Narratives of ‘single homeless people’: reformulating and reinterpreting the homelessness experience

by

Alexandra Cuncev

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Social Sciences

Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences

Supervisors:

Sarah Earthy

Robert Meadows

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Abstract

This PhD study focuses on understanding formerly homeless people’s attitudes to self, their home and their status in the housing system. The study was based on the analysis of twenty-eight narrative interviews with people who had experienced homelessness and who were, at the time of the interview, living in supported housing in a city in the South East of England.

The decade 2000-2010, which provides the policy context for the research, was seen as a period of positive developments in homelessness research.

In the current study and by using a combined narrative and thematic research approach, I place the single homeless people’s conceptualisations of identity into the Third Space (Shilling 1999, Burkitt 2008) presentation of flexible individualities, but which, despite the challenges and pressures experienced, maintain a strong sense of the core of the self that makes them unique. My approach to the homeless people’s identity formation accepts the possibility of a decentralisation of identities in contemporary societies; however, I maintain that there are parts of own identity which persist in individuals’ definitions of self and ultimately help ground the homeless individual. I acquiesce that identities can go through changes, imposed by personal circumstances and social context, and that these changes can lead to variations in the elements which retain value for the individual. However, despite all these changes, the homeless interviewees continued to refer to their self as easily recognised – retaining the same main qualities which belonged to the self before the homelessness experience. It was this strength of self that the interviewees ultimately wanted to transmit to the interviewer and it is this strength of self which places their conceptualisations of identity in the ‘Third Space’ approach.

The study was placed at a crossroads for homelessness policies which had passed through a series of changes through two different governments: New Labour and the Coalition Government. As well as highlighting areas that required improvement, the study showed that a holistic perspective towards the homeless person, taking into account their experiences before, after and during the homelessness event and acknowledging the value of training and unpaid employment, could lead to policy and practice which is closer to individuals’ perceived identities and routes out of homelessness.
Declaration

This thesis and the work to which it refers are the results of my own efforts. Any ideas, data, images or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to their originator in the text, bibliography or in footnotes. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic degree or professional qualification. I agree that the University has the right to submit my work to the plagiarism detection service TurnitinUK for originality checks. Whether or not drafts have been so-assessed, the University reserves the right to require an electronic version of the final document (as submitted) for assessment as above.

Signature: __________________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________
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Abbreviations

The following list offers a brief description of the main concepts and acronyms used in the study, which might be unfamiliar to the reader. Further discussion on each main concept follows in chapters 1 and 2.

**HSS (Homeless Support Service):** the organisation under study, a large supported housing association offering medium to high level of support, in Sea City. Areas of expertise included: housing, support, life skills, work advice and move on support. Table 1.1 gives details regarding the size and band of each project. The institution was anonymised for the purposes of the present study; all other details connected to it, such as individual names of projects, managers, staff etc. were anonymised as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of project</th>
<th>Type of housing</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Council banding</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HSS1 (largest project, 96 beds)</td>
<td>shared</td>
<td>Two residents sharing kitchen, bathroom, toilet in two-bedroom flats</td>
<td>Band 2 (24 hour support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>HSS2 (60 flats)</td>
<td>Self-contained</td>
<td>Studios or one-bedroom flats</td>
<td>Band 3 (support during office hours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>HSS 3 (25 rooms)</td>
<td>shared</td>
<td>Five bedroom houses with two shared toilets, shared kitchen and shared bathroom</td>
<td>Band 2 (24 hour support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>HSS 4 (40 flats)</td>
<td>Self-contained</td>
<td>One bedroom flats on the outskirts of Sea City</td>
<td>Band 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>HSS 5 (33 flats)</td>
<td>Self-contained</td>
<td>One bedroom flats on the outskirts of Sea City</td>
<td>Band 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>HSS 6 (33 flats)</td>
<td>Self-contained</td>
<td>One bedroom flats on the outskirts of Sea City</td>
<td>Band 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>HSS 7 (11 flats)</td>
<td>Self-contained</td>
<td>One bedroom flats on the outskirts of Sea City (smaller project)</td>
<td>Band 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Sea City:** city under research, a coastal town in the South of England;

‘single homeless person’/ ‘single homeless people’: the label under which the participants in the study were known and identified as, in policy and in practice;

‘resident’/‘service user’/‘customer’/‘client’: names used for the people residing in HSS accommodation. These changed over time, in the order they are presented above, the reason invoked for each change being that it should diminish potential negative connotations;

‘keyworker’/‘project worker’: staff offering one-to-one support as well as general housing support to the people housed at HSS. The staffing hierarchy at HSS, for most projects, was: manager of the project - deputy manager/ assistant manager – (senior) project worker/ keyworker. At every project, there would also be a finance officer, who would mainly support clients in paying their rents, and some cleaning staff.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my special appreciation and thanks to my supervisors, Sarah Earthy, Rob Meadows and Ann Cronin for their support, insight and patience. Thank you for your kind comments which always brought out the positive. Most importantly thank you for being great role models, professionally, but also on a personal level.

The 1+3 research grant I received from the Economic and Research Council made the research possible. I also enjoyed being part of a wider research community and benefitted from the numerous professional development opportunities available.

The Sociology Department at the University of Surrey provided me with a stimulating and aspirational environment.

Thank you to all staff and residents involved in this research. From the financial support in the first year, which made it possible to embark on this journey, to the support of the staff and of the Chief Executive of the organization, who granted unlimited access and complete trust. Last but not least, I would like to thank each participant in this study. I cannot provide your names, for reasons of anonymity, but I have learned and grown so much from simply talking to you.

Thank you to my friends. A special mention goes to Corina, a wonderful and generous friend, whose positive outlook and ability to always smile have been an inspiration.

I especially thank my mum and dad, Elena and Ioan and my sister Teodora. It was in our small childhood flat, crowded with books to its seams, that I got a long lasting love for books and a need to inquire about the world around me. My sister’s husband Horia is a credit to her and to our family.

My children have given me the strength and motivation to get things done! Most importantly I would like to thank my husband Pawel. Without his love, understanding and constant appreciation, I would not have been able to complete this work.
CHAPTER 1: Introduction and context for the study

1.1. Introduction

This qualitative study explores the different perceptions of self, home and homelessness exhibited by people living in temporary and supported housing.

I set off to produce a sociological investigation of contemporary homelessness experiences in the UK and to explore an understanding of present policy and practice through the perspective of the homeless people. Following the themes emerging from the narrative type interviews, the study developed into an elaboration on the meaning of ‘single homelessness’ for the people thus defined by the policy. The study also looks at the meaning of living in supported housing for the interviewees.

‘Single homeless people’ (the label used for the interviewees in policy) are distinctive in policy and therefore the study centres on the definitional struggles that this specific policy group experience in the context of contemporary housing policy and practice. The study queries the existence of the ‘single homeless person’ category for the people labelled as that.

The study was qualitative. I interviewed twenty-eight ‘single homeless people’ using narrative interviewing and used a combined narrative and thematic analysis approach.

Section 1.2. introduces the context for the study. Section 1.3. presents the research aims. This is followed by the structure of the thesis in section 1.4. Section 1.5. offers an introduction to the city where the research took place, the organisation under study and the group of homeless people studied, as appearing in the policy. This last section of the first chapter thus sets the scene for the study.

1.2. Context for the study

The present study is placed at a crossroads, due to its timing. The preparation for the study and collection of the data took place prior to and during May 2010. In fact the last interviews were recorded on the 24th of May 2010. This coincided with the formation of the Coalition government following the general election on the 6th of May, and with this, the start of a revision of policy and practice in certain areas of housing and homelessness, as well as throughout the social sector. This fortuitous placement
of the research offers the study a unique position, as it presents the accounts of single homeless people at the end of the New Labour government, while at the same time in the context of predicted\textsuperscript{1} changes in housing policy and significant financial cuts in the housing sector. Whilst the study is mainly located in New Labour’s approach to housing policy, as this is when the data collection took place, it offers some timely reflections on emerging concepts such as the welfare reform, Housing First etc. in the discussion (Chapter 8).

There are three main factors which influenced the research aims.

Firstly, the institutional response to homelessness started to undergo a period of change in 2002, with the introduction of the Homelessness Act. This in turn affected both the ideological conceptualisation of homelessness and the practical response to it. Homelessness was no longer regarded as separate from other issues of social and economic disadvantage. Instead it was incorporated into a multi-focal agenda aimed at tackling social exclusion. The focus up to 2010 was on rehabilitation and employment, followed by a secondary discourse of empowerment and independence for the socially excluded (Alcock 2008, Supporting People 2008). New organisations, aimed at tackling specific issues which were viewed as factors leading to homelessness (such as low skills, inappropriate accommodation, untreated mental illness etc.) had been forming gradually since 2002. Supporting People, regarded at the time of its introduction as the main agent for bringing about change in the homeless sector (Jones and Pleace 2010, Sea City\textsuperscript{2} Single Homelessness Strategy 2007-2012) was established in 2003. Of key importance for the present study is the establishing of ‘single homelessness’ as a distinct policy category.\textsuperscript{3}

Secondly and at the same time, the decade 2000-2010, providing the context for the present research, is seen as a period of largely positive developments in housing and homelessness, not only from a policy perspective, as briefly highlighted above, but also from a research perspective. The 2000s saw a renewal in homelessness research, with more qualitative researchers acknowledging the need to look at homeless people’s experiences from their own perspective. Qualitative researchers criticised the lack of all-encompassing definitions considering the complexity of homelessness, as well as the overlooking of certain categories of homelessness, such as the ‘new’

\textsuperscript{1} At the time of the research, these were merely predicted. The cuts to this sector became a reality while writing up.
\textsuperscript{2} The name of the research locality has been replaced by a pseudonym and this has been applied to the references as well.
\textsuperscript{3} The policy context for the research is detailed in Chapter 2.
homeless (women, ethnic minorities, families etc. - Goode 2000, Casey et al 2008 etc.) and 'unseen' homeless (those who chose not to self-define as homeless, but would be described as that by policy (Widdowfield 1998, Adkins et al 2003, Washington and Moxley 2008, Ravenhill 2008 etc.)4. In the context of more qualitative research, and especially narrative interviews looking at homelessness from the homeless people's perspective, a gap still remained in considering 'single homeless people' as a category to research, in its own right. Although differentiated from other homeless people in policy, they were overlooked in research. Research in ‘single homelessness’ existed, but always from the perspective of specific causes or categories, such as mental illness, addictions and other health issues.

Thirdly, in the context of new research approaches applied to homelessness (generally using qualitative techniques which involved lengthy, unstructured interviewing), researchers became aware of the stigmatising potential of the term ‘homeless’ for the individuals. Homelessness thus started to be conceptualised through the perspective of stigma theories in the 1990s and early 2000s, followed by an increased focus on conceptualisations of home and a general emphasis on multi-disciplinarity in recent research. However, in many areas research is only at an incipient stage. A need to concentrate on homeless people’s ideas of self in order to further understanding of homelessness recently started to be mentioned (Sommerville 2012, McCarthy 2013).

The present study aims to build a bridge between homelessness qualitative studies and contemporary conceptualisations of identity. The multitude of existing definitions of homelessness, viewpoints and theories, combined with the complexity of homelessness as a concept for the individual, requires a similarly complex placement in an identity framework. The study proposes a dialogue between identity theories, homelessness studies and my own qualitative research, in order to build a thorough understanding of the ‘single homeless person’.

The research aims were formulated in the context of an existing, specific category in policy and practice (the ‘single homeless person’), but who had not been researched in their own right.

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4 ‘New’ and ‘unseen’ homelessness are further discussed in sections 3.2. and 3.5.
1.3. **Research aims**

Considering the above mentioned policy and research context, the main aim of the study was to gauge the existence of a ‘single homeless person’ category at an individual level, from the ‘single homeless person’s own perspective. By listening to the interviewees’ narratives, I wanted to assess if they saw themselves as ‘single homeless’, or ‘homeless’ or not even homeless at all, what this meant for them, and what place this took in their narratives. By employing narrative interviews as the main research method (followed by a narrative and thematic analytical approach), I wanted to look at the concept of ‘single homelessness’ from the interviewees’ perspective of their lives as a whole.

Other studies had looked at perceptions and the importance of ‘homelessness’ from the homeless person’s perspective (Snow and Anderson 1993, Ravenhill 2008, etc.). On the one hand, many of these studies saw the homelessness moment as a stigmatising event, but ignored the potential physical and emotional effects which could have significant impact on the person’s definition of self (Thomas 2004). On the other hand, other studies (Sommerville 2012, Thomas and Dittmar 1995, Goode 2000, Kellett and Moore 2003, Hoch 2001), especially when considering the ‘home’ element of ‘homelessness’, had identified a ‘great sense of loss’, which suggested both physical and emotional connotations for the individual. This ‘lack’ or ‘loss’ (of shelter but ultimately of sense of self), although identified in research, had not been placed in a wider identity context. My aim was to listen to homeless people’s narratives, in their complexity, and as they would be offered by the interviewees, in order to understand what ‘homelessness’ and ‘single homelessness’ meant for them, to what extent (if any) they did experience a sense of ‘loss’ or ‘lack’ [of something], and what this meant for their sense of self. In the context of liquid modernities (Bauman 2008, Sennett 1999), where people experience many types of loss, through a restructuring of social categories, what were the social categories that the homeless people still maintained? What was their attitude to their selves, their life stories and the homelessness event?

The main aim of the study was, as earlier mentioned, to explore the existence of a ‘single homeless person’ category at an individual level, from the ‘single homeless person’s own perspective. Underneath is a list of the main questions emerging from this main aim, that the study set out to explore:
a) to explore direct or indirect messages homeless people wanted to convey, through their stories of homelessness;
b) to explore the ways in which homeless people experienced and defined ‘home’, their perception of their surrounding space, their relationships with their peers and other (immaterial) meanings of home;
c) to explore the ways in which homeless people used and considered the personal and social networks and institutional resources available to them;
d) to understand where and why homeless people placed the homelessness event in their life story, and what impact this had on their perceptions of self.

As the research progressed, some of these aims came to the forefront (such as a and b) and some changed or merged (such as c, which, in the analysis, merged with parts of b). The first aim developed, during analysis, in a complex definition of ‘single homelessness’ from the interviewees’ perspective. The research method chosen (narrative interviewing and combined narrative and thematic analysis) also led to themes and concepts directly emerging from the data. Such was the concept of time in homelessness narratives, which did not benefit from the same level of attention in homelessness literature as other concepts.

The table on the next page illustrates the changes the aims went through, from the research design stage, to the analysis stage, during and following the narrative interviews:
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<th>Expanded aim (during and after data collection)</th>
<th>Concepts that the analysis focused on</th>
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<tr>
<td>a To explore direct or indirect messages homeless people wanted to convey, through their stories of homelessness.</td>
<td>To explore direct or indirect messages homeless people wanted to convey, through their stories about becoming (and staying) homeless. To analyse interviewees' definitions of self and of homelessness (and/or 'single homelessness').</td>
<td>The homeless body (physical and emotional challenges) Stigma and the homeless 'other'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b To explore the ways in which homeless people experienced and defined 'home', their perception of their surrounding space, their relationships with their peers and other (immaterial) meanings of home.</td>
<td>To understand single homeless people's definitions of home and their wide reach, extending to perceptions of their surrounding space, relationships with peers, personal and social networks and institutional resources available to them.</td>
<td>Complexity of 'home' Social support Social relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c To explore the ways in which homeless people used and considered the personal and social networks and institutional resources available to them.</td>
<td>To understand where homeless people placed the homelessness event in their life story, why this was, and what impact this had on their perceptions of self. To understand interviewees' conception of time and the role of time in their narratives and in their perceptions of self. To understand the role of narratives in building an idea of self for the 'single homeless person'.</td>
<td>Time in narratives The homeless self</td>
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<td>d To understand where and why homeless people placed the homelessness event in their life story, and what impact this had on their perceptions of self.</td>
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<td>e</td>
<td>To explore how all of the above can have an impact on policy and practice.</td>
<td>Policy implications</td>
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During this process, I encountered similar issues to other researchers: the complexity and multi-dimensions of the single homeless accounts made placing the study within one predominant concept (such as ‘home’, or ‘stigma’ etc.) almost impossible. There were several notions that were important to the interviewees, and only considering them together could lead to a more thorough understanding of the construction of identities for ‘single homeless people’.5

An in-depth consideration of the research methods chosen is presented in Chapter 4. There were two main factors which led to a qualitative study. Firstly, homelessness literature suggested a need for more in-depth considerations of homeless people’s own view of their experiences. This is discussed at length in Chapter 4. Secondly, the study design developed after considerable experience of working in the field of homelessness and particularly single homelessness. At the time of the study I was employed with HSS, as a policy officer. I had worked at the organisation for approximately five years, in various roles, from frontline to senior management. Therefore benefitted from full access across all sites and a good relationship with the staff at the various hostels within the organisation.6 As part of my working day, I had spent considerable amounts of time talking to people who had been homeless, about their lives and their experiences. I soon realised that there was little opportunity for these stories to be heard. Already as a frontline worker I noticed a fascinating conceptual richness in those stories. This position as former housing worker, coupled with in-depth research in existing homelessness literature, led to the present study.

1.4. The structure of the thesis

The thesis includes nine chapters. Following this introduction (in Chapter 1), Chapters 2 and 3 set out a social policy and theoretical background for the research. Chapter 2 focuses on the policy context, while Chapter 3 provides an overview of the concepts used in the study. Chapter 3 focuses on theories of identity and time, stigma and the influence of a stigmatised body over identity. The chapter is also concerned with the framing of homelessness in qualitative studies. Chapter 4 describes the research methods used for the study, including ethical issues, the conduct of the interviews and the process of analysis.

5 An in-depth discussion on the concepts which were important for interviewees’ definitions of self follows in Chapter 8.
6 For more information on my position in the field, please see section 4.6.1. in Chapter 4.
Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the research findings. Chapter 5 focuses on the physical and emotional impact of homelessness and the interviewees’ efforts at distancing themselves from the homelessness experience. Chapter 6 explores the concept of ‘home’ in interviewees’ definition and discusses to what extent HSS was a ‘home’ for the interviewees. Chapter 7 is an analysis of the narratives told by the interviewees. These narratives are classified according to their style, their direction in time and their content. Chapter 8 brings together theory, methodology and findings into a discussion for the thesis. Chapter 9 summarises the conclusions of the study.

1.5. Presentation of the city, organisation and the people researched

This section places the interviews in a location, at a specific organisation and as a group with specific characteristics.

All people interviewed for the study lived in Sea City, at HSS and belonged, according to the local authority, to the ‘single homeless people’ definitional bracket. The present section describes Sea City and HSS and classifies what the ‘single homeless people’ label stood for at the time of interviewing.

1.5.1. Location – Sea City

Sea City is the pseudonym for a coastal town, placed in an area facing significant homelessness issues in the South of England. The area is exposed to housing issues, generated among other factors by overpopulation and a historical lack of affordable housing (Malpass and Murie 1999). One of the problems in Sea City is that, being on the coast, it has limited possibilities to expand, but is faced with a growing population. The city is particularly challenged during the summer months of the year, with seasonal increases (Sea City Housing and Homelessness Strategies, 2007-2012, 2008-2014). The city has always experienced pressures from high property prices, with historical pockets of poor quality housing having a ‘detrimental effect on the health and well-being of many residents’ and it continues to have one of the highest street count figures outside of London (Sea City Single Homelessness Strategy 2007-2012). In terms of demographical makeup, the 2011 Census showed increases in the overall population, by 8% compared to 2001. Sea City has a predominantly white population (94% of the population are white, compared to 91% national average) with 92% of the total
population speaking English as their first language. Other languages spoken are, almost in equal percentages: Arabic, Polish and Spanish, with fewer Italian, Chinese, French, Portuguese speakers. This population make up was typical for a seaside town in the South of England at the time of the data collection as well as writing up.

1.5.2. HSS – the organisation where the research took place

HSS was a large homelessness charity, providing housing support for single men and women who had experienced homelessness. It had seven projects of different sizes: the smallest project was a building containing eleven self-contained flats, the biggest was a hostel of ninety six beds. I had access to all projects.

HSS mirrored the general Sea City population findings, with overwhelmingly White British residents through all the hostels. The only difference was that unlike the makeup of the city, which was approximately 50% male population versus approximately 50% female, in HSS (as well as in other single homeless housing services in the area), a maximum 10% of the total were women.

The organisation had a convoluted history. It had started as a direct access hostel for young people visiting the town, as this had been the wish of the donor of the first premises. At that time (at the beginning of the 20th century) the organisation was self-funding, managing its income almost exclusively from rents. Slowly, HSS expanded. They bought seven more premises and transformed them into hostels for people of all ages, with experiences of homelessness. Until early 2000, they had continued to be financially independent and thus run as a self-sufficient organisation, with their own aims, objectives and regulations. Since Supporting People funding (2003) and the launch of the Integrated Care Pathway7 in 2005, the organisation had been in a process of adopting the new, Government led system involving a new ethos and procedures. In 2010, the emphasis on Supporting People decreased and a slow withdrawal of government funding from the area of single homelessness was announced. HSS was directly affected, with two of its services decommissioned. Despite the cuts, HSS continued to provide support to all its residents.

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7 Anonymised for the purposes of the study.
1.5.3. Types of housing within HSS

All twenty-eight interviewees in the study resided in one of the seven different projects within HSS. The accommodation consisted of supported, shared housing, with a limited stay.

The housing was supported. This meant that all housing was staffed with trained ‘key workers’ within a hierarchical structure, who worked with the residents towards goals initially defined in the overall local authority dedicated programme (Integrated Care Pathway) and further refined within the organisation. The Integrated Care Pathway’s main aim was to move homeless and ‘vulnerable’ people through the housing path towards independent, privately rented living, outside the supported housing sector.  

The housing was shared. This assumed two different levels. Some of the housing - Band 2 housing – consisted of hostels or houses with single rooms, where the bathroom and kitchen facilities were shared. These hostels and houses would also generally include communal areas (such as a lounge, a ‘computer room’, a coffee bar) and a general reception area/ office, where the staff was located. Band 3 housing was made of self-contained flats, which had their own kitchen and bathroom. In Band 3 facilities there was much less opportunity to interact with others, other than on the communal corridors or around the office area and sometimes in the communal gardens. People residing in Band 3 properties were supposed to be more independent and in need of less support than Band 2.

The housing was limited in stay. At the beginning of the study, an overall restriction of a two year stay in any of the accommodation was imposed by the local authority. By the end of the study (and after the field work had finished), the local authority had started to relax this two year stay cap. Even though not documented in the policy, it was accepted by the officials dealing with specific cases that it was difficult to find housing (especially in the private sector) for everyone, within the two year bracket. There was no legal definition of how long temporary accommodation could last for. It was recognised that homeless households were often forced to spend a long time in temporary accommodation (such as bed and breakfast hotels or hostels with limited stay like HSS), due to the shortage of social rented homes (Shelter 2008).

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8 Further discussion on the Integrated Care Pathway and Supporting People takes place in Chapter 2 (section 2.4.).
1.5.4. Single homeless person

The local authority’s notion of single homeless person reflected the Government definition at the time. The definition was in operation at the time of the interviews and despite some changes in theory and practice since, has continued at the time of writing up.

This policy definition of a ‘single homeless person’ was made of several elements. A ‘single homeless person’ was: a) an adult without dependent children, having experienced or at risk of experiencing homelessness, b) in a temporary housing situation and c) with ‘support needs’.

a) A ‘single homeless person’ was firstly a person of adult age, without dependent children, who had experienced homelessness in the past or/and they would be vulnerable to experience episodes of homelessness in the future if not placed in supported accommodation (Shelter 2008, Crisis 2008, Jones and Pleace 2010, Sea City 2007-2012). The potential of experiencing episodes of homelessness is important in the definition, as, like it is shown later in this study, research still tends to ignore this ‘hidden’ element of homelessness. HSS had no housing provision for families, therefore all adults lived there without their ‘dependent children’ and would sometimes have to travel outside of town to be reunited with their children.

b) Secondly and very importantly for the policies regarding them, ‘single homeless people’ had to find themselves in a temporary housing situation. Policy stressed that homelessness did not only mean ‘lack of shelter’ (Sea City 2007-2012, Shelter 2008) as the shelter, even if present, could still not be fit for purpose, a temporary dwelling, or simply could not be called a ‘home’. A ‘single homeless person’ thus did not have a ‘permanent address’.

More interest has recently been given to the concept of ‘home’ in academic literature, and to differentiating between ‘home’ - a place of belonging, security, with a clear sense of identity - and ‘house’ - as merely place of (especially in the present study) temporary residence (Dovey 1985, May 2000, Ravenhill 2008, Sommerville 2013). Further discussion on the concept of ‘home’ and its meanings in the formation of identity takes place in Chapter 3. It is important to stress, at this point, that ‘homelessness’ and ‘lacking a home’ assumed a very large spectrum at the time the study took place. Thus all temporary accommodation (such as bed and breakfast hotels, hostels, night shelters, living with friends and relatives) was included in the homelessness definition.
In order to be legally declared homeless at a point in time, the individual had to either lack a secure place where they were entitled to live or they must not reasonably have been able to remain in their current accommodation (Crisis 2008). Also taken into account in policy and even more so in practice was the imminent threat of losing the accommodation (HSS admissions policy 2009). A FEANTSA\(^9\) developed typology of homelessness, ETHOS\(^10\), shows the variety of households which can be assessed as homeless by separating different types of homelessness into four areas: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing, and inadequate housing (Jones and Pleace 2010). Thus over the course of their lives, all the people interviewed experienced one or multiple homelessness periods. The study takes the view that problems do not stop when an individual has somewhere they can sleep at night and for this, narrative analysis was an appropriate research tool.

c) Thirdly, ‘single homeless persons’ were identified in the policy as having ‘support needs’. The other appellations used to designate ‘single homeless people’ in the policy all suggested vulnerability, social exclusion and needs: ‘chronically excluded adults, ‘most vulnerable members of our community’, ‘chronically excluded people’, ‘people with support needs’ (Sea City Housing Strategy 2008-2013, Jones and Pleace 2010, HSS admissions policy 2009).

The support needs were varied: ‘single homeless people’ were identified as having difficulties in forming relationships, lacking academic skills (such as basic numeracy or literacy), having problems in controlling their behaviour, poor physical or mental health, issues with substance abuse, histories of offending etc. (Sea City Housing Strategy 2008-2013).\(^11\)

In conclusion, all people interviewed for the present research had been residing in ‘temporary accommodation’ at HSS at the time of the interview. They were all within the Integrated Care Pathway, a Supporting People programme aimed at moving homeless people through the housing path towards independent, privately rented living, outside the supported housing sector. All had experienced one or several types of homelessness (such as rough sleeping, sofa surfing, or living in bed and breakfast

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\(^9\) FEANTSA: the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless; established in 1989 as a European non-governmental organisation to prevent and alleviate the poverty and social exclusion of people threatened by or living in homelessness

\(^10\) ETHOS: European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

\(^11\) For more details on homelessness and single homelessness, refer to Appendix 1.
accommodation) at one or several moments in time prior to accessing HSS housing. All HSS housing was shared and supported and with a limited stay.

1.6. Summary

Chapter 1 is the first of three chapters offering the context for the present research. It provided an introduction to the study, its aims and the research context. Following this, chapters 2 and 3 offer a theoretical and policy context to the research.

The study was entirely qualitative, using narrative and thematic analysis and it took place in an anonymous location in the South of England, at a large ‘single homelessness’ organisation funded by Supported People, which functioned according to the policies instated by the New Labour Government. Chapter 2 offers a perspective over those policies and a historical understanding of their governing concept – social exclusion.
CHAPTER 2. Policy background

2.1. Policy context at the time of research

The present chapter situates the study in a policy context. The research was placed at a crossroads for homelessness policies, facing a series of changes in approaches and discourses. Chapter 2 offers an overview of the changes in housing policy before 2002/2003 and since 2002/2003, including conceptualisations of social exclusion and a presentation of local policy and practice.

Section 2.2. provides a brief overview of housing policy, from its very early beginnings, to the present day. Section 2.3. offers a conceptual history of social exclusion, the term underpinning housing policy. Section 2.4. presents the homelessness legislation at the time of the research, while section 2.5. looks to the future of policy and legislation. Section 2.6. summarises the chapter.

2.2. History of housing policy – as a dimension of welfare

Homelessness is a perpetually changing concept, in policy. Definitions vary according to governments, political stance and economies. Literature emphasizes problems with defining this issue and barriers encountered when trying to provide realistic estimates of the phenomenon, both from a policy perspective (Alcock et al 2008, Jones and Pleace 2010) and in academic research (Ravenhill 2008, Somerville 2012, Neale 1997 etc.). The present chapter is concerned with the evolution of the homelessness concept in policy. Chapter 3 presents definitional challenges appearing in homelessness research, especially in qualitative research.

In modern policies, homelessness is seen as multi-faceted and best encompassed by the overarching social exclusion concept (Jones and Pleace 2010). Qualitative studies contribute to defining the complexity of homelessness by adding perspectives regarding the emotions of homelessness, experienced and communicated by those individuals who find themselves in a situation ‘lacking at various levels: in their private life (emotional, health), professional (out of work), and/or financial.’ (Da Silva 2007: 70)
Homelessness is also not a modern day dilemma, but rather has been identified since medieval times. Homelessness charity and housing started as an endeavour of the rich. The 1601 Act for the Relief of the Poor was among the first documents to acknowledge the need for attention towards the poor. The act established a system whereby state parishes were made responsible for the support of the poor within their boundaries (Malpass and Murie 1999). With the development of industrial counties, parishes attempted to limit the movement of the poor, treating them with more harshness in times of poverty and more goodwill in times of wealth (Jones 2000). The harsh conditions imposed by the Poor Relief Act made it impossible for the poor to leave their state, and principles such as the ‘least eligibility’ first introduced the distinction between deserving and undeserving poor (Jones 2000). There followed a redefining of terminology, with the introduction of the idea of philanthropy in the Victorian era as an attempt to counterbalance the harsh effects of the workhouses with only partial success and the Liberal National Insurance Act of 1911, which provided for unemployment and health insurance. Over the next two decades, the gulfs between social classes became more evident, following the 1930s economic depression and the devastations of the Second World War. After the war, and coming from a newly born ‘passion for social justice’ (Jones 2000: 104), the Beveridge plan set out the beginnings of the welfare state, by introducing a set of payments for people on low incomes and the unemployed.

