these periods of a few months or a couple of years?

D: A few years.

X: A few years down on farms and things?

D: Yes.

X: And were you off alcohol then or were you using it just a little bit.

D: I was still on ma addiction.

X: But you could keep a job OK?

D: No.

X: Not really. You just struggled along?

D: Yes, just struggled along. (Danny 30s)

7.6.2. Discussion

The sorts of employment that homeless men and women reported having been engaged in on the whole were typically gendered jobs. For example, according to Grint (1998) whereas women predominate in education, clerical, catering, cleaning and hairdressing, men dominate in the professions, science, engineering, management, manufacturing, construction and transport (1998:203). The illicit jobs were also gendered, in that women tended to be forced into prostitution to pay for their drugs, whereas men did not have that option in the same way. Whereas all older men reported having been in employment in their lives at least before they were homeless, young men did not report having been employed to the same extent. Amongst those that did not work, most of the women had children.

Following previous discussions of addiction, the intimate link between employment loss, problem drinking, relationship breakdown and homelessness was made by several men. These men seemed to have started out as social drinkers, but as the drinking culture was

regular and persistent there were unlimited opportunities to develop an alcohol problem. Crane (1999) supports these findings by drawing a strong association with drinking and male jobs. 'The former building labourers described how they used to drink on the way to work and heavily at the weekends; for them, the pub was a focal point. One man said: "the pub was a labour exchange and a place to get lodgings when you arrived in town"... Alcohol became an integral part of the men's work and living circumstances, and a focus of their social activities (1999:67). Philips also supports this view by succinctly arguing that drinking, earning power, male identity, relationship breakdown and even homelessness are inextricably bound together: 'If a man fails to make money he is excluded from a male peer group that depends on beer (or other drugs) to lubricate friendship. Without the money for a pint he has no right of entry. If he uses his money at the bar he may well threaten his place in the home' (1993:27). This theme is continued in Chapter Eight.

7.7. Conclusions

In conclusion, this chapter shows some noticeable differences in the specific problems leading to homelessness reported by men and women. The loss of a mother rather than of a father played a greater part in both men and women's explanation of their homelessness. For some men, homelessness followed immediately after parental loss and homelessness may have been partly due to their lack of domestic training. For women, the effect of parental loss may have indirectly affected their homelessness because women who experienced loss may have initially tried to compensate for that loss through starting their own families at a young age. From the evidence of family conflict amongst young people, the implication of paternal loss may have impacted to a greater extent on young men's family roles in addition to the economic problems associated with lone parenthood. More women referred to relationship breakdown as a significant factor in their homelessness than men and domestic violence remains a strong feature in the breakdown of relationships leading to homelessness for women. More older men reported having alcohol problems and that alcohol had been instrumental in their homelessness; there were gender differences in the reasons homeless

men and women gave for alcohol use. The link between employment, relationship breakdown, addiction and homelessness was an especially close one for some men.

CHAPTER 8: BEING HOMELESS IN GENDERED WAYS: GENDERED INSTITUTIONALISATION

8.1. Introduction

8.1.1. *Aims of the chapter*

Having examined in the previous chapter some of the different reasons why men and women become homeless, this chapter focuses on the differences in experience that men and women may have once they have become homeless. This chapter closely follows the previous one in the sense that the reasons *why* people become homeless affects both their subsequent experiences of being homeless and may contribute to the reasons why they may remain homeless (Downing-Orr 1996:4). In this chapter I wish to avoid presenting a 'situation' of homelessness in a static sense, or as some 'end stage' (Blasi 1990) but rather try to place an emphasis on homelessness as a series of processes. Passaro (1996) asserts that analysis of the process of being or remaining homeless is missing in many accounts of homelessness. Passaro (1996) also draws parallels between homelessness and a theoretical understanding of slavery which is defined as 'a process of social transformation that involves a succession of phases and statuses' (attributed to Kopytoff 1986 in Passaro 1996:29). This chapter then, in part, attempts to redress the issue of processes but also, more importantly, seeks to address the question of whether these processes can be said to be gendered.

A central organising concept in this chapter is 'institutionalisation' and it is suggested that the experience of homelessness is often also an institutional experience (or may be in reaction to an institutional experience). The concept of institutionalisation is useful because it allows for an understanding that the processes and practices involved in institutions may also be gendered processes. Therefore, the focus in this chapter can be summarised as: examining experiences of being homeless, looking at whether those experiences were gendered experiences and further, whether those experiences were also experiences of gendered institutionalisation.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section begins by looking at definitions of institutionalisation and institutional aspects of homelessness such as segregation by sex. The perceptions and preferences of homeless people with respect to their accommodation are also explored, including an exploration of gendered patterns in the meaning of home. Continuing with the previous chapter's examination of the gendered pathway into homelessness, the second section considers how men and women may react to earlier family or institutional experiences (such as family or care background) in ways that are gendered. This focus is achieved by looking retrospectively at the lives and explanations for their situations given by the men and women who had lived in the hostels for the longest amount of time. The third section looks more closely at some of the gendered processes involved in becoming homeless and the gendered identities that may be adopted. These identities are gendered and include a 'prostitute' identity that some women may adopt, or a rough sleeping / begging identity that some men may adopt. The fourth and final section reflects on the experiences during homelessness that may act as barriers to getting out of homelessness, and in particular focuses on gendered stereotypical attitudes towards men, not unconnected to men's drinking.

Finally, following some of the themes of the previous chapter, this chapter complements Chapter Five in suggesting that the type and nature of services available strongly shapes men and women's subsequent experiences of them. This chapter also links to Chapter Six, in showing that the housing officers would have some knowledge of their clients' likely experiences once homeless that, therefore, may affect the decisions that they make. The data for this chapter is drawn mainly from interviews with homeless people and service providers, but data also comes from the formally observed homelessness assessments and general informal observations. Much of the focus centres on statutory hostel provision. This was one of the most common accommodation types amongst people interviewed and most single homeless people would have been through council hostel accommodation at some point. Other homelessness accommodation types (and sleeping arrangements such as rough sleeping) are also discussed in this chapter.

8.2. Institutions and Gendered Accommodation

8.2.1. *What is meant by the term 'institutionalisation'?*

The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology (Abercrombie *et al* 1994) defines 'institution' as the term widely used to describe social practices that are regularly and continuously repeated, are sanctioned and maintained by social norms and have major significance in the social structure' (1994:216). Institutions also refer to established patterns of behaviour and a unit (or institution) incorporates a plurality of roles, so that for example a school has teachers, pupils and inspectors. According to Abercrombie, five main complexes of institution are conventionally identified including economic institutions, political institutions, stratification institutions, kinship institutions and cultural institutions. 'Institutionalisation' is defined as 'the process whereby social practices become sufficiently regular and continuous to be described as institutions' (1994:216). The Concise Oxford Dictionary offers a further meaning such that to 'institutionalise' refers to being made apathetic or dependent after a long-term period in an institution. Finally, an institution can also be defined either as an act, an organisation or a building used by an institution.

For the purpose of this chapter, these definitions of institutions are useful because they suggest new ways of thinking about the experience of homelessness. For example, homelessness as a set of regular practices in a context where roles are allocated and (internal) social norms exist may be especially relevant to the experience of living in a hostel. Homelessness as a process of dependency may also be particularly pertinent to the issue of gender (and as has already been touched upon in the previous chapter). A focus on definitions of institutionalisation also serves as a reminder that, in addition to a care background, the family itself is an example of a kinship institution. Therefore, it follows that both care institutions and family experiences can be explored together for the ways that they may 'institutionalise' men and women. In addition, having identified 'stratification institutions' (defined as those that distribute power and resources, Abercrombie 1994:216) it is suggested that homelessness may be examined from a functionalist perspective, for example, in the way

it functions within wider society. Finally, it is also important to note that there have been proposals under English legislation to extend priority need groups to include those 'who are vulnerable because they have an institutionalised or care background' (DTLR 2001, see also footnote 2). This change, therefore, reflects the increased recognition of the close relationship between the experience of institutions and homelessness.

The following section looks at the segregated nature of homelessness accommodation and its implications for the creation of gendered and institutional environments. The section also includes homeless people's preferences regarding single or mixed sex accommodation and the reasons that they give for those preferences.

8.2.2. Hostels as gendered environments

Most of the accommodation for single people interviewed for this research (22 out of a total of 37) was provided in the form of single sex hostel accommodation or single sex supported houses, and this reflects the dominant form of homeless provision in the city (see Chapter Three, Table 3.2, also Appendix Five). Largely due to this provision of single sex accommodation, it is possible to talk about broad differences in 'environment' which characterised the men and women's hostels.

The direct access men's hostels tended to be much bigger than the women's hostels, with the four adult council hostels each having bed spaces for over 200 men, as opposed to the sole women's hostel with bed spaces for over 60 women. As a partial consequence of this size difference, the men's hostel was more impersonal, with long corridors and large communal rooms. Both staff and residents described the men's hostels as violent and aggressive places. Many of the men, especially younger men, had long scars slashed down their faces, and the possession of knives was a frequent problem for staff (see also Fitzpatrick and Kennedy 2000:31). A manager commented on the regularity of men's violence in the hostels:

The reception is their area. If someone has got a grudge, staff have to walk through their public area. You do get threats. They see their problems as a priority; they see the staff as not being very helpful. There's regular friction if they think the staff don't like them... () Lots of the residents have got weapons... () Groups and cliques get together, it's mob rule (here) sometimes... () It's safer on the streets than in the hostels. (Duncan)

The women's hostel, by contrast to the men's, was much smaller and more domestic in appearance with bright paint and curtains at the windows. The negative aspect of the hostel was characterised, not so much by violence, as by a petty harassment and extortion (also present in the men's hostel), especially said to be perpetrated by the younger, drug-using women. In addition to harassment, a general tension was described between younger drug-using women and older alcohol-using women, similar to the men's hostel (see also Fitzpatrick and Kennedy 2000:32). Alongside these tensions, however, the specifically female engagement of some women in prostitution seemed to make a significant impact on daily life in the hostel for all the women. Consistent with this different focus, one of the increasing preoccupations of male staff in the women's hostel was the fear of harassment accusations from the younger women.

8.2.3. Preferences for single sex hostels or 'love boats'⁷⁵?

Gender differences emerged when people were asked whether they would have preferred single or mixed accommodation; the reasons for the choices given are perhaps revealing about relationships between men and women. For example, whereas women largely preferred to stay in women only hostels (seven out of nine), men were more divided on the subject of single sex accommodation (only four said they would prefer a men only hostel)⁷⁶. The reasons women gave for remaining in a single sex hostel included the friendships they described having there; in addition, the wish to avoid male violence, intimidation and unwanted sexual attention (also Carlen 1996, and McRobbie 1993 reported in Croft-White and Parry-Crooke

⁷⁵ 'Love boat' was the expression used by housing officers to describe mixed sex hostel accommodation.

⁷⁶ All of the respondents were in a single sex hostel at the time of interview except the under 18's who were in a mixed specialist young people's hostel.

1996:6). The desire to avoid male harassment is perhaps not surprising given the past experiences of this amongst many of the women interviewed (see Chapter Seven). Women's reasons for preferring mixed accommodation included getting away from the 'bitchiness' of an all-female environment (also Jones 1999:82).

In contrast men's reasons for preferring men only accommodation included the belief that women caused trouble between men (also Morrish 1993:19). The men who said they would prefer mixed accommodation, however, spoke of their desire for women's company, conversation and to diffuse the aggressive atmosphere of all-male hostels. Therefore, whilst some men seemed to be expressing positive thoughts about the future company of women, women interviewees did only in terms of breaking up an all-female environment. Overall, women did also express a greater dislike of hostel accommodation compared to men, something that housing officers mentioned in Chapter Six (section 6.4.1) as a partial justification for greater efforts on behalf of homeless women.

The accommodation preferences of homeless men and women is also suggestive of their future aspirations, such that men seemed to be looking forward more than women to future relationships. This difference perhaps suggests the emotional labour (James 1989) that women are expected to give in relationships and men expect to get, an asymmetry that can be perceived in the discourses of rehabilitation. For example, Morrish (1993:23) argues that there exists an explicit premise that genuine rehabilitation requires a mixed sex environment, but I would suggest that this is more often espoused in terms of men's rehabilitation rather than women's. Support for this qualification comes from Passaro (1996) when she suggests that women are seen as easier to rehabilitate because of dominant maternalist and protectionist ideology whereby women are viewed as dependent, worthier and /or more easily 'rehabilitatable' than men (1996:19). The following quote also captures the idea that homeless men would benefit from the chance of relationships with women:

Some mixed hostels work as men make an effort with women about. Cohabiting isn't a big problem. The guys maybe do fight over the women. Some more mixed hostels are probably a good idea. It also good for someone to have a chance at having a

relationship. Problems are more contained here. More mixed hostels are worth a try. Some private hostels do mixed hostels, only the SAC is mixed – more men than women though. I think it would be a different set of problems in a mixed hostel. Mixed would be better for some of the more stable residents but a great problem for people with extreme problems. In mixed hostels people would get a chance to get a relationship going. Girlfriends aren't allowed in these hostels. It's hard to stop people going against human nature (Duncan, all male hostel manager).

In conclusion the provision of single sex accommodation for homeless men and women strongly affected the type of environment that men and women experienced and strongly shaped their perceptions of them. Although the earlier given definitions of institutions do not mention sexual segregation, segregation would seem to be a key characteristic of homeless institutions.

8.2.4. Gendered meanings of home

Women generally elaborated more than men on the subject of what home meant for them. For example women wanted to be able to come and go through a door without censure, to be able to invite family and friends around to visit and the privacy and security of a front door to close. Most of the women who talked about 'door' control seemed to be referring to their *present* living circumstances in a hostel where staff had control over who came and went. The one exception to this was a woman who had suffered domestic violence who specified that her desire to control a door was in the context of her husband's past control:

'I would like to be able to say to you, Helen, would you like to come on Thursday night and visit with me ... () I would like to have control of myself as opposed to being controlled' (Jean 56).

A few women mentioned the more 'material side' of a home in terms of wanting bathrooms or having more room for stored possessions. In comparison to the women, men mentioned

material desires more frequently but this was in regard to owning a house or simply in expressing a desire for the permanence of a home (the major issue of young people as reported by Fitzpatrick *et al* 2000:9). No men mentioned wanting a front door to control or a desire for visitors, as women did, although for one man home was being able to have a dog again. The exception to positive projections of home came from a man who had been abused by his parents. Out of all of the respondents only one young woman and one young man (each of whom had just left the parental house) felt that home would be living again with their families (parent). All the other respondents indicated that home for them only involved others as visitors. That homeless people's future preference was primarily to live alone was also found by Anderson *et al* (1993).

So for the women it seems that home was a more central experience, an important locus or base from which they were free to come and go and give hospitality, as was also significant in the findings of Watson and Austerberry (1986:95). Men, on the other hand, seemed to emphasise ownership or a desire for permanence. All but one of the informants seemed readily to conceptualise a positive outline of what home was for them, including those women who had suffered from domestic violence. This might not have been expected in the light of research which points out that due to gender inequalities for many women, home is not a positive experience (Johnston and Valentine 1995, Tomas and Dittmar 1995, Wardhaugh 1999). The centrality of home to women may have further implications for the differences between the way men and women may be said to be institutionalised.

8.3 Gender, Hostels and Institutionalisation

8.3.1. *Long staying residents*

A number of people who had lived in hostels for a long time⁷⁷ (see Table 8.1) said that the hostel was their home. Jones (1999:60) argues that the people in her research who most liked hostels had been there the longest and were 'institutionalised', and Timms and Balasz (1997)

argue that hostels produce 'institutional deficits'. Although Jones does not elaborate on what she means by 'institutionalised', taking the definitions outlined earlier of institutionalisation, the evidence available suggests two things: first, that if people who lived in hostels for a long time were institutionalised, they were so in gendered ways; and second, that any current institutionalisation in living circumstances was related to previous experiences in institutions.

⁷⁷ Although hostels were designed for short term stays, in practice many homeless people stayed long term especially middle aged men and people with alcohol problems (Carlen 1996:61)

Table 8.1: Length of time homeless

Length of Time Homeless:	Women	Men
Over 5 years	May 62 H. (29 years), Martha 40 H. (17 years), Aida 54 SA. (13 years), Lily 41 H. (10 years), Elsie 61 SA. (7 years)	Sam 40s RS. (20 years), Graham 48 H. (17/18 years), Danny 30s SA. (15+ years), Jerry 55 T. (12 years), Douglas 27 H. (9 years),
1 year to 5 years	Jean 54 H. (4 & 1/2 years), Dee 27 H. (1 year*)	Tim 51 H. (4 years), Richard 27 H. (2 years), Malcom 52 T. (1&1/2 years)
3 month - 1 year	Andrea 34 H. (7 months*), Maria 33 H. (4 months*), Irene 33 TFF. (3 months),	Alan 54 SA. (10 months*), Frank 50 H. (5 months), Duncan 48 H. (4 months*)
0 - 3 months	Dorothy 60 H, Nancy 35 H*, Paula 30 TFF, Gillian 24 TFF, Frances 21 TFF, Sarah 20 TFF, Jane 18 TFF, Eleanor 16 TFF, Anna 16 TFF, Lucy 16 H.	Shaun 16 H, Wayne 18 H, Mark 17 H, Jeremy 16 H, Gavin 24 TFF*, Keith 27 TFF*,

*Incomplete information. Time spent where currently living but also known to have been homeless and / or living in hostels previously.

Key to where living at the time of interview: H = hostel, TFF = temporary furnished flat, SA = supported accommodation, RS = rough sleeping, T = own tenancy (but still using homeless services, see Chapter Two, section 3.5.2)

For example, Martha (40) described having lived in a care institution since she was ten and related her current living circumstances directly to this background:

I mean I will be honest with you – they just couldnae put me in a house, cos I wouldnae survive. I have got to have people around me because I am used to that because I have been in care all my life (Martha 40).

At the time of interview, Martha had lived in the women only council hostel for over two years. Between leaving care and the hostel she said that she had worked at various jobs, including being a singer. However, some (unspecified) 'bad incident' had happened to her in Dublin where she had been living that led to a nervous breakdown and some years in a psychiatric hospital. She was the eldest of seven children and described how she had mothered her younger siblings, a role that she seemed to be continuing with at the hostel:

OK I mean I am bad with my nerves... () I mean I have been in hospital with a nervous breakdown over what happened to me which I won't get into... () So I mean I don't think of myself as being homeless, I think of myself as being on a mission from God. ... () I have been in hostels for a long time and I am quite happy... () I mean it is amazing the work you can do in places like this... ().