Homelessness and housing became a problem for state intervention with the redefining and enhancing of social welfare after the Second World War (Malpass and Murie 1999). Housing policy evolved from slum clearance for British workers in the 1930s, to a more central role after the Second World War in the post-war reconstruction (Alcock 2008). This was followed by a focusing in aims with an attention towards the poor by the 1960s, with the first realisation of the impossibility in providing state housing for all people who needed it. In the 1960s and 1970s the homeless people in the UK were predominantly white, male and in early middle age. Many homeless people were alcohol dependant (Jones and Pleace 2010).

In 1977, the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act was introduced and for the first time households in ‘priority need’ could benefit from the statutory right of being rehoused by their local authority. However, after major growth in the 1960s and 1970s, social housing started to diminish in the 1980s, partly due to the Government’s new sales

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12 The principle of least eligibility distinguished between different types of paupers in order to minimize poor relief.
initiatives, with the gradual privatisation of social housing. The Conservative government also decided to close the very large hostels for single homeless people, emphasising the need for a 'normalisation of lifestyle and independent living in the community' (Foord et al. 1998). The closing of the hostels reflected a shift in policy, away from the impersonalised experience of communal living; however resettlement was not successful in all cases, especially for older homeless people, who returned to the streets and for the younger homeless, who had often not been included in the resettlement programmes. This was coupled with a slow rate of replacement of the previous housing provision and led to youth homelessness particularly to peak by 1987 (Malpass and Murie 1999) and an increase in rough sleeping in general.

Even more, in 1986-1990 Britain witnessed a progressive withdrawal from asylum provision (long-term residential mental health hospitals) and centralised social planning and one by one the long-term mental health institutions began to close (Tomlinson 1991, Malpass and Murie 1999). Considerable numbers of mental health patients from the neighbouring areas were slowly transferred to HSS.

The displacement of the board and lodgings entitlements in April 1985, which was substantially reducing the amount of time people were eligible to claim benefits in different areas (eight weeks in London, four weeks in other areas) led to a substantial drop in benefits available to homeless people. In order to continue claiming benefits, they were forced to move to another area. These changes led to unnatural migration, young people sometimes being faced to move to an area which was far from the family home or to an area with high unemployment, and thus contributed to an increase in street homelessness. (Foord et al. 1998, Malpass and Murie 1999). The Social Security Act, introduced by the Thatcher government in 1986, abolished some grants and benefits and introduced private pensions. At the same time, the Thatcher government allowed selling the Council properties to individual buyers, thus reducing housing stock. In the 1960s and 1970s, the homeless people in the UK were predominantly white, male and in early middle age. Many homeless people were alcohol dependant (Jones and Pleace 2010).

Peter Townsend’s Black Report in the 1980s provided evidence of a connection between mortality, ill health and poverty. In fact, the data showed that ‘the capitalist system has not only kept the poor in their place but has also meant that they have shorter lives and experience worse health among their offspring’ (Bury 2001: 60, on Townsend). This was the first report to concentrate on health inequalities and as such,
it revitalised the debate on health inequalities. However there was an insistence on class differences which was critiqued by subsequent studies. In the 1980s and 1990s, the single homeless population became more varied, including younger people, people with ethnic minority backgrounds and women.

Following the measures of the Thatcher government around 1985 - 1986 and the selling of Council properties, the need for enhanced state intervention became apparent in the 1990s (Communities and Local Government 2008, Alcock 2008). In the 1990s the concept of ‘enabling local authority’ (Communities and Local Government 2008) emerged. This was an authority that rather than doing everything itself, contracted other organisations, such as housing associations, to provide most of the services. There followed the 1990-1991 economic crisis and the decrease in affordability of housing, which meant that in 1997 New Labour inherited growing homelessness numbers and an increasing housing problem. Thus in 2000, the spectrum of homeless people was varied, spanning from teenage homelessness and rough sleeping, to homelessness among different ethnic minority backgrounds.

In 2005 the ‘million dollar Murray’¹³ (Gladwell 2006) case brought forward to the media attention, in the US as well as worldwide, the fact that sustained homelessness over a long period of time had considerable financial impacts on economies. New Labour started introducing concepts such as ‘quality of housing’ to improve council stock and brought in Supporting People (in 2003) as negotiating body between Government and local authorities (Alcock 2008, Communities and Local Government 2008). The New Labour discourse focused on putting in place measures to prevent homelessness/social exclusion. Throughout 2002 (Homelessness Act) to 2010, at the local authority level, there was an increase in the focus on employability and rehabilitation, life skills, user involvement and early intervention. Housing associations providing only housing support found it difficult to defend their existence. The homelessness agenda was thus moving away from mere housing support to an agenda where empowerment, life skills and the pursuing of work became main aims. Since 2002, consistent improvements in housing support and housing provision for single homeless people became more and more visible (Jones and Pleace 2010, Housing Strategy Sea City 2008-2014). Steadily,

¹³ ‘Million dollar Murray’ was a high media profile case of a long term street homeless individual in the USA who, having never been fully assessed, continued to live in the street and eventually died in the street. It was assessed at the time that Murray had in fact cost the USA a lot of money, through the continued use of emergency and detox accommodation and repeated prison sentences.
old, large hostels had been replaced by new services, offering a mixture of forms of housing and other ‘tenancy sustainment’ services and new move on requirements. The next section offers a context for this new agenda, emerging from the wider encompassing social exclusion discourse. New challenges have emerged since 2008. On the one hand, 2008 marked the start of an economic recession in Britain and with this, increased homelessness. On the other hand, the change of Government in May 2010 led to a change in focus and priorities for the housing sector.

2.3. Understandings of social exclusion

In the late 1990s, New Labour policy introduced the idea that single homelessness was part of a wider social problem – ‘social exclusion’. Social exclusion was defined as ‘a result of long term processes, such as bad childhood experiences, growing up in a highly disadvantaged neighbourhood, attending a badly run school, being exposed to illegal drugs, committing crime at an early age, as well as the effects of health problems as an adult, such as severe mental illness and problematic drug use.’ (Jones and Pleace 2010)

The concept of social exclusion has become essential to policy discourses around poverty and social issues and in homelessness, especially since the Homelessness Act in 2002. Understanding the different ways in which this is employed in policy is important for placing this research in context.

Social exclusion theories were first developed in France to analyse poverty, ‘homelessness being the epitome of poverty and social exclusion’ (Hills and Stewart 2005). In Britain, early social exclusion theorists (such as Peter Townsend) started explaining poverty in terms of being excluded from ordinary living patterns (Munck 2005). A definite change of this approach occurred, as explained in the previous section, when New Labour took office, in 1997. At the time of election, New Labour had inherited a situation in which the levels of poverty and inequality unprecedented in post-war history (Hills and Stewart 2005). New Labour soon made social exclusion central to their agenda. Policy started to make reference to ‘multiple deprivation’ (Hills and Stewart 2005). It was argued that with the Blair government, in 1997, the ‘age of inclusion had arrived’ (Levitas 2005: 2).

The terms which referenced directly to social exclusion and homelessness started to be: ‘most disadvantaged people’, ‘vulnerable adults’, ‘multiple needs/ multiple
disadvantage’. These terms can be found in the Social Exclusion Unit’s definition (Buchanon et al 2007: 189). It is based on the existing European Union definition and on New Labour’s 1997 approach to social exclusion:

'Social exclusion is about more than income poverty. Social exclusion happens when people or places suffer from a series of problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, ill health and family breakdown. When such problems combine they can create a vicious cycle. Social exclusion can happen as a result of problems that face one person in their life. But it can also start from birth. Being born into poverty or to parents with low skills still has a major influence on future life chances' (ODPM 1999).

There has since been considerable debate about the Social Exclusion Unit’s definition of social exclusion (Hills and Stewart 2005). It recognizes that social exclusion has an intergenerational and multi-faceted dimension, whilst at the same time placing at the centre the family and the chances the person has in their early life. The discourse combines the European Union view that social exclusion is multidimensional, but adds a moral and almost stigmatising value, by bringing growing up in specific environments into focus (Hills and Stewart 2005). The definition is illustrative of the preoccupation, in recent years, both in Sea City Single Homeless and Housing Strategies, with early intervention in order to eradicate social exclusion.

Levitas (2005) offered further clarification on the concept of social exclusion, by identifying three discourses of social exclusion in Britain (redistributionist, moral underclass and social integrationist), each serving a different purpose. Essentially, all three approaches defined a boundary between the excluded and the included.

According to Levitas, the redistributionist discourse (RED), initially adopted by New Labour in 1997, centres on poverty and defines exclusion according to ‘whether people have sufficient resources to participate in the customary life of society’ (Levitas, 2005:9). Thus all members of society are entitled to a set of material goods, customs and social pleasures from which they should not be deprived. Exclusion starts to be defined as multi-faceted, including housing, health and environmental pollution alongside income. One-parent families are included as a new category in social thought. The change of discourse and especially taking into account of other causes of inequality apart from poverty was a big change at the time of the New Labour discourse. Benefit levels were increased and thought to have a more prominent role in reducing social exclusion. Monetary equality was seen as the main solution to poverty and exclusion.
The second model of social exclusion proposed by Levitas is the moral underclass discourse – MUD - (Levitas 2005) and has its premises in the New Right discourse from the 1980s. The New Right brought the concept of deserving and undeserving poor back into light (Levitas 2005). Terms such as ‘culture of dependency’ started to arise and there was talk of a welfare culture: the ‘giro culture’, of those reliant on benefits. The focus shifted from the ‘structural basis of poverty to the moral and cultural character of the poor themselves’ (Levitas 2005: 15). According to Levitas, Charles Murray’s underclass theory influenced the political and public discourse. During a research visit to the United Kingdom in 1989, American researcher Charles Murray defined a certain section of the British working class as underclass. He saw underclass as that particular stratum of society where crime was higher and morality lower (Murray, 1994). The main factors behind the underclass syndrome were identified as family breakdown (and thus the lack of role models) and worklessness. Murray connected the concepts of undesirability and illegitimacy to the refusal to accept employment. His legacy crosses governments. Murray presupposed a clear threshold between the deserving and undeserving poor. His discourse received opposition from theorists such as Hills who argued there was ‘no permanent underclass cut off from the rest of society’ (Hills 2008:17), as most people experience moments of exclusion or loss of social identity at some point in their lives. However, Murray’s theory has persisted in the discourse of the New Right, who generally considered the socially excluded/ underclass as ‘culturally distinct from the mainstream’ (Levitas 2005: 21) and focused on the poor rather than the circumstances of the whole society. In this political discourse, monetary benefits are deemed to be ‘bad’ for their recipients, as they encourage ‘dependency’.

The third, social integrationist discourse (SID) identified by Levitas sees exclusion ‘as the breakdown of the structural, cultural and moral ties which bind the individual to society’ (Levitas 2005: 21). Marginalisation is again perceived as multi-faceted, including cultural, social, economic and spatial aspects. The reciprocal nature of solidarity is emphasised by this approach. Social programmes concentrate on ‘daily living, behaviour and family relationships’ (Levitas 2005: 21). Social integrationists see paid work as one of the possible integrative practices. In SID, both paid and unpaid work are accepted as having an integrating value.

Levitas argues that all three discourses have a moral content and discuss the value of work. This is essential for understanding changes in homelessness policy over the years, and especially at the time of the research, which took place at a crossroads in public policy. The three approaches differ in what the excluded are seen as lacking. ‘In
RED they have no money, in SID they have no work, in MUD they have no morals.’ (Levitas 2005: 27). Levitas (2005) argues that the New Labour discourse shifted from RED towards an inconsistent combination of MUD and SID. It has thus increasingly encouraged paid work as a way out of social exclusion, whilst not acknowledging the value of unpaid work. This approach was continued, with a new, clearer emphasis on paid employment under the Coalition Government from 2010 onwards. There is a clear financial aspect to this, which seems to compare workfare with welfare and this is particularly evident in homelessness. When it was first formed, the Social Exclusion Unit was seen as a combination between MUD and RED, placing at the centre neighbourhood issues, criminality, teenage pregnancy, ‘problem’ youth and linking them with unemployment. By emphasising the importance of work, the discourse shifted towards SID. Equality was defined as equality of opportunity, promoted on an economic background which remained fundamentally unequal (Hills and Stewart 2005). Hills and Stewart (2005) argued that Levitas’ position is unfair to New Labour in the 21st century, who in the following years introduced further developments which looked at other aspects than merely employment. In fact, the pre-2010 homelessness agenda brought to the fore community involvement, involvement of clients in their own support, quality of care and inter-agency work in equal measure to an employment trajectory (Communities and Local Government 2008, Sea City Housing Strategy 2008-2013, Sea City Homelessness Strategy 2007-2012, Supporting People 2007).

Following 2010, employment became predominant in the Coalition Government policy and severely influenced by deep benefit cuts (Jones and Pleace 2010). It could be argued that the Government's attitude had moved once again, this time towards a moral underclass discourse of the deserving versus not deserving, where the deserving were those who worked, participated in prescribed programmes and were remunerated for their achievements.

The introduction and use of social exclusion in homelessness policy is crucial for the redefinition of the term and especially for homelessness policy. It offers a multidimensional and multidisciplinary paradigm for understanding social inequality (Munck 2005). It is not a static concept but one that aims to be dynamic, changing overtime and taking into consideration the changes in times and politics (Widdowfield 1998, McCarthy 2013, Somerville 2012 etc.).
2.4. Homelessness legislation and policy 2002 - 2010

Having briefly outlined the history of the housing policy and conceptualised social exclusion in the previous sections, the present section presents the main pillars of homelessness legislation and policy in England at the time of research. It does this by listing them in a hierarchical order (from the central to the local level); social exclusion is present at all levels. The levels of homelessness policy are: The Social Exclusion Task Force – the Supporting People agency – Homelessness policies and strategies at a local level – the Integrated Support Pathway in Sea City – HSS’s own policy and practice.

2.4.1. Social Exclusion Task Force

Since 1997 and especially after 2002 (the year of the Homelessness Act), the existence of the Social Exclusion Task Force (old Social Exclusion Unit) brought an increased emphasis on social exclusion. In 2006 it released a Plan and Progress for Social Exclusion discussing the ‘cycle of disadvantage’, which showed that deprivation in one generation was likely to pass down to the next. Early experiences in someone's life were seen to have a significant impact in how the person would lead their life thereafter. The plan stressed the need for early intervention, early support and preventative action, which were deemed to make a difference in avoiding the exclusion of most individuals (Cabinet Office 2007). Alongside early intervention, the plan mentioned four other objectives: 1) identifying what works, 2) promoting multi-agency action, 3) tailoring programmes to individuals’ needs and rights, and 4) supporting achievement and managing underperformance (Cabinet Office 2007). Furthermore, the plan mentioned a need to target individuals ‘with chaotic lives’ and ‘multiple needs’ (Cabinet Office 2007: 11). These needs would be met by developing ‘alternative’ ways of caring for them, by ‘accelerating their employment’ and by tackling their ‘poor qualifications and skills’ (Cabinet Office 2007: 11). Essentially, the Action Plan for Social Exclusion centred on employment and life skills and thus proved to be in line with the SID (social integrationist) model described by Levitas. Intervention was seen as essential in the early lives of the potentially excluded individuals.

The Report that followed on from this document (the Reaching Out report, Cabinet Office 2007) reiterated the main elements in the New Labour Government discourse: cycle of disadvantage, which presupposed that people that grew up in poverty and disadvantage had a higher probability of going on to experience the same kind of
outcomes as their parents as adults (Cabinet Office 2007) and multiple deprivation in the context of the ‘most disadvantaged groups’, which are difficult to reach and engage with. The report once again stressed the Government’s new approach of ‘prevention’ rather than ‘treatment’, involving a life course approach to social exclusion (Cabinet Office 2007:9).

The Reaching Out Report, the Plan for Social Exclusion and local policies all adopted a social integrationist framework, reinforcing work and stability as main factors promoting social inclusion, and at the same time acknowledging the difficulties experienced by those already in a ‘cycle of disadvantage’ or suffering from multiple deprivation. These two documents were essential in forging strategies on homelessness at local levels. The following section offers a closer look at specific initiatives and strategies for housing and single homelessness.

Before May 2010, and as a result of the Reaching Out report, centrally imposed National Indicators covered homelessness at a national level in England. These were, specifically: National Indicator 142 (the number of people who are supported to maintain independent living) and National Indicator 146 (the number of households living in temporary accommodation) (Communities and Local Government 2008). Following May 2010, the Coalition Government announced that National Indicators and Local Area Agreements were to be abolished, as central government devolved more responsibility to local authorities as part of its localism agenda (Jones and Pleace 2010).

Even before 2010, since 2002 a slow process of transferring more decisive power to local authorities had started. Local authorities had to produce local housing and homelessness strategies (such as Sea City’s Supported Housing Strategy and Single Homelessness Strategy). Local authorities were told to take more responsibility for homelessness, to review provision, to adopt a more strategic response and then to review progress. This led to improvements in partnership working and to new or improved working relations between local authorities and voluntary sector groups working with single homeless people (Jones and Pleace 2010). These changes undoubtedly led to further regulation and more uniformity of standards across homelessness services, however key stakeholder feedback suggested an imbalance in the treatment of different homelessness groups (now firmly categorised). There was thus a reported belief that homelessness strategies ‘had tended to focus on priority groups (families with children and young people) and, in some areas, the most visible form of homelessness, rough sleeping, rather than on single homeless people more
generally’ (Jones and Pleace 2010). The group being researched in the present study belonged to ‘single homelessness’.

An evaluation of the services available to single homeless people up to 2010 (Jones and Pleace 2010) showed consistent improvement of these services over the last decade. Of particular importance is the growth of services providing ‘alternative’ paths, such as education, training and employment. However, Jones and Pleace (2010) emphasize there is not enough ‘robust research’ to demonstrate effectiveness of such services for ‘single homeless people’ over time. Certain areas of homelessness had been given particular attention (among these, youth homelessness and rough sleeping), while other issues identified in earlier research persisted (specifically poor health, barriers to employment, lack of appropriate accommodation) (Jones and Pleace 2010). However, the overall conclusion of the report was that the new policies adopted since 2002 had led to consistent improvements in housing support and housing provision for those in all homeless categories.

2.4.2. Supporting People

In order to keep track of the national indicators and the objectives set out by the Reaching out report, Supporting People was launched on the 1st of April 2003, as a Communities and Local Government initiative. Supporting People was (and still is, at the moment of writing up) a government body responsible for homelessness funding at a local level. Moving beyond the practical and financial, Supporting People was underpinned by a moral and political discourse on homelessness, which emphasises independence and change. For example, its main principle is ‘providing housing related support that enables people to move to independent housing.’ (Supporting People 2007:3). Since its inception in 2003 and exclusively until 2010, Supporting People functioned as the only commissioning body for local councils in terms of housing provision for people in need of support, in order to ‘help the smooth transition to independent living for those leaving an institutionalised environment’ (Communities and Local Government 2008: 1). The first of the Supporting People objectives is delivering quality of life and promoting independence. All Supporting People services therefore needed to prove high standards, strategic planning and cost efficiency. Planning and development of these services had to be needs-led (Supporting People 2008).
Although not all housing support services were funded through the Supporting People programme, HSS was one of the main services in Sea City in receipt of Supporting People money at the time of research.

Terms such as ‘user involvement’ and ‘empowerment’, ‘move on’ and ‘employment’ were an integral part of the enhanced Supporting People agenda. ‘User involvement and empowerment’ assume engaging clients of the organisation in all decision-making areas. ‘Move on’, in a Supporting People definition, is ‘a planned, supported process of change in an accommodation context’, which involves ‘developing the necessary skills to maintain a tenancy, as well as dealing with the practical challenges of finding and setting up a home’ (Supporting People 2008:1). All homeless people who aspired to moving through the Supporting People system needed to show their desire to work and live independently.

The Supporting People grant for England was distributed among local authorities, with amounts of money already allocated for different purposes. These strategies were reviewed every five years. Until 2009, Local Authorities had to directly report to Supporting People on the ways they decided to spend the grant (Communities and Local Government 2008).

2.4.3. Changes in Supporting People funding from 2009

In April 2009, the ‘ring-fence’ around Supporting People funds was removed, in other words, Communities and Local Government announced that the grant would be paid directly to the local councils, which would have to independently decide on their local needs for spending the money. This removal of the ring fence was aimed at ‘providing councils with the opportunity to come up with new and innovative ways to support their clients’ (Communities and Local Government 2008). This event was seen as creating both potential risks and opportunities. Among the concerns, the main one was that funds would be redirected towards social care services, away from the charitable sector, as well as away from the ‘unpopular’ groups among homeless people (such as older homeless or single homeless). Among other concerns was that with the removal of constraints to the use of that funding, the main positive aspect it had introduced – more strategic thinking and more planning ahead for the homelessness services - would be lost or would lose its area-wide impact and coherence.¹⁴ Lastly, the main

¹⁴ These concerns are connected with the fact that Supporting People had provided strategic thinking in the area of housing and homelessness, which could be lost if funds were to be redirected according to immediate need, and not long-term planning.
concern for housing charities similar to HSS was the expected decrease in funding coinciding with the comprehensive spending review of 2011-2015. Individual homelessness services became more and more uncertain of their funding, and soon some immediate cuts were obvious. The cuts became more considerable after May 2010, when HSS started to be directly affected. Thus, although awareness of the impending cuts had been raised, these had not happened before the interviews were collected.

The Supporting People service is still in transition at the time of writing up. Some of the concerns are that the housing support services affected by the cuts could be significantly constrained, and their support provision become minimal, due to the likelihood that financial reductions would be taking place in the holistic and inclusive side of the service (Jones and Pleace 2010).

Among key stakeholders, Supporting People was seen as one of the most important changes in homelessness policy and practice since 2002. The reported benefits were a direct amelioration in the housing and support conditions for ‘single homeless people’, increased joint and strategic working (among agencies in Sea City and between non-governmental agencies and the local authority) and the appearance and development of innovative intervention and housing services (Jones and Pleace 2010, Sea City Housing Strategy and Report, HSS Annual Report 2007-2013). This opinion was reflected at the local level, among the people I came in contact with and in relevant policy and strategic documents. At a local level, the main concern since 2010 was the gradual decrease in Supporting People funding, which forced all services to appeal to alternative sources of funding which were in high demand and very competitive. After the field research had been completed, in the Comprehensive Spending Review of 2012, housing was indeed one of the losers in terms of cuts from the government funding.

Under the Supporting People umbrella, the different housing support services were encouraged to work together and share good practice, towards a coherent strategic plan for single homelessness. The main focus areas still on-going at the time of writing were: growing emphasis on prevention (tenancy sustainment), employment, training and education.
2.4.4. Local housing and homelessness strategies

The local housing strategies and single homelessness strategies in place at the time reflected the Supporting People agenda. The housing strategy in Sea City centred on ‘providing a better quality of life for vulnerable people to live more independently and maintain their tenancies’ (Housing Strategy Sea City 2009-2014). The strategy dedicated a full section to ‘Single Homelessness and Rough Sleepers’. It talked about implementing a ‘multi-agency approach’ across all services, increasing ease of access to services for single homeless people and providing increased care for those facing ‘multiple diagnosis’, a word which resonates the ‘multiple deprivation’ announced by the Reaching Out Report and Plan of Social Exclusion. In fact, the homelessness agenda followed the national social exclusion agenda at the local level. The discourse of the Homelessness Strategy and Housing Strategy kept elements from a social integrationist discourse with traces of moral underclass. Unemployment and/ or lack of life skills combined with intervention in the early life were seen as main pillars to be tackled for combating the social exclusion of single homeless people. As a tool for promoting the independence of single homeless people and for measuring success in Sea City, the Integrated Care Pathway was introduced.

2.4.5. The Integrated Care Pathway

In Sea City, the Integrated Care Pathway was the local tool for Supporting People, a way of strategically solving the homelessness problem. In Sea City literature in 2007-2010, the Integrated Care Pathway was defined as ‘a gateway’ into services which would provide housing as well as support. Furthermore, the main aim of the pathway was to become a ‘route to independence’ for ‘single homeless, rough sleepers, young people at risk and ex-offenders’, thus to ‘actively promote independent living.’ The pathway was made up of a number of ‘support providers’ – housing services similar to HSS, largely varying in size, which functioned according to the same principles and whose standards were monitored in identical fashion. The services registered within the pathway were organised in ‘bands’ – levels of support, from most support needed to least support needed (or most ‘independent’). Thus, Band 1 included services reaching out to the people in the street, Band 2 included hostels providing high support

15 Anonymised.
16 The unreferenced quotes abundant in the present section were extracted from documents available solely to service providers registered within the pathway, HSS being one of them.
and twenty-four hour cover, Band 3 represented services providing support only during office hours, Band 4 provided floating support to people living in their own homes and Band 5 included the services giving crisis intervention, when tenancies could be lost. HSS had services in Band 2, Band 3 and Band 4. All interviewees came from residential services either of a Band 2 or Band 3 level¹⁷.

The Integrated Care Pathway was meant as 'an integrated pathway of resettlement services that challenged service users to make life changes, fulfil their potential, achieve independence and become contributing members of the community.' (Single Homeless People Strategy 2002-2007). The key aim of the Pathway was to give vulnerable people the right type of support at the right time and to gradually enable them to move through homelessness services into employment and more independent living, thereby overcoming their personal barriers to social inclusion. The structure of the Pathway was therefore aimed at accommodating different support needs. Later strategies (2009-2014) recognised the possibility that people may move in any direction and at any pace in the Pathway according to their needs. When it was first launched (2007), the Pathway was putting a strong emphasis on quick move ons and attending specific life skills and employment courses. By 2010, the emphasis on move on decreased and was replaced by a more relaxed perspective over the lengths of time spent in supported housing. The emphasis on life skills courses was replaced in 2010 by an insistence on work placements and work retraining schemes.

2.4.6. HSS policies on housing and support

HSS policies and supporting paperwork followed the guidelines of the Integrated Care Pathway, however subtle differences were noticeable. HSS provided ‘temporary accommodation’. The study took place at a time when ‘serious problems’ connected to living in bed and breakfast hotels especially had been identified (Shelter 2008). Therefore, temporary accommodation came to the forefront as a service which could ensure the necessary conditions for moving out of homelessness, eventually.

Within the Integrated Care Pathway, HSS was a ‘fixed site move-on service’, utilising ordinary housing where a support worker was attached. The support worker worked with the clients to prepare them for move on. Once the client was ready to move into

¹⁷ Table 6.1. in Chapter 6 details where each interviewee lived.
‘independent’ housing, the support worker was allocated to the person who would take their place in the supported housing project.

At the time of research, a unifying template of support paperwork had not been introduced. HSS and many similar organisations had to create their own support tools, following loose guidelines provided by the local authority, such as a list of ‘support needs’ and of different types of paperwork necessary: a ‘risk assessment’, ‘support needs assessment’ and ‘support plan’. The main differences lie at the level of the support plan, which was a type of contract drawn between the supported housing client and their support worker/ keyworker. It listed the client's perceived ‘support needs’, from the perspective of the client and of the keyworker, as well as the actions agreed by the client and the support worker that would lead to dealing with those needs and would thus ensure sustenance of their accommodation and potential ‘move on’. HSS ‘support plans’ were the most detailed and rigorous of the support plans I have seen in Sea City. Respectful of the individual’s own voice, they included separate sections for the client and the staff member to individually express their opinion. The guidance accompanying the support plans was detailed and it emphasised the individuality of each homelessness case and the need to look at each individual holistically, with their own ‘support needs’. The paperwork also recorded the amount of time spent in the service, which could vary largely. Some people had resided twenty years or more at HSS, thus arrived at HSS before the Supporting People ‘support’ ideology and other people had only recently started to live at HSS.

On the other hand, the detailed and almost prescriptive nature of the support paperwork did lead to the keyworking sessions being quite lengthy and bureaucratic. There was almost an expectation or assumption that the support worker would be untrained or unexperienced and thus the paperwork gave step-by-step instructions on how to use the keyworking session. An example of a ‘support plan’ before 2010 is attached in Appendix 5.

Since 2010, the paperwork has substantially diminished and is imposed by the local authority. The classical support plan listing ‘goals’ of ‘move on’ and personal care has now become a visual representation of someone’s situation at various moments in time: at the time of accessing supported accommodation, regularly while living there and at the time of exit. Figure 1.1 shows an example of this new plan – the Outcome star, before completion. Following subsequent inputting, the outcome star would have several lines drawn onto it, which would give an immediate visual representation of
where the client was on the graph. The higher the score, the more complex the 'support need' and thus more keyworker input would be required.

**Figure 2.1. Outcomes star**

It was commonly recognised in Sea City that the Outcomes Star had brought further uniformity among services, it had reduced the amount of paperwork and kept reflections regarding the individual succinct and to a minimum.

Even more, at the time of the study, in HSS there were differences between the guidance to paperwork and what happened in practice. Thus the guidance advised that all paperwork (support plan, risk assessment etc.) be filled in together with the resident. However, it was ultimately decided at HSS that the risk assessment (which detailed previous offences and perceived risks towards self and public) would be shown to the clients, but not amended by the clients, unless specifically requested. The explanation was that upon showing it, the support worker might feel obliged to diminish the client’s ‘risk score’, which might ultimately be in their detriment, as it would
not alert other potential agency staff of their actual needs, so it would not act in the client's 'best interest'. At the time of writing up, this process had changed again, which meant that all paperwork was available for updating by the client. It could be argued that this need to retain some of the control was the expected reaction during a profound change of culture at HSS and in Sea City housing services in general. The present study explores the clients’ own perceptions of what they considered important when living at HSS and thus sheds a different perspective on the impact of paperwork and institutional culture on the interviewees.

2.5. Changes in policy since the research: localism, Work programme, Welfare Reform and Housing First

The strategic changes announced by the Coalition Government in 2010 presented specific challenges for the homelessness sector. Among these: the localism agenda, the Big Society, the welfare reform (including the introduction of the benefit cap), a new work programme and the housing reform, all under a Comprehensive Spending Review 2010-2012.

Localism involved devolution to greater local government, locally delivered public services and more empowered local communities (Jones and Pleace 2010). Introduced at the end of the New Labour governance, localism was an area the Coalition Government focused on. Localism was meant to ensure more flexibility for local authorities in deciding what services to invest their allocated money into. There was thus a potential for creating innovative solutions for homelessness. But, by not specifically regulating it, some parts of homelessness, such as single homelessness, could lose focus.

Changes and reductions in Housing Benefit\(^{18}\) and Local Housing Allowance\(^{19}\) had the potential to place many households in financial difficulty. This was coupled with sanctions, such as withdrawal of benefit for those who did not comply with the new housing requirements imposed (for example, the ‘bedroom tax’\(^{20}\)).