Another of the women, Jean (56) who had lived in the hostel for four and a half years, also stressed her desire to help other people in the hostel, where she could. Jean had had an unhappy childhood, married young and had four children but she had also endured domestic violence for nineteen years. She left her husband once her children had grown up. Jean described how the violence she suffered wore her confidence down and how she started to misuse alcohol in order to cope (see Chapter Seven, section 7.5). It is suggested that both Martha and Jean exemplify a particular gendered response to their difficult backgrounds and current homelessness. Building on the previous chapter that argued that women who experience parental loss may try and compensate by having their own families, what is being suggested here is that, over and above raising a family, some women may try to care in other ways, regardless of their living circumstances. Therefore, in terms of institutionalisation, women's response may be to (continue to) care, with caring as a repetitive activity sanctioned by the social expectation / norm that women care (Hooper 1996). Further, rather than their caring being seen as apathetic or necessarily dependent, a gendered response for some women may be actively to embrace the system of care that they have been in, and to become carers themselves.

By contrast, a gendered response of some men to their circumstances and difficult backgrounds seemed to be to drink heavily. Amongst the interviewees, more men than women had had, or still had, an alcohol problem (see Chapter Seven, Table 7.4). These gender differences reflect the general finding that most heavy drinkers are male (Morrish 1993). Examples of heavy drinkers in this research included Graham (48) Douglas (27) and Danny (30s). Graham, for example, had been in a hostel for the last 16 years, since his parents put him out. For most of that time he said he was drinking, although at the time of interview he was trying to stay off the drink. Douglas had also been in hostels all of his adult life and was still drinking heavily. He said that his foster parents had put him out because of his drinking and he no longer saw them. He was interviewed at the homeless day centre which he attended daily for help with his budgeting because he said otherwise he would spend all his money on drink: 'money burns a hole in my pocket'. Finally, Danny had been in care since he was five and had suffered sexual and physical abuse from his parents:

This is home to me cause I never had a home. I've no family home. I got disowned when I was a child and got put into care and all that. Cause my family were alcoholics. I just got pushed aside by family and friends but this is my home. If I had to leave I would be back on the street, back on ma addiction (Danny 30s).

Although Danny had not only spent time in hostel accommodation (he had also slept rough, been in jail / hospitals and spent periods of time in employment and periods of time in 'dry houses'), he described an unsettled life dominated by his drinking:

I just went onto alcohol, continuing, non-stop, 24 hours a day, 24 hours a night, 48 hours a day, 48 hours a night. Round the clock. I just wisnae caring ... () This has been goin' on wi' us since I was 15 right up to this present moment but now I am starting to care about it.

Although the details of Graham's, Douglas's or Danny's life history with their parents, foster parents or carers are unknown, as was argued in Chapter Seven, it is possible that, as men, their upbringing did not adequately equip them to cope domestically. Moreover, without

these domestic skills, and in the absence of partners and / or employment, it is suggested that men may suffer from a lack of alternative roles. Furthermore into this role lacuna there are social norms that encourage men to drink (Morrish 1993, Macdonald 1994:129), to express their distress through alcohol (Meagher and Murray 1997) and to find friendship (Philips 1993) and result in drinking being taken to an extreme. Graham's friendships, for example, were still built around his drinking and at the time of the interview he was still 'drinking' daily with his friends in the 'wet room', albeit with a 'can of ginger'⁷⁸. Where an addiction in itself may be seen as an institution (repetitive social practice sanctioned by social norms), within hostels the drinking of men could be said to have been instituted and incorporated into the structure through the provision of 'wet rooms'. The women only hostel did not have a 'wet room' and, although some women such as Lily also drank heavily, they did not have the same 'social support' for their drinking. In other words, women do not have the same role models for drinking and there is a greater stigma attached (Morrish 1993); it is generally a more private and solitary affair (Macdonald 1994:132). Further, as Morrish (1993) points out, women's addiction is more likely to be seen as a mental health problem (1993:22), although it was actually Martha's 'divine calling' (see quote earlier) that hostel staff labelled a mental illness.

If it is accepted that a hostel is an institution, it may be said that people have been 'institutionalised'. More important, though, is the point that if hostels are institutions, they are gendered institutions. Therefore, if people have been homeless for a long time or lived in a hostel for a long time, they seem to have spent their time in gendered ways such as drinking or caring: gendered roles that are sanctioned by social norms. These gender differences may also be linked to women's greater capacity to conceptualise what home meant for them and their greater emphasis on friendships and sociability.

⁷⁸ 'Ginger' either refers to ginger beer or is used as a general expression for soft drink.

8.3.2. *The function of hostels and total institutions*

If it is accepted that a hostel is an institution, it may be worthwhile considering how hostels and homelessness in general function within wider society. With regard to prisons, for example, Foucault has argued that however they were originally conceived, prisons have always been used instrumentally. For example, according to Foucault, criminals were found to be economically and politically useful as threats against workers or in justifying the presence of police (in Gordon 1980:47). The large hostels were certainly described by some hostel workers as 'dumping grounds', where many people ended up from prisons and psychiatric hospitals, with all sorts of social problems. In addition, whereas other service providers (such as social work) were seen to pick and choose their clients, if they were also homeless then the duty fell on the housing authority (fieldwork diary 4/3/99),

Hostels would not seem to be the 'total institutions' as described by Goffman (1961). For Goffman, 'total institutions' are defined as social arrangements which regulate, under one roof and according to one rational plan, all spheres of an individual's lives: sleeping, eating, playing and working. Total institutions also assault key aspects of an individual's sense of self: through role dispossession; programming and identity-trimming; dispossession of name, property and 'identity kit'; imposition of degrading postures, stances, and deference patterns; contaminative exposure; disruption of usual relations of an individual actor; and finally restriction on self-determination, autonomy and control (in Branaman 1997:liv). Hostels, therefore, would not seem to fit the description of a 'total institution'. However, Passaro (1996) cites Gounis (1995) who argues that in North America homeless hostels *have* become a kind of total institution in the way they dehumanise, domesticate, debase and only serve to shelter in the sense that they shelter the general population especially from homeless men (1996:32). Passaro further comments that, because it is overwhelmingly men that are (visibly) homeless and dominate the hostel populations, then we should ask questions of wider society about why those men are 'expendable'. Although Passaro's question may seem more appropriate to North America, uncomfortable questions are important to anthropology and why men predominate amongst the visibly homeless and why this is an acceptable situation, are relevant questions.

8.4. Gendered Homelessness: Ways of Being

Some women who had been in and out of hostels for some time and who illustrated a gendered way of being homeless (other than caring) included a group of women, mostly in their late twenties or thirties, mostly drug using, all of whom were also involved in prostitution (see Chapter Seven, Table 7.5). Men who slept rough and / or who were involved in begging are an alternative example of gendered response to homelessness. Rough sleeping and / or begging were often accompanied by an addiction. Although only one man interviewed for this research slept rough at the time of interview, more men than women said that they had done so (11 men to 6 women). Rough sleeping is consistently found to be an experience that men are more likely to do⁷⁹ (Anderson *et al* 1993, Pleace *et al* 1997:6 and Smith 1999:121).

8.4.1. *Training' for prostitution*

In an ethnographic study of prostitution in Norway, Høigård and Finstad (1992) make a distinction between the reasons (or individual motivations) for prostitution (primarily economic) and the *processes* of becoming a prostitute (cited in Phoenix 1996). They argue that in addition to working class backgrounds, irregular home lives and difficulties with school or work, experiences of institutions are important as 'training grounds' for women in becoming prostitutes. In institutions, people in trouble are thrown together like 'surplus wreckage' and knowledge about ways to survive is inevitably exchanged (Høigård and Finstad 1992 in Phoenix 1996:62). More specifically, Høigård and Finstad point to key processes which women who become prostitutes are likely to undergo. First, there is a breakdown in respect for themselves, for other women and for men. Second, this breakdown in respect is translated and incorporated into a collective experience shared with other women. Third, a woman learns that her body is her most important asset. Fourth, from this

⁷⁹ Or which women go to greater lengths to avoid (Fitzpatrick 2000:140), or do it in more hidden ways (Passaro 1996:18-19).

combination of shared biographies, transformation of self-image and collective experience, a 'subculture'⁸⁰ of sharing often arises (or 'prostitute identity' Phoenix 1996); whereby 'prostitution is an act of solidarity and abstention is sponging' (Høigård and Finstad 1992 in Phoenix 1996:62-63). This idea of processes of the self is not dissimilar to what Goffman is arguing in relation to the way total institutions assault the self.

Høigård and Finstad's explanations constitute powerful insights into an understanding of prostitution, which did seem to 'ring true' regarding the lives and experiences of women involved in prostitution in this research. For example, the women that I spoke to did seem to share a collective identity and were proud of the economic independence that prostitution brought them. However, a point which Høigård and Finstad do not make, and which Phoenix adds, is that what constitutes for prostitute women the means for securing material and social survival is, at the same time, a set of relationships which also threaten survival (1996:2). This ambiguity was also recognised in this research in, for example, the less positive aspects of the women's work such as the health problems they faced, their guilt at letting their families down and the lack of support and stigma they encountered. A voluntary agency drugs worker commented on the ambiguous position of many prostitute women identified as simultaneously victims and agents: this could be captured in the frequently made justification 'I used to be abused for free, now I get money for it'.

An important aspect of this work on prostitution is how it highlights the role of prior institutions in providing a setting for a collective exchange of knowledge. This knowledge, I would argue in more explicit terms than Høigård and Finstad, is *gendered* knowledge. Thus, just as staff in the Homeless Persons Unit are involved in processes of consolidating and reinforcing collective (gendered) attitudes and practices towards homeless men and women, so too in institutions such as children's homes, refuges, prisons, psychiatric hospitals and homeless hostels, men and women are brought together and involved in sharing gendered ways of coping and surviving.

⁸⁰ This is Phoenix's term. Anthropologists remain highly critical of loose claims of culture (see Wright 1994).

A second useful function of this work on prostitution is that it provides a template for examining more widely gendered processes into homelessness. For example, Høigård and Finstad's description of the process of breakdown in self respect may be relevant for understanding the way women get stuck in situations of domestic violence as exemplified by Jean or Dorothy (see section 8.3.1 and Chapter Seven, section 7.4.3). In addition, the suggestion that women who become prostitutes develop a collective identity would seem to highlight another crucial point about domestic violence that one of the main difficulties for women leaving is that the experience is so individualised (Walby 1990:130). This template may also be used to try to illuminate equivalent processes that men may go through, before they engage in activities such as rough sleeping, begging or heavy drinking. The next section therefore focuses on exploring these equivalent masculine processes, but also considers the prior experience of specifically masculine institutions such as the military, institutions where men share gendered knowledge.

8.4.2. *Masculine institutions and masculine ways of being homelessness*

Men with a military background tend to be over-represented in homeless (male) populations (Higate 1997:109) and be more likely to rough sleep (Randall and Brown 1994:9). Rough sleeping has been identified as a primarily male activity (Anderson *et al* 1993, Pleace *et al* 1997:6 and Smith 1999:121), as has begging (Fitzpatrick and Kennedy 20007). Male drinkers outnumber female heavy drinkers (Morrish 1993, Hillier and Scambler 1997:122) and there is understood to be a significant overlap between all three activities (rough sleeping, begging and heavy drinking)⁸¹. As an example of masculine processes the case of Sam is considered; a man in his 40s who was a rough sleeper, begged, drank and had a military background. Although a military background is taken here as the starting point for a comparison with Høigård and Finstad, descriptions of military values, norms and processes are thought to be relevant more widely amongst many men⁸².

⁸¹ Taking drugs may also be the addictive substance especially of younger people who beg and / or rough sleep (Fitzpatrick and Kennedy 2000) but is less of a gendered (male dominated) activity.

⁸² Some regions have been identified as places where men display more 'macho' values than others. See for example Fitzpatrick and Kennedy (2000:31). This fieldwork location was also such a region.

As 'training grounds' for gendered survival activities such as begging, rough sleeping or drinking, a military institution would presumably qualify as a gendered experience *par excellence*. Military institutions are characterised, especially at the lower level ranks, by a strong team spirit, by self-discipline and as places where weakness of any sort would be regarded as failure (Higate 1997). Survival as a team of men is a military theme and their togetherness would be more positively valued than in the sorts of institutions where 'social wreckage' could be applied as a term (Høigård and Finstad 1992 in Phoenix 1996:61). These sorts of values, especially toughness, are identified as specifically masculine as opposed to feminine traits (Higate 1997:117). Drinking is also the basis for socialising in military settings (Higate 1997:115) and, in a study by Randall and Brown (1994) over three quarters of ex-service men said they drank and one in five admitted their drinking had caused them problems in the past with their housing (1994:25). In comparison to Høigård and Finstad's point about prostitute women often having similar biographies, Higate also makes the point that men often go into the military after previous care experiences or difficult family' lives (1997:119, also Crane 1999:19).

Where Høigård and Finstad outline processes of self transformation for a woman to become a prostitute such as through issues of respect, knowledge about self and solidarity with others, these issues could also be pertinent to the experience of leaving the military. Thus, a respect for self, and self as part of a military unit (which is an identity and often defined against the civilian population (Higate 1997)) might be shattered when a man has to leave the army. The military pride, toughness and invincibility of the male body as a fighting machine may undermine an ex-military man's sense of bodily self. Alternatively, ex-military men may retain a military attitude and try to 'tough it out' on the streets in all weathers. In a study of 77 ex-service men, Randall and Brown found that these men were more likely to have slept rough than other men without this background, and to sleep rough for longer periods (1994:9). On being questioned about the help they took or wanted when leaving the services, two thirds of these men said that they had not needed any help with their housing, over half said that they had not needed any help at all and 85% said that they did not get any help (1994:20). This relates to a further point made by Higate that, in the military, men are encouraged not to

ask for help as this would be regarded as a sign of weakness / femininity (1997:117) and which might, therefore severely restrict their ability to access support and / or accommodation services.

The sense of camaraderie in the military, with its masculine style of 'family belonging' and shared drinking, may be sorely missed on leaving the army and not uncommonly lead to continued drinking (Higate 1997). Sam (40s) for example, explained that he had chosen to tough it out on the streets and stated that anyone who tried to hurt him 'would be destroyed'. He was bitter about the way the army turned him out in disgrace and was adamant that only through being on the streets, rough sleeping and begging could he be fully in control. He was dressed in combat style camouflage and drank lager steadily throughout the 'interview'⁸³. He did not explain exactly how he had come to leave the army, but made veiled references to losing his wife and children (see quote by Sam in section 7.6.1). However, he stated clearly that the loss of his life in the army was a greater blow than the loss of family. Lifton (1992) argues that people who have survived and suffered (what they may feel as) extreme victimisation, often conflate feelings of pride in survival with a critique of the society seen to be responsible for that suffering. When this occurs, people are reluctant to buy into the society that caused their pain (Lifton 1992 in Carlen 1996:73). This description seems to fit with Sam's account of why he stayed on the streets and similar accounts were also reported in Fitzpatrick and Kennedy (2000:19) who also mention the camaraderie of the streets (although it was thought that these experiences were not very common).

In conclusion, certain masculine values such as self-reliance and pride have been identified as values especially embodied in military training but also representing ideals of masculine behaviour. It is further suggested that such values may become important to a person's identity and help to explain why men are more likely to live and remain on the streets (sleeping and / or begging) in a way that women are less likely to do (although there would be additional negative factors that would deter women).

⁸³ The interview with Sam was not as formal as it had been with other informants. He was initially very reluctant to be interviewed but later bargained with me: if I accompanied him begging for an hour he would answer my questions. After a couple of hours he granted me an interview. This experience also gave a valuable insight into the alarming level of harassment that a woman on the streets might expect from other men.

8.4.3. *Embodying public homelessness*

Wardhaugh (1999) argues that men and women embody the experience of being homeless in different ways, either through differences in managing their body space or through 'identity work'. She argues that in homelessness (presumably especially at the 'roofless' end of homelessness see Chapter Two, section 2.2.1) the body becomes the first line of defence and that men and women may respond to this threat in gendered ways. These responses either take the form of contracting or expanding the body's boundaries, or embracing or distancing from the homelessness role. Following fairly typical lines of the traditional public / private - male / female argument (see Rosaldo 1974, Moore 1988, Duncan 1996), Wardhaugh sees men as having more options than women to adopt an assertive bodily attitude: men can either claim the streets individually, (when begging for example) or seek to claim the streets en masse by linking up with a group of men. Sam, for example, certainly seemed to assert himself physically and verbally on the streets and had a 'performance' style of begging (see also Fitzpatrick and Kennedy 2000:26). During the time that I was with him he made frequent and dramatic gestures, gregariously verbally accosting most passers-by with comments such as; 'Marry me!' (to women), 'Give us a go in your car!' or, 'What have I done?!' According to Wardhaugh, women, by contrast, have to disappear on the streets for fear of harassment and do not have the same 'safety in numbers' option that men have (1999:104). Daly (1998) also notes that whereas homeless men were encouraged by hostel staff to go out and use the city's networks, women were encouraged to stay in (1998:122) Amongst Wardhaugh's informants no women, only men, expressed any confidence about being on the streets (1999:104). 'Bag ladies' were the exceptions, and being a prostitute was the only other 'public' female option.

Whilst there is a substantial body of criticism (eg Strathern 1980, Pateman 1989) against the public/private argument on which Wardhaugh (1999) draws, her comments do help to explain observed gender differences in public forms of homelessness such as rough sleeping.

Wardhaugh's theories are consistent with the publicly risky activities of shoplifting, theft and

robbery that men are more likely to take part in to support an addiction (see Table 7.7). These activities are assertive, liable to harsher judicial sentences and are therefore more 'manly' (Young 1994, Pilcher 1999:132). In a similar way to women learning that prostitution is an option for them, men perhaps learn their crimes from other men as the proper masculine way to make money. Although Wardhaugh only mentions prostitution in passing, women who do work as prostitutes can, to an extent, be accommodated by her theories. For example, although being a prostitute does often force women into 'public' street work, the very nature of their work is 'intimate' or 'private' in terms of bodily invasion. Thus women working as prostitutes can be said to be negotiating public and private issues in relation to their bodies and their work (also Mitchell 1995 cited in Duncan 1996:127).

8.4.4. *Gender, responsibility and dependence*

Wardhaugh's (1999) ideas have the support of Morrish (1993) in terms of men's, often public, communal drinking and sharing arrangements that are not paralleled by groups of women. These 'drinking schools' involve men sharing their alcohol, benefit payments and money from begging to ensure that the group always has drink (Morrish 1993:6, Fitzpatrick and Kennedy 2000:27). The women who also drank, from Morrish's findings, remained peripheral to the core male groups⁸⁴.