\(^{18}\) Benefit for people on low income, helping them to pay their rent.

\(^{19}\) Benefit paid by the local authority to help people who were renting from private landlords.

\(^{20}\) The local authority could sanction people that they had assessed as having ‘spare’ bedrooms in the rented housing they occupied (if that housing was owned by the local authority or social housing).
The *Work programme* promised personalised, flexible support for people seeking to get back into work from specialised services. However, it was introduced at the same time as the ‘payment by results’ for support providers. There was an immediate concern that housing providers might ‘cherry-pick’ those clients who were closer to the labour market, thus leaving behind those least ready to restart work.

This concern became acute following *the housing reform*, which announced reducing the budget allocated to housing services, as well as higher rents for tenants and fixed term contracts for new social tenants. It was announced that the Comprehensive Spending Review (started in 2010) would result in 12% reduction in Supporting People funding by 2014 (Jones and Pleace 2010). Previous New Labour concepts, such as education and training, subsided under the changed focus towards gaining paid employment. The *Welfare Reform* was now talking about changing the social benefits so that ‘claimants are better off in work than on benefits’ and thus it would ensure ‘smoothing [of] the transition from welfare to work’ (Jones and Pleace 2010). *Universal Credit* was the new, unified benefit, which was ‘designed to make work pay’\(^{21}\). There was thus a clear adoption of a work-based approach to the social system and thus, in this clear movement from welfare to workfare, a clear separation between those deserving (in employment) and those less deserving (who were not successful in gaining or sustaining employment).

At the local level, the change in focus before and after 2010 was apparent. When comparing Sea City Single Homeless People Strategy 2002-2007 to the 2009-2014 strategy, the vision changes from ‘to eradicate rough sleeping, prevent homelessness, and help the most vulnerable residents to achieve settled homes, independent living and social mobility’, to ‘reducing rough sleeping to zero, reducing inequality, social exclusion and disadvantage through learning, skills and employment, ensuring that people are able to move on and maximizing their independence’. Thus, gaining skills and employment becomes one of the key solutions to social exclusion.

Already prior to 2010, evaluations of the Supporting People service found the lack of sufficient appropriate housing (either supported housing or reflected in supportive schemes in the community) as a main barrier to move on (Jones and Pleace 2010, Single Homeless Strategy 2007-2012 Sea City, Cabinet Office 2007). This had a subsequent effect on clients securing employment, as it was found that many

\(^{21}\) For a more detailed description of the changes brought about by the Welfare Reform, please refer to Appendix 4.
employers were reluctant to interview people living in hostels (Jones and Pleace 2010, Sea City Single Homeless Strategy 2007-2012). Increasing notifications of people feeling ready to move on, but not having where to move to appeared in Sea City reporting (Sea City Single Homeless Strategy 2007-2012).

An incipient idea for resolving the supported housing problem was to adopt a new housing system, similar to ‘Housing First’ in Europe. At a European level, there was a shift in philosophy from the ‘pathway’ or ‘staircase’ models of housing provision for single homeless people to a ‘housing first’ approach, which assumes immediate ‘permanent supportive housing’ without the previous gradual plan. This new focus was connected to the new political focus on ‘ending homelessness’ rather than ‘managing’ it (Jones and Pleace 2010). This type of housing had not yet been adopted in the UK at the time of writing up, but it was favoured by some homelessness lobbying agencies. It assumed placing single homeless people with specific support needs directly into permanent independent housing without any requirement for clients to accept more than a minimum support level from visiting workers (Jones and Pleace 2010).

2.6. Summary

Chapter 2 has offered an introduction to the main policy terms that this study refers to, while also setting the policy scene for the research findings. It has placed the research at a point of change and relative uncertainty in the homelessness sector. Whilst promoting an empowering discourse and after having introduced significant changes to homelessness policy (such as Supporting People), the New Labour Government limited the impact of organisations by removing the ring fence of Supporting People funding, in April 2009. The Government discourse at the time suggested a social integrationist model with moral underclass elements. After 2010, the Coalition Government changes in policy leaned more towards MUD than the previous government. In this context, recently emphasised by a ‘payment by results’ attitude which was drawing on quantitative presentations of the value of the money spent, a qualitative study, querying the impact of this discourse on the homeless individual seemed timely. The study was located in a flagship town for policy, with a real homelessness issue. Chapter 3 offers a theoretical perspective over the concept of homelessness. In the concluding chapter of the thesis I reflect back on the policy in order to further understand its relationship with the attitudes of the people using the system.
CHAPTER 3. Main themes emerging from reviewing qualitative homelessness research

3.1. Introduction

This is the second of two chapters setting out the theoretical and policy background for the present study (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3). Moving on from social policy, chapter 3 places the research in a qualitative literature context. It does this by pointing out main themes that previous research engages with and existing gaps in literature.

The chapter is divided into two parts. Part I presents the evolution of homelessness research, from a qualitative perspective, to date. Main themes such as stigma, body, housing etc. emerge. These themes are each considered chronologically, as they were developed in homelessness studies. Thus sections 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7. and 3.8. provide descriptions of the concepts of stigma, new homelessness, body, time and home.

Part II offers a discussion on identity and on existing studies which consider homelessness research within a context of identity theories. Part II aims to further discuss a link between these two fields, while the rest of the thesis engages in a dialogue between identity theories and homelessness research in the present day.

PART I. Homelessness literature to date

In recent years there has been an increase in qualitative studies on homelessness, with a large number taking on a narrative or thematic approach at least at one stage in the research process. These studies aimed to delve further into homeless people’s own perspectives of their lives and the housing they received. Part I of this chapter presents the main theoretical concepts this research has elaborated on, in approximate chronological order.
3.2. Conceptualising homelessness in qualitative research

At the time of the study, whilst qualitative research had started to experience an impetus, quantitative research predominated, especially at Government level. Government departments (the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and its predecessors) had started to periodically fund large scale studies of homelessness, and specifically relevant for the present study - Single Homeless People studies (Anderson et al 1993, Dean et al 1997, Fitzpatrick et al 2000) and various surveys on hostels and other forms of temporary accommodation (Smith et al 1992, Bacon et al 1996). For a long time and to some extent still, the majority of research on homelessness in the UK was being undertaken by homelessness charities and pressure groups, and there is now a large volume of such work (Fitzpatrick et al 2000), but the remit and reach of the research was often influenced by the monetary constraints of the organisations and/or by contemporary policy issues, often relating to budget cuts.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the need to look at homeless people’s experiences from their own perspective was acknowledged (Snow and Anderson 1993, Neale 1997, Goode 2000). Qualitative researchers presented several critiques to the predominantly quantitative research of the time. Ultimately all these critiques were connected to an uncertain definition of homelessness, coming from the quantitative researchers’ sole preoccupation with work around clarifying the causation of homelessness (Fitzpatrick 2005), its risk factors (Crisis 2008) and recurring patterns (Communities and Local Government 2008). Qualitative theorists argued that by continuing to use and not challenge a very limited definition of homelessness, quantitative research left a lot of questions unanswered (McCarthy 2013, Maruyama 2006).

Qualitative researchers criticised the tendency to categorise ‘homeless people into various stereotypes and to make assumptions about their lives’, exhibited by both academic research and other deciding bodies connected to homelessness (such as the media, homelessness charities looking for donors) (McCarthy 2013: 54).

Still at present, there is not one over-encompassing definition of homelessness. Different theoretical approaches bring different viewpoints to homelessness. Before the 2000s, theories which assumed that homeless people’s needs and requirements for policy would be quantified and answered for/catered for were prevalent. After 2000

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22 Such questions can be: what factors influence how roles are constructed? What is the dynamic between these constructions and people’s personal identities?
and especially more recently, poststructuralist (Farrugia 2011), feminist (Washington and Moxley, Neale 1997, Casey et al 2008, De Ward 2007) and postmodernist (Da Silva 2007) theories recognised the wide variations encountered in the homeless population, in terms of their backgrounds, ethnic origin, reasons for being homeless, sex, gender, use of public space etc. and therefore accepted that there was not just one possible approach for homelessness, from the policy and research perspective.

Another reason for an uncertain definition of homelessness for a long time could be the ever-changing nature of the concept (expanding in recent years to include newer forms of temporary housing, for instance) and the disagreement in practice regarding the types of homelessness that there are (Widdowfield 1998, Adkins et al 2003). This led, according to some qualitative researchers, to whole categories within homelessness being ignored for long periods of time. One of these categories is the ‘unseen’ or ‘hidden’ (Widdowfield 1998) homeless. ‘Unseen’ homelessness is the ‘unofficial’ side of homelessness, that is, those people who are not yet on the street, nor in local authority properties, but still in inappropriate accommodation, yet not recognising it as such and not referring to themselves as homeless. Another category which tended to be ignored until recently was the ‘new homeless’ – a term originally used in America and denoting the increased variety of homeless people in contemporary societies: homeless mothers (Goode 2000), homeless families (Shinn et al 2013, Fargo et al 2013, Gultekin 2014), young people (Haldenby et al 2007), homeless people who were mentally ill or using drugs/alcohol (Montgomery 2008), women homeless (Adkins et al 2003, Watson and Austerberry 1998, Casey et al 2008, De Ward 2007), older homeless (Washington and Moxley 2008), rough sleepers (Butchinsky 2007, Parsell 2011).

This chapter focuses on the main themes and tendencies emerging in qualitative homelessness research, in this new context, across the last decade. Since the 2000s, the body of qualitative homelessness research has started to grow. This study occupies a unique position in homelessness literature, at a time when even in the context of growing qualitative research, very few studies focused on ‘single homeless people’23. The present chapter argues that not taking account of day to day experiences of homeless people can lead to gaps and misunderstandings in policy.

In terms of themes in homelessness research, the focus changed, from a preoccupation with stigma in the 1990s, to a larger focus on identities, multi-

23 This affirmation excludes the quantitative studies on single homeless people, which mainly aim to respond to existing policies.
disciplinarity and the concept of home and time after 2000 and recently. Among these studies, many used narrative (life story) analysis, sometimes combined with thematic approaches as interviewing and analysis methods. Those researchers made the case for narrative studies being able to add important observations about different categories within the homelessness field (Stephenson 2003, Ravenhill 2008, Hanninen and Koski-Jannes 1999, Parsell 2011, Juhlia 2004). Homeless people’s ‘stock of stories’ is considered crucial in constructing homeless people’s identity (Hanninen and Koski-Jannes 1999), as the chapter further illustrates.

3.3. Beginnings of qualitative research on homelessness: Snow and Anderson 1987

As previously mentioned, in the late 1980s and 1990s, authors began to expand on the (then) traditional understanding of homelessness as easily quantified and considered independent from people’s own experiences, to a more nuanced understanding of homelessness as part of the lived experience (Neale 1997, Snow and Anderson 1987 and 1993, Somerville 1992 and 2012, Casey et al 2008, McCarthy 2013, De Ward 2007), and thus largely dependent on people’s individual reactions and opinions about it. This change in attitude towards homelessness is significant and its effects are more recently starting to be felt.

Among the main precursors of this change in sociological thought were Snow and Anderson (1987 and 1993). Their symbolic interactionist study was innovative in the homelessness research field. Theirs was among the first attempts to research homelessness as disruption in someone’s life course, leading to an awareness of the person’s own image and role in society. During their study on homelessness, consisting of a year-long ethnographic immersion in the field, in various American cities, Snow and Anderson did a lot of what they called ‘hanging out’ with the homeless. The study also involved some life history interviews with a series of homeless people. Snow and Anderson found that the only way homeless people could construct and negotiate their situation was through ‘identity talk’, a constant process of self-reflection, involving own images of homelessness and others’ attitudes. In this context, Snow and Anderson found three different identity types among the homeless. Firstly, the ‘distancing’ type involved active distancing from the world of the homeless. Especially those recently homeless expressed a strong aversion towards other homeless individuals, unlike those who had been in the homeless situation for a while. Secondly,
Snow and Anderson noticed ‘embracement’ among homeless people, which meant accepting the situation the homeless people found themselves in. ‘Embracement’ went as far as acknowledging a specific role within the homeless population (such as tramp). The third form of identity talk observed by Snow and Anderson was ‘fictive storytelling’. In ‘fictive storytelling’, the individual narrated ‘present, past or future experiences and accomplishments that had a fictive character to them’ (Snow and Anderson, 1987: 1359) and in this process used narration to construct a new identity.

Snow and Anderson’s study was important firstly because it drew attention towards the need to consider homelessness as a stigmatising experience, at this stage the concept of stigma being only an emerging concept in homelessness research. Secondly, Snow and Anderson’s three typologies (distancing, embracing and fictive storytelling) have since been used time and time again to identify the subtle differences between homeless people’s feelings and general attitudes to the homelessness experience: Hanninen and Koski-Jannes 1999, Goode 2000, Ravenhill 2008, Radley 2006, De Ward 2007, to mention only a few.

3.4. **The concept of stigma**

Subsection 3.4. discusses the concept of stigma in detail as appearing in qualitative studies on homelessness, while at the same time considering recent conceptualisations of stigma.

3.4.1. **Introduction**

Snow and Anderson (1993)’s study presupposed an existing state of stigmatisation for the homeless individuals, without consideration as to whether all presupposed instances of stigmatisation actually happened in the setting the research was taking place. This is an incipient way of looking at stigma, which has since been refined.

Since Snow and Anderson’s study, much of the literature on homelessness has highlighted stigma as an important concept. Stigma, in Goffman (1963)’s definition, refers to the disapproval that a person is (or is perceived to be) associated with. In other words, stigma is an attribute or a behaviour which is discreditable in a specific way. Judgement can be passed on a health-related problem or illness or features of

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24 Each of these studies benefits from detailed discussion further in this chapter.
identity (such as race, social status, gender and housing). Stigma, since its original definition (Goffman 1963), has been associated with notions of ‘shame’ and deviations from the ‘normal’, where the ‘normal’ was the acceptable state at a specific moment in time for others and for the self, as follows.

Goffman (1963) discussed three separate forms of social stigma: physical deformations, deviations in personal traits (such as alcoholism, mental illness etc.) and deviations of a group (ethnic, religious etc.). Goffman also differentiated between three types of adults: the ‘stigmatised’ (those bearing the stigma), the ‘normals’ (those who did not bear the stigma) and the wise (those familiar with the stigma, and accepted by the stigmatised as knowledgeable of the condition). Goffman further differentiated between the ‘discredited’ (those whose stigma is easily visible) and the ‘discreditable’ (those who can conceal their stigma). The differentiation is important, as both these categories are faced with different issues. The discredited are permanently faced with the tensions of having to deal with their stigma on a daily basis in interactions with the ‘normals’. The discreditable face the day-to-day issue of concealing information in order to continue to hide the stigma from others. After Snow and Anderson (1993), homelessness literature started recognising the ambiguous status of the homelessness experience which can lead both to discreditable, and discredited types of behaviour, as the following sections show.

According to Goffman (1963), the stigmatised could find themselves in three states when faced with the stigma: correcting the ‘flaw’, considering the flaw to be a ‘blessing in disguise’ (which hides other potential ‘failures’) or talking from the perspective of the persons who experienced the flaw and now found themselves on the other end. This separation between three states and further elaborations on people’s attitudes to their own lives and to potential stigma/‘discreditable’ events informed Snow and Anderson (1993)’s study and subsequent qualitative homelessness research. The stigmatised, Goffman argued, could develop processes of hiding and revealing the stigma, in order to control their identity. Thus, when the ‘discreditable’ decided to show their stigma through a chosen symbol (for example wearing glasses, when they would be ridiculed for it), they found themselves in a privileged situation of control. Much of the literature on homelessness and identity draws on insights from Goffman (1963), on the constant renegotiation and re-presentation of different social roles depending on social context and interaction.
3.4.2. ‘Felt’ and ‘enacted’ stigma

Qualitative research in the 1990s and early 2000s started to further develop the concept of stigma of homelessness. In a study on representations of women who were homeless, Taylor (1993) showed that homeless people's appearance (unclean) and having an identity without certification (without paper proof) affected homeless women's sense of self-esteem and personhood. In this case, it was not others’ perceptions of themselves, but others’ ‘felt’ (Scambler 2009) perceptions by the homeless women which affected the women’s self-esteem.

Scambler (2009) introduced the differentiation between ‘felt’ and ‘enacted’ stigma. ‘Felt’ stigma can be defined as the perceived threat of being stigmatised (which has not actually happened), the internalised perception of not being ‘as good as’, or as valuable, while ‘enacted’ stigma encompasses the actual incidents of stigmatisation. ‘Felt’ stigma might relate to fears of being treated differently, or of being labelled by others, even though the stigmatising element is not apparent as such. Individuals experience ‘shame’ and view themselves as discreditable. Seeing themselves as different, even though there is nothing apparent to suggest difference to others, assumes ‘felt’ stigma. ‘Enacted’ stigma refers to the response of others to visible characteristics of the person. For example, refusing someone's entrance to an official building (like a bank) because of their appearance, would be ‘enacted’ stigma. Scambler argued that it was ‘felt’ stigma, even though this had not happened yet, that was more dangerous for how individuals perceived themselves. Stigma is generally part of a vicious circle which continues and even worsens unless stopped (Scambler 2009). Many homelessness studies drew attention towards this subtle differentiation at the level of stigma (although not directly mentioning Scambler’s work on this subject at that point), and therefore research in the late 1990s and early 2000s started to focus on homeless people’s reactions to the ‘felt’ stigma and more generally, their perception of homelessness. The importance of the ‘felt’ stigma cannot be underestimated. For example, Schneider’s (2012) study is very illustrative of this. Schneider researched the entries of one homeless man to his blog over a period of two years. She observed that the homeless person lived through continuous attempts to conform to a general image of what he believed society saw as ‘normal’, as he kept writing about his attempts at being a ‘better version of what I have been’ (by suggesting

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25 Even though not directly specified in homelessness research of the time, I am using Scambler (2009)'s distinction and terminology, as I feel it makes a clearer distinction on the new emphasis of homelessness qualitative studies of the time.
he would be drinking less, feel more ‘in control’, suffer less from his mental illness etc.), and thus assuming a stigmatised perception from his audience (his readers).

The differentiation between ‘felt’ and ‘enacted’ stigma is important because it helps understand the importance of delving into the different reactions homeless people have regarding their situation. In their study, centring on homeless people’s use of public space, Radley et al (2005) reported the attempts made by homeless people to pass as other characters, such as city dwellers, in order to remove the potential stigmatisation which might have been occurring otherwise. Radley et al (2005) named this reaction ‘passing’, in a Goffmanesque (1963) interpretation of the term. Homeless people believed that whilst some of them could make unrestricted use of the public space (by passing as city dwellers), others would be restricted to the social roles attributed to them by their appearance (beggar, drinker etc.). In their study on homeless women’s use of public spaces, Casey et al (2008) observed the homeless women presented themselves as ‘non-homeless’ in order to be able to use public spaces – the women were ‘blending in by adopting expected behaviour’ and were thus present where they would not have been expected – the homeless women were ‘staking a claim’ to the public spaces. These reactions (Radley et al 2005, Casey et al 2008) resonate with Snow and Anderson’s ‘embracement’ and ‘distancing’ types. This assumption of roles within the homelessness society is often encountered in homelessness studies, at any point in the homelessness experience, not only at the street level. For instance, in her study pointing out hierarchies among homeless people who were housed at the time of the research, Williams (1998) observed a difference in self-defining between homeless women and women affected by domestic violence. Although all in temporary accommodation, the latter saw themselves superior, as they could elude the categorisation of victims and presented themselves more as dignified survivors. To them, ‘homeless’ suggested ‘a woman mentally ill or drug addicted, unwashed, helpless and hopeless, a person mired in a permanent lifestyle rather than in transition.’ (Williams 1998: 149) Once again, in this study, the assumed perceptions of others played an important role. Especially important in the study were physical appearances (‘unwashed’) as a means of social hierarchy. These studies revealed a tendency in general perceptions of taking homelessness ‘to mean a constant defining attribute’, ignoring the fact that ‘at different times of the day, in different contexts, with different people, individuals might align more with any other attribute’ (McCarthy 2013: 55), such as gender, sexuality, role as mother or father.

Snow and Anderson’s (1993), Williams’ (1998), Radley et al’s (2005) and Casey et al’s (2008) research helped highlight the different reactions that the homeless people
adopted to counter-act the effect of felt or enacted stigma. These reactions took different hypostases: embracement, distancing (while passing as ‘normals’) and ‘fictive storytelling’, in Snow and Anderson’s definition. ‘Distancing’ was illustrative for the big gap that could exist between others’ perceptions of homeless people and their own perceptions, or how they wanted to be viewed. An important aspect was the act of differentiating from certain physical connotations of homelessness (Williams 1998). In fact, further discussion on the homeless body and on the need of present research to take the body into account follows in section 3.7.

**3.4.3. Studies focusing on homelessness and identity**

When considering the effects of the ‘felt’ stigma on the homeless individuals and when taking into account these individuals’ own ways of managing this stigma, the concept of identity comes into focus. Some qualitative homelessness studies acknowledged that homeless identities are and should be viewed as more complex than the public perception and that qualitative analysis is necessary to understand the homeless individuals in a process of sense-making and rebuilding of potentially stigmatised or stigmatising identities.

In her study on two Finnish shelters for homeless men and women, Juhila (2004) brought to the fore the stigmatising nature of the shelters, which were seen in the public opinion as ‘last resort welfare institutions’. Juhila was interested to understand whether and what identities the shelter residents constructed for themselves and their places of residence, and if this happened, whether they constructed identities in response to the dominant, stigmatising ones. In her analysis of the seventeen interviews with men and women living in shelters, the researcher noticed the persistence of a comparison between the interviewee’s identity and that of the assumed stigma of the institution. Jhulia argued her interviewees’ method of coping with the stigma associated with their places of residence was to fashion different identities at different points in their life. Thus some of those identities were placed at various moments in the past (before accessing the institution and soon after, for example). Another strategy of coping with the stigma was to compare themselves to other residents at the housing facility, this having the purpose to show them in favourable light. Juhila defined this non-acceptance of the stigma as ‘talking back’ to it, through building different identities at different stages in their lives, through the narrative experience.

Another study on sheltered housing and querying the residents’ identity talk strategies is De Ward (2007)’s study of twenty women in sheltered housing in America. De Ward
aimed to find out how homeless women’s identities were affected by the general negative perceptions of homeless people. The study, which employed qualitative interviews, drew on Snow and Anderson’s (1993) previously mentioned findings of three different identity types: embracing, distancing and fictive story-tellers. De Ward argued that participants in her study reacted to the felt stigma of the shelter by engaging in ‘identity talk strategies to reframe their experiences and restore the congruence’ (De Ward 2007: 47). Their distancing strategies referred both to the institution seen as undesirable and to some of its residents. Embracement involved assuming a partial role of shelter resident, thus using stories about the ‘undesirable’ shelter residents as comparison. Finally, by embellishing their past or present circumstances or ‘fantasising’ about their positive futures, some residents removed themselves from their on-going stigmatising situation.

Harter et al (2005)’s ethnographic study with young people, their educators and case managers suggested that through processes of stigmatisation, youth street homelessness disappeared – became invisible, this on the one hand serving the already stigmatising public processes of homeless identity formulation, and on the other hand undermining them, making dealing with youth homelessness harder. Harter et al discussed the emergence of ‘resilience’ against stigmatising processes by the marginalised homeless, especially among younger homeless. The homeless youth reacted to the processes of stigmatisation by enacting different identities such as the ‘street smarts’.

Similarly, based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted over a period of six months with rough sleepers in Australia, Parsell (2011)’s study started off with the aim to describe a perpetuating ‘homeless identity’. This ‘homeless’ identity was, in Parsell’s view, one dimensional, ill-fitting and never informed by actually spending time with the individuals in question. However, the homeless people still managed to maintain agency in shaping their identities to a certain extent.

Parsell located identities in a social and interactional context, thus always in relationship with other people and being enacted in a fluid and plural fashion, with an element of self-performance. For the researcher, body language was seen as important in expressing the individual’s identity in ways that words did not. In the study, participants particularly enacted two elements of the self: the ‘passive meek homeless person’, characterised by the ‘display of submission and the absence of any overt assertiveness or drive’ and the ‘assertive customer’, an assertive self who ‘overtly displayed confidence’, and who found themselves in stark contrast with the first. This
was linked with context. Thus the passive meek identity was enacted upon receiving charity and in the street, whereas the assertive customer belonged to the social services office.

Butchinsky (2007)’s participant observation with 200 rough sleepers in Oxford over three years also aimed at discussing the effects of the negative connotations of the public image of homelessness. Butchinsky brings to the fore notions of ‘engagement and disengagement’ of rough sleepers, combined with tactical uses of their identities. This tactical use involved subtle differences between categories of rough sleepers (for instance, the homeless versus the ‘part-time homeless’ – those who had been housed for periods of time). Other important issues brought into discussion by Butchinsky are the multi-dimensionality of hardship that homelessness imposes, this suggesting a need to explore the physical aspect of homelessness, the importance of the immediate (homeless) community for expressions of identity and a suggestion of time as important. Thus Butchinsky mentioned the notion of ‘empty time’ – time the homeless people had ‘to kill’, a negative notion of time, which had as main structuring force work, that is, those moments when the participants were temporarily engaged in work. Notions of time and homelessness are further explored in this chapter and in subsequent chapters.

This section shows that over the last decade there has been increasing interest in studying the performance of homeless identities within a social and interactional context. Community, outsiders’ perceptions and time all play a role in the fashioning of identities of the homeless people. The following section shows how the institution specifically plays a role in enhancing the ‘enacted’ stigma of homelessness.

3.4.4. Enacted stigma – ‘playing the victim’

An examination of the relationship between homeless people and the institution develops the discussion of enacted and felt stigma further.

Homelessness studies started to point out the impact that institutions could have on the formation of a stigma on homelessness and the homeless people’s reactions to existing institutional stigma. In relation to the institution, reactions to stigmatisation were closer to ‘embracement’, as detailed below. Some authors warned of the close connection between the homelessness institution and the homeless person in the production of narratives; sometimes, this became a co-production of stories (Lovell 1997, Goode 2000, Marvasti 2002, Cramer 2005, Williams 1998 etc.). During his three-
year study on the relationship between homeless people and institutions, Marvasti (2002) noticed manipulation of stories and concepts. He signalled the ‘collaborative narratives’ put together by staff and residents for the ‘outsiders’ (as a ‘better’ story, or what they thought the outsiders wanted to/ought to hear). Marvasti found it difficult to identify the homeless person’s narrative or opinion in this collaborative story. He argued that staff’s conviction that there should be a better narrative for the residents ultimately led to confusion for the homeless people and a lesser ability to self-define. In her study on homelessness and domestic violence, Williams (1998) noted how the restrictions in admission procedures at shelters led to women defining their experiences as belonging to the identity required by the shelter, sometimes hiding one problem and emphasising another for this purpose. Similarly, during her observations at three different homelessness institutions in the UK, Cramer (2005) noted the different treatments between men and women, with women being given priority and often treated as acceptable ‘exceptions’. Men were not treated equally even if they had children. Cramer also showed that the imbalanced treatment of women over men at the level of the institution was counter-balanced by local authority provision, which favoured male homeless applicants. Van Doorn (2003) warned that little attention was given to the dynamics arising from institutions and homeless people’s interaction. Furthermore, other studies discussed occurrences of ‘playing the victim’ – homeless people learned how to behave and what to say in order to get most help, get benefits or receive public sympathy. Ravenhill (2008) believed this happened partly due to the ‘medicalisation’ of homelessness: homeless people were treated as if they were ill, and mental health diagnoses were imposed on them, or, even more relevant to the present study, they were retrained, re-educated through the means of ‘life skills’ courses, social workers and keyworker support.

3.5. After 2000: ‘New’ homelessness

As shown above, homelessness studies started to focus on a more complex meaning of stigma, which took into consideration the impact of ‘felt’ stigma among the homeless population. Goode (2000) investigated the day-to-day lives of forty-eight mothers who used drug and alcohol and were housed in temporary accommodation, arguing that this was an area often disregarded by research. This was a population which was hard to access, and therefore the researcher relied on gate-keepers and their relationship with the women for obtaining and maintaining access. Goode’s (2000) report thus became as much focused on her method (qualitative interviewing with a substantial
involvement from workers) as on the results. Goode (2000) discussed the stigma of being a mother who had an alcohol problem. Her description can be identified as falling into the category of ‘felt’ stigma. Goode purported that the women perceived the existence of stigma before this actually materialised: ‘Normative motherhood has been regarded as incompatible with the use of a variety of psychoactive substances, of which alcohol can be seen as the paradigmatic case’ (Goode, 2000: 20). The study found that substance-using homeless mothers valued motherhood and had more in common with non-substance-using mothers than with their substance-using male counterparts. The substance-using mothers developed strategies to protect their children from finding out and were often not accessing services in order to avoid social service intervention. Goode (2000) stressed the reluctance of mothers with alcohol or substance use problems to engage with social and housing services and to thus acknowledge their ‘problem’, preferring to create a different image of themselves to their children, in order to protect their children from the perceived stigma of having a mother who did not behave according to the ‘social prescriptions of what a mother is and how she ought to behave’. Goode therefore urged for a change in policies and attitudes to drug-using mothers, to acknowledge a change in adult relationships, which become fragile and disrupted in contemporary society, this making certain values, such as relationship with the children, become even more central than before. Goode believed that a new type of homelessness was the result of these societal changes and changes in family values. ‘New’ homelessness was mentioned in other subsequent studies as a reaction to a changed society, which led to an increased variety of types of homeless people and homelessness issues in contemporary societies: Adkins et al (2003), Sjoblom (2004), Washington and Moxley (2008), Padgett et al (2006) etc.

Adkins et al (2003) combined a systematic literature review with a policy review and data collection over four different Australian services providing housing and support exclusively to women and identified key innovative practice in those services. Similar to Goode (2000), Adkins et al (2003) discussed the ‘new homelessness’ phenomenon, caused by the tendency to not separate between types of homelessness. They underlined the propensity to marginalise women in research and therefore their housing needs and experiences would not be explored and further, not addressed. At the same time, a modification in the shape of families and households, deregulation of the labour market and a general ‘increase in the risk and precariousness of social life’ were putting women in a vulnerable position and more exposed to homelessness. ‘Loss of a home for women raises a range of complex issues. These are not just the
loss of security in a material sense of shelter, but also a loss in the subjective context of being able to manage independence apart from the material security of home. Loss in this deeper subjective sense of security is also related to the abandonment of networks with significant others within the home and within the outside community.’ (Adkins et al 2003: 4) Casey et al (2008) also discussed the marginalisation of women, in public perception and the allocation of the public sphere (and removal from the public sphere) to homeless women. In order to access the public sphere, the women felt they needed to ‘pass’ as ‘non-homeless’. Even more, even though allocated a place and a label (as homeless), the homeless women in Casey et al's (2008) study felt that they retained a sense of self, and by participating in activities which would have characterised them prior to the homelessness event (such as going to the library), they attempted to ‘salvage the self’ and to maintain dignity and self-worth.

The above mentioned studies draw attention towards two areas in need for attention: 1) the observation, made by others too – like Washington and Moxley (2008), McCarthy (2013) etc.- that there is a danger of marginalising some homeless individuals, according to their gender (Adkins et al 2003, Casey et al 2008), ethnic origin (Marvasti 2000), age (Washington and Moxley 2008) or other factors (McCarthy 2013), and 2) the growing differences in meaning that the concept of ‘home’ can have for different individuals. With regards to home, Adkins et al suggested there was a need to link ‘material and psychological aspects of home to support those in need.’ (2003: 31) Adkins et al were among the first researchers to discuss the variety of meanings that home and homeless can have for the individuals. They argued that an innovative approach towards new homelessness and women homelessness would emphasise the need for capacity building for clients, would be aware of the ‘new homelessness’ and would ‘offer diversified but integrated strategies that acknowledge the relationships amongst the market, government and the family/community’ (Adkins et al 2003: 7). This second area in need of attention, on the meaning of home, is further developed in section 3.9.

Sjoblom (2004) also observed that homelessness should be viewed in a new context. Her study centred on teenagers’ experiences of running away from home, from an exclusively narrative perspective. Sjoblom (2004) was interested in how young people constructed narratives of estrangement from their families. She identified the feelings of powerlessness, ambivalence on what choices to make and abuse, that her interviewees exhibited throughout the narratives. Similar to Adkins et al (2003) and Goode (2000), Sjoblom (2004) concluded that there were certain new dimensions in family life (such as family break-up, estranged relatives and thus a different experience
of family altogether) which needed to be taken into consideration by social services in order to fully support young people faced with difficulty. Sjoblom posited that ultimately, viewing running away/ being thrown out of home as a ‘normal, perfectly legitimate break-up of a relationship’ (Sjoblom 2004: 133) in present times would place running away in a visible position for the social services, thus allowing it to be directly handled and approached in the right way (for instance by offering the right type of support to the people affected by it). Sjoblom asked for a reflection of a changed society in the social policies affecting young homeless people.

Washington and Moxley (2008) used a combination of narratives and art installation to make a statement about the difficulties experienced by homeless minority and older women in Detroit. The project included a social action forum which aimed to integrate older homeless women, the women’s own narratives and a public exhibit built by the participants themselves. For this, eight women produced fifty photographs which were arranged into an art installation. The findings centred on the disproportionate vulnerabilities found among older African homeless women in the US. Washington and Moxley (2008) discussed the 'diminished status' that older minority women who are homeless could experience. Diminished status implies marginality and could lead, they argued, to other issues, such as a lack of support services to resolve issues successfully. One of the study’s main aims was to sensitise the public to the issues faced by older homeless minority women. They found qualitative methods better placed for making an impact.

Another point Washington and Moxley emphasised in their study was the communication between arts and social studies for an enhanced portrayal of the homeless women, whilst ensuring their participation at all phases of research (during telling the stories, processing those narratives for the exhibition, preparing the exhibition and participating in the public action around the exhibition). Washington and Moxley’s research made a strong case for qualitative research. The final product of the research was an art exhibition aimed to show the journey of each of the eight participants, 'from plight to efficacy' (Washington and Moxley 2008: 161). The research itself thus became a tool which aimed to erase enacted stigma of those homeless women. The authors argued that through listening to their voices and being empowered, the homeless women managed to reject the stigma attached to their situation. In very recent years, and particularly after Washington and Moxley’s study took place, there has been more research focusing on older people in supported housing. In the UK, research focuses on ensuring equality of rights and equality of
treatment of older people in a mixed age context (Blood, Blood and Pannell 2013), and it is policy driven and evidence based.

Padgett et al (2006)'s American study included formerly homeless women with serious mental illnesses in the range of ‘new’ homelessness. Padgett et al (2006) led ‘lengthy’ life story interviews which they analysed using a ‘cross-case analysis’ approach. This method involved leading thirteen narrative interviews with formerly homeless and mentally ill women and then comparing their stories across the interviews. From the life stories five themes emerged, which the authors saw as representative of the interviewed women’s lives: betrayal of trust, horrific nature of traumatic events, anxiety related to getting out and speaking up, the desire for a place of one’s own, outcasts versus outlaws. The study most importantly showed that homeless mentally ill women valued being given autonomy, needed protection from further victimization and sought assistance in restoring status and devalued identity.

3.6. The embodied self: the need to consider the stigmatised body in framing homeless identities

As earlier mentioned (Williams 1998, Goode 2000 etc.), some qualitative homelessness studies started to discuss the physical side of homelessness and its ways of perpetuating a ‘felt’ stigma. In a study on homeless women Wardaugh (1999) described the public perceptions and reactions to the homeless body and the ‘repulsion’ experienced by others at the sight (and thought) of the homeless body: ‘For the settled population, homelessness is a source of fascination and repulsion, an embodiment of their fears (of poverty and alienation) and their dreams (of freedom and simplicity)’ (Wardaugh 1999: 91).

Kawash (1998) was one of the first researchers to suggest the body had an influence on how the homeless individuals saw themselves. Kawash (1998) discussed the homeless body as concept, from the perspective of the expectations it created. This refers to the fact that homeless people’s bodies are often impaired in a variety of ways (suggesting ‘stench, waste and bodily excretions’), leading to a permanent association of the homeless person with those expected bodily changes. Kawash (1998) argued that the homeless body should not be used as a label, but rather a ‘contingent condition that emerges and occludes identity’ (Kawash 1998: 320). In other words, the homeless appearance and expectations of that appearance (unwashed, possessing bags of
belongings or carts, scavenging) become more meaningful in public perceptions than the actual characteristics of the person. This leads to social exclusion: ‘What I am calling the homeless body is less an attribute of the homeless people than it is an event that marks the exclusion of the homeless from the public’ (Kawash 1998: 321). Furthermore, Kawash (1998) discussed the effects that the public perception of the homeless body had on public policy and in return the effects of coercive public policy on the homeless body (containment, constriction and compression) and strategies of negotiating the place of the homeless body in the street and in temporary lodgings.

Kawash considered the homeless body as a concept, but he did this mainly from the perspective of the perceived stigma, or with the concern of the outsider in mind. The focus was on the punitive aspects of an ill/ changing body in reaction to others or to the institution. There is not much discussion on the continuity of the homelessness experience, the effects of its physical aspects on the body, or of the potential loss of status which could be encountered with the loss in ability/ the loss of the body, in a situation when, even once homelessness has finished, the aftermath of the event is rarely linear in terms of physical and emotional recovery.

Thus Williams (1998), Kawash (1998), Goode (2000) mentioned a perpetuation of pejorative common associations with the homeless body. However, in these studies, much less emphasis was given to the effects of this modification and unwanted aggression to and of the body on the homeless person and on the homeless person's perception of self.

The physical side of homelessness, the changes suffered by the body and the emotional impact this can have on the homelessness individual need to be considered per se. Physical degradation is mentioned in literature and policy: the ‘ragged’, the ‘unwashed’ side of homelessness; parallel to it, the ‘psychological’ issues are mentioned (in studies on mental illness and homelessness, as will be detailed underneath). They are rarely regarded combined: physical and emotional aspects together. When mentioned together, the emotional effects are notable. For instance, in their study on women’s use of public spaces, Casey et al (2008) mention the ‘moving terms’ used by the homeless women to describe the negative effect that being homeless had had on their self-worth.

26 ‘Psychological’ is used, in this context, as section 2.6.1. further explicates, to underline the array of emotions experienced by the homeless person, but not taken into account in research.
In order to fully understand the effect of the body and its physical changes on homeless individuals, a parallel is needed, with research which is already established, in the sociology of health and illness.

3.6.1. Homelessness as illness or disability

In studies which place the body at the centre of their analysis, the body is found to be important at all points in the development of a perception of self (Bury 2001, Frank 2013, Plummer 2012, Shilling 2008). These theorists argue that changes on the body impose changes on identity. Thus, even extreme situations (such as concentration camps, illness, or in the present study, homelessness), which are meant to reduce individuals to their bodies, could be argued that in fact ‘enable individuals to reach beyond the ordinary boundaries of their organic being.’ (Shilling, 2008: 34) This is because in this changing body the person discovers aspects of their personality that they were not aware of, as it is discussed underneath.

In his account of the effect of acute illness over the body, Frank (2013) saw three ways out of the impasse of permanent and incontrollable physical changes. He argued that:
1) some people see the change in the body as an opportunity to gain a new identity (the quest narrative); 2) others work at regaining the old identity (the ‘restitution’ narrative); the third category are left in a gap (the ‘chaos’ narrative), where none of the previous seems feasible. In all three options, the changed body has an impact on the definition of the self. In his account of how chronic illness changes the body, Bury (2001) showed the body under attack from the illness, reconciling who it is in the present with the old self. The actions and modifications happening to the body in the moments of distress that the illness creates (like obligations of a certain standard of cleanliness, nourishment or the existence of pain) can be compared with the various dimensions of homelessness which can also be interpreted as assaults on the body. In homelessness, the body is always present: it experiences hunger, extreme temperatures (hot/ cold), lack of comfort, anger etc. The individual’s reaction to these internal and external factors takes the body into account. Bury’s study was done from the perspective of chronic illness and homelessness could be perceived as a finite experience, however research quoted earlier (Wardaugh 1999, Williams 1998) and in other sections (Schneider and Remillard 2013, Ravenhill 2008 etc.) shows that the effects of homelessness can linger after the homelessness event has finished, even though this is not fully formulated from a theoretical standpoint.
Bury (2001) describes the creative solutions found by people affected by illness or life-changing situations in dealing with the assault on the body: people respond and try to reconstruct normal life. Bury’s definition of ‘biographical disruption’ is of interest in respect of the present study. With the onset of illness, the individual experiences a loss of control over their life and a fracturing of their social networks which can be potentially damaging to their self-identity. Chronic illness, in this context, can lead to alteration in the person’s life situation and personal relationships which are essential to the individual’s situation in the everyday life. Bury makes a distinction between consequences of illness and significance of illness. Among the consequences, the symptoms of illness ‘disrupt the normal flow of everyday life and introduce a growing sense of uncertainty into it’ (Bury 2001). The symbolic significance of illness, its symptoms and their view in society can be more disabling than the actual consequences of illness, to make a parallel with Scambler’s definition. The associations with the diagnosis matter for how the individual will be seen and placed. Yet again, the felt stigma is more important than the enacted one.

When analysing the connection between illness and biographical disruption, Bury noted that people affected by chronic illness went through the process of ‘legitimation’, where they made attempts at establishing a place for the disabling illness within an ‘altered daily life and within a web of social relationships in which the person’s life may be enmeshed’. (Bury 2001: 260) In order to be legitimate, the illness thus becomes part of the person’s daily life and this life needs to be reconciled in all aspects. Close relationships are redefined to work around the illness. Distant relationships might yet again be different, due to the different rapport with the illness from afar. Public dimensions of the identity might be refashioned in order to reduce the illnesses’ disruptive effects. A similar interaction between the concept of homelessness and the individual’s identity could take place in the case of homelessness and is worth considering. Bringing the experience of the body to the fore is important for building an image of the homeless individual which is closer to the individual’s own vision of self.

Disability studies offer a framework within which changes to the body can be considered. Authors such as Thomas 2004, Shakespeare 1997 discuss the ‘psycho-emotional dimensions of disability’ (Thomas 2004), which tend to be ignored when discussing the effects of disability over identity and quality of life. Thomas argues that a complete model of disability should include reference to the oppression that disabled people might be experiencing ‘inside’ as well as on the ‘outside’. Thus, if on the ‘outside’ there are physical limitations for disabled people (such as getting on or off a bus, train etc. easily), the not so obvious ‘inside’ oppressions (the ‘psychological and
emotional pathways’) include ‘being made to feel of lesser value, worthless, unattractive or disgusting’ (Thomas 2004: 11). Thus the emotional effects brought about by physical modifications of illness (or in the context of the present study, homelessness) should be taken into consideration in equal measure to the physical ones.

3.6.2. The emotional effects of homelessness: ‘alternative realities’

Studies focusing on mental illness in homelessness bring a new dimension on the potential ‘psycho-emotional’ (Thomas 2004) effects of homelessness. These studies acknowledge a link between mental illness and homelessness, but do not focus much on the body.

Lovell (1997) described the mystified journey that one of her interviewees (Rod) talked about. Rod told of travelling across many states, in America, in the space of ten years; he told the story by placing it in an ‘infinite present’ (Lovell 1997) and personified the city, as his mother, who would leave food for him and find him shelters to sleep at night. Lovell believed that all narratives contained some type of voyage with an endpoint, which she saw as part of a healing process. In Rod’s account, this voyage took on a dangerous and fantastic dimension (as Rod was increasingly convinced the city was his mother), which could not be completed and simply became an integral part of a search of self. Lovell saw this as ‘restitution or compensation for a stigmatised identity’ (Lovell 1997: 358).

Rod’s story represents a clear illustration of the significant, equally physical and emotional (Thomas 2004, Somerville 2012) effects that homelessness has on the individual. The shame created by the harshness endured during homelessness leads to the formulation of an alternative reality. These alternative realities can only be explored through qualitative techniques, such as analysing homelessness narratives, as they only appear at a subtle level, in people’s accounts of their lives.

Montgomery et al (2009) analysed eight distinct drafts of the same woman (Anna)’s homelessness story, prepared for a conference in Canada. Like Rod, Anna also experienced mental illness when homeless. In her accounts, she told about the ‘aimless wandering’, without a specific destination in mind and repeated over several days, that she did whenever homeless. Anna’s aimless wandering appeared consistently with every episode of homelessness and mental illness and always changed the course of the story (of the narrative). Montgomery et al found this latter
aspect significant, as they believed it connected the episodes of aimless wandering with emotional ‘loss’.

Lastly, Feher (2011) compared the reactions of people who remained in the homelessness state for a longer time with those of people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. He thus made a link between homelessness and emotional ‘trauma’, underlining that homelessness has deep ‘psychological’ effects that should be considered. Feher (2011) also used narrative techniques in his research. The findings in the above studies show that integrating the emotional side of homelessness with the physical aspects could lead to a more holistic understanding of homelessness.

3.7. The complexity of time in homelessness accounts

Rod’s story, discussed in the previous section, contains some references to time (such as living in an ‘infinite present’ during homelessness). Time is another important element of homelessness, albeit only recently approached by homelessness literature.

3.7.1. Placing the homelessness event in time

Farrugia (2011)’s study with homeless people at different stages of housing mentions time. Farrugia found that to counteract the ‘status degradation’ and ‘acute act of suffering’ imposed by the ‘symbolic burden of homelessness’, homeless people presented two narratives, depending on the positioning of the homelessness event in time: for the people moving into homelessness, a narrative of failure and shame; for those anticipating movement out of homelessness and into a home, narratives of strength and pride. These latter people described those who stayed in the homelessness situation as the ones marked by a stigmatised difference. In order to avoid ‘carrying’ the homeless burden, Farrugia’s interviewees brought ‘symbolic capital to accomplish an acceptable ontological position’: they mentioned acts that they would not have done in the past, positioned themselves as responsible for their own success and changed their appearance. The findings in the study are important, as apart from emphasising homeless people’s reactions to the ‘felt’ stigma of homelessness, the study also shows differences in people’s perceptions of self according to the closeness of the homelessness event.
Using different theoretical frameworks, Farrugia’s allusions to time reverberate with findings in other recent studies such as Boydell et al (2000) and Radley et al (2005). In their participatory research with twenty-nine single adult shelter users in Canada, Boydell et al (2000) mentioned the existence of different ‘strengths’ of self, depending on the amount of time elapsed since the homelessness event. The participants were involved in coding all interviews and thus establishing the initial analytical categories.

Boydell et al noted that the interview situation itself represented an opportunity for the interviewees to deal with the homelessness event, which was posing definitional problems. Firstly, in the course of the interviews, the homeless people found it hard to identify value in their lives. Secondly, past, present and future merged and the homeless person created an identity which was ‘projected’ either in the past or the future. Participants showed an enhanced sense of pride in their past selves. Boydell et al (2000) suggested there is a certain strength of the self in the early phases of homelessness and if at this point social systems intervened in using that motivation and strength, homelessness could be fully avoided in many cases. Thus Boydell et al revealed a distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ homeless (people who had been homeless for a while versus people who had just become homeless), with individuals who had just become homeless presenting themselves in a positive light (smiling, funny) when talking about their present self. Old homeless presented a devalued self, ‘battered’ and ashamed and avoided getting in touch with old friends and acquaintances. The future self that Boydell et al (2000) discovered in their interviews often assumed an individual that in the future would have transcended the homelessness situation, would free themselves and reformulate themselves in a better identity. In Boydell’s study, the concept of homelessness moved from merely talking about stigma, towards a concept of identity formation through homelessness, made visible through qualitative interviews. Boydell et al’s study is important as it reveals different ‘strengths’ of self depending on the length of time spent in homelessness. Boydell et al also announced a movement through time, a different appreciation of time in the homelessness situation. They announced that homelessness is not only an event, but it is more importantly a process of great loss for the self and one’s identity. It’s findings in studies like Boydell (2000)’s, Ravenhill (2008)’s, Farrugia (2011)’s, which suggested a need to consider homelessness from the perspective of identity definitions. These studies revealed an intrinsic suggestion of time as an important factor. Similar to Boydell et al (2000), Van Doorn (2003) found that the more prolonged the episode of homelessness, the harder social integration was. Van Doorn (2003) questioned when the type of stigma which Scambler defined as ‘felt’ stigma started leading to habits
which were harder to break. Using a mixed methods approach, Van Doorn (2003) identified different phases of homelessness to find the best intervention strategies. She analysed observations, autobiographical documents such as diaries and personal literature and in-depth interviews, using grounded theory. Van Doorn concluded that socialisation was of vital importance in becoming homeless and therefore also in resettlement of the homeless.

In ‘The culture of homelessness: an ethnographic study’, Ravenhill (2008) also noted changes in the ‘strength of self’ depending on the placement in time of the homelessness event. Ravenhill used a time concept in her analysis method: she drew 150 ‘life route maps’ to track the homeless people’s narratives over time. Ravenhill (2008) took an ethnographic and grounded theory approach to study homelessness in London and the East of England and discussed a two way stigmatisation process through the use of labels in housing. Firstly, the homeless people already felt cast as outsiders simply through the existence of the term. This would correspond to Scambler’s definition of ‘felt’ stigma (although Ravenhill did not make specific reference to it). Secondly, the homeless people did not feel they were characterised by the term, thus opposing ‘enacted’ stigma, which leads to different responses, as follows. She identified three types of response to the homelessness event: ‘normalisation’ - where the individual aspired to get back to a pre-homelessness state, ‘medicalisation’ - where it was believed that treatment was needed for exiting homelessness and ‘battle for the mind’ - where the individual went back and forth in time trying to make sense of their life story (Ravenhill 2008). The author suggested the need to develop the concept of stigma into a multi-dimensional approach to homelessness. Ravenhill criticised UK homelessness literature which focused mainly on the last few events leading to homelessness and explained there was a slow build-up of problems up to a crisis point, family background and childhood playing a significant role. Ravenhill thus announced the importance of taking into account a multitude of factors and life experiences when considering the homelessness individual. Ravenhill also focused on showing the importance of narrative interviews in constructing a multi-faceted perspective of homelessness.

In a comparative study of two narratives from formerly homeless women suffering from mental illness, Heuchemer and Josephsson (2006) found differences in the way the two homeless women viewed time, the time after the homelessness event (when in secured housing) being viewed in a ‘broader’ fashion, with longer goals and longer timelines than the time during homelessness. The time after homelessness was ‘experienced as less intense and as a life that can partly be controlled’ (Heuchemer
and Josephsson 2006) This stretching of time finds further attention in Ravenhill’s (2008) study mentioned above.

3.7.2. Manipulating time through the narrative

Other studies which mentioned time in homelessness were written as manifestos, aiming to integrate the voice of the homeless in the overarching deconstruction of voices in society. Such are studies using art (music, painting and photography, poems) to get closer to the subjects of research (Davis et al 2010, Radley et al 2005, Montgomery et al 2009, Washington and Moxley 2008 etc.). These authors talk about interlocking voices in the narrative, belonging to different time periods (Davis et al 2010), different time dimensions (Davis et al 2010, Montgomery et al 2009) and disrupted or fragmented narratives (Radley et al 2005).

Following a traditional qualitative interviewing approach, Davis et al (2010) felt the need to get closer to their interviewees. They decided to present the interviews in the shape of poems which detailed literature, method and findings, in free verse. This led to a more succinct, if more linear presentation of the interviews:

‘Surgeries. / Staph infection. / Lost my leg. / Evicted. / Homeless. / McCreesh Place-/ A blessing.’ (Davis et al 2010: 514)

In fact, this was not the only study focusing on the issue of linearity of narration. Marvasti (2002) showed the ‘narrative editing’ that the participants in his study (in a collaboration with health professionals and other relatives) applied to their stories, and thus modified them. This ‘narrative editing’ was also evident in their modification of time references, which they applied freely, to suit their purpose. Time became a corroborated experience, between the participants, health professionals, relatives and even interviewer. Similarly, Clarke et al (2005) felt that when interviewing homeless people, they as researchers had breached the real storyline by refocusing the interviews. Clarke et al (2005) produced poems about Canadian mentally ill people who were homeless in order to find out whether this means of presenting data was a worthwhile qualitative method. Following standard presentation of data, Clarke et al

27 An approach resonating with Bauman (2008). Fluid identities are discussed in section 3.12.
28 These authors argue that research still maintains a barrier (taking them away from the main subject) that they need to cross. The aim for their research is to help cross this barrier. The research therefore often materialises in a poem or a photograph etc.
29 See section 3.4.2. for a more detailed description of Marvasti’s concept of ‘narrative editing’.
wrote a series of poems which included ‘what seemed to be salient events in the words of the respondents’ (Clarke et al 2005: 918). The poems were thus aimed to reproduce the initial homelessness narratives with increased fidelity to the time of narration. The poems mimicked the time sequence of the initial narratives by piecing the story fragments in the chronological order of events. Clarke et al underlined the importance of hearing each story in its turn (which the poems reflected), so that the reader could perceive the way in which the interview was conducted in a more holistic manner. They introduced the notion of braided time - the actual time of narration where events interlock and circle around each other the same way braided hair does.

3.7.3. Theories on time

To fully explore the notion of time in homeless narratives, it is necessary to look at theorisations of time, especially from a sociological perspective.

A preoccupation with time has existed in a variety of fields. ‘Clock time’ (the measured time generally accepted by Western societies) was historically seen as a tool for social control (Weber 1877, Marx 1976).

The main difference between clock time and the body’s own concept of time is that clock time is visible, ‘spatial’, whilst the body rhythms are internal (Adam 2004) and can be varied and multidimensional, depending on the individual. Adam argues for moving away, in sociological thought, from a standardised and unified time framework, where the clock measure is imposed irrespective of its suitability, towards a more flexible approach to time which takes into consideration the human factor (Adam 2004). This discussion happens in the context of contemporary societies experiencing the commoditization of clock time (Adam and Groves 2007). People have a say over their ‘time’: they use, allocate, plan, spend and sell their time. With this freedom comes also the inability to escape measured time in Western societies, as it becomes visible everywhere, in bank opening times, school times, working day divisions etc. Time in relationship with people is known as ‘social time’ (Adam 1994, 2004, 2008), or ‘relative’ time (Harvey 2009).

Thus, an alternative to the clock time is the ‘socially constructed’ time (Gershuny and Sullivan 1998, Usunier and Valette-Florence 2007, Adam 2004). This time is impossible to measure, as it is determined by the individual and the society. Kant introduced the concept of time as an internal, immutable and formal condition on which phenomena are based (Kemp Smith 1991). He argued human beings were born with
internal categories which determined the way they lived. Time, in Kant’s definition, is the purest schema of a pure concept and therefore influences all the other categories of our life, which are primarily based on time. Examples of categories, in Kant’s representation, are: quality, quantity, community etc.

In this context, Elias (1978) makes the differentiation between a ‘social time’ and a ‘physical time’, by arguing that every person has a concept of time, which has developed socially over generations. ‘Social time’ is always different, as it results from choice, whilst at the same time, time is a norm, one of the decisive factors for people’s behaviour in society (Tabboni 2001).

Discussing Elias’ concept of time, Durkheim (1984) describes time as a social fact - a social classification originating in social activities and thus a social construct, ‘capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint’. Durkheim (1984) positioned time within human activity and experience. Time thus ceases to be perceived as an abstract and homogenous entity. It rather represents a qualitatively varied, heterogenous and ambiguous process marked by social experiences within a particular group or society. Social activities and the relations between these activities connote the process of time. Other sociologists who have developed the concept of time as a socially dependent concept are Sorokin (1943, in Ford et al 1996), Hassard (1990) and Giddens (1984).

The present study is informed by Adam (2004) and Giddens’ (1984) approaches to social time and attitudes to the future, the past and Adam’s notion of ‘transcendence’. When analysing people’s orientation to the future (especially) and also to the present and the past, time is not viewed only as clock time, but also as a subjective entity. The reason for this relativity of time is that, especially in Western societies, individual time is perceived as finite, culminating with the arrival of death. This leads to a resolve of the Western individuals to ‘reckon with time’ (Adam 2004). Thus, in order to cope with main metaphysical concepts such as mortality and the continuation of consciousness, many recur to a necessary re-creation of time. Adam advises that we recognise that people make history outside their control and the future is actively constructed in the present. In this context, time is not ordered exclusively by the clock, but it becomes conceptualised as a ‘societal dimension to be recreated, constructed, learned from or eliminated.’ (Adam 2004: 98)

In Western societies a ‘colonisation of the future’ (Adam 2004) takes place. Elements of the future are brought in the present and made certain, which makes the future easier to cope with as a concept - less daunting. For example, the individual does not have to experience the anticipation of a reply to a letter, as they receive an instant
response to their email. The future thus moves into the present. Furthermore, contemporary individuals have the option of ‘being their own past’, in other words, of living the past in the present (Adam 2004). The capacity to keep detailed written records, for instance, does not leave room for speculation or unknown, and thus the past is appropriated in the present. It is possible for past, future and present to be superimposed in the now. Thus the future and the past can be ‘operationalised in the present’ (Adam 2004).

The present study takes into consideration Adam’s view that our imagination leads to not only living our future, present or past, but to a permanent shaping and reshaping of the past. We ‘reinterpret, restructure, alter and modify the past irrespective of whether this is done in the light of new knowledge in the present, to suit the present, or for purposes of legitimation’ (Adam 2004: 100). Adam calls this a ‘multilayered’ approach to time. Past and future become real in relationship with the present and time becomes a ‘multilayered, complex fact of life; multiple in its forms and levels’ (Adam 2004). A certain variety of levels and intensities of time is suggested by existing homelessness studies (Clarke et al 2005, Montgomery 2009), in particular in relation to homeless narratives. The present study aims to take the argument further, by allowing the possibility that conceptualisations of time can have a leading role in homeless people’s attitudes to their experiences and to themselves.

3.8. The complexity of ‘home’

The previous sections identified some concepts which are important for homelessness research, but only emerging recently and therefore not fully developed. ‘Home’ has also relatively recently started to gain a central role in homelessness studies. Few homelessness studies discussed the concept of home as a concept in its own right. Research rather chose to focus on homelessness categories (pre-defined in policy or defined within the study), such as: mentally ill, older homeless, youth homelessness, women homeless or on stigma, as detailed earlier, almost as if assuming that once homeless, the concept of home became immaterial. The debate lies on the definitional boundaries of home, as is further developed.

Recent policy and practice emphasise the difference between having a ‘home’ – a secured and safe place of residence, and living in temporary and often unsuitable conditions. The present section considers these differences.
3.8.1. Identifying the importance of ‘home’ as concept

Neale (1997) opened the debate on ‘home’ by criticising housing policy and housing provision for their limited definitions of housing, housing design, and the meaning of home and homelessness. She asked for a definition of ‘home’. More recently, in a study on homeless people with mental illnesses, using narrative techniques, Kirkpatrick and Byrne (2009) showed that the concept of ‘home’ was very important for their interviewees. The circular movement from shelter to shelter led to feelings of insecurity. Kirkpatrick and Byrne highlighted the importance of the concept of ‘place’ in the process of recovery from mental illness. A Canadian study of homelessness and mental illness using a thematic analysis of narrative interviews and examining trajectories of events and experiences (Patterson et al 2012) concluded that the homeless people interviewed felt marginalised, and one of the decisive factors generating this feeling was space/place/ neighbourhood. An important connection between emotional well-being and space was identified in Paterson’s study. Casey et al’s (2008) study on homeless women’s use of public spaces reveals an extension of the spaces used by homeless women from the private and the institutional to public spaces and buildings, thus challenging existing beliefs that homeless women are confined to the private realm.

In their opening definition of homelessness, Shelter (2008) state that whilst homelessness is the most extreme housing need, it should be clarified that it is not just about people sleeping on the streets:

‘There are many more people in England who do not have a home despite not actually sleeping rough. Some have to put up with living in temporary accommodation where they have an uncertain future. Unable to afford alternative options, others have to endure overcrowding and unsanitary conditions. Having a home is about more than just having a roof over your head.’ (Shelter 2008, last accessed: 31.01.2014)

Research shows that the vast majority of homeless people are families or single people who are not ‘sleeping rough’ (Widdowfield 1998, Watson and Austerberry 1998, Adkins et al 2003). ‘Some may be staying with relatives and friends on a temporary basis. Others live in temporary accommodation, such as bed and breakfast hotels, hostels, night shelters and refuges. For many, this means living in poor quality accommodation that is detrimental to their health and well-being. ‘(Shelter 2008: 3) Also important to
note is that for a third of the homeless population, homelessness is a reoccurring event (Shelter 2008).