The camaraderie of men's drinking groups, men who rough sleep, and homeless men generally was also commented on by a female development worker at the main day centre:

In homelessness there is a sense of community in its own right. People are looking out for you, there is a belonging. This makes it hard to resettle. This is for men though, it's probably not the same for women. They (women) don't have such a camaraderie in homelessness...() Institutionalisation brings with it a sense of community, it's an extremely strong bond and you just wouldn't get this in a flat...(); men are more easily

⁸⁴ As was noted in Chapter Five 'wet rooms' are more likely to be found in men's hostels whereas the women's hostel did not have such facilities (also mentioned in this chapter 8.3.1).

subsumed into the culture of homelessness. There is something attractive about it to them. The men own the stereotype, abdication of responsibility is what they want. They don't want to do the dishes, sort out the bills, do the washing, do the shopping and have a flat. They want all their money for drink, not bills...(). It's not OK for women in the same way...() There is something macho about homelessness. You do hear men going, 'I've been skippering⁸⁵ for five years', 'I've been skippering for ten years', 'I've been skippering before you were born'. They do compete, its hardness. Never heard women before bragging about this, about who skippered the longest. It's a bit like a brotherhood. Revenges will happen. There's a complex network, very macho. If one guy gets hassled, then his mates will get back for him. Women probably aren't part of this. Maybe some women emulate this to survive, but for most women it just isn't like this.

This quote, from the point of view of an observer who had worked for many years in homelessness provision, consolidates and lends support to several theoretical positions that have been developed above. In this quote, the development worker also suggests a further motivation for the behaviour of homeless men as being due to a preference for the abdication of responsibilities. This feeds into the idea suggested in Chapter Seven about men's lack of domestic training and is supported by Thomson *et al* (1998) who argue that from an early age women embrace responsibility as a value in a way that men do not.

This issue of gendered responsibility and irresponsibility seems to feed into an important point about gender and dependence. Men and women, in specifically gendered ways, locate themselves and identify with the issue of dependence (also O'Connor 1996). For example, within marriage, men have normatively depended on women domestically and women have depended on men economically, so that addressing economic independence has been a particular concern of the feminist movement. In homelessness, I would argue, men and women continue to negotiate their identities around issues of dependence. For example, relations of dependence and independence exist in relationships between men and women (domestic / economic / emotional) and so therefore may be challenged in gendered ways on relationship breakdown. Relations of dependence and independence continue to be relevant

⁸⁵ Skippering' is another term for rough sleeping.

with, for example, women who work in prostitution (independent income but dependent upon male clients and vulnerable therefore to male violence). It may also exist in situations of rough sleeping, or for people who do not claim welfare benefits, and finally relations of independence and dependency may be significant during periods of addiction (freedom from emotional / societal worries or constraints but physically addicted).

Passaro (1996) touches on the issue of gender and dependency when she talks about homeless men occupying the contradictory position of being both emasculated and hypermasculinised. 'These men appear to be independent of the control of women, family and society, and thus are considered dangerous, violent and aggressive... (). Accompanying these hypermasculinised images are emasculated ones – homeless men are failed men, in traditional gender terms, because they are dependent and unable to support themselves' (1996:1-2).

Passaro does not see the same contradictions operating amongst homeless women, but instead sees their dependency in homelessness as consistent with their general dependent state.

However, as has been discussed in Chapter Six, some homeless women, especially women who also drink or work in prostitution, definitely do straddle similar contradictions to those set out by Passaro for men. For example, a woman who works as a prostitute becomes in a sense hyperfeminised as society defines her primarily through her public sexuality. On the other hand she is denied her womanhood because she is so sexually public, especially if she has had children who she no longer lives with. It would seem, then, that there are important issues around gender and dependency, which continue to be important in homelessness. Men and women are partly defined through issues of dependency and may actively attempt to define themselves against it.

8.5. Conclusions: Gendered Barriers to Getting Out of Homelessness

The final section of this chapter concludes with a brief examination of the ways gendered barriers obstruct men and women in getting out of homelessness.

The first main gender barrier to getting out of homelessness follows directly from the previous sections of this chapter. Here it is argued that the gendered activities that men and women get caught up in, such as men's drinking and women's involvement in prostitution, also prevent their moving on. Primarily, the activities that engender a sense of identity and belonging are identified as particularly problematic in moving beyond homelessness successfully. In relation to men's drinking, the easy affordability of drink, the relative social acceptance that men will drink and the sense of friendship that is involved in group drinking all seemed major obstacles for men. Likewise the economic pull of the money and the 'girls' getting ready to go out was something which Dee said she found hard to resist, despite having also said that she was trying to control her drug addiction and preferred to 'keep herself to herself'. This is what Høigård and Finstad (1992 in Phoenix 1996) were referring to earlier, when they outlined the sense of belonging that many women found once they entered prostitution and goes some way to explaining why some people who are no longer homeless continue to use homeless services, as was the case with two of the informants for this study.

The second gendered barrier to be considered, and which applies more to men than women, is one of the central arguments of this thesis. The argument is that attitudes towards the abilities of homeless men to be successfully rehoused constituted a significant barrier for them, in a way that was not apparent with women. To elaborate, there was a greater concern to accommodate women, a greater expectation that women would want to 'return' to their own (domestic, individual) accommodation, and more services were provided for women so that they could be better helped towards a domestic goal. By contrast, similar concern and encouragement did not seem to exist in the same way for men (also Passaro 1996).

In terms of the services that the men and women interviewed reported using, more women (14) than men (8) said that they used a support service. More men also asserted that they needed no support (4) whereas only one woman said this. From staff reports of services available, for example, to residents in men and women's hostels women's hostels apparently offered a variety of services, whereas services for men seemed to be both offered less and used less. Interestingly, in the following quote the manager also gives further support to the idea that men use drink to express themselves:

Men are more reluctant to talk, it would be better to talk if they could. There are informal support mechanisms and some practical support. When men drink - then they get emotional, then feel bad because they let their secrets out. Very few take up opportunities of support or counselling, and the services which could be offered are limited (Derek – Men's Hostel Manager).

A further illustration of gender differences in resettlement work was an example given by the women's hostel manager of her experiences in setting up an older person's accommodation project. The new project consisted of clusters of four flats and had been built for older men and women who had been homeless but had no additional problems and no support needs. The hostel manager who was also responsible for filling these places said that she could not find four women (for a segregated cluster) who qualified under these criteria. Her explanation for this problem was that women with no support needs or problems would be in their own tenancies whereas many men in equivalent situations were still living in hostels.

This gender difference in resettlement expectations can be related to debates on whether service provisions should aim at 'containing' or 'changing' homeless people (Crane 1999:152-154). For example, the greater provision of accommodation spaces, services such as wet rooms and long established day centres could all indicate that homeless provision aims to facilitate the containment of men to a greater extent than it does women. Likewise, the encouragement of service take up for women and the provision of more specialised services may be said to add up to a greater expectation that women will 'change' in some way and go back to independent living. This theme has been reinforced through Chapter Six, with its arguments about a leniency towards women and yet not turning away 'troublesome' men. These 'external' attitudes from staff and service providers may also both be internalised and reflect homeless men and women's own attitudes towards themselves and their abilities.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS

9.1. Conclusions and Summary of Findings

This final chapter concludes the study, summarises the main findings in answer to the central research questions, considers how the research has extended and contributed to knowledge, reflects on the methods used and ends with ideas for future research.

Previous homelessness research has tended to ignore the issue of gender; research that does consider gender tends to do so only in terms of adding in the experiences of homeless women in specific areas such as experiences of services (see Chapter Three, section 3.2). This research has addressed this gap, and tried systematically to explore the ways in which homelessness is a gendered phenomenon by directly comparing homelessness amongst men and women and critically engaging with gender theory. More specifically, this research has examined: if homelessness legislation is gendered; if there are gender differences in the implementation of homelessness legislation; if homelessness administrative organisations (statutory), support services (statutory and non statutory) and accommodation (statutory and non statutory) are gendered; if there are differences in the reasons why men and women become homeless; if there are any differences in the way men and women experience homelessness; and if there are barriers to people getting out of homelessness that are gender specific.

In terms of the approach of this research and the way it was carried out, the comparisons between men and women were made in a specific British city context. However, it is not thought that the findings of this research are unique to the city where the fieldwork was carried out. Gendered assumptions and practices are not region specific, although there may be particular local manifestations (see also Silverman 1993:160). The decision to take an ethnographic approach to the subject of gender had implications for both perspective and choice of methods. The perspective has been to focus on micro processes and everyday contexts and to emphasise the meaning and function of social action. The methods included the use of a range of data collection methods and, most importantly, included an observational

element. An ethnographic approach, characteristic of anthropological research, has also supported the engagement with gender theory so that gender differences have not been taken at face value but explored for what they may represent. Unpacking assumptions about men and women in homelessness has been a central theme of this research and is essential when attempting to look behind, for example, homelessness statistics, which are often unhelpful and misleading.

The most significant findings which emerged are outlined below and are set out in answer to the central research questions:

1. Do men and women get treated differently by housing officers and, if so, how and why?
2. Are homelessness services gendered services?
3. Do men and women become homeless in gender specific ways?
4. Are men and women's experiences when homeless different from each other and in what ways?