The public definition now centres on the multifaceted meaning of ‘home’ and thus on the immaterial dimensions of insecure accommodation:

‘Homelessness is about more than rooflessness. A home is not just a physical space, it also has a legal and social dimension. A home provides roots, identity, a sense of belonging and a place of emotional wellbeing. Homelessness is about the loss of all of these. It is an isolating and destructive experience and homeless people are some of the most vulnerable and socially excluded in our society.’ (Crisis 2008, last accessed: 31.01.2014)

Even though, as research suggests (May 200030), the concept of home can seem lost in the frequency of temporary movements that the homeless experience, what differentiates home from a permanent state of homelessness and moving on is an emotional affiliation with home. A study on the ‘activities of home-making’ of homeless people in the UK and Canada found that processes directly connected to having a home and more importantly the ‘goal of home’ helped the people involved in the research move from a position of social exclusion and lack of acceptance to the feeling of belonging to a social group and a shared identity (Kellett and Moore 2003). Goode (2000) found that living in insecure housing and neighbourhoods had a direct impact on the way her interviewees saw their neighbourhoods, projecting them as unsafe and unfriendly. She cited this as a common reason for women living marginalised existences: ‘The majority of women who experience problems with psychoactive substance (…) are likely to be those with the least access to supportive resources, living in insecure housing and regarding their neighbourhood as unfriendly and unsafe.’ (Goode 2000: 4). Even more, Hoch (2001) found that people only defined housing as ‘home’ when it was of a high standard. In a case study of a ‘single occupancy’ scheme in Chicago, Hoch criticised the overemphasis and overuse of hostels and other ‘socially dependent’ housing for tackling the homelessness problem instead of increasing the amount of affordable independent housing. Hoch’s overriding conclusion was that a sustainable solution for improving the chances for people who are homeless involved, significantly, the ability to access affordable housing in socially diverse neighbourhoods.

30 See further in this section, a description of May’s (2000) research.
There is disagreement in research on how home should be analysed and in what context it should be placed. Perspectives differ from, at one end of the scale, seeing home as an ideological construct based entirely on people’s emotional affiliations with it (home is ‘where the heart is’) (Tomas and Dittmar 1995), to connecting home to a spatial entity which also has emotional implications (May 2000). In a long term study which explored homelessness as ‘life process’ (where people were actively re-telling and evaluating their personal histories through the means of the narrative), Tomas and Dittmar (1995) sought to locate a concept of home within the stories told by the homeless women throughout their lives. Their research revealed an antipathy to living in unstable accommodation and an inability to identify the existence, in their past, of a ‘home’. Tomas and Dittmar found this lack to be important for the women’s further definitions of self – this was identified as an emotional and potentially spiritual ‘lack’.

Robinson (2008) defined home as follows:

‘For some, it represents a centre, a place in which possessions and display represent identity. For others it is the existential space of being where the nature and limits of centre and universe, sacred and profane, are created and maintained. Home can also be a material place in which the production and organisation of housing and neighbourhoods necessarily entails certain kinds of social interaction and relations. (…) Depending on one’s cultural group, home is imbued with greater or lesser degrees of privatism and home-centredness.’ (Robinson 2008: 93)

Robinson highlighted the diversity of home, but also the different degrees of importance of each of these aspects, depending on the individual, for example, more or less privacy.

3.8.2. Home as a multidimensional loss

May (2000) made the distinction between ‘home as residence’ *stricto sensu* as main abode, and ‘home as place’, which assumes the nomadic aspect of homelessness. In his study with night shelter users in England, May identified four ‘narratives of home’: the (dis)placed, the homesick, those who lived in a new ‘spectral geography’ and the ‘new nomads’ (May 2000). Having started from a classical definition of home, the findings suggested that home should not be seen as a fixed category for homeless people, but rather a concept subject to permanent alteration, according to a multitude of factors; also a concept which can be very restrictive and concentrating solely on one
specific place or, at the opposite pole, outsized, stretching to a larger area or a complexity of individual emotions. May’s research leads to a more elaborate definition of home, further developed by Somerville (2012).

Somerville (2012) stressed that for a meaningful definition of homelessness, the physical and emotional aspects implied by home would have to be considered together. To the homeless individual, home is signified by a multitude of elements: a physical space of their past or future (which would be determined, according to Somerville (2012), Ravenhill (2008) etc., from the homeless people’s life stories), one of several cultures they feel have had an impact on them, a social side (made by the people they meet throughout their lives) and an overall emotional connection, which is linked to all the previous points mentioned. So, individuals could be roofless and yet maintain that they are not homeless because their home is on the streets. Similarly, people may have a very good material standard of accommodation, but nevertheless consider themselves to be homeless. Somerville (2012) summarised the concept of home as a collection of factors, relationships and phenomena arising from unconditional care, commitment, kinship and kindness. Subsequently, Somerville defined homelessness as the lack of these. Homelessness thus becomes ‘multidimensional’ (converging a multitude of meanings) too:

‘Homelessness is not just a matter of lack of shelter or lack of abode, a lack of a roof over one’s head. It involves deprivation across a number of different dimensions: physiological (lack of bodily comfort or warmth), emotional (lack of love or joy), territorial (lack of privacy), ontological (lack of rootedness in the world, anomie) and spiritual (lack of hope, lack of purpose). It is important to recognize this multidimensional character, not least because homelessness cannot be remedied simply through the provision of bricks and mortar – all the other dimensions must be addressed, such as creature comforts, satisfying relationships, space of one’s own, ontological security and sense of worth.’
(Somerville 2012: 409)

Homelessness is thus seen as a ‘loss’ on a multitude of levels, including friends, community, confidence, self-esteem. Literature showed the loss was even more apparent for women rather than for men. Both Adtkins et al (2003) and Padgett et al (2006) stressed the more profound impact that loss of status had on women rather than on men. Padgett et al argued that men who were depleted of jobs or life opportunities usually regained some of their lost status in the marginal roles they could assume, which are portrayed well in films and general media culture (such as pimp,
gambler, hustler). In comparison, women’s loss of status was complete and unequivocal, their options outside the norms of society being shoplifting or prostitution.

The concepts of ‘lack’ and ‘loss’ started to appear in homelessness literature, but they were not given focus on their own. ‘Lack’ refers to the emotional lack experienced when not housed right; ‘loss’ can refer to loss of self, of status and of strength. An important question regarding this is: what makes homeless people feel incomplete or lacking something? Could this be the quality of their housing (Thomas and Dittmar 2005, Hoch 2001), the lack of stability/ the bad neighbourhoods (Adkins et al 2003, Patterson, Goode 2000, Kellett and Moore 2003, Hoch 2001), the lack of personalised attention (Washington and Moxley 2008, Padgett et al 2006, Ravenhill 2008) or all of these points combined (Somerville 2012, Ravenhill 2008), or a few of these points combined? Could this be different for each individual? Recent studies (Fingfeld-Connett 2010, Somerville 2012, McCarthy 2013) suggest that an intersectional, interdisciplinary approach is needed, in order to capture the nuanced nature of homelessness. The present study considers these questions further in the discussion chapter, revealing the importance of individual perceptions of home.

It is essential to stress the complexity of the concept of ‘home’. Previous research advises, as shown above, against adopting the common place notion of ‘the street you’ve lived in most of your life’, or the ‘bricks and mortar of your childhood home’ (Somerville 2012, May 2000, Kellett and Moore 2003). Home, in a homelessness context, is an elusive concept. It often can be an idealised and intangible element of future development, it can extend to a whole neighbourhood, district or town and it can encompass a community, a sense of belonging, a group of friends. From this, a further question arises, which was not presented in the existing homelessness literature: What do these highly mobile individuals find meaningful and worthwhile keeping in a changing lifestyle? The concept of ‘liquid societies’ (Bauman 2000), where boundaries and traditional concepts such as class, gender, age etc. can lose their traditional meanings itself suggests a liquid concept of home. In a liquid society, which assumes a constant movement of people, jobs, social groups, the classical concept of home can be lost. The question whether people still maintain a sense of home is especially pertinent regarding those people who are most on the move, and at short notice. In a context when the homeless person can find themselves stripped of daily possession and when all they can take with them is all they can carry, the existence of a place that seems secure and that allows the individuality to express itself is limited. The individual has to find creative ways (Shilling 2008) of expressing themselves, which may be not through possessions or a secure place anymore, nor through meaningful bonds, but
through a continued sense of self-description. Part II of the present chapter offers further investigation into the above concepts, which all form part of a theoretical context for the present study.

**PART II. Building an identity framework for homelessness studies**

Part I of the present chapter has already shown how several qualitative studies started off researching the homeless from the perspective of an expected stigma of homelessness. Many of these studies found that the homeless people were doing important identity work when talking about or living in the homelessness situation (Lovell 1997, Snow and Anderson 1993, Boydell et al 2000, Goode 2000, Radley et al 2005 etc.); however the studies did not fully place the identity work they reported on within an overarching theorisation of identity. The present study acknowledges the connection between homelessness and identity formation, and, as well as considering the findings of previous homelessness research, places itself within identity conceptualisation in contemporary societies. Part II is therefore concerned with placing the study within contemporary elaborations on identity.

The main concepts appearing in homelessness literature from an identity perspective are as follows. Homeless people are seen to be either ‘compensating for a stigmatised identity’ (Lovell 1997: 359) through exaggerations of reality or through adding a fantastic dimension to the perceived reality or adopting the homelessness identity (Snow and Anderson 1993), in either case, the need to develop an understanding of self being clearly present in narratives. Homelessness literature also denotes homelessness as a process of ‘great loss’ (Boydell 2000) or ‘lack’ (Somerville 2012). This in turn leads the homeless person to look at their future or past for diminishing this loss (Clarke et al 2000, Boydell 2000). Recently, there is an indication of multidimensionality (Somerville 2012, McCarthy 2013) – which involves both a diversity of factors leading to homelessness (Ravenhill 2008) and a variety of experiences, emotions and notions associated with the homelessness as well as the post-homelessness state (Somerville 2012).

Difficulties in finding an overarching, all-encompassing explanation of homelessness are often reported in the literature. In order to build a definitional framework for the
issues regarding the single homeless person, an understanding of existing identity concepts is necessary.

Existing homelessness literature identifies the homelessness event as a significant change in someone’s life, similar in importance to changes in career paths, sudden breaks in relationships, periodic life-crises etc., when the self can be affected. The questions individuals ask themselves about these changes can lead to a process of reaffirmation or search for the self (Burkitt 2008, Sennett 1999). Part II is concerned with elaborating on the concept of self and identity in contemporary societies and by doing so, it further develops a theoretical framework for the study.

The concept of identity has been central to discussions of contemporary societies. Theories of identity range from fluidity of identities, leading to a profound sense of alienation (Bauman 2000, Sennett 1999), to fixed identities (Bennett 2005), with a more moderate approach in the middle, which accepts the decentralisation of identities but argues that there are parts of own identity which persist in individuals’ definitions of self and help ground the individual. This latter stream of thought is also known as the ‘Third Space’. During the instances of ‘crisis’, the individual relies on ‘habit’ and creative measures to preserve parts of identity deemed important (Shilling 2008). This chapter places the present study in an identity approach which, whilst taking into consideration a postmodern fluidity of identity and a multiplicity of selves, also recognises there are consistent elements of identity which continue to be relevant for the individual. This is closer to the ‘Third Space’ (Bennett 2005). The following sections present the evolution of theories of self, from Mead’s placement of self in a social context (section 3.9.) through to Burkitt’s presentation of the challenges of contemporary societies (3.10.) and on to definitions of liquid modernity (3.11.) and the Third Space (3.12.).

3.9. The concept of self: emerging from a social context

Mead (1934) presented the self as a result of a social process where despite communication, individuals were not yet aware of the meanings of their actions. People became aware of their selves through observing the meaning of their gestures on other participants in the ‘social act’: ‘The self has within its own experience the entire social act, both the gesture and its meaning.’ (Mead 1934 in Miller 1997: 48) Through communication, we find ourselves ‘like a child that emerges from the social bonds that
nurture, sustain and educate it, yet manages to become a distinct individual with its own self-identity. All selves emerge from a social context to become unique individuals. Mead considers the social context essential for the formation of the individual, for their traits and sense of self.

Mead is one of the first pragmatists (Miller 1997). The pragmatists and the Chicago school of sociology tried to understand the self as embedded within everyday relations and interactions. For the pragmatists, knowledge and truth were relative and changing socially. Truth is not knowledge that best reflects the world, but rather what works for the individual when changing that world to best suit their needs. Human consciousness is employed solely to that avail, of changing the world to best suit their needs, according to the pragmatists. This action of changing the world to best work for the individual takes place during social activity (Miller 1997).

Following in the line of the pragmatists, social interactionism (Blumer 1969, Goffman 1959, Becker 1963) and its new theorists (Denzin 2008, Plummer 2000) brought the individual to the centre of analysis. The individual acts and reacts, constructs and deconstructs the world around them and themselves in their ‘everyday lives’ and in this process they learn to negotiate and manage social roles (Goffman 1963). In this process, stigma is highlighted as an important influence on identity. Many homelessness studies looked at homelessness from an interactionist perspective (Ravenhill 2008, Goode 2000, Da Silva 2007 etc.). However, as shown earlier (section 3.4.), concepts of stigma and blaming tend to be at the centre of such theories. More recent homelessness research (Somerville 2012) shows the need for a broader and more complex look at homelessness identities, which allows new and emerging concepts to develop.

### 3.10. The challenged selves in contemporary societies: multiplicity of choices

As contemporary societies change, the self is also affected. These changes can affect the homeless individual as well. In the present day, we are surrounded by a variety of voices that can be attractive for the individual (for example, the internet, new technologies, new types of communication). This multitude of contemporary voices poses a dilemma, as individuals become confronted with a myriad of hypostases that

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31 Section 3.4. presented a conceptualisation of stigma.
they could enact. Contemporary thinkers are concerned with establishing the effects of these increased possibilities on conceptualisations of the self or selves (Bauman 2008, Sennett 1999).

An issue of postmodern societies is that the overarching social narratives, which used to be consistent, are now fragmented. A multiplicity of political concepts, streams of thought, beliefs etc. are accepted, all at once or in close succession and neither occupying a central or explanatory position (Bauman 20008, Sennett 1999). The present is thus seen as confusing and fragmented:

‘We […] only appear to others as unified and whole identities, when just under the surface of appearance we are a fragmented and diverse assemblage of voices, demands, intentions and possibilities.’ (Burkitt 2008: 165)

Burkitt discusses the ‘chronic state of doubt’ (Burkitt 2008) of the contemporary individuals, once no one can be certain of one overarching truth. Burkitt sees this change in the way the self is viewed as increased opportunity to reformulate the self.

In fact, an important element of contemporary societies, following the break from traditions and class structures, is the greater choice becoming available to the individual, as mentioned earlier (Burkitt 2008, Giddens 2013, Bennett 2008). In this context, personal relationships rest on personal choice and decision making, and not on traditional institutions. The break is reflected at all levels, such as a break from the traditional concept of gender and sexes (Plummer 2012), break of geographic boundaries etc. However, contemporary societies also include groups that find themselves marginalised and who cannot act this freedom of choosing identities (Bauman 2008). These people (the poor, the old, the homeless – Washington and Moxley 2008, Adkins et al 2003, Goode 2000 etc.) find it impossible to exercise their identities in a world where consumption leads to a constant change of roots and reference points. These people might find themselves in a position of having immaterial rather than material choices, thus choosing to stay connected to memories rather than things. In homelessness, these contemporary changes are defined as ‘new homelessness’. New homelessness is the response of the homeless individual to the rapid changes in society, especially to changes in family structure and family roles, as well as changes in societal roles (Washington and Moxley 2008, Goode 2000, Somerville 2012 etc.). The next section ponders further on the changes at the identity level and how the individual deals with them. The concept of ‘liquid modernity’

32 See section 3.8.
develops, regarding the new ways in which people are characterised in society, differences and levels of choices.

3.11. A way of coping for the decentred self: the ‘career’

With the emergence of theories of postmodernity, the concept of ‘everyday life’ becomes more complex. The postmodern self is defined by a variety of concepts such as ‘cultural fragmentation’, pluralism of identities, multitude of reference points, descentredness.

A main concern of postmodernist writers is that in a complete fluidisation of identity and complete freedom to construct themselves, the postmodern character can lose control of their purpose and sense of self. Individuals lose their ontological security (Giddens 1991) – the ability to sense order and security with regard to their daily lives, to the predictability and certainty of most events in their lives. If before meaning was experienced through this stability and the avoidance of chaos in their lives, in contemporary societies, stability is erased. One viewpoint is that the self becomes fragmented, dislocated and decomposed (Sennett 1999). Even more, the short time span of modern institutions (amongst which the ‘hostel’ or ‘project’ with limited stay can also be included) does not allow ‘informal trust’ (long term relationships) (Padgett et al 2006, Schneider and Remillard 2013, Hall 2003, Marvasti 2000 on relationship with workers) to develop (Sennett 1999). According to postmodernist writers such as Bauman (2008) and Sennett (1999), in the contemporary world two main changes influence identity: globalisation and greater flexibility in people’s lives, with the erosion of life-long commitments. Bauman calls this ‘liquid modernity’, and it involves a process of transformation of modernity from ‘solid’ (based on well-known and accepted canons, rules and classes) to ‘liquid’, where human relationships become fluid (Bauman and Tester 2001). According to Bauman, people do not need to settle anywhere for very long, but individuals find that they still need something of their own, which can identify them in this constant flux of knowledge. With fluid relationships, this is harder to achieve. Concepts, forms and ideas which replace those from modernity are, according to Bauman (2008), themselves in a constant flux of transformation and change, and therefore meanings change constantly and are harder to pinpoint. Later homelessness studies (Ravenhill 2008, Somerville 2012, Washington and Moxley 2008, McCarthy 2013) suggest similar fluidization of relationships and concepts of self
in homelessness, even though these concepts were not fully anchored in identity theories.

There are several critiques to postmodernists’ view of identity and especially to Bauman’s concept of ‘liquid modernity’. One of these critiques starts by questioning Bauman’s concept of contemporary identity, arguing that if people feel adrift in postmodernity and still find themselves in search of commitment, love, kinship, then they must be, in contrast with ‘liquid modernity’, making attempts at stabilising concepts and at finding some coherence (Burkitt 2008). Even more, the role of others in this process of ‘globalisation and detraditionalisation’ (Burkitt 2008) needs to be taken into account. In a context where unknown and faster social transitions can lead to identity crises, Burkitt argues the self can be re-created reflexively, with the help of others, through a constant process of creation and recreation of a biographical narrative (Giddens 2013, Burkitt 2008). Some homelessness studies confirm this increased importance of the ‘other’ – be it support workers (Marvasti 2000), friends or family members (Lemos and Durkacz 2000), depending on the context. In order to maintain ontological security, ‘life-planning becomes all-important, which presupposes a mode of organising time by interpreting the past and preparing for the future.’ (Burkitt 2008: 171) This ‘shaking’ of ontological security is obvious in homelessness as well and is announced by homelessness research as a new societal order, where there is an ‘increase in the risk and precariousness of social life’ (Adkins et al 2003).

Sennett (1999) discusses a new way of interpreting the experiences, changes and disruptions that have affected individuals. Sennett announces a ‘corrosion of character’ by the tearing apart of social relations through an increased demand for geographical mobility. Sennett questions how people can continue to sustain durable social relationships and develop coherent narratives of identity in a fragmented society, which loses ideas of loyalty, commitment and purpose.

One solution to salvaging character, according to Sennett, is building a ‘career’: a personal narrative of inner growth. Homelessness literature does suggest transcending the homelessness experience by trying to ‘pass’ as the person’s better self (Snow and Anderson 1993, Schneider 2012), but the concept is in its incipience, being presented rather in a Goffmanesque (1959) connotation of distorting the facts of life in order to present the self as good or worthy. In Sennett’s understanding of the concept, the individual builds a narrative of self-worth in order to deal with their failures and outer events. This leads to a sense of responsibility over their own conduct and an increased sense of purpose. In Sennett’s case studies, the people who adopt such
narratives assume responsibility for their previous actions and develop a ‘career’ based on assuming this responsibility, adopting choice and thus seeing a new way and a new purpose to their lives. There is another side to this assertion of choice and responsibility. As Sennett points out, the narratives that develop in contemporary societies speak of the deep pain represented by the fear of failure experienced by a lot of individuals, especially in middle age, when they might find themselves unable to adapt to the new requirements an aggressive society has in store for them. In this case, the narrative has a recovery and healing role: the preservation of their own voice is the only way to make failure bearable. Sennett’s concept of a ‘career’ as recovery for the self adds an important nuance to the concept of identity, which is further developed by ‘third space’ theorists, detailed in the next subsection. The concept of ‘career’ informs the present study, especially in connection with homeless people’s attitudes to their future.

In summary, social changes in contemporary societies make the affirmation of one consistent self more difficult. Some theorists see identities adrift and lacking any grounding (Bauman 2011), whilst others notice the formation of new narratives. Bennett (2008) observes the emergence of another way of analysing identities in the contemporary world, where not all grounding is lost. The present study identifies better with this third space.

3.12. The ‘third space’: Fluid identities, but a consistent core - the social selves

For Bennett (2008), there are three streams of thought regarding evolution of identities in the contemporary world. Firstly, the belief that the postmodern identity is fully disconnected from any previous structures such as class, gender, race, occupation, education. This leads to alienation of the individual, who does not co-exist with other members of society and thus becomes ‘self-orientated and self-interested’ (Bennett 2005). In this first approach, identity is a fluid construct and the self can be made up of a series of definitions which can be maintained or discarded at will (Bauman 2011, Bauman and Tester 2001). A second school of thought sees the postmodern individual as an empowered being, freeing themselves from structures which imposed limitations and rules, free from the ‘confines and restraints of class and tradition’ (Bennett 2008: 40). Lastly, Bennett mentions the formation of a ‘third space’ (Sennett 1999) where identities are neither rigid (pre-determined by existing concepts and structures), neither
completely fluid, nor arbitrary. According to this ‘third space’ approach, postmodern identity continues to use some structurally defined categories (such as class, gender, race), which themselves have changed, becoming ‘more fluid and reflexively articulated expressions of social identity’ (Bennett 2008: 41). This individual becomes more active and self-reflexive in defining their own identity, and ultimately, more involved. Again, for the present study, the question that appears is to what extent these choices are the same for the single homeless individuals. Section 3.8. on the value and meaning of home, suggests a limited and mobile concept of home, one could argue a fluid concept, dominated less by material goods and more by immaterial references to people, symbols and a sense of being. Section 3.4. elaborated on stigma and again on specific social structures and power relations which need to be brought into question for the present study. The section showed that even though bounded by different rules and structures, the person can still interact, is reflexive and is able to contribute to their re-definition. Thus choice needs to be context-specific (including concepts such as ‘home’, ‘stigma’ etc.), but it can be argued that it still might exist at the level of the individual.

Returning to the ‘cultural turn’, this involves, rather than postmodernity, a different modernity, a shift towards Giddens’ ‘reflexive modernity’ (1991). Giddens argues that modernity has not vanished, in the postmodern world, but rather it has begun to ‘modernize its foundations’ (Giddens 1991), it has become ‘late modernity’. Modernity is directed at itself, it changes the boundaries between concepts, and in fact it creates a ‘plurality of boundaries’. Institutions and individuals are able to modify these boundaries and the way they view themselves. This leads to tensions, but at the same time to a newly discovered freedom of expression (Giddens 1991). In late modernity, all questions about how to behave in society do not have to be based on tradition, but are open to questioning and reformulation. Self-identity, in this context, is a set of reflexive judgements of the person’s own biography. Individuals do not have to behave in fixed ways. They are able to reflect on, and to assess what they are doing, and they could start to behave in new ways which can alter patterns of social interaction and social structure (Giddens 1991: 54). According to this perspective over society and social structures, the homeless people are not devoid of decision making powers. Neale (1997) argues that homeless people occupy a range of different and shifting positions in relation to a wide variety of power structures (such as gender, race, age, health, employment and housing market) and in the interaction with these power structures they have a role to play, in ‘defining their needs and in shaping the provision
available to them’ (Neale 1997). For Neale, homelessness is a ‘social fact’ which can, and should be explained and defined.

In this different modernity, individuals feel more empowered and thus more critical of themselves and the world around them. All attributes of self become negotiations between the individual and the world. This gives rise to ‘new, reflexively derived articulations of identity’ (Bennett 2008) and not the standard ‘structured’ ideas of class, gender, race etc. The reformulation of social categories involves different associations with them. Instead of defining their world simply through the intermediary of class, gender or race, individuals reflexively draw social boundaries to reflect their group’s common patterns in taste, habit and interest. Thus everyday practices have as aim to ‘aestheticize’ the world around them. These practices are ‘designed to block out, or symbolically negotiate, the more oppressive and restrictive features of everyday life’ (Bennett 2008). This understanding of contemporary society more as a ‘conscious modernity’ (Burkitt 2008) or ‘reflexive modernity’ (Giddens 2013) and connecting it to everyday life practices results in a more nuanced understanding of identity, in a world governed by ‘a deepening level of reflexivity in everyday life’ (Burkitt, 2008). Burkitt (2008) talks about three outside factors which determine a multiplicity of selves: the position someone is born in (family, neighbourhood, social class etc.); the different social activities performed; and ‘political issues’, involving rights and duties within a society.

Burkitt (2008) argues that we need to recognize modern individuals’ ability to change and adapt to the new conditions of their environment, whilst having an engrained ability to create a sense of core identity. This comes from two sources, according to Burkitt: the habitus33, ‘part of the core of our selves,’ which ‘endures in our bodies as a form of corporeal memory’; and ‘the ability to create a unified voice that dialogues with many other voices, which carries something of their intonation and values, yet is still recognizably our own’ (Burkitt, 2008: 180). In this definition, Burkitt is using Bourdieu’s idea of habitus, whilst having removed the idea of social class. Essentially, Burkitt

33Habitus was first developed as a concept by Bourdieu in 1984. Habitus, in Bourdieu’s definition, is a structure of the mind including a mixture of the deepest engrained sensibilities, tastes, dispositions and skills, based on our personal experiences. Habitus allows people to navigate their social environments. Bourdieu argues that this set of skills and habits that individuals develop within their environments can be easily confused as natural, rather than directly influenced by the environment and can thus lead to social inequalities (thus mistaking class differences as differences in the natural ability of performing (or not performing) certain tasks (such accessing a highly paid job etc.).
argues for the continued existence of a core identity, but also a multitude of voices borrowed from others and transposed into a voice of our own, with qualities of our own.

Notions of ‘habit’ are often present in identity theories. Such is Giddens’ notion of a ‘tacit understanding’ of what it is to be us which maintains a narrative of our selves (Giddens and Sutton 2013). The notion of ‘habit’ is further developed by Shilling (2008) as discussed below.

3.13. Habit, crisis and creativity in the development of self

Shilling makes an important definition of habit, crisis and creative measures. Shilling argues that the focus on the physical, biological and material components of the human being was side-tracked for a while (by symbolic interactionist theorists such as Blumer 1971, Goffman 1963, Becker 1969) in favour of a focus on the human capacity for symbolism (Shilling 2008).

Shilling discusses ‘creativity’ as a response of the individual to the coercion of the body. Change, flux and flexibility remain defining elements of identity. Many of the methods of coping with the status degradation caused by homelessness could be considered ‘creative’ ways of responding to ‘crisis’ in homelessness. Some of these are: maintaining (Kellett and Moore 2003) and projecting (Boydell et al 2000) a ‘goal of home’, ‘distancing from the homeless in the street (Ravenhill 2008, Snow and Andersen 1987), differentiating between ‘states’ of homelessness, at an emotional (Montgomery et al 2009) or physical (Williams 1998) level, to name just a few.

Shilling discusses the importance of ‘habit’ in the development of identity. Habit is based on the conviction that ‘people have a deeply embedded sense of who they are’ (Shilling 2008: 169) and involves an ability to maintain existing histories, habits and bodies, on which new experiences and an identity can be built. Following crisis, people feel a need to reassert their identities, or certain aspects of identity, even stronger than they would otherwise feel obliged to. Even when routines are not as obvious (as they may be dissolved in the wake of and during the crisis), Shilling (2008) argues that after a while these become re-constructed. Individuals recognise the series of actions and habits which continue to exist in society and soon the tendency is to re-work them into their new realities. The self thus changes according to the realities it is faced with at any one time, but some habits remain. Plummer calls this the ‘reworking of old habits’.
(Plummer 2012). In this context, we are permanently remaking who we are, while maintaining a consistent core:

'We can begin to develop a core rather than a unified self: that is to say, a feeling of a centre to our being, of existing as 'I' in the world, without this ever being unified into a fixed and unchanging entity that has no contradiction, indecision or univocal tensions of many different voices – both of the self and of others – clamouring to be heard. This is a core self that is never entirely sure of itself, never completed, always in the process of some degree of change, and open to the possibility – perhaps the inevitability – of reconstruction.'
(Shilling 2008: 190)

Part II has presented an overview of approaches to identity and lastly focused on the theoretical stances which were closest to the thesis. The section is conceptually rich – dealing with concepts such as habit, crisis and creativity, reflexive modernity and multiplicity of selves. This mirrors the conceptual richness of the research findings. The present study is best placed at a crossroads between the new symbolic interactionist discourse which advocates for the inclusion of the body, self and others in conceptualisations of identity and the ‘third space’ perspective of flexible individualities but with a strong core of self, as the main theoretical starting points for an understanding of homeless people’s identities. It is important to acknowledge the permanent process of reformulation and reconstruction faced by the modern individual (which becomes evident in interviewees’ discourses, as the next chapters show), whilst at the same time acknowledging the strength of personal values and habits accumulated prior, during and after the homelessness event.
3.14. Summary

This chapter has shown an increased interest in research with homeless people’s own view of themselves and homelessness. This took place primarily by seeing homelessness as a stigmatising experience. The concept of stigma developed, with later homelessness studies (Ravenhill 2008, Washington and Moxley 2008 etc.) focusing more on ‘felt’ stigma (even though not explicitly stated) than on ‘enacted’ stigma. These studies revealed ‘new’ homelessness, involving the existence of varied homeless groups, which were not always taken into consideration as such by policy: older women, disabled homeless, homeless people who were mentally ill. Single homeless people, it could be argued, could also be such a group.

In the process of researching homelessness from a qualitative perspective, different theories had been used, this leading to an ‘amalgam’ (McCarthy 2013) of theories and conceptualisations. Different themes were brought into focus. Among these, in recent years, there are the first attempts to see ‘home’ (and therefore homelessness) as ‘multidimensional’ (Sommerville 2012, Neale 1997, May 2000). These researchers advise a consideration of all aspects of home, in their totality and complexity: psychological, emotional, physical. Other important concepts revealed in literature, some in their incipient stages, are time and the connection between stigma and body. The body starts to be perceived as stigmatising. Studies reveal the public perceptions of the homeless body (Kawash 1998, Wardaugh 1998) as a symbol of poverty and physical deterioration. These studies do not focus on the efforts of the body nor on the perceptions of the homeless person of their self, following the changes to their bodies.

From a theoretical perspective, although pointing out the importance of the homelessness event for the identity construction of the homeless people, homelessness studies largely draw on symbolic interactionist theories of identity. A real dialogue between homelessness theories and identity theories has not fully been established.

The same studies however reveal a strong identity element in homelessness. Homelessness is revealed as a process of great loss for the individual. Consequently, the individual has to put in place strategies in order to recover and redefine this loss. Sometimes these strategies include looking at the individual’s past or at their future, this involving identity work. Although pointed out in some studies (Boydell et al 2000,
This struggle for self-definition is not consistently outlined in an identity framework.

This chapter reflects on the need of looking at homelessness from a complex theoretical viewpoint and thus situating homelessness in the present theoretical context. In order to do this, the second part of the chapter built an image of contemporary approaches to self. Other homelessness researchers observed this theoretical lack and advised towards using an ‘amalgam’ of theories for a thorough understanding of homelessness (McCarthy 2013, Ravenhill 2008).

Sociological literature on identity is vast and ranging over several theoretical approaches. This chapter did not set out to present an exhaustive report on identity theories, but rather planned to integrate the study in a complex theoretical context. Having been preceded by an eclectic theoretical background for homelessness studies and having encountered several issues at situating the analysis, as presented above, the study adopts a heuristic approach to homelessness. It thus combines the flexible approach to identity of the ‘third space’ with the renewal of the body in new symbolic interactionism and with notions of social time and a complex and multi-layered concept of home. The aim for this approach is to help paint an image of the homeless person close to their own self-representation and personal messages.

At the same time, other than from a policy perspective, single homelessness had not been a focal point for qualitative analysis. This study aims to add the experiences of single homeless people to the growing body of homelessness research.
CHAPTER 4: Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapters showed that the study set out to engage in a dialogue between homelessness theories and identity theories. Chapter 4 goes on to discuss the rationale for the methods used and how these methods made understanding single homeless people's perceptions of themselves and their status possible. Sections 4.2. and 4.3. offer an overview of the qualitative methods used for research and analysis: narrative interviewing and thematic and narrative analysis. Section 4.4. discusses issues encountered when entering the field. Sections 4.5. and 4.6. delve into ethical and philosophical concerns regarding the role of the researcher and ways of leading the research.

I have chosen a combined narrative research and thematic analysis approach for my study. These are qualitative approaches, which started to be used in homelessness research, as the previous chapter indirectly shows and as the following section summarises.

4.2. Choice of a qualitative approach

As highlighted in Chapter 1, the primary objective of the research was to explore the lived experience of single homelessness in the specific setting of supported accommodation and in doing so to situate these experiences within the broader context of institutional and policy responses to homelessness. The study was also supported by the suggestion in other homelessness qualitative research that understanding how homeless people narrate and construct their identities can provide an important insight into the nature of homelessness (Ravenhill 2008, Somerville 2012 etc.).

The project represented a snapshot of a group of ‘single homeless people’ – formerly homeless people living in temporary accommodation - in a UK seaside town. ‘Single
homeless people’ were identified as a category in policy, but not in research. The aim of the analysis was to develop an understanding of this specific group’s perceptions of self and homelessness and to situate the homelessness event in the context of their life stories. I did not set out to construct a generalised pattern, even though some of the findings do point to areas of policy and practice. The purpose of the analysis was to identify meanings specific to what research showed to be an individualised but under researched group of people.

The study takes the view that qualitative research and in particular narrative research gives interviewees the ground for presentation of self. Through creative measures (Sennett 1999), such as iterations, annotations and justification, the self presented in the space of the interview becomes plausible, real to others. The body of analytic work from a qualitative perspective is slowly growing, with organisations understanding the value and impact of listening to clients’ (Washington and Moxley 2008, Ravenhill 2008, Radley et al 2003 etc.) and staff’s (Marvasti 2000, Williams 1998 etc.) own feedback. This section briefly highlights a number of homelessness studies which have used a qualitative or mixed methods approach. I made the selection to show the variety of methods used and the differences in interpretation, as well as pluses and minuses of some of these approaches. Chapter 3 extensively mentioned studies in qualitative homelessness research and showed that the large majority employed similar methods to the ones I propose, although within a different conceptual framework. The present section makes the case for qualitative methods (specifically narrative analysis and thematic analysis) for researching formerly homeless people’s identities and life stories.

As shown in the previous chapter, recent homelessness literature purports that qualitative studies are essential in understanding the realities of homelessness. Authors (Ravenhill 2008, Williams 1998, McCarthy 2013 etc.) argue that not taking into account the day to day experiences of homeless people can lead to gaps, omissions and misunderstandings in policy. There has been a consistent concern in qualitative homelessness literature that researchers and policy makers have traditionally failed to observe and understand the fragmented quality of the experiences of homelessness, by only taking a general (quantitative) approach to the issue of homelessness.

34 See Chapters 1 and 2 for more discussion on the status of ‘single homeless people’ in research and policy at the time.
4.2.1. Variety of qualitative methods in homelessness research

Recent studies on homelessness have used a range of analytic methods, from observation to complex participatory analysis or a mix of methods. Many studies used at least one element of client participation or/ and social research. Among these, Boydell et al (2000)’s research on adult shelter users invited coding and category formation from the people researched; Washington and Moxley (2008) combined social action with narrative research to describe those women’s experiences. Several other studies used action research in identifying and informing a particular problem: Adkins et al 2003 employed it when looking at the effects of a structured empowerment model with homeless men and women in Utrecht and Amsterdam, while Van Leeuwen and Haasnoot (2003) employed action research following a standards review which flagged that the organisation under study was not coherent in their approach.

Other studies used staff as researchers, underlining the special role that staff and support workers played in homelessness settings (Marvasti 2002, Cramer 2005, Lemos and Durkacz 2002).

As presented in the previous chapter (Section 3.6.), there is a range of studies using art to get closer to the subjects of research and in order to overcome the invisible barrier between researcher and the researched. Using poetry (Davis et al 2010, Clarke et al 2005), photography (Radley et al 2005) or a combination of artistic means (Washington and Moxley 2008), the researchers reduced their findings to what they believed was quintessential. Often these methods were paired with a need to perpetuate the research to a wider audience and therefore with social action.

A number of studies used some type of qualitative interviewing. Among these, Stephenson’s (2003) study on young homelessness, Goode (2000)’s research with homeless women and their support workers, Williams’ (1998) research on domestic violence in homelessness settings. Some authors, like Van Doorn (2003) and Casey et al (2008) combined qualitative interviewing with other analytical methods (observation, research participation, surveys etc.).

Some homelessness studies used narrative (life story) analysis, sometimes combined with thematic approaches. This body of research is aimed at understanding homelessness from the homeless people’s perspective and through accounts of their everyday lives. Snow and Anderson (1993), Ravenhill (2008), Padgett et al (2006), Da Silva (2007), Fraenkel et al (2009), all used narrative interviewing in their studies.
These authors argued that this method of interviewing led to findings which would not have been accessible in other ways. This method of interviewing revealed unprecedented detail on the environment and conditions interviewees had lived in (Stephenson 2003). It also revealed important past details about the interviewees’ lives and it often had therapeutic value for the interviewees. For instance, Ravenhill (2008) noted that her interviewees had become completely immersed in the study – they were solely preoccupied with the therapeutic nature of telling their stories. Narrative researchers stated that narratives were best suited at presenting a holistic and empathetic account of homelessness.

4.3. Interviews: Narrative research

Existing homelessness literature as well as previous uses of narrative analysis suggested narrative interviews as the best analytic method to be employed in order to investigate the meaning of homelessness for a group of people who had been under researched, even less so by qualitative research.

Narrative analysis is a form of inquiry which solicits people’s accounts about their lives. The term can refer to a variety of forms of gathering these accounts, this reflecting the multidisciplinarity of the approach (Earthy, Cuncev and Cronin 2015). Biography, autobiography, oral history, life history are some of the ways in which people can engage with telling their life story.

The concept underlining narrative analysis is that people are in a continuous process of constructing and deconstructing their life meaning (Lieblich et al 1998). It is this process of formation of self that informs the sociologist. By not focusing upon certain previously formulated themes, the narrative helps uncover the tacit assumptions and meanings a person might not be aware of (Riessman 2008).

The performative and often rehearsed nature of life-story interviews means that narrative stories encounter several stages in their formation and their meaning is influenced by several authors: the self, the teller, the listener and recorder, the analyst and the reader (Riessman 2008). Plummer extends this further by talking about narrator, coaxed(s) and the audience (Plummer 2000).

Narrative analysis allows access to people’s identity and personality, in a way other types of research do not. Narratives involve issues of self-representation and
idealisation of the self (Riessman 2008). In the context of the present research, these are essential for understanding how the ‘single homeless people’ saw themselves: what they chose to reveal and which events in their life course had significance to them: ‘We know or discover ourselves and reveal ourselves by the stories we tell.’ (Lieblich et al 1998: 3). It is this process of identity formation that interests and informs the sociologist. The previous chapter revealed a gap in research regarding single homelessness identity formation, so an approach naturally aimed at researching identity struggles was fitting. Narratives are also important because they can occur as a result of a meaningful event: ‘Respondents narrativise particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society.’ (Riessman 2008: 3) Narratives help discover the tacit and unconscious utterances we might not be aware of. The process is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity or focusing on traumatic/ life changing experiences (Riessman 1993 and 2008, Bury 2001, Plummer 2000). Narrative interviewing techniques and analysis tools are specifically visible in Chapter 7.

There are different ways of analysing narratives. Lieblich et al (1998) identify two approaches to narrative analysis, according to unit and focus of analysis. According to the unit of analysis, the researcher can analyse segments (categories) of the interview (for example, a particular experience or event), or the narrative as a whole. Categorical analysis tends to be used when comparing the experiences of several people, whilst holistic analysis focuses on one person’s life and the meanings that can derive from the whole narrative, the accumulation of experiences. According to focus of analysis, the researcher can choose to focus on the way a narrative is structured (its form), or on the content of the narrative or of a particular story in the narrative. If focusing on content, questions regarding specific details of the story might be asked, whereas if focusing on form, the researcher looks at the way the narrative is structured: the plot, the order of the events, the language used etc. (Earth, Cuncev and Cronin 2015).

Bury (2001) argues that telling stories fulfils more than one function: therapeutic, sense-making (of one’s biography) and forging links with others. Through narration, the individual deals with disruptions of their lives. Bury (2001) discusses the restorative role played by language and narrative when identity is threatened. Language and narrative ‘help sustain and create the fabric of everyday life’ (Bury 2001: 264). Bury argues that when identity is threatened, ‘individuals often feel a pressing need to re-examine and re-fashion their personal narratives in an attempt to maintain a sense of identity’ (2001: 264). According to Bury, there are three types of narrative formed in the face of illness: ‘contingent’ narratives, dealing with the practical effect of illness and
possible pragmatic solutions; ‘moral’ narratives, which provide accounts of the way the person changes when confronted with the illness, and ‘core’ narratives, which make the link between the person’s own deep cultural and personal traits and the change imposed by the illness (Bury 2001). Core narratives can be further categorised as classic narratives, such as: tragic, comic, heroic etc. Similarly, in their research based on fifty-one autobiographical stories told by homeless people who had recovered from addictions, Hanninen and Koski-Jannes (1999) identified different story types. They linked these stories with their participants’ cultural backgrounds and discussed the moral assessment and explanations that each of those stories provided for the listener. An example of such a moral assessment offered by the story-teller is: ‘not guilty but victim of a disease’ (Hanninen and Koski-Jannes 1999). Hanninen and Koski-Jannes’s approach reminds of Bury (2001)’s extraction of a moral sense to each story, and also suggests an existence of stigmatised aspects of the homeless and/ or addicted body.

Another typology for narratives is according to narrative structure. Narratives can be progressive (where the plot develops over time), regressive (where the plot deteriorates) and stable, where the plot stays the same; narratives can also separate into ‘good stories’ and deviations (Lieblich et al 1998). Lieblich et al (1998) identify four main narrative types, according to the role played by the narrator in the story: the romance, the comedy, the tragedy and the satire. Each type has at the centre a struggle to restore the lost social order.

In his study on the effect of life threatening illness over the body, Frank (2013) also classifies narratives according to restoration of identity, into: restitution narratives, chaos narratives and quest narratives. In the restitution narratives, the narrator finds methods of coping with the initial denigration of self (illness) and continues to live a balanced life or returns to a previous life. In the chaos narratives, the narrator announces loss of control. Chaos narratives lack structure, they are distorted and fragmented. In the quest narratives, illness is accepted and the story-teller tries to learn from it, to use it in order to build a new life and reality.
4.4. **Analysis: combining thematic and narrative approaches**

The interviews generated two types of data: some of a narrative quality and some thematic. Therefore, in order to fully grasp the meaning of interviewees’ stories, a combined, thematic and narrative analysis approach fitted best.

Coding was thus a combination of thematic and narrative analysis. I started extracting sections of narrative on the first level of analysis and then used primarily grounded codes when common themes emerged. Thus my analysis naturally separated between reflections on homelessness narratives and emerging themes. Throughout the process of coding I attempted to stay faithful to the text and expressions used by the interviewees.

**4.4.1. Thematic analysis**

The main themes presented in Chapters 5 and 6 resulted from analysing the data thematically. Analysis using thematic analysis does not make prior assumptions on the data. Theory emerges out of the data rather than being developed in advance for testing. The interviewees are seen as the experts, so analysis comes solely from what they said. As a first step in analysis, thematic analysis generally assumes that all derivation of codes is transparent and begins at a basic level. Coding is shaped by the researcher’s interpretations of the data. Slowly the researcher moves away from data to theory by applying codes and, gradually, abstract concepts are formed (Glaser and Strauss 1969, Charmaz 2006, Strauss and Corbin 1990, Saldama 2009). Categories are refined through constant comparison, looking for deviant cases and for similarities. Analysis and data collection are iterative. The researcher is constantly looking for confirmation or disconfirmation in the data, in order to clarify the emerging concepts. This ensures the robustness and reliability of the process. The aim of the research is to move away from the initial descriptive codes, to groups of codes (categories) and eventually to abstract theory. A theory is formed when the researcher experiences theoretical saturation. This presupposes a high level of familiarity with the data from the researcher, who is able to readily identify meaningful or often occurring concepts.

Strategies such as transcribing interviews fully and personally and iterative analysis of the data help and were employed in the present study. In fact, the analysis process was never one-sided. Analysis took place at all stages, from transcription (when I was
making ‘memos’ alongside, as Fielding and Thomas 2001 suggest), to writing up, when I kept referring back to the annotated data for clarification. Having access to Atlas ti, a computer software for qualitative analysis, I used the memo tool extensively. Such an iterative process of reflection and negotiation during coding can increase the quality and accuracy of analysis (MacQueen et al 1998, Fielding and Thomas 2001). In Atlas ti I was also able to combine ‘memos’ written during the analysis with field notes and personal reflections which took place at the interview stage. This was particularly useful, as there was a time gap between collection of data and analysis (due to my being on maternity leave twice). In fact, when writing up the results, I permanently felt this gap in time was working in favour of the data and the analysis process – it offered distance and the perspective of a slightly older researcher, with more ‘life experience’, as the interviewees would have preferred (see section 4.6.3. and Chapter 6), and thus better able to understand their references. Miles and Huberman (1994) advise various strategies to ensure consistency and accuracy: typing interviewer’s questions in a different font or colour, numbering the lines or exchanges, leaving generous margins and spaces for annotations, not tidying the language, clearly noting the clarifications, interruptions, pauses, laughter etc. The researcher is iteratively looking for similar patterns, recurring themes and distinctions between subgroups (Mason 2002). Atlas ti ensured most of these strategies were in place from the beginning.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) separate into clear levels of coding: 1) open coding (where the concepts are being formed and grouped into categories, 2) axial coding (when data is put back together in new ways around those categories which can be applied to the whole dataset and 3) selective coding (the last stage of coding, where the core categories which would integrate the other categories are selected). Charmaz (2004) identifies two levels of coding: open/ initial coding and selective/ focused coding. My approach found itself at a crossroads between these two approaches, the key element of my coding being the constant iteration, the checking and self-checking that I felt I had to apply to the data. At the same time, a lot of the codes involved participants’ own wording (‘in-vivo codes’), making them very close to the data. Many of the themes I wanted to probe further had been in fact first introduced by the interviewees, as ‘spontaneous codes’ (Hammersley 2008) during pilot interviews. This was important in ensuring the interviewees had stayed ‘active participants in the definition of the interview process’ (Proctor and Padfield 1998: 57). During the second and subsequent stages of analysis, I revisited all materials and used techniques similar to axial coding (Glaser and Strauss 1969) to allow themes and analytical concepts to emerge. In this process, some new codes emerged, while some were combined due to their re-
occurrence. Contradiction among some responses led to refocusing and rephrasing my analysis.

4.5. Conduct of the interviews

Interviews were designed to allow for narrative development. They took the shape of conversations, embracing the view that people live their lives through the stories they tell (Plummer 2000, Ravenhill 2008, Somerville 2013), as elaborated in section 4.3.

4.5.1. Narrative interviewing as a fluid and reflexive process

I wanted to allow interviewee utterances, perspectives and feelings to initiate main themes for analysis. Literature advises that interviewing people who are labelled and therefore treated as socially excluded is problematic and needs to be done in an empowering way for the respective population (Ravenhill 2008, Somerville 2012, Williams 1998). Narrative analysis, intrinsically an interviewing tool which offers ‘complete’ freedom to the narrator, offered the narrators ownership and thus a sense of control over the interview contents but most importantly over the interview message. The interviewees were thus able to ‘tell a story of personal significance’ (Tucker 2006, also Da Silva 2007, Goode 2000 etc.) and could offer their own frame of reference to the issue discussed.

The present research takes the stance that narrative research is a spontaneous ‘way of telling someone about one’s life’ (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992, Riessman 2008) which involves further delving into the person’s own sense of self and identity. The study therefore sees this life story as an opportunity to understand the person or the event narrated etc. more holistically and from the perspective of the person narrating it. As the story should be led by the interviewee, I did not impose a certain order of events, nor did I set out to be consistent with the phrasing of the initial question asked. The study therefore adopts the view that to the sociologist, studying narratives brings the additional benefit of revealing important and not readily available aspects of the social life (Riessman 2008). During my interviews, following a loose initial phrase which prompted interviewees to ‘tell me their life story’, I probed minimally, allowing the story to unfold.
The interview guide included only one (general) main question, which would start off the interview and which prompted the interviewee to tell me their life story, however they wanted. There followed a few topic areas, which I used solely as reminders and prompts for me, in order to keep track of where the interview was going. I did not know how I would use the interview schedule, but in practice, not only was there no time for me to look over it, but the few times when I did, I found this disconcerted the interviewee and broke up the flow of their narration. It also often happened that I did not need to even ask the initial question (variations of: ‘Tell me about your life’), as the interviewees had already prepared to offer me a story. The only questions that I did find myself asking were of clarification or encouragements to continue, rather than inquiries. This aligns itself to the perspective that the best results in interviewing are achieved when, apart from steering the conversation, the interviewer allows the interviewee to voice their own opinions and take the path they decide to take (Hemsely 2003, Riessman 2008).

Narrative research is often used in studies with ‘hard to reach’ and infrequently researched groups (Earth, Cuncev and Cronin 2015). The general view in research is that the ‘single homeless person’ is one of those ‘hard to reach’ research groups (Ravenhill 2003, Hanninen and Koski-Jannes 1999, Wardaugh 1998, Washington and Moxley 2008 etc.). Although in the present study access was not an issue (as I had worked in the field and knew many of the people interviewed), facilitating a fruitful interview, where the interviewee would feel comfortable to tell their life story, required a number of skills and the right atmosphere, as the present section further elaborates.

Firstly, the method employed in the interviews did not pose an immediate threat to the individual. By being allowed to narrate their life stories, the interviewees could provide a multi-dimensional perspective over their life and understanding of homelessness:

‘A.C.: Why did you come here today?’

Kate: To talk to you, because it’s about time that people stopped being classed as being, uhm, I don’t like the word, homeless. (…). And talking to you gives me this opportunity.’ (Kate, 24, shared house)

Secondly, the interview was a fluid process. Sometimes I would make a mental note about information that had already appeared, questions that I did not need to ask

35The interview guide (interview schedule), which was constructed following a literature research, previous pilot interviews and observations and my own assumptions or ‘puzzlements’ (Lofland and Lofland 1994) can be seen in Appendix 6.
anymore. In order not to forget, I would mark the question by reiterating it. When transcribing, this was immediately apparent and sometimes even humorous. In the following passage, I reiterate what the interviewee says, having realised that he has given me an answer to the question I was about to ask (‘where would you like to be in five years from now?’) Following my prompt, the interviewee responds further to the same question:

‘Gerry: Just want me own place, do nothing, get a job, go to work, come home. Maybe get a girlfriend, maybe not have a girlfriend, see what happens. I ain’t [sic] planning nothing anymore, I don’t see a future anymore, I just see every day as it comes and make the most of everyday. I don’t sleep because of my eyesight. The tablets I’m on don’t work. (...) It’s ridiculous.

A.C.: Sounds like you have a vision of where you want to be.

Gerry: I know where I want to be. A place of me own, where I can have friends round, they can stay over if they want to.’ (Gerry, 40, shared flat)

4.5.2. Narrative style and narrative editing

Interviews varied in style. This was connected to different homelessness narratives which emerged during analysis and which form the subject of Chapter 7. The present section is concerned with narrative style and outside influences to these styles.

My initial understanding of narratives as a perfect Labovian progression with a beginning, middle and an end of the story were soon challenged. Labov and Waletsky (1967) offer a description of the narrative structure. A narrative includes: a summary of the story (details of time, place and characters), followed by the ‘complicating action’ and thus the main narrative. The ‘resolution’ closes the action. In the ‘evaluation’ the story-teller explains the moral of the story – their own perspective. The story can be followed by a coda, which provides the round effect of a story. The narratives I encountered were all different, depending on the time and place of the story being told, on the personalities telling them, on the subject matter, on my own understandings. Labovian stories stricto sensu rarely occurred.

Thus already during the first interview I noticed that the interviewee did not ‘pour’ narrative – his narration was not a clear story, with beginning and end, simple timeline, and told in an undisturbed fashion. Rather, he had a tendency to go over the same things, so I permanently refocused the interview. I had been saying a lot ‘let’s go back
to where it all started… let’s go back to the time when…’. The information I gathered was none the less important. Had I granted the narrator full sovereignty, the interview would have ended much earlier and it would have referred to only five years of his life. During another interview, the same voluntary breaking of the narrative happened. With Murray, with whom I was well accustomed (I had worked with him in the past), my questions were naturally more focused. In both cases, even though the narrative was broken, the questions I was asking were the result of my extensive activity in the field and extensive knowledge of the interviewee and therefore valuable for my results.

In terms of length, some narratives (and the interview itself) were much shorter than others. In a concise manner, some interviewees felt they had managed to convey the story they wanted to convey and (with some exceptions, such as the one above) I did not prompt any further. In other cases, the narration took place almost entirely in pictures, the scene was painted in colour and images, metaphors of things to come and moments that had passed:

‘And that’s when we came to Wales and I visited Ben for a little while, and I met his family, and they were quite old fashioned. Had their own garden at the back, they’d grow their own vegetables and... just very old fashioned. (...) And he was like the clean country boy, rosy cheeks and very presentable, he was a driver, instructor, teaching people to drive, but the place I was in, was like a mini studio, with separate kitchen and bathroom and a bed. And I really quite liked it, the little bedroom that I had, and the location, it was quite nice.’ (Laura, 35, flat)

Sometimes, there would be time or fact distortion, with certain events told on more than one occasion but in different ways. The only consistent element of all interviews was a permanent need for their narrator to justify and interpret. This need was rarely hidden and most often it was suddenly reinforced, with prompts directed to me, aimed at pointing at the relevant material for interpretation. Thus in Gerard’s opening paragraph (on the next page), he provided all the information needed to interpret his story. The paragraph included turning phrases from the matter in hand (‘anyway, school’) and essential elements which stressed the angle the story should be listened from (‘sociologically’). The message transpiring from Gerard’s story was that his situation was the result of a sequence of acts of fate:
‘Yes, I’ve got diaries going back… way back. Well, my parents moved to Suffolk after the Second World War. My grandfather opened a shop. I was with my father, playing on the rocks one day and I slipped and banged my head. And I had no medical attention and a couple of years later, I was about four, I had double bronchopneumonia and a cough. They had to drain my lungs, which left me a little bit deformed on the left and still a bit depressed. Anyway, we moved then down to Surrey and I went to school there and I was. If we hadn’t moved to Suffolk we’d have been homeless then, because they, my grandfather, had lost everything. Anyway, school - I was happy, unhappy, it was alright...so when I was about fifteen we lived by Gatwick airport and the low flying planes kept me awake. I was very sensitive. [The airport was] About ten miles away. And the drugs started to come into town as well. And you know, sociologically around an airport you get all that kind of thing going on.’ (Gerard, 63, flat)

In fact, there were a few occurrences of specialised vocabulary such as sociologically, psychologically being used in the interviews, in an attempt to engage with the research. In the following paragraph, Cal ‘unmasked’ my prompts, thus demonstrating that he knew what I was trying to achieve:

‘Cal: I mean, even in 2007, when I was having all these accidents happen to me, I still managed to take the little buggers [his children] on holiday to Bournemouth. I couldn’t take them anywhere else, cause I was stuck on crutches, you know. Yeah, so all in all, you were pushing me for a bit more information about something...

A.C.: Yeah, we were talking about your children...

Cal: Yeah, big motivating factor in my life, absolutely massive.’ (Cal, 47, shared house)

Cal showed (‘you were pushing me’) that he was aware I wanted to lead him in a direction, maybe to tell me more about his children, that he may not normally have taken. In reality, Cal offered a lot of the information voluntarily and these ‘pushes’ (prompts) were only needed on very few occasions.
Often interviewees would assume a secondary role, of editor, when narrating their story. They would keep alert to their own divagations or inexactities. In the following paragraph, Alice draws her own attention towards the fact that she is digressing:

‘I know I had a sleeping bag, and I know I was thinking well, I'll sleep outside Westminster Cathedral and I'll be quite safe there, so I went to the Cathedral and slept there. My sleeping bag was not waterproof so therefore I got soaking wet. But I still had somewhere to live. Cause I came back [to the city where she used to live]. I think I was still living with my aunt then, I'm not quite sure, and my aunt was being very kind. She got me... see, I'm jumping, I'm going round the bend. I'll go from here; I'll do it like that: I remember reading in a newspaper, I don't think it was a Catholic newspaper, oh yes, it was, on Sunday they are put out, and then ... (Alice, 66, flat)

‘I'm going round the bend’ is not only a note to self, pointing out the digression, but also maybe a way of signalling to the interviewer that Alice’s intention was, in fact, to offer a trustworthy account and not to simply ‘have a chat’. Alice was famous in the project she was living at for her long ‘chats’, and she was aware of this. These self-adjustments and collaborations to rendering a ‘good’ narrative were all signs of ownership of the narrative and thus confirmation for me that interviewee-led, narrative interviewing had been achieved.

4.6. In the field: location, organisation and my role

This section presents the organisation under research and my role at the time when the interviews were conducted.

4.6.1. Sea City and HSS

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the location of the study, Sea City, was an ideal place for this type of research, aimed at reflecting the effects of policy and policy changes on the individual’s attitude to their identities. At the time of the study Sea City had become a flagship for trying out new Government schemes and ideas. It had long been seen as a leading area in tackling a very complicated homelessness problem, and was therefore an ideal place to try and implement new programmes for the South of England. This was most obvious at times of change (the 2008 economic crisis, followed
by the 2010 change of Government), when Government decisions would quickly impact on the local policies and strategic thinking.

HSS was the largest housing association working under Supporting People standards at the time of the study. It thus had an important role in carrying out Government procedures and setting out standards. The senior managers of HSS were among the first to be updated of changes in structures and approaches by the local authority and HSS was often in a position of trialling new approaches. In fact, for a short while, an innovative floating support service was tried at HSS during the time of the study.36

Throughout the research I worked part-time at HSS. I started as project worker, then manager of the second largest hostel and later on I moved to the Head Office of the organisation, in the policy team. From this position I could keep up to date with policy and procedural changes. I found this position highly beneficial for my study. It meant I could stay abreast with sometimes substantial changes, even during my two breaks of maternity leave. It also granted full access to all seven projects and direct access to their ‘gatekeepers’ (the managers). I found that being known to the staff made access at the manager level much easier. Not only were they aware of my history with the organisation, but also they were confident that I was sufficiently trained to deal with potentially challenging situations within an interview situation and that I would always be considerate of my interviewees’ emotional disposition and place their welfare first. Also, from an organisational perspective, I had valid CRB (Criminal Records Bureau)/DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks, I was trained in ‘lone working’ and I was a first aid trainer, should the situation occur when this would be necessary. Aside from this, one manager was also a personal friend, so she made added efforts to distribute the information about the research to the residents in her project.

On the one hand, this ease of access to a large Sea City homelessness organisation made the research easier and led to all the data being collected at the same time (within the initially established time framework). On the other hand, I was permanently aware of potential bias that could happen at various moments, and my determination to have opportunities to reflect is highlighted further on in this chapter, as well as through the analysis chapters.

It is also worth noting that it was working for HSS that led me to start the study in the first place. When I first started working for HSS, I was surprised by the inherent

36 Chapter 8 (Discussion) considers the reported effects of this service, when discussing policy implications for the study.
variances of practice within the organisation, by the differences in approaching the residents, and by how these seemed to work well. Listening to the residents’ stories made me realise the variety within homelessness, as each story seemed unique. I found the homelessness sector fascinating, yet not fully acknowledged and was impressed by their achievements. Although not a ‘hard fact’ as such, this is worth mentioning, as it is from this perspective and ultimately with dedication that I conducted my interviews. I believe my commitment to the research was communicated to my interviewees and potentially influenced the quality of the answers I was getting.

4.6.2. Sampling

I felt the sample was already naturally defined by existing policy, which separates ‘single homeless people’ as a distinct group with distinct standards and housing provision, within homelessness (Supporting People 2008), even though this was not fully recognised in research. Apart from this, I decided for minimal criteria for sampling (Fielding 2001) and not to separate according to gender, age, cause of homelessness or other differences, in order to allow for many and diverse themes and codes to naturally emerge from the interviews.