9.1.1. Do men and women get treated differently by housing officers and, if so, how and why?

This research has found that men and women do get treated differently by housing officers. Women on the whole tend to be treated better. This was apparent in the time and effort housing officers would spend on a person's case, in the interpretation of priority need so that women would still be accommodated when hostels were full, in the informal transport arrangement whereby women would get a lift to their emergency accommodation, in the distinction made between domestic and external violence and in the way women with children did not have to prove custody. The favourable treatment of women was an informal agreement that most, but not all, housing officers adhered to.

The informal agreement that housing officers should be more lenient towards women was maintained through the way housing officers worked. Although each housing officer took on one case at a time, most cases were discussed with colleagues and managers, and decisions

taken were by consensus. Within this process of decision-making and discussion, gendered assumptions, beliefs and norms were present which influenced housing officers' decisions. The use of discretion was also an essential element in affording housing officers the flexibility to treat men and women differently. A qualification to the statement that women were treated better is that gender conformity was also important. Therefore, although women were on the whole treated better, men who behaved well, as men, (or behaved badly but in ways expected of men) did not receive such bad treatment as women who did not conform to gender norms. The decision making process was a site of active negotiation between housing officers and homeless people, both drawing on ideas and norms about gender.

It was suggested that the reasons why women were generally treated better include: women being seen as more vulnerable and more 'deserving' (less to blame) for their situation; the shortage of accommodation for women and the belief that women would be less able to cope in hostel type accommodation; and the nature of women's circumstances - often the primary carers of children and a significant proportion fleeing domestic violence. These reasons are related to, and examples of, the patriarchal social structure that is the context of women's lives. Finally, the smaller number of women that housing officers saw may also have contributed to their being singled out as a group for special attention; the work of housing officers was difficult and it was suggested that having favourite groups helped to give a sense of job satisfaction.

Although homelessness legislation did not explicitly suggest that men and women be treated differently, the legislation was not entirely gender neutral. It was shown to potentially to disadvantage men fleeing external violence and fathers who wanted a more equal right to accommodation and to advantage women fleeing violence (although in the detail of the legislation, women fleeing violence did not fare as well as may have initially been thought). The gendered language of the legislation and the implicit model of family and social roles upon which it was still based were thought to have implications for men and women's subsequent treatment. Furthermore, gender was present in the legislation in a way that functioned ideologically in the legitimisation of the legislation. In terms of gender theory therefore, it is suggested that gender differences were partly created and reinforced through

homelessness legislation and that these would have an impact on the implementation of the legislation. Finally, the legislation was also the primary site for setting out the basic distinction between family and single homelessness, which has obscured a gendered understanding of homelessness and the ability to draw direct comparisons between men and women.

9.1.2. Are homelessness services gendered services?

It was found that homeless services are gendered services. The housing authority that administered statutory homeless accommodation (HPU and SAC) was a gendered workplace where gendered styles of working were observable. These gendered styles included differences in attitude towards the aims of an interview and in the relationships established with clients. These had implications for the amount of work that was achievable. The working environment in the HPU and SAC were also observed to have gendered aspects.

The accommodation and support services provided for homeless people were also gendered. The system of homelessness services had been set up chiefly for men so that women were at a disadvantage. This meant, for example, that there was more choice in accommodation for men and the options available for women were severely constrained especially in certain situations such as for women who faced evictions. The segregated and gendered nature of hostels and support accommodation also had implications for the ways that men and women learnt to survive either in hostels or on the streets, especially in terms of sustaining addictions. Support services that were apparently open to both men and women were not necessarily so accessible in practice due to gendered ways of working in a service, ways of offering services and the dominance of one (usually male) client group. The existence of specialist services aimed at women did not necessarily compensate for the fact that the system was set up for men, largely because the numbers of women that those services could cater for were so small. Therefore, the favourable treatment of women observed in the HPU and SAC was not necessarily followed through in terms of accommodation and homeless support services.

Further gender differences existed when children were also considered. In the context of this research the administrative implications of the legislative distinction between single homelessness and family homelessness has meant that families were dealt with by less specialist staff and were dealt with more rigorously. The consequences of a negative decision were also more serious for homeless families (affecting proportionately more women in lone parent circumstances) because even if a single person was not deemed to be in priority need, they were usually offered accommodation, whereas families were not. Homeless families were also offered a different type of support to single people and were excluded from many mainstream homeless services. It was suggested that gendered assumptions underlie this difference in support. Parents who were not living with their children were disadvantaged in that there was little support for them as parents and significant obstacles for them as part time parents. This was particularly the case for men, but also seemed to affect a significant number of women. This lack of support for parents was short-sighted given the finding (also in this research) that a disrupted upbringing is a factor in later homelessness.

9.1.3. Do men and women become homeless in gender specific ways?

It was found that there were gender differences in the reasons why men and women became homeless. The loss of one parent was common in childhood descriptions that homeless interviewees gave and the effects were either immediate (usually in the case of homelessness of younger people) or resulted in longer-term effects (as was possible to tell from the cases of older homeless people). Accounts from people of all ages showed gendered patterns. The loss of mothers was more significant in explanations of homelessness than the loss of fathers. It was suggested that parental loss may have influenced women to start their own family at a young age and further, that any problems stemming from a disturbed upbringing amongst women who started a family young, seemed to have had a delayed effect. For some men, homelessness followed immediately upon parental death and it was further suggested that some men's homelessness was influenced by a social organisation whereby men are not 'domestically skilled' to the same extent as women. For younger men, the effect of parental

loss (or 'replacement') impacted to a greater extent on their family roles than for younger women.

More women referred to relationship breakdown as a significant factor in their homelessness than men and domestic violence was a strong feature in these breakdowns. Domestic violence and addictions were examples of (gendered) problems that were connected with parental loss. More older men reported having alcohol problems and that alcohol had been instrumental in their homelessness, and there were gender differences in the reasons homeless men and women gave for alcohol use. The link between employment, relationship breakdown, addiction and homelessness was a close one, especially for some men. Women with a history of drug or alcohol abuse mentioned the responsibility for childcare as an extra factor in their not being able to cope.

9.1.4. Are men and women's experiences when homeless different from each other and in what ways?

Women generally seemed to be supported more towards independent accommodation, so that the favourable treatment of women by housing officers seemed to be continued by staff in support and residential services. Expectant and encouraging attitudes towards women did not seem to exist to such a large extent towards men. This difference in attitudes about gendered capabilities (possibly related to domestic skills) constituted a significant barrier for men moving out of homelessness. The barriers which women faced seemed to have been understood to a greater extent than the gendered barriers for men.

The high numbers of people who were homeless and who had addictions also showed gendered patterns. People seemed to live with their addictions in gendered ways and this may have been related to staff perceptions of gendered abilities and the organisation of homeless services. Gendered ways of living in homelessness also had implications for the constraints that men and women faced in getting out of homelessness. Friendship groups and organisational tolerance combined to support the heavy drinking of men and affected their

chances of getting out of homelessness. Gender roles and identities were relevant to understanding gendered addictions and ways of being homeless as exemplified by men who slept rough and women involved in prostitution. Both gendered identities may have contributed to sustaining addictions and increasing the duration of homelessness. Gender and dependency were themes that ran through the reasons why men and women became homeless, their experiences during homelessness and issues involved in getting out of homelessness.

9.2. Contribution to Knowledge

The contribution of this research to knowledge has been in the way it has directly compared the experiences of homeless men and women across many aspects of homelessness. Gender differences have been identified and explained in relation to: homelessness legislation; the everyday implementation of homelessness legislation; gender differences in staff practices; the reasons why people become homeless; the pathways into homelessness; the ways people live when homeless; and the barriers to getting out of homelessness. The research has not been limited to a specific age range, or been constrained by the distinction between single and family homelessness and so has been able to include gender and parenting issues in the overall picture.

The gender differences identified in the research have also been explored in terms of gender theory relating both to epistemological and methodological concerns. That is, gender has been understood as a 'way of knowing' that was used, for example, by housing service workers who assumed that men were less able to be rehoused successfully than women. Gender was examined beyond the idea of concrete differences and as also existing at the level of ideas, which nonetheless may turn into concrete differences in services available. Homelessness, then, is a site wherein gender is both constructed and experienced.

An understanding of gender as a relational concept, inextricably tied up with power, has complemented the methodological understanding about power in the research process and informed the decision to study both 'up' and 'down'. Studying 'up' and 'down' the

organisations that administer homelessness and the people that use them has led to a second key finding, not previously identified, that gender is a significant factor in the assignment by housing officers to the informal categories 'deserving' or 'undeserving'. Gender was also seen as a resource for homeless people in their negotiation with service providers. Therefore studying 'up' and 'down' has facilitated a focus on housing officers and homeless people in active negotiation, neither side totally constrained nor passive and both drawing on ideas of gender to make their case. The triangulation of research methods has further strengthened this finding so that admittances of gender bias by housing officers have been supported by observations of this going on, and thus have illuminated the process by which it happens. The observational element is also fairly unusual in the field of housing / homelessness research.

Because of the theoretical and methodological decision to make gender the key point of comparison, the research has not been confined to the distinction between single and family homelessness. Having therefore explored the subject of gender and homelessness unfettered by this distinction, important connections have been highlighted. For example, the lack of services for 'single' people with children has become more prominent, as have the extra problems faced by lone fathers or 'single' men with children. In the particular context of this research, there were also key administrative differences that made it harder for families to be accepted. In addition, it has become clearer that the gendered assumptions built into homelessness legislation which favour women with children and men without, make it harder for women without children and men with children to gain access to secure housing.

In the introduction to this thesis, it was stated that, through a focus on gender, the research would speak to a theoretical lacuna in homelessness research. Important theoretical aspects of this research have therefore included the identification that the domestic abilities of men are useful in helping to explain the reasons why some men are homeless and highlighting the particular skill barriers that older men have faced and which young men still seem to be facing. Furthermore, this theory of domestic deskilling has not been understood as the failure of individual men, but as a societal norm. A second area of theoretical development relates to the further elaboration of the discretionary processes of housing officers. The previously

recognised categories of deserving and undeserving are now known to be also influenced by considerations of gender, and the reasons and mechanisms behind this have been outlined.

This research has also contributed theoretically to new knowledge in that it has systematically extended and reinterpreted areas of previous knowledge as gendered knowledge. For example, it was already known that alcohol and drugs were factors in the reasons why some people become homeless and why some people remain homeless. However, this research has also identified that alcohol problems develop in gendered ways and are more likely to be sustained organisationally in the homelessness of men rather than women. It is further suggested that certain 'addicted social identities' may exist which are more likely to be adopted by either men or women and which may also hinder a person's ability to get out of homelessness.

The precise research aim in Chapter One was 'to examine the extent to which homelessness is a gendered phenomenon'. It is important, therefore, to reflect on the overall importance of gender in homelessness. However, if you look for something, you tend to find it and gender has indeed been found to be relevant and manifest in a variety of ways. It is difficult to evaluate the extent to which gender is important because it depends on your perspective. This project, then, has magnified the importance of gender in all areas but it is felt that gender has also been a lens through which greater insights and understanding have been made about the nature of homelessness. The experiences of homelessness are patterned by gender and some experiences are gender specific. Our ideas and assumptions about gender do profoundly affect the experiences of homelessness.

9.2.1. Methodological reflection

With hindsight, there are three changes that I would make if I were able to do this research again, although all of these changes would be supplementary to the existing fieldwork. Two of them would involve more ethnographic methods, especially participant observation and the last one would involve focus groups. Having said this, only the first of these proposals could

have been fitted into the time frame available; the second and third would have required more time and may not have been feasible for the scale of this research.

The first addition would be to volunteer at one of the homelessness day centres early on in the research and during the analysis and writing stages. Ideally I could have volunteered at the main day centre, which at the start of my fieldwork only admitted men, although women were subsequently allowed in. This would have helped to inform me more on gendered issues, from the perspectives of both homeless people and staff. However, a strict fieldwork diary would have had to be kept in order to keep the insights 'fresh' and the knowledge from being too taken-for-granted. It would also have been a useful 'sounding board' throughout the analysis and writing process. The second addition would have been to do some focus groups with housing officers to try and understand more about their ideas of gender difference in a collective interview setting. The discussion of gender, with the agreements and disagreements between housing officers, would have been interesting to supplement my ideas on gender norms and consensual working. However, any focus groups would have had to be done at the end of my observations in the HPU and SAC as the nature of my questioning may have influenced their subsequent behaviour towards homeless men and women. The third addition that I would have made would have been to follow up a little more the issue of gender assumptions and resettlement issues. These issues came to the fore in interviews with homeless people and service providers and it would have been good to follow this up with more fieldwork with some resettlement teams. A participant observation exercise for a couple of weeks may have offered insight into this process.

9.3. Future Research

The scope for future research is almost limitless, but I will confine myself to three matters that would be of most practical and / or theoretical benefit.

The first idea is derived from the limitation of this research whereby it was possible only to take a snapshot look at the gendered aspects of the HPU and SAC and thereby also only to

draw limited conclusions about the long term outcome of gender favouritism. A future piece of research could attempt to follow, over a longer time period, a cohort of men and women who became homeless and presented themselves as homeless to the housing authority. These people could be interviewed at regular intervals and their progress recorded through different sorts of temporary accommodation and support services. This type of study would be useful for exploring (and hopefully confirming) the effects of gender over a longer time frame and also show more clearly the areas where individuals may fall through the net of provision. Although it is anticipated that there would be problems in following people up for interviews, if a large enough sample were taken initially, there should be enough people at the end of the time period to make useful conclusions.

A second idea is based on the observation that this research has built on and drawn upon an extensive body of previous research on homelessness. The PhD was co-sponsored by Shelter through a CASE studentship and has involved a close working relationship with this campaigning organisation, which tries to make any research it does practical and liaises closely with policy makers. However, given the knowledge we have about homelessness coupled with the awareness that homelessness still causes an immense amount of suffering, the relationships between research, policy and practice could be explored, perhaps using Shelter as a case study. For example, the research could look at the communication process between policy staff at Shelter who try and impact on policy staff in Government through meetings with civil servants, publications, media events and identify where there are blockages to good communication, new ideas or resistance to old ideas. It would be an anthropological investigation of the very topical 'evidence based policy', but including a reflexive, and probably uncomfortable, examination of the everyday process of making policies and putting those policies into action.

A third and final research idea that stems from this study could be a much more focused examination of homelessness and the existence and recognition of mental health problems. Having strictly limited the focus of this thesis to areas of homelessness that seemed most relevant to gender, the issue of how people with mental health problems were treated was not pursued in any depth. However, a number of cases of people with mental health problems

and learning difficulties were observed, and it was apparent that mental health problems were poorly understood by the housing officers. It was also clearly apparent that the relationship between mental health problems and homelessness is a vast and complicated area, and one that would benefit greatly from further study. One approach could be to do another participant observation study looking at the different types of interpretations of the term 'vulnerability' as found in homelessness legislation. Another approach could perhaps explore the public understanding of mental health problems from the point of view of the housing officers, which might reveal further gendered assumptions.

It is clear from this research that a gendered analysis illuminates many aspects of homelessness and should, therefore, be a more central preoccupation of homelessness research. Furthermore, if gender is to be properly understood this does not mean that it would be an 'add on' to existing work, nor that it is confined to gender research, but an integral part in all homelessness research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Description of interviews with staff from homelessness organisations

Description of role of interviewee	Description of Organisation	Type of Organisation
Chief Housing Officer	Homeless Persons Unit	Statutory – Housing
Housing Officers	Homeless Persons Unit	Statutory– Housing
Receptionist at HPU	Homeless Persons Unit	Statutory– Housing
Hostel manager	Women’s Hostel	Statutory– Housing
Depute manager	Women’s Hostel	Statutory– Housing
Hostel manager	Men’s Hostel	Statutory– Housing
Depute manager	Men’s Hostel	Statutory– Housing
Hostel staff	Young Persons' Hostel	Statutory– Housing
Homelessness team	Social Work Department	Statutory - Social Work
Drug Outreach Worker	Social Work Department	Statutory - Social Work
Homeless Families Health Care Team	Health Centre	Statutory - Health
Community psychiatric nurse	Health Centre	Statutory – Health
Worker at a Housing Association that specialises in ethnic minority issues.	Housing Association	Voluntary Sector
Hostel manager	Homeless Charity	Voluntary Sector
Hostel manager	Homeless Charity II	Voluntary Sector
RSI funded development worker	Day Centre for Homeless People	Voluntary Sector
Outreach Worker	Centre for Young Homeless People	Voluntary Sector
Research and development worker	Day Centre for Young Homeless Young Persons	Voluntary Sector
Director	Co-ordinating body to support single homeless people	Voluntary Sector
Manager	Housing Advice Centre	Voluntary Sector
Team of development workers	Mental Health Association	Voluntary Sector
Development worker	Women’s Refuge	Voluntary Sector
Development worker	Residential and support organisation for sexually abused single women	Voluntary Sector
Manager and development worker	Women’s Drug Project	Voluntary Sector
Research and development Worker	Prostitution Support Centre	

Appendix 2: Participant observation guide (what to look for in homeless assessments).

Sitting-in on homelessness assessments (Homeless Persons Unit, Secondary Assessment Centre, Neighbourhood Housing Offices) with / without a tape recorder.

1. place, date, time, all people involved - homeless person / people, children present, staff
2. gender, ages and other relevant social characteristics eg ethnicity
3. preliminary background to meeting
4. basic details of 'case'
5. how person presents situation - what homeless person wants
6. what are staff trying to find out - what staff offering
7. what information is required - what information left out - what still needed
8. tension - what the negotiation centres on
9. relevant legislation - how it is applied / interpreted
10. general balance of power throughout - who initiates - who does most talking
11. process of interaction - how starts / initial facts - computer check - interview - what checks / phone calls / manager involvement - follow up interview - how left
12. sites of decision making - with homeless person - in back office - with manager - from computer information before start - after all information obtained
13. general attitudes of client
14. general attitudes of staff
15. obvious gendered content of assessment
16. gendered play in negotiations
17. obvious gendered interpretations of situation
18. physical environment - and how this affects interaction
19. influence of my presence / my role in unfolding situation
20. how ends / how things left / how happy the homeless person seems
21. any final resolution to follow up

Appendix 3: Interview topic guides - Housing officers

1. What is your role here?
 - How would you describe the role of this organisation?
 - What are its aims and its philosophies?
 - Who are the services of this organisation for?
 - Is it possible for you to describe a 'typical' person who uses these services?
2. Would you say there is a stereotype of homeless people?
 - Are these popular images more about men or women?
 - What do you think of these stereotypes in relation to your own experiences of homeless people?
3. How do you feel about balancing the needs of homeless people on the one hand, and the need for rationing limited resources on the other? How do you try and work with this dilemma?
 - Are there particularly problematic areas for implementing the homelessness legislation?
 - Do you agree with the principle, reflected in the legislation, that family homelessness is prioritised over single homelessness?
 - Do you think the homelessness legislation and Code of Guidance favours men or women in any way? Do you generally think it is fair?
4. What are the main reasons for homelessness given by the people that you work with?
 - What reasons do women / men give?
 - How do you feel men / women cope with their homeless situation?
 - Do you think that once men/women are homeless they experience greater difficulties because they are men / women?
5. Do you feel that you ever give different advice if it is a homeless man or woman?