A single homeless person is a person with a housing support need, who has spent some time in temporary housing or on the street and who at present finds themselves in insecure/ temporary accommodation. Single homeless people\textsuperscript{37} may have children or not, but their children do not reside with them. Most single homeless organisations house both men and women. I interviewed twenty men and eight women, which was reflective of the proportion of men and women in HSS and generally in homelessness organisations of its kind. The table in Appendix 3 offers demographics about the people interviewed. The table details where those people lived, their age, the cause for their initial homelessness event and their relationship with their family. Appendix 2 includes a brief life story, as close to how they narrated them, for each of the interviewees. All interviewees resided at HSS, in temporary accommodation.

I did not select my interviewees, but rather allowed them to come forward. This happened in stages. I first sent information letters and a written call for interviews to all seven projects within HSS. These were placed in individual letters and thus mailed to each resident. Rather than issuing any interview appointments at this stage, the letter, it was reported by some interviewees later, ‘stirred their interest’. Following this initial

\textsuperscript{37} For an in-depth definition of ‘single homeless person’ please see section 1.5.4.
stage, I organized visits to each project. I attended ‘in-house meetings’, ‘resident meetings’, ‘resident panels’ and sometimes groups (art groups, coffee mornings etc.). Many of these took place in the evenings or at the weekends, but although this was more difficult for me (as I was not living in Sea City and weekend train travel sometimes was problematic), I decided it was important to use as many channels as possible to invite interviews, in order to make the sample as diverse as possible. There were indeed different people at different groups: sometimes mostly older residents, at other times just women, whilst at the house meetings a wider range of age and gender was met.

A large number of interviewees came from these meetings. Those who had not immediately announced their interest got in touch a few days later.

Often the meetings would be attended by keyworkers, and this was another way of recruiting interviewees. Hearing more information about the research, the keyworkers offered to contact some of their clients, who, they argued: ‘had an interesting story to tell’.

Lastly, I recruited some of the participants directly – they were people I had already come in contact with, in my previous role, as support worker.

The sample was therefore diverse, but in some cases (especially for the people who came forward at the resident meetings) it did rely on an individual, self-selection process. Considering the population, who was considered ‘hard to reach’ and therefore imposed an increased recruitment difficulty acknowledged in research (McLaughlin 2009, Larkin 2009), the question does arise on the specific features that the interviewees had or felt they had, in order to come forward for the interviews. This is where my role as an insider helped, as some of my interviewees attended the interviews solely due to me being the interviewer: they stated they felt comfortable in my presence, not threatened. One interviewee told me specifically that he would not have attended the interview, had it been facilitated by someone ‘from the outside’, while someone else told me she felt I was aware of her ‘anxiety’ and she felt safe in my company.

Ultimately I felt that a wide array of voices could be heard in my interviews. This was the reason I stopped making appointments after my thirty first interview – in fact, I had to cancel that last one, the thirty first, and never rescheduled it. At that stage I felt a desired richness of the data had been reached. This was confirmed along the way, during transcription, when interviewees’ self-adjustments, collaboration with me, their
complicity with me were further proof that interviewee-led, narrative interviewing had been achieved, and I had not been delivered a well rehearsed narrative, generally dedicated to the social services. Even more, during analysis stage, an obvious conceptual richness emerged, which required a variety of concepts and a complex theoretical approach – thus further confirmation that a varied sample had been achieved.

At the analysis stage I used an internal HSS policy (originally based on the Census) separation into a broad ‘younger’ (up to 35 years old) and a broad ‘older’ resident category (35 and older). I did not introduce further categories (for example, 18-25, 65 and older etc.), because due to the small size of the sample, this could have been restrictive. In fact, none of the people interviewed belonged to the 35-45 years old category. The actual age range for the research was: 18-35 = young; 45-70=older.

4.6.3. Field experience

As mentioned earlier, I had to consider the power imbalance that could arise at the time of the interview. I therefore used the duality of my role (as academic researcher as well as employee) to ensure a harmless interview setting. I reassured the interviewees (when I considered this necessary) that this was an academic exercise. This was particularly necessary with people who outrightly seemed nervous or specifically informed me of their anxieties. In most cases, my working at the organisation only provided interviewees with extra security and thus more confidence:

‘And I mean when I heard it’s for you [doing the interview], I thought, yeah, she’s worked here a long time, she knows what she’s talking about.’ (Darren, 63, shared house)

Darren further touched on the existing lack of specialisation in the housing sector at the time of interviewing (this is changing rapidly) and age concerns, which are addressed from a researcher perspective in the present chapter and in chapter 6.

Negotiating interviewees’ different communication styles and levels of interaction and understanding was harder than I expected. Other researchers report this as well in homelessness research (Da Silva 2007). Two interviewees had been diagnosed with learning difficulties. In one case, questions had to be formulated in a distinct way to solicit an answer. Long silences, which might embarrass most, seemed natural to him and were left unaddressed. This required an adjustment on my side. Having worked
with other people with similar issues beforehand was very helpful in being able to manage the situation early on in the interview. The other interviewee would repeat sentences, names and events, would speak in different voices when discussing different issues and solicited a break every time we reached a sensitive subject. In a sense, this offered me a key to what he had found hardest in his life. It was a difficult interview to negotiate though and on this occasion, my previous knowledge of the person led to a successful discussion.

The duration of interviews was another unexpected issue. The exactness of the interviews and the lack of fluctuation in time with one exception underlined on the next page could be connected to the interviewees’ potential expectations. Living in temporary housing implied the requirement to go through a series of timed encounters with housing professionals: housing interviews at the point of access, keyworking sessions on a regular basis (weekly, bi-monthly or monthly) and exit interviews when leaving the service. These were generally much shorter, around thirty minutes, and sometimes less. Therefore it is possible that the interviewees not only expected this length of time from my interviews, but were also used to speaking within a timeframe, and therefore were able to transmit a complex and meaningful message in a shorter amount of time than a narrative interview might be expected (Josselson and Lieblich 1993) to last. I acknowledged this difference connected to the group researched and allowed the interviews to draw to a close if I felt that both the interviewee and myself had felt a meaningful narrative account had been created. There was one exception to this relatively short narrative encounter. On one occasion, the participant reacted very emotionally when remembering traumatising events from her past. This led to a complicated balancing act on my part. I introduced numerous coffee breaks in key difficult moments of the narration, but in return an already quite long interview got prolonged indefinitely (or so it seemed). My interviewee’s mood fluctuated less and less with time, but as the time passed it became difficult to sustain my own motivation. This was particularly hard, since the interview had extended into the afternoon and early evening and I had the train travel home ahead of me still. I then decided to limit my future interviews to a maximum of two hours with the possibility of a second interview at another date and communicated this to the participants in advance. However, there were no other interviews that extended, as presented earlier in this section.

38 Section 4.3. details the features of a successful narrative interview.
Among other unexpected issues there were: the resonance of the room at one of the projects, which made recording and transcription very difficult, the lack of staff in the afternoon at another project, which restricted the amount of time I could spend on the premises, the different design of the interviewees’ flats, which often restricted where I could sit my recording devices and paperwork. This latter point led to my deciding early on in the interview phase to carry only what was absolutely necessary in the field, which eventually resumed to just the recording device. To ensure better acoustics, I changed the recorder early on, the second, newer version being not only better, but much smaller and less visible than the previous one.

4.6.4. Reflections on researcher impact

Narratives offered the interviewees the ground for detailing a presentation of self which, through iterations, annotations, justification and legitimation (all creative measures of the modern individuals) (Sennett 1998) would become plausible, real to the others. In the present case, the ‘other’ was the researcher – myself, first, and following this, a similar audience of the professionals whom I represented. My role was uncertain: I became an ambiguous representative of the housing professional, the institution and not least of the social researcher. The ambiguity was created jointly by my known status at HSS, interviewees’ expectations or assumptions and my evasive acceptance of the status designated by them. This interaction in itself was a creative measure, both on my part and my interviewees’ part, of synchronising our perceptions of the world towards a profitable momentary interaction at the time of the interview. The mere occasion of the interview could thus be defined through a pluralism of reference points (Bennett 2005) and thus socially constructed labels. In this process, I became one of the ‘significant others’ (Goffman 1963) and was thus expected to behave like one.

Research is not independent of the person who is conducting it and of their own reference framework (Fielding and Thomas 2001, Padfield and Procter 1996). Although the present study is not elaborating on the co-production of narrative between the interviewer and the interviewee and the effects of such interactions, the current section briefly focuses on researcher impact, as it occurred in my study.

Interviewing involved a new perspective over the research subject as well as of my own identity and preconceptions held when entering the field. It challenged my expectations regarding individuals’ narrative styles (see section above). I also had to
face unmet expectations on the contents of the story being told (as elaborated in section 4.5.2.). Throughout the interviewing process, I was aware that qualitative research involves ‘travail sur soi’ by retrospective and prospective reflection (Da Silva 2007), in a situation when ‘the interviewer, by being an active listener, is a co-producer of the narrative.’ (Da Silva 2007: 75). My research was also intrinsically connected to my work history. My position in the organisation being varied gave me a faceted perspective of working with the homeless. In fact, as shown in the first part of the present chapter, some studies use people employed in the service, to ensure matching and thus better data (Lemos and Durkacz 2002, Williams 1998).

Being employed at HSS and thus being a representative, to some point, of the institution could also carry potential disadvantages. I was aware of the possibility of solely getting a rehearsed institutional narrative and of the potential risks of being offered what the interviewees thought I wanted to hear, instead of unrehearsed, spontaneous life stories. I did not feel this risk had ever materialized. Firstly, the narratives themselves had a very spontaneous and natural quality. Secondly, not all narratives followed the same, homogenous narrative and contents path. The narratives in fact varied widely, in style and contents and according to personal, rather than institutional messages conveyed. Thirdly, there were instances when the existence of the institutional concerns made its presence, but these queries/ questions were isolated in the narration – they were placed in breaks of narration. Often this break would happen at the end of the interview, and after I had switched off the recording device, and they would relate to organizational matters: residents’ survey, visiting hours, housing benefit questions etc. Being a trained worker and familiar with the setting, I was able to respond to those queries, and thus allowed the interview to continue on a relaxed note, or finished the interview experience on a positive note.

From a personal perspective, in order to make sure I was improving my interviewing technique and that I was alert to the information given, I maintained a self-reflective attitude to the research throughout the study. I also asked for feedback at the end of each interview. When received, the feedback was positive. Some of the recorded feedback was that the interview offered a cathartic opportunity of telling their life stories, it was also seen an added opportunity to self-reflect and that it felt nice to be given the exclusive time to be listened to. This is not an unusual reaction, in fact other researchers report similar feedback in their studies (Ravenhill 2008, Fraenkel et al 2009, Hanninen and Koski-Jannes 1999). I made sure there were many opportunities for debrief during and after the interview (Lemos and Durkacz 2002).
4.6.4.1. The issue of intimacy

Literature reports a growing sense of intimacy with the respondent as the research deepens (Clarke et al 2005, Davies et al 2010, Montgomery et al 2009) and thus an increasing need on the researcher’s part to be reflexive and self-aware when providing an account of the respondent’s experience. In the present study, some of that familiarity existed even prior to entering an interviewing relationship, due to my having worked within the organisation. This brought a new dimension to the interview, as I was not probing in the dark and was thus getting more information in the space of the interview. Knowing my interviewees also meant that I knew when to stop. I was attuned to the slightest sign of distress.

In terms of interview dynamics, familiarity helped. I made a real effort in assuring comfortable conditions for all my interviewees. In the carefully chosen interview room39, I arranged the chairs and table in a suitable way, more in a coffee shop scenario than in an informal interview style. I limited the amount of papers on the table to the consent form, which disappeared shortly after being signed and the interview schedule, a creased, rather non-formal looking piece of paper, which, as mentioned earlier, disappeared altogether in the later interviews. I made various attempts at making the recording devices as inconspicuous as possible, to the extent of one interview being difficult to transcribe, as the recorder had been partially hidden by a packet of biscuits. I made numerous breaks for coffee, tea, biscuits and cigarettes and allowed impromptu interruptions for various needs: such as the interviewee phoning the social worker, a friend or checking if a parcel had arrived.

Many researchers consider familiarity and especially feeling at ease on the part of the interviewees very important in a qualitative interviewing setting, and some go to great lengths to facilitate this for their interviewees. For example, whilst wondering ‘how mutual or reciprocal information-giving should be’, Goode (2000) did her best to build a rapport with the women she interviewed. She took a very relaxed approach to showing her gratitude for taking part in her interview and bought the women flowers, offered to baby sit, took one woman and her child to the circus. Goode felt she achieved better quality of data in this way, because the women felt more at ease and open with her during the interviews.

39 See section 4.5.1.
While I preserved a traditional interviewee-interviewer scenario, all researcher characteristics played a role in the interviews, especially in aiding (or infringing) familiarity and openness in discussions. For instance, in interviews with homeless people at HSS, age was an important and favourable factor. All interviewees were used to the new generation of supported housing worker, who would generally be considered ‘young’ (in their early twenties). Although only in my late twenties at the time of research, the difference was noticed. I was treated like an older person, closer to my interviewees’ age, and thus more trustworthy. I felt the balance would have again changed if I had been even older. Even more, during the second round of the interviews, I was heavily pregnant, which initiated questions about my pregnancy and the expected baby, these ensuring a much more relaxed and informal atmosphere.

In fact, being a woman had an impact in more than one way. Thus even though interviewees reacted with much aplomb to my questions and were relaxed telling their stories, they usually refrained from using certain language and warned me when ‘inappropriate’ or undesired comments were going to appear: ‘You might not want this in here, but I met some working ladies...’ (Paul, 60, living independently).

4.7. Reliability and validity

One of the questions often asked in connection to qualitative research is whether and how the data can be reliable, or considered valid, when not supported by the accountable controls that are present in quantitative research. It is precisely this lack of added controls, the interpretative quality of the data, that make qualitative research valid and especially appropriate for studies where assumptions and correlations are required (due to the scarcity of prior data on this subject) for building a more holistic image of the subject researched (Becker 2001, Miles and Huberman 1994, Somerville 2012). The following paragraph offers an example of my inductive process for one of my interviews and it is an elaboration on how qualitative analysis seeks to build the individual’s utterances, uncertainties, hesitations into the main subject of the research.

Laura was one of the first people I interviewed. During the interview itself, I realised I kept trying to separate the ‘truth’ from confusion (the apparent inconsistencies) and even trying to extract factual meaning. Laura was involuntarily mixing what she would have wanted to tell with what she remembered and what she thought would make sense for the story. Thus, Laura recounted several relationship stories, all involving
different men; at a point in the narration she in fact exclaimed: ‘Well, I actually probably got the story wrong, but I am just going around.’ (Laura, 35, flat) This led to a rather uncertain account. I took a long time coding and trying to piece the narrative together, but upon failing this I understood that the only concept that emerged from her account was the underlying feeling of angst, frustration and inability to cope. Therefore, rather than looking at the facts as she was recounting them, I analysed how she told the story and what she really wanted to convey. The meaning of her story was hidden and at the same time made obvious by her unclear account. In fact, this is an interpretation the present study adheres to. Riessman (2008) argues that narratives should be interpreted as metaphors, or text requiring interpretation: ‘Narratives are interpretative, and in turn, require interpretation.’ (2008:3) Narratologists see this as a clear advantage, as the new story, bearing traces of past, present and future altogether conveys more meaning than a strictly objective account of the same story.

Even more, qualitative researchers work within a framework of validating and self-checking when in the field. During their study on homeless identity construction consisting of a year-long ethnographic immersion in the field, Snow and Anderson (1993) took note not only of what the homeless people told them, but also of what they told each other. An interesting feature of the study was the communication between the two researchers: one of them took the active role of ethnographer, whilst the second debriefed him on a regular basis and offered critical observations on the field notes collected. In the lack of a research partner, other tools, such as a research diary or notes, can be very valuable in assuring self-checking for the researcher and were, like mentioned earlier, tools that I also adopted in my research.

4.8. Ethics

The study was designed and conducted according to the guidelines of the University of Surrey Research Committee. It was awarded favourable ethical opinion by the University of Surrey Research Committee on the 20th of April 200940.

In my frontline work, I managed highly sensitive situations and had in-depth training on negotiating relationships with ‘vulnerable’ individuals. I also always had access to up to date policies and information on hostel practices and procedures. Thus, I had established a good understanding of homeless people’s personalities and experiences

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40 See Ethics Committee Approval letter in Appendix 11.
and learned to forge empathetic but professional relationships with the people I came in contact with.

Throughout the study I ensured everyone’s anonymity and confidentiality. I identified interviewees by code numbers (at the transcription stage) and pseudonyms (at the main analysis stage and in data extracts in the thesis). I decided to keep the organisation and location of research strictly confidential and only identify them as ‘a location in the South East’ (Sea City) and HSS, with fictitious names. Documents containing codes, names and addresses, as well as written consent forms are kept separately in strict confidence, in accordance with current legislation, particularly the Data Protection Act (1998). Data will be retained for five years after publication of the thesis. All the above points were explained using information sheets and consent forms for each stage of the research. All interviewees were given the option of switching the recorder off at any point in the interview but no one did. I offered transcripts to all participants, but few actually took this offer. The aims, methods and any potential risk or benefit were clearly explained, with an outline of these details provided as written information.

The main guidelines for valid consent in the literature are that it be ‘informed and voluntary’ (Israel and Hersh 2006: 44). During the recruitment phase, all people I spoke to received information sheets which mentioned the research aim, duration and circumstances of the interview, potential risks and discomforts, outcomes and usage of the interview material. I also attached information on local counselling and other support agencies. It was explained that volunteers may decline to participate in the study, or withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Aware that we could discuss delicate, potentially upsetting subjects, I attached a list of counselling contact numbers. Due to contacts being local, I could not reproduce this sheet in the thesis, as it would have corrupted the anonymity of the location under study.

During my research I was faced with ethical concerns. I offered interview transcripts to all interviewees. When asked whether he wanted a transcript, John casually explained it would be an opportunity for him to give the transcript to his key-worker to publish in the hostel's newsletter. My first response was a self-confidence crisis: the transcript of our conversation was going to be brought to a public forum, not in a way that I could control or censor. I also had not intended to involve staff in the research. Even more, I was playing the role of the worker once again, being worried about the potential

41 See Appendices 8, 9 and 10.
confidentiality breaches his ‘confession’ could lead to. I was worried about John’s safety beyond the safe space of the interview, where I could not safeguard his choices any longer. Providing him with the transcript would lead to a loss of control that I had not prepared for, but not giving him the transcript would betray his confidence. I resolved this impasse by making sure I was as accurate as possible. I erased identifying factors. If John decided to add them in, it would be his decision. I handed him the transcript based on the belief that by accepting to take part in my interview, he had predicted an opportunity to tell his life story and have it written down, and I had accepted that what he did with the story would at some point be out of my reach.

4.8.1. Informed consent

As mentioned above, I ensured I had actual consent throughout my research, not only at the initial stage, and planned to be mindful of the interviewees’ own style. My aim was to make the research empowering, fair and personally rewarding for all participants (researcher as well as researched). This approach of being alert to potential challenges did lead to my decision not to use two of the interviews I had collected. These belonged to individuals for whom, although they had given their consent, I did not feel continuing with the research would be fair nor beneficial. At the time of the interview as well as during subsequent visits at the projects, one of these interviewees had been heavily inebriated and not fully aware of or alert to his surroundings. I felt he was answering my questions without being fully aware that, although anonymised, they would be used in research. This coupled with his background (he had found a long lost relative through accessing missing people services and was still negotiating access to her) ultimately led to the decision not to use his interview, nor delve further. The other interviewee got diagnosed with an advanced stage of Korsakoff’s disease – an alcohol induced type of dementia, in the period after arranging the interview but before the interview took place. I did not feel sufficiently trained to interview him. Even more, our meetings seemed to upset him, and I felt that the interview would take place not in his best interest.

4.9. Summary

The present study argues that a qualitative approach, which focuses on the individual’s own reflection of their current and past situation and where the discussion is led by the
single homeless person rather than the interviewer, makes for a different type of data and a better understanding of the way the single homeless people define themselves. Talking to the researched individuals, rather than about them, and in a way which makes sense to them leads to richer and more complex information. Chapter 4 concludes the introductory chapters of the present thesis. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 concentrate on the findings of the research and their discussion. Chapter 9 provides a conclusion.
CHAPTER 5: ‘I’m not stupid, and that’s what’s so frustrating about ending up in a situation like this’: Homelessness as experience and status

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 5 is the first of three chapters presenting analysis of the interview data (5, 6, and 7). The homelessness experience, as the interviewees described it, and the values and connotations attached to this experience by the interviewees form the subject of this chapter.

Following a brief discussion on definitional discrepancies (5.2.), the chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section is predominantly descriptive (5.3.). It presents a depiction of the homelessness event, as appearing in the interviews. The second part of the chapter (sections 5.4 and 5.5) discusses the interviewees’ presentation of themselves as formerly homeless, but not homeless anymore. In this process of presentation of self, a homeless ‘other’ (section 5.4) emerges. The definition of the ‘single homeless person’ was formed, in part, via juxtaposition with the homeless ‘other’ (section 5.5).

5.2. Definitions of the ‘single homeless person’ in use at the time of research

As noted extensively in Chapter 1\(^{42}\), the definition of the ‘single homeless person’ in use in Sea City was made of several elements. The person did not have a permanent address (but rather might be housed in one type of temporary housing, usually funded or provided by the local authority), they had experienced homelessness in the past, they were vulnerable to experiencing other episodes of homelessness in the future if not placed in supported accommodation and they were housed on their own, not with a partner or dependents (Jones and Pleace 2010, Crisis 2008). All temporary accommodation (such as bed and breakfast hotels, hostels, night shelters, living with friends and relatives) was included in the homelessness definition.

\(^{42}\) In section 1.5.4.
All interviewees fitted the ‘single homeless person’ criteria in the Government’s definition of the term and they all talked about their previous experiences of homelessness in the interviews. Their homelessness experiences ranged widely, from having slept in the street (for a few nights or even six months or several years) to having used friends’ and family’s temporary offers of shelter (sofa surfing) or sleeping in bed and breakfast accommodation at one or several moments in time prior to accessing HSS housing.

At the time of the interview, participants had been placed in temporary accommodation with HSS. All housing was shared and supported, with a limited stay. All residents were in a programme (Integrated Care Pathway, within the Supporting People programme) which was aimed at facilitating their movement through the housing path towards independent, privately rented living, outside the supported housing sector\textsuperscript{43}. The table in Appendix 3 offers a brief overview of the histories of the people interviewed and of their different routes into homelessness. The causes for their homelessness were diverse, this reflecting the variety at HSS\textsuperscript{44}: mental illness, alcohol, family breakdown, living in care, lack of support coped with learning difficulties, a combination of teenage pregnancy, drugs or alcohol etc. Most of these ‘causes’ are extracted from interviewees’ own narration. The table only aimed to offer an overview regarding the interviewees’ lives before the homelessness event; however this study is not concerned with causes of homelessness as such.

It became clear in the early stages of the interview that participants’ definitions of self as homeless was more complex than the one held by Sea City’s local authority.

5.3. The homelessness experience

This chapter gives homeless people a voice in describing their own practical experiences of homelessness, their journeys in overcoming it and their conceptualisation of homelessness. The first part of the chapter specifically has a descriptive quality. I felt this descriptive tempo was necessary, as interviewees voiced their need to get a definition of the homelessness event and status across to a larger audience. For many people, this was the main reason for taking part in the interview:

\textsuperscript{43} For further information about HSS and the support services for homeless people in Sea City, see section 1.5.

\textsuperscript{44} Information extracted from HSS Performance Indicators at the time.
'A.C.: Why did you accept the interview today?

Jimmy: Why, I think [knowing about homelessness] is important. I think it's important for whoever is going to read the information, to realise that it is people behind any policies being made or any ideas. It has always helped me listening to what other people have been through, so…' (Jimmy, 30, shared house)

One of the main points the interviewees wanted to get across was the difficulty of the homelessness situation. Interviewees concentrated on two main themes: homelessness is physically and emotionally challenging and it is a chaotic experience. The present section discusses each of these themes in turn.

5.3.1. Homelessness is a physically and emotionally challenging experience

The first theme in interviewees’ description of the homelessness event concerned the feelings experienced when homeless. All interviewees referred to homelessness as a tiring, relentless and physically exhausting experience, where rest was not acquired, day or night, and the individual felt permanently ‘on the move’:

‘Not the station [she was not allowed to sleep at the station], cause they told me, you're not allowed to sit down on the benches in the station. If they find you there, the police will walk you home. So I knew in those days, I had a map of London and I knew it by heart. Like a taxi guy would. Cause you can't sit down. You have to keep walking.’ (Alice, 66, flat)

Homelessness was described as the hardest, most challenging thing the interviewees had ever done. In the following paragraph, Pace implied homelessness (in his case, rough sleeping) could be associated with a ‘fear of life’. The quote appeared after a description of his ways of coping with drug withdrawal and anxiety whilst living in the hostel. In the comparison between the anxiety caused by side effects from withdrawal from drugs and living in the street, the street was considered the extreme case, which inspired a ‘fear of life’. Also appearing in the following quote is a sense of always being on the move and a constant threat of the unexpected aspects of the street. These often appeared in people’s descriptions of the homelessness event:

‘Just like, it'll pass [anxiety of living in HSS without using drugs]. It's not like, a fear of life. I'll tell you what’s hard, sleeping in shop doorways and like waking
up at four o’clock in the morning and having to make a tenner to go and buy a bag of gear, and risk getting nicked or having it stolen off you, to make yourself feel better.’ (Pace, 46, flats)

Anxiety about the hostile environment was combined with Pace’s specific state of ‘unwell’, which, he had mentioned earlier, was unique to the homelessness event. Homelessness was in fact described by all as the extreme indisposition, combining mental and physical state alike: ‘your lowest of low’, ‘you feel worse than an animal’ etc. It also had an effect on the interviewees’ appearance. Further in her interview, Alice mentioned that during homelessness ‘your dress code changes’, ‘it’s your clothes… [they become rags]’ as she had fewer opportunities and less stamina to wash her clothes and attend to her personal hygiene.

Many interviewees mentioned ‘fear’ in connection to the homelessness event. Depending on the type of homelessness experienced, the concept of ‘fear’ would change. Many interviewees, especially those who had slept rough, mentioned a physical fear: fear of attack or fear of having things stolen from them (especially drugs). In the same category was the fear of weakness, of loss of own abilities, as homelessness was physically exhausting. In this context, many interviewees, but in particular the older ones, associated returning to the street with death:

‘I would not like to be homeless again. If I were, I think I would kick the bucket [would die].’ (Alice, 66, flat)

The second, but more intensely reported type of ‘fear’ was abstract and it was connected to how the interviewees were perceived by outsiders. Some people spoke of the constant fear of being recognised, once in the homeless situation. Others described the coping practices they employed in order not to acknowledge their ‘lowest of low’ (the homeless situation) to their family/friends. Paul (60) spoke of the time he went to stay with his daughter. He described himself as a homeless ‘alcoholic’ at that point in time. Paul’s crisis moment was when he saw that his daughter had checked the drinks cupboard before leaving the house. For him this was the proof that his daughter had discovered the situation that he had been in for a while but which he had managed, until that moment, to conceal:

45 I refer to the state of homelessness as the ‘lowest of low’, as this is how it appeared described in the interviews, as the chapter further shows (particularly section 5.5.).
'And I thought, if that's what my kids think of me [that I'm an alcoholic living on the streets], that is ridiculous. And that was one of the moments of lucidity for me…' (Paul, 60, independent)

Following on from this, Paul described going back to Sea City, where he had been homeless, and seeking the local authority’s help. He was placed in a shelter, from there moved to HSS, where he had experienced all types of supported housing, and at the moment of the interview he had recently moved out to a privately rented flat but remained involved on the residents' board.

This fear of recognition, of acknowledging a different status to the people most important to them (family and friends) resonates with studies on the stigma of homelessness, where following the physical changes incurred through homelessness, research participants assumed the existence of a negative and stigmatising attitude from outsiders (Williams 1998, Radley et al 2005, Schneider and Remillard 2013 etc.).

In the following paragraph, Alice described the close and ambiguous succession of events which led to her being on the streets, unable to direct her actions towards finding accommodation. The story started with Alice having lost her last point of contact – her aunt, who ‘got fed up’ with Alice’s erratic behaviour. Alice then tried to sleep at a nunnery, but was not permitted access with her dog. Following this, she took a taxi to an unknown destination:

‘Anyway, that was the beginning of me becoming homeless. Because.... After a month, my aunt was getting fed up with me, but she hadn't said it to me. But I had read you know about Providence Road, so I went there and I had very little money and I had the dog with me. And the nuns opened the door and they said, yes, we'll take you, but not the dog. So no way! I'd gone through too much with that dog! So I said no, thank you, so I went back in a taxi... I didn't have much money. Very little. So the taxi driver began to be a bit peculiar with me. So I asked him to go a little way and then stop. And he did. I can't even remember paying him. But I got out, and then charged up into some sort of building. And thank God it was a hospital and it was the department of a hospital, that I really can't remember, it looked, they must have seen what I looked like and they sat me down and they asked me what I wanted and I said, I explained about the taxi driver and I said I had nowhere to live, I don't know anywhere, so they couldn't have been nicer.' (Alice, 66, flat)
The event marked the beginning of a series of actions where Alice felt she had lost control and found herself in a downward succession of events leading eventually to long-term homelessness. The longer the erratic episode lasted, the lonelier Alice felt and less understood by the 'others': authorities, onlookers, relatives. Once again, as mentioned earlier, outsiders’ lack of comprehension about the interviewees’ situation was often described in the interviews. In this context, the physical aspect of homelessness had further, emotional implications over the individual (Thomas 2004). The unusual behaviour experienced at the ‘lowest point’ was referred to as incomprehensible for the onlooker and thus contributing to the general stigmatising perception of homeless people. Interviewees felt that during the homelessness event, unwarranted judgement was passed by the outsiders, which contributed to the formation of the ‘felt’ stigma (Scambler 2009).

Alice’s quote about the erratic succession of her actions introduces the next section, which discusses chaos in more detail.

5.3.2. Homelessness as chaos

The present section adds a second connotation to the homelessness event, alongside physical and emotional exhaustion: its chaotic structure. When talking about the homelessness event, interviewees described it as a state of chaos. It was the moment when all control (including self-control) had been lost. Many interviewees declared they had not been able to answer for their actions during that period.