- Do you think, as a woman / man, that it is easier to relate people of the same sex who are homeless?
- Do you think that there are any differences between the way male and female colleagues generally work and relate to people?

6. Why do you think there are more hostel spaces for men than women?

⇒ *Reflects the fewer nos. of homeless women?*

⇒ *Fewer nos. of women willing to use hostel spaces?*

⇒ *Because traditionally provision has been focused on men and hasn't caught up with demand?*

⇒ *If equal nos. of beds provided would equal nos. of men and women come forward?*

7. From your experience what are the key issues to be addressed to tackle homelessness?

8. Is there anything important which you think I've missed and you'd like to mention?

9. What did you think of the questions?

Additional questions for service providers

1. What does this organisation do? How do you see your organisation's role in tackling homelessness?
 - What are its aims and its philosophies?
 - What is the history of this organisation, how did it come into being (when / why)?
 - What is your role in this organisation?
2. Who are the services of this organisation for?
 - Is it possible for you to describe a typical person who uses these services?
3. What typically happens when a new (homeless) person turns up?
4. Who works for this organisation?
 - What is the management structure?
 - Who does what in the organisation? (Full / part time, paid / unpaid?)
 - Are there separate steering groups or overarching bodies that make decisions about the organisation?
5. How is your organisation funded / resourced?
 - Are you affiliated to other organisations?
 - Is your funding / resources stable?
6. Do you monitor for gender?

Appendix 4: Interview topic guides - Homeless people

1. How long have you been living here? (*Where are you living at the moment?*)
 - Do you like it here?
 - Do you get on with the other residents?

2. Would you describe yourself as being homeless? (*At the moment? Ever thought of yourself as homeless?*)
 - Do you regard where you are living at the moment as your home? (*If yes, why say this? If no, what is home for you? What makes a home, home for you?*) * ask with caution

3. What services do you use here? (*drug/alcohol counsellors, Social Work, CPN, Dr*)
 - Do you feel that this is enough support for you? Do you feel that you are treated well by them?
 - Do you get on with all the staff here/ at x?
 - Do you have different types of relationships with the male and female staff?
 - Would you prefer to be in a mixed (or single sex) hostel/ house? * *if appropriate*

4. Have you ever used the Homeless Persons Unit or the Secondary Assessment Centre?
How did you feel you were treated there? (*Other services used and how treated*)
 - Did a man or a woman interview you? *Would you have preferred a man / woman? Were you given the option?*
 - *If used the HPU a lot, do you think that there are any differences between the way male and female housing staff treat you, differences in attitude?*
 - Do you feel that you've ever been given different advice because you are a man/woman?

5. Could you tell me about all the places you've stayed in since you were 16 / last 5 years?
Or, where were you living before this?

- *Check - ever slept rough, which hostels used, ever had a flat, ever had a family/children, ever been in care, ever worked, used drugs or alcohol? Still in touch with your family (parents/siblings/children)? * ask with caution*
6. Do you think men and women are any different to each other? *(Have different needs?)*
7. Do you feel that the sort of experiences you've had are similar to other men / women? *
*same sex Could these experiences have happened to men / women in the same way? * opp. sex*
- *Do you think that it's harder for homeless men/women?*
 - *Do you think men / women encounter different treatment, or attitudes because they are men / women?*
 - *Do you feel men / women cope with their situations in ways that are different?*
8. In your experience, would you say that more men than women are homeless? *If yes, why do you think so?*
9. In terms of homelessness where do you think more money/resources, should be spent?
- *Who do you think should be given priority treatment?*
 - *Do you agree that families who are homeless should be prioritised over single people who are homeless?*
 - *Do you feel that the city council favours women/men who are homeless in any ways?*
**Same sex, then opp sex?*
10. What do you hope for, in terms of accommodation, in the future?
11. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experiences that you think are important? Stereotypes, images in the media that annoy you? Something I've missed out?
- *Were the questions OK?*

Appendix 5: Homeless Services

- Services available at the time of fieldwork period December 1998 - July 1999. Please note that numbers have been rounded up or down and names of organisations have been omitted to help try to preserve the anonymity of the fieldwork location.
- City Housing Authority comprising: Neighbourhood Housing Offices (NHOs); mainstream council housing; and the Homeless Persons Unit (HPU)
- Homeless Persons Unit comprising: Emergency Services Division; Furnished Accommodation Division (permanent, temporary and supported flats); Hostels Division; Specialist Service Provision (youth housing strategy); and private bed and breakfast accommodation
- Council Hostels for Adults and Young People

Description	Male bed spaces	Female bed spaces	Mixed bed spaces
Men's Hostel A (18+)	over 200	-	-
Men's Hostel B (18+)	over 200	-	-
Men's Hostel C (18+)	over 200	-	-
Men's Hostel D (18+)	over 200	-	-
Women's Hostel (18+)	-	over 60	-
Secondary Assessment Centre (18+)	over 70	30	
Young person's Hostel A (16-17 or, if vulnerable, up to 21)	-	-	15
Young Person's Hostel B (16/17)	-	-	40
Total	over 1000	approx. 100	55

- Social Work Services including specialist homeless teams (children and families, young people, criminal justice, community care), emergency standby services, 'positive' accommodation team for people with HIV or Aids, addiction centre (+ outreach drug workers)
- Health Services including specialist GP's and nurses, hostel mental health team, homeless families health care team, community dental service, chiropody, physiotherapy, mental health association, occupational therapy, drug centre (including women's drug project), alcohol support, head injury project

- Police services
- Voluntary sector accommodation and support
- Advice and information including co-ordinating body for single homeless and homeless women's action team, Housing Advice Centre, charity, Refugee Council, Big Issue, HIV/AIDS support
- Support services including day centre for adults (men only in the evening), day centre for young people, pre-five's support, prostitutes support centre, women's safety centre, Rape Crisis centre, women's support project, black and ethnic minority women's project, self help women's group, soup centre, soup and street team, food centre, resettlement services

Accommodation projects with support for men

Projects	Age range	Level of support	No. of bed spaces
Housing Association W – direct access	25+	Medium	over 150
Housing Association W – self contained flats from local hospital	any	Medium	under 10
Homeless Charity and Campaigning Group (HCCG) – long term homeless and alcohol problem	25+	High	under 10
HCCG	25+	High	10
Homeless Charity B – long term homeless	18+ but mainly older	Medium	40
Homeless Charity B – direct access hostel	18+	Medium	70
Commercial hostels - direct access	18+	Low	250
Total			over 500

Accommodation projects with support for women

Projects	Age range	Level of support	No. of bed spaces
Religious Charity P - pregnant women or women with children under 10	16-25	High	under 20
Homeless Charity C pregnant women or women with children under 10	16+	Medium	over 10
Homeless Charity D	16-25	High	over 10
Homeless Charity E - abused young women	16-25	Medium to low	under 10
HCCG	18+	High	under 10
HCCG – long term homeless women	35+	High	under 10
Homeless Charity B	35+	High	20
Women's Aid	any	Various	60
Black and Ethnic Minority Women's Project	any	Various	over 10
Total			150

Accommodation projects with support aimed at both men and women

Projects	Age range	Level of support	No. of bed spaces
Religious Charity P including training flats	16-25	High	under 20
Religious Charity P	16-25	Variable	under 20
Children's Charity	16-25	Medium	under 10
Homeless Charity F	18-25	Medium	under 30
Homeless Charity G	16-25	High	over 10
Homeless Charity H	18+	Medium	under 10
Homeless Charity I	16-25	Low	over 10
Homeless Charity J	18+	Medium	under 10
Religious Charity Q	28+	High	over 10
Young Person's Charity	16-21	Medium	over 10
Drug crisis centre, short stay unit	18+	High	over 10
Homeless Charity K	16-25	Variable	over 20
Mental Health Charity – short term (12wks)	18+ but usually older	Medium to low	over 10 flats
Charity G	16-25	High	over 10
Housing Association X	16-25	Low	over 10
Religious Charity R	18+	Medium	40
Religious Charity R	18+	Medium	over 50
Religious Charity R	18+	Low to medium	100
SACRO (ex offenders) scatter flats	16+	Variable	over 30
Refugee Council – single asylum seekers	No age limit	Low	over 10
Housing Association Y– Black and Ethnic Minority Project - scatter flats	16-25	Low	over 10
Homeless Charity B – alcohol rehabilitation and respite	18+		over 20
Homeless Charity B	18+	High	over 50
Homeless Charity B – mental health problems	18+	High	over 10
Homeless Charity L	16-29	Low	over 50
Homeless Charity L	16-30	Low	over 20
Total			over 600