The utter loss of control over their own actions and the situation around them led the interviewees to desperate measures, or to events which they considered uncharacteristic of them and which they later regretted:

‘There was one episode where I poured a bucket of paint all over myself and walked around the streets naked with, you know, as an art piece but I was also in my head as well wrapped up, so I was covered in the whole paint and stuff and, I smashed TVs and stuff up. So my behaviour became quite, quite extreme.’ (Jimmy, 30, shared house)

This was indeed an extreme example of behaviour, unusual for the rest of Jimmy’s interview, which centred on positive events, outside of the homelessness experience.
Homelessness was often associated with ‘madness’, ‘mental illness’, ‘going mad’, psychological distress, mental exhaustion or mental instability, which was perceived as chaotic:

‘I was homeless. And I heard voices left, right and centre, I was a schizophrenic. An absolute and complete schizophrenic. And I was paranoid. You know, they [hospital staff] have a terminology for it now. I know I didn’t know what all of those things were...' (Alice, 66, flat)

The homelessness state was often described in hyperbolic terminology: at that point in time, the homeless person was seen as ‘an absolute and complete schizophrenic’. On the one hand, in the above paragraph, Alice uses this to indicate the importance and severity of the event. On the other hand, she professes her ignorance at the time regarding mental illness, and thus her lack of control over the situation: ‘I didn’t know what all of those things [paranoia, schizophrenia] were.’ Control is, in the quote, in the hands of the hospital staff. During the homelessness situation, the individual experienced loss of control and chaotic/ ‘paranoid’ behaviour. However, due to the severity of the event, the interviewees explained this type of behaviour should not have been considered as one of their attributes. Alice’s quote in fact suggests a need to justify the homelessness event. It was this event that bore the stigma in this interview, and not the ‘madness’ that she volunteered as her state at the time. ‘Mad’/ ‘schizophrenic’ etc. in this context as well as in many other interviews was a way of reacting to the stigmatising signs of homelessness.

Once again, in the following quote Chris’s lowest point happened outside of his control, following the death of a very important person in his life:

‘A.C. How did you become homeless?

Chris:  Well it all went, erm, basically, Monday [the Monday following the interview] is the anniversary of my twin sister killing herself, and when she killed herself my whole life took a 360 degree turn and I started drinking very heavily. When she killed herself it just completely tipped me on my head.’ (Chris, 46, shared house)

Many interviewees included the death of a parent or a close sibling among the reasons for their homelessness and/ or psychological distress.

Interviewees’ description of the homelessness event as something outside of their control, as well as references to shame for being in that situation, resonate with findings
in Chapter 7, where often the homelessness event would be placed outside of the narrative, as a hiatus, outside of the teller’s control. This is further developed in Chapter 7, the present chapter continuing on a descriptive, definitional path.

5.4. Complexity of the term homeless: Homeless, but ‘not homeless homeless’

This section delves further into definitions of homelessness, showing the difficulties, in this study, in building a coherent definition of the ‘single homeless person’, which incorporates but at the same time separates the homelessness event. The first section shows the interviewees’ efforts to separate themselves from the homeless other. The second and third sections show the placement of the homelessness event in the interviewees’ accounts.

5.4.1. Separation from the homeless ‘other’ (or the ‘homeless homeless’)

The interviewees introduced a social comparison between them, in their present situation, and the ‘other’ homeless. Even more, there was an accepted hierarchy among homeless people, depending on the degree/ level of their homelessness. This section presents these differences.

The social comparison had on one side the interviewees in their present situation (after the homelessness event) and on the other side the ‘homeless homeless’ person (as both Alice and Allen phrased it) – the individual still on the street, in the interviewees’ previous position. Separation emerged from the interviewees’ need to distance themselves from the homeless ‘other’. The closer on the scale towards exiting homelessness the person was, the better they were placed in theirs and others’ eyes. The comparison finished once interviewees had completely exited the homelessness status or they had arrived where they wanted to be (secure housing, reconciling with the family etc.). Even though the interviewees made a clear separation between their current situation and the ‘homeless homeless’, in Government definitions there was no distinction between types, levels or degrees of homelessness. Sleeping on the street, in bed and breakfast hotels or on people’s couches were all included within the same ‘problem’ which needed to be resolved, in policy. The figure on the following page

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46 At the moment in time of the interview, ‘single homeless person’ in HSS (supported) housing.
illustrates the discrepancies between the interviewees’ perceptions and the Government definition.47

**Figure 5.1. Single homeless person vs. interviewees’ definitions of self**

There were specific characteristics specified by the interviewees which in their eyes applied to themselves and not to the ‘homeless homeless’ and which awarded them therefore with a substantially different status. Being housed in a safe environment, having access to basic amenities, having basic needs met and especially having a door to close behind them (or a ‘big gate’ in some places) were all essential details defining the interviewees - a person who had overcome the event of homelessness.

In her announcement of wanting to help ‘break the stereotype’ by attending the interview, Kate performed a social comparison:

> ‘I don't know how else [other than ‘single homeless person’] to describe it [our situation], because that's exactly what we are [homeless]. But people’s general perception of a homeless person is an alcoholic on the street or someone who does drugs or someone like that, when there are people out there that aren't

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47 However, even though this definitional difference could easily be captured by a figure, the three analysis chapters go on to show that in terms of stigmatizing experience, the homelessness event continued beyond the physical moment of exiting homelessness and was, essentially, an event with complex consequences.
either of those, but are genuinely homeless. It’s like, well, it’s about time those sorts of people start getting recognised and that we aren’t all stereotyped as alcoholics, or drug addicts or whatever. Yeah, just to break the stereotype really.’ (Kate, 24, flat)

In the quote on the previous page, a comparison between homeless people was apparent: between the ‘alcoholic on the street’ and those who ‘aren’t either of those, but are genuinely homeless’. In this quote, when associated with herself (with Kate), ‘homeless’ loses the pejorative connotations attributed to ‘homeless homeless’, through its association with ‘genuinely’, implying an unalterable reality of this situation.

In the following paragraph, the interviewee describes the homeless other, who is in a worse situation than himself, using the terms mentioned in the previous section. This ‘other’ experiences chaos, loss of control and ‘madness’ during the homelessness event. The interviewee, even though in the homelessness situation himself, assumes, in this case, the role of an observer:

‘About four weeks I think [I was living on the streets]. Living on the streets of London, which is very traumatic. I mean, you start at six o’clock in the morning or you’re up at five because the police were there and then they’d kick you out and you laid with your shoes underneath your head or in your sleeping bag so nobody could pinch them. There was a man of sixty-two years old, I remember, he was skin and bones and you looked underneath this blanket and there was just cigarette packets everywhere around, and that’s how he lived. It was totally mad, it was totally mad.’ (Jimmy, 30, shared house)

The paragraph contains two common epithets used for the description of the homelessness event: ‘mad’ (with variations: ‘mental’, ‘mental health’; ‘crazy’) and ‘traumatic’. The description is visually detailed. The introduction of a different character described by extreme labels: ‘skin and bones’ makes the moment even more dramatic. This degree of detail was only employed when describing the experience of homelessness. Thus the event of homelessness was seen as an intensely traumatic experience, which the interviewees made efforts to avoid going back to. Already in the description of homelessness, there emerges a suggestion that this is a potentially shameful experience for the individual, which needs to be justified. Notions of shame and suggestions of a potential degradation of self appear throughout the present analysis and are discussed further in Chapter 8.
Apart from the social comparison, there was the change in status experienced by interviewees after the ‘lowest of low’. In Allen’s interview it became apparent that he had accepted that at a point of his life he had been homeless. However, there was a clear hierarchy, from rough sleeping, to sofa surfing, to bed and breakfast accommodation and then to temporary housing such as HSS:

‘A.C.: Speaking of that, what would you call yourself? Homeless, or with a home?’

Allen: I don’t know, because the council describes us as homeless, but I just don’t think, because you see people in the streets, sleeping rough, I would class them as homeless, and then I don’t know, people that, mental health people, but then when people see this big gate, and you going in, they wouldn’t say you were homeless... Because people associate homelessness with sleeping on the streets, sleeping rough and not having the amenities, but because you’ve the amenities and basic things that you need, with, I don’t think I’d call myself homeless homeless. Because I’ve always associated it with people in the street. And I think until you sleep on the streets, or you sleep rough, then I think that’s when it becomes homeless.’ (Allen, 23, flat)

When answering the first question (‘what would you call yourself?’), Allen listed rough sleepers and people with mental health issues as the ‘homeless’. In the same paragraph he mentioned the ‘gate’ to his temporary flat, which provided clear separation between him and the street, in people’s perception: ‘when people see this big gate, and you going in’. Allen further mentioned the amenities and ‘basic things you need’ as another separation. However, further on in his interview, Allen identified with homelessness. He had not slept rough, but had experienced numerous instances of sofa surfing and bed and breakfast accommodation:

‘So I think I was at that stage where I was homeless, because I think until you are in that situation [homelessness situation], you don’t think homelessness is sleeping on the sofa or you think of staying in temporary accommodation, you always associate it with people without homes.’ (Allen, 23, flat)

The separation between interviewees and the ‘homeless homeless’, rather than linguistic, was one of status. Allen did not realise straight away that he was homeless, still seeing himself ‘with a home’, whilst not actually having one. He only accepted he had started his homelessness journey post-factum, and in fact once that journey had been completed. In fact, most interviewees felt, at the point of the interview, that they
had successfully exited homelessness – which they saw as their lowest. Similarly, when describing the ‘lowest’, definitions differed: it could mean rough sleeping, sofa surfing, sometimes it would mean up to three nights on the streets and other times it would be months/years spent sleeping in graveyards, under bridges and in other accommodation which, in policy standards, would be considered unsuitable.

5.4.2. Route into homelessness

The interviewees thus situated themselves in an intermediary space at the time of the interview. There was a fine line between what was considered acceptable by the interviewees (such as becoming homeless in the first place) and what was seen as an attribute of those ‘destined to be on the streets’. Remaining in the homelessness situation belonged to the latter.

The interviews suggested that there were clear reasons for the individual to have gone through homelessness at a certain point in their life. They suggested that had the causing event not happened, they would have never found themselves in that position, as it was not considered to be within their nature to be homeless. There was a strong suggestion of fate being responsible for the interviewees’ present predicament. In their words, it was external factors which had led to them drinking/abusing drugs/becoming mentally unstable and eventually ending up on the street. In some cases, this external cause was presented as childhood abuse or neglect, the early presence of alcohol or drugs in the family environment or later factors, such as being in the army:

‘I mean, I’ve always been a reasonably heavy drinker, I mean part of it is, a) I come from a family who drink fairly heavily, I mean, you could actually be found in my parents’ house at eight o’clock [in the morning] with a glass of scotch in your hands. (...) So I mean if there was a psychological reason, drinking had been part of my life, but that doesn’t abdicate responsibility for my own actions, of course. Plus of course the services [the army] are a heavily drinking [environment]... So I mean drinking, when you finished work, you’d go to the bar and you’d drink and (...) nobody actually used to care, so long as you were at work at nine o’clock in the morning, or half past eight or whatever, you were ready to be on duty and you were sober and ready to do your job ... and when you do twelve years of that...’ (Darren, 63, self-contained flat)

The quote followed after a long discussion on HSS and its role in Darren’s recovery. Darren acknowledged the need for supported housing in his life and the positive impact
it had on his recovery, but at the same time his narrative was punctuated by paragraphs justifying his former alcoholism and street homelessness. The paragraph becomes stronger through the antithesis: ‘that doesn’t abdicate responsibility for my own actions, of course’, followed by ‘and when you do twelve years of that…’, which suggests anyone in Darren’s situation would have become an alcoholic if they had worked in the army. Immediately following this, Darren described his former life – as a successful stay at home dad of six - and his achievements since being at HSS: giving up alcohol, re-establishing contact with one of his estranged daughters and getting involved with the in-house Resident Scrutiny Panel. It was this present persona that he concentrated on from this moment of the interview onwards. Through his own suggestion, Darren had spent his life claiming it was ‘all somebody else’s fault’\(^48\), explaining all of his downfalls as events outside of his reach.

The interviewees felt the need for clear distinction between those who were unable to raise themselves from the situation they were in and themselves. Although already in secure accommodation, interviewees still discussed a perceived labelling as homeless person and thus continued to make efforts to distance themselves from the ‘homeless homeless’. As presented above, there were various ways of distancing themselves from the ‘homeless homeless’: by invoking family issues, the army, mental illness etc.

5.4.2.1. Case study: justifying the homelessness event

The following subsection presents the justification work done by the interviewees in more detail. Justification was a common feature in many of my accounts. The interviewees stated that parts of their lives and especially the crucial moments leading to homelessness had been triggered by factors which they could not control. Jimmy stated that living in South Africa as he was growing up was one of the main reasons for his becoming ‘unwell’ and being unable to sustain studying and conventional living:

‘he [psychiatrist] said it in the best way possible, he says, normal kids when they’re growing up, they have not got this level of stress [as Jimmy had experienced in South Africa] in their developmental years. So I had to go through extreme stress and my serotonin was used to cope with that time.’ (Jimmy, 30, shared house)

\(^48\) This is in fact a direct quotation from Darren’s interview. Elsewhere in the interview, Darren said: ‘I have spent my life claiming it was all somebody else’s fault.’, thus offering me a cue to interpret his life story.
In the above quote, medical terms are introduced to give the discourse more weight. Jimmy referred to medicine and complex medical diagnosis whenever he described moments in his life that he felt ‘ashamed of’, could not cope with or did not want to include in his usual description of self: ‘when I’m like that [mentally ill], I am not myself’. This introduces the concept of mental illness as a difficult concept to cope with. Jimmy’s story of mental illness was recent (unlike other interviewees, such as Gerard or Alice, who were older), but the feelings of shame and guilt attributed to it and his need to justify each of these episodes were similar to Gerard and Alice’s. The only difference was that whilst the people who had experienced mental illness in the past (in the 1970s and 1980s) were justifying those moments as periods of total disturbance of self, as madness: ‘I was (totally) nuts’, ‘I was crazy’, ‘I was mad’, Jimmy and other younger interviewees were using highly medicalised vocabulary to try to remove the (assumed) negative social impact of recounting the experience. Medicalisation of the homelessness experience is suggested in recent homelessness literature (Ravenhill 2008). Mental illness, in the present study, was invoked when talking about the chaos of homelessness. In this context, mental illness makes erratic behaviour, loss of control, chaos justifiable.

During the ‘mentally ill’ episode, the individual was different: ‘this is not who I am’:

‘And I won’t say this is the reason of why I’ve always ended up homeless or kicked out of situations because of my behavioural thing, almost like a retrograde, being you know – mentally ill - but seen as that way, and knowing it’s not, it’s not who I am. And a couple of incidents would then cause people to (A.C.: To kick you out…) yeah or even worse, even if, you know, I started accepting the fact that I was bipolar.’ (Jimmy, 30, shared house)

Although mentioning he had been diagnosed with ‘bipolar disorder’ – mental illness, Jimmy saw his mental illness as temporary (only present in the moment) and it was in that temporality that the homelessness event took place, mental illness justifying its appearance.

There is a suggestion that mental illness justifies behaviour which would not otherwise be acceptable for the individual. In the interviews, associations of shame with ‘mental illness’ become an accepted presence which contributes to placing the homelessness event in a specific, isolated moment in time. In this way, the pre-homelessness persona stays undamaged by the homelessness (combined with ‘mental health’) experience. The homelessness experience becomes an isolated experience, restricted to that moment in time, and not to the ‘before’ and ‘after’, in terms of damage to the actual
character of the interviewees. Associations with shame and mental illness, as well as placement at a specific moment in time of the mental illness episode are acknowledged by mental health literature and public debate (Hinshaw 2007, Boydell et al 2000, Montgomery et al 2009). To suggestions of ‘shame’ and stigma, an association with time is added (Montgomery et al 2009, Lovell 1997). The role of time in presenting a potentially stigmatising event such as homelessness (and subsequently mental illness, alcohol use) is further discussed, as it occurs in the study, in Chapters 7 and 8.

5.4.3. Complexity of the term ‘homeless’: accepted only as ‘limited’ experience

The previous sections illustrate the separation from the homeless ‘other’ which the interviewees operated, and thus the complexity of the term ‘homeless’. The concept encountered further definitional issues when the interviewees were faced with providing a characterisation of their own status (either as the question came up in the interview, or spontaneously, as they offered a definition). This section presents these definitional tensions and completes the presentation of definitional struggles of homelessness.

When describing who they were, most interviewees placed themselves in an intermediary space between their previous ‘homeless homeless’ - like persona and the ‘normal’\(^{49}\), ‘ordinary’ individual that they once had been and they expected to return to. Moving to HSS was not seen as ‘on the streets’ anymore, but was also never the final destination of choice for the people interviewed. It was a ‘stop gap’:

‘I don’t know, I’ve become more acceptable of the situation, it’s a stage where I’ve become more appreciative of the roof over my head. But I understand it’s not my home. And when I move on, it will be my home. But this is like I said before, the stop gap, between mental health and orderly life, whatever orderly or normal is. And I think it’s just like ‘getting my head together’ moments, of realising what I want to do, where I want to go and things like that. And then just move on and have more clarity.’ (Allen, 23, self-contained flat)

In the above paragraph, Allen defines where he is situating himself: between ‘mental health’ and ‘orderly life’. Here, ‘mental health’ (mental distress, psychological and emotional breakdown etc.) is used as substitute for ‘lowest of low’, whilst ‘orderly life’

\(^{49}\) The concept of ‘normality’ is discussed in Chapter 6 (Section 6.4.3).
is life outside of HSS, a projection to the future, as Chapters 7 and 8 further discuss. HSS is seen as the ‘stop gap’ between these two stages, a ‘getting my head together’ kind of moment, of ‘realising what I want to do’. This, combined with ‘roof over my head’, suggests HSS is a safe space outside of the dangers experienced during homelessness, or the ‘lowest of low’, but still a transitory space (‘then just move on’). HSS has an in-between quality.

A lot of time was spent on describing this intermediary space/person – ‘me at HSS’. Thus the struggle was to show that the person in the ‘now’ was better, more worthwhile than the ‘other’, the ‘homeless homeless’, who had stayed in a permanent state of homelessness. Sometimes, the homelessness episode itself, which the interviewee had experienced, had to be reshaped, reformulated or even rejected, as it did not ‘fit’ with the interviewee’s definition of ‘me at HSS’. The following extract shows such a definitional struggle.

Each time Danny mentioned homelessness, he framed it differently. Underneath, the homelessness event changes shape in the same paragraph:

‘A.C.: Have you ever been homeless?

Danny: No. Yeah, I have done, couple of times. Not lived in the street, but not had where to go that night. I’ve been out a couple of times. Not again though, not again.’ (Danny, 19, shared room)

Throughout his narrative, Danny had worked at showing his strength, difference and credibility among people of his age. He had not eagerly admitted his homelessness. In reality, Danny’s first secure accommodation since he had left foster care at sixteen had been HSS, having beforehand lived in what the local authority described as unfit accommodation, on friends’ couches and on the street.

However, homelessness was not considered acceptable in Danny’s eyes, so although in reality he had experienced (and had earlier recounted his experience of) homelessness, he defined this as ‘not having where (sic) to go that night’. This made being homeless look more like an unfortunate incident rather than a prolonged reality. He reinforced the short span of the event by offering a finite quantity to the nights spent on the street: ‘I’ve been out a couple of times.’ Even more, he made no reference to the streak of bed and breakfast accommodation and youth hostels he had been housed

Danny mentioned by name a few of these places, which I recognized as temporary accommodation and youth hostels, due to my insider’s knowledge of Sea City and its housing facilities and procedures.
in between these instances of rough sleeping (where the word ‘homeless’ would have come up during every conversation with the local authority)\textsuperscript{51}. The adverb ‘out’ is an interesting choice of describing homelessness. It rather points to spending time ‘outside’, which could have different connotations to the actual instance of ‘sleeping rough’ - improvising a bed in difficult weather conditions and sustaining the sleeping space until the morning. Homelessness and especially street homelessness had safety connotations, underlined by all interviewees who referred to this event in detail, whereas ‘out’ could imply wandering around the town in a recreational manner. In fact, when further prompted, Danny referred to being ‘out’ as ‘walking around with people’, ‘walking around the streets, doing nothing’. He qualified this as ‘boring’, rather than unsafe.

Danny’s last phrase in the paragraph is a repetition: ‘not again though, not again’. A determination to not go back to homelessness was present in many interviews. When asked why he would not go back to homelessness, Danny answered he found it ‘boring’ and he started talking about his social success and leading role among his peers. This could suggest being ‘out’ was an experience best forgotten, an experience which could be connected to ‘boring’ and thus a situation which was not preferred. ‘Never again’ was an in-vivo code connected to homelessness and it was also attached, in other interviews, to the physical and mental degradation of self, experienced by the interviewees at the moment of homelessness (as discussed in section 5.3).

Also essential in making a separation from ‘homeless homeless’ was the temporality of the homelessness situation. Irrespective of the amount of days, months or weeks the interviewees had spent on the street or in ‘unfit’ accommodation, they always saw this as ‘temporary’. In the quote, Danny referred to being on the street as ‘not lived in’, lived, in this context implying a permanent situation, more difficult to change. There was thus a difference between the process of becoming homeless, on one hand, and the homelessness experience on the other.

The homelessness event was accepted as part of interviewees’ experiences as long as it was a limited experience, and most importantly one which was considered finished before the interview took place.

\textsuperscript{51} See footnote above.
5.5.  *What am I not?* A portrait of the formerly homeless person, now living in supported accommodation

Section 5.3. presented the difficulties experienced during the homelessness event, while section 5.4. showed the difficulties in defining ‘single homelessness’ as ‘homelessness’. The following section provides a portrait of the individuals living in supported accommodation (or ‘single homeless people’, as labelled in policy), constructed in the interviews solely through the antithesis with the ‘homeless homeless’ (the homeless other).

There were several layers of differentiation between the interviewees and the ‘homeless homeless’, ranging from physical to emotional. I have separated the traits of the ‘single homeless person’ into six categories: physical, intellectual, material, emotional, role model and home. The quotes on which the categories are based belong to the interviewees: ‘I'm not a beggar’, ‘I'm not stupid’, ‘I improve myself’, ‘I have the strength’ and ‘a front door’. Interestingly, the majority of these quotes start with the first person pronoun ‘I’. This suggests an appropriation of the present characterisation and the present situation - an appropriation of the present self. This section describes five of the six traits mentioned above. The last trait – ‘home’ – the physical and psychological meaning of home and the role of HSS in the conceptualisation of ‘home’ form the subject of Chapter 6.

This section thus lists traits of character from which the interviewees believed it was important to differentiate themselves. A portrait of the ‘single homeless person’ is forming, in a backwards fashion, by listing characteristics which do not belong to the single homeless individual. Interviewees found it important to mark the difference, to get away from the common stereotype that they felt was predominant. In this context, the individual’s as well as the outsiders’ opinion about homelessness became important. Issues of denial of present status, pride in own achievements and emphasis on certain features of personality in order to build a certain persona will be discussed in Chapter 8. This section attempts a correct placement of the ‘single homeless person’ in the homelessness hierarchy as suggested by the interviewees, as well as a presentation of the symbolism of the existing ‘tramp’ stereotype for the interviewees. The comparison generally works through antithesis. Setting up clear boundaries between themselves and the ‘homeless homeless’ was very important for the participants.
5.5.1. Physical difference: ‘I am not a beggar’

Danny made efforts to disassociate from the ‘tramp’ stereotype. Although the person he lived next door to accessed the same level of accommodation and had been through a similar homelessness situation, Danny described all his neighbour’s actions as features he would never associate with:

‘The dude next door to me is a fucking tramp. I cannot stand him, mate. I physically cannot use that kitchen. I walk in there, it stinks. He does not clean up after himself, he leaves shit everywhere. (...) He’s a tramp. He doesn’t like to look after himself. He needs to sort himself out. Cause my room is a hundred percent clean all the time, you will not find one bit of mess in my room (...). But him, mate, he lives like a tramp. In the toilet, there’s fucking shit all over the toilet, fucking stinks. There’s piss on the floor, ah, I can’t live like this! But... he’s a tramp. They think it’s me not cleaning up after me, but like I say, I don’t use it. I don’t.’ (Danny, 19, shared flat)

In fact, several homelessness studies mention ‘disassociation’ as one of the main ways of coping with the stigma of homelessness (Snow and Anderson 1993, Radley et al 2005, Williams 1998 etc.) Thus, Danny’s ‘strong aversion’ (Snow and Anderson 1993) to his neighbour’s living habits and especially to his physical appearance (Williams 1998) can be interpreted as Danny’s reaction to the ‘felt’ aspect of the stigma.

The feature characterising the ‘single homeless person’ and not the ‘tramp’ was cleanliness. The people who wanted to distance themselves from the ‘homeless homeless’ took great pride in their immediate surroundings – their flat/room particularly, which were described as clean and tidy:

‘my flat is somewhere where I’m quite happy for people to come in, always immaculate, erm, it’s quite tasteful, got my pictures on the wall, it’s got my mark in it, yeah.’ (Michael, 47, shared house)

The above description is a direct opposite to descriptions of the ‘homeless homeless’, where physical appearance suggests a loss of self: ‘it’s your clothes... [They become rags]’ (Alice, 60, flat). Thus, whilst real homeless people’s clothes become rags and the toilets they use are dirty, the ‘single homeless person’ has a standard of cleanliness, tidiness and self-care which is considered acceptable – ‘normal’.
5.5.2. Intellectual difference: ‘I am not stupid’

The second difference between the homeless other and the interviewees was intellectual abilities. There was a general conviction that in order to exit the homeless status, someone had to have the intellectual capacity to do so.

In the paragraph underneath, Jimmy stated that it was the negative connotations around the term ‘homeless’ that made him reinstate his previous identity and explain himself:

‘Yeah, I hate to think of myself as homeless but it’s true it’s, you know, it’s part of my ... I’m not stupid, and that’s what’s so frustrating about ending up in a situation like this, but it’s the support and the things that I’ve lacked and my illness that’s ended up being in this situation.’ (Jimmy, 30, shared house)

There are two sides to Jimmy’s argument in the above paragraph: ‘I’m not stupid’ and ‘it’s my illness that’s ended up being in this situation’. Jimmy first distanced himself from the other homeless, by naming the quality which he felt belonged to him: ‘I am not stupid’. Secondly and in the same paragraph, Jimmy named the factors leading to him becoming homeless: ‘the support and things that I’ve lacked and my illness’ (he referred to his mental illness and/or the emotional distress that he often went through). Two different factors are responsible for his homelessness, but he perceives both factors as not actually of substance for defining who he is.52

Regarding the separation from the homelessness event, Jimmy as well as other interviewees considered the homelessness episode as a fleeting experience which he felt did not fully characterise him. There was a cause for it – ‘things I’ve lacked and my illness’, but there was also an exit strategy (evoked by other interviewees too: ‘I’m not stupid’). The exit strategy implied that he would not remain stuck in his situation for an unlimited amount of time.

Even more, in the following quote Cal explained that his superior intellectual abilities helped him exit the situation he once was in. This was not the case for the other - the ‘homeless homeless’:

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52 Issues of responsibility and blame emerge in this paragraph, and belong to narratives of disassociation, which are further discussed in Chapter 7.
‘I was only six months [homeless], but some people really do fall, I trust I am very intelligent, this system is not geared towards [those who are not intelligent], they don't seem to recognize that some people just don't have the native intelligence to deal with this plethora of forms, there is a form here, a form there, and people just get lost.’ (Cal, 45, shared house)

In Cal’s quote, intelligence separates him from the ‘other’ homeless and reduces the time spent as homeless to ‘only’ six months.

5.5.3. Material difference: ‘I improve myself’

Having hobbies, interests or an ambition to attend courses and change their career path was seen as another factor differentiating the interviewees from the other homeless. There was a sense of appropriation of these activities – they belonged solely to the interviewees and thus shaped a personality which was outside the realm of homelessness.

After self-defining as homeless, Allen backed up his statement with a personal reinstatement, a refined explanation of his present situation. He explained he had aspirations which were aimed beyond his present status and misfortune; therefore, he should not be associated with the homeless any longer:

‘So they [general public] probably expect us all to stay around town instead of going home and drink ourselves into a stupor. I mean, until they’ve actually realised you as a person, and not doing the wrong things, but actually trying to improve yourself. Because I actually try to improve myself by going to college and different things like that.’ (Allen, 23, flat)

There was indeed an attempt to fill the outsiders’ gap of understanding, but at the same time this conveyed deeply rooted identity work. Allen’s entire interview read as an attempt at regaining or rebuilding a persona that was acceptable to his peers, to outsiders and to himself.

Many interviewees took time to explain who they were and to emphasise their interests, their personality, their friends, all of these assigning them to a culture outside of their immediate surroundings and the hostel. Michael dedicated big portions of the interview to describing himself and his main interest – music (an interest which he shared with his partner):
‘had flying lessons at Elstree, done lots of things, my partner’s Swedish, been together nineteen years, he’s a, he’s a progression musician in an orchestra, plays double bass and cello, I play guitar, piano, so (...) The only thing I get joy out of is music, and poetry, I love my poetry.’ (Michael, 47, shared house)

In fact, while living at HSS, Michael had to live separately from his partner, as while he was classed as ‘single homeless person’, his relationship was not acknowledged for housing purposes. Homelessness literature mentions an attempt of retaining a sense of self by maintaining interests from a life before homelessness in an attempt to resist the homelessness identity (Clarke et al 2008).53

5.5.4. Emotional difference – ‘I have the strength’

One of the elements which was considered important in defining the difference between ‘homeless homeless’ and the interviewees was inner ‘strength’. Talking about the immediate period following homelessness, Cal explained that the change from being homeless to leaving homelessness was possible if the individual possessed ‘internal strength’. In fact, this is another factor, among factors which he had already mentioned, which Cal believed had ensured his leaving the homelessness position and remaining in the post-homelessness stage:

‘But it’s alright, because I don’t feel vulnerable, I am strong now, you know, having, and knowing that I am actually looking forward, I’ve got sort of internal strength, that you haven’t got when you are actually in that complete no hope situation... so I got the strength.’ (Cal, 45, shared house)

Interviewees stressed it was their attitude and their strength which got them so far: through the homelessness situation and beyond.54 Cal’s quote includes a subtlety of the ‘inner strength’ of the ‘single homeless person’, in the use of the adverb ‘now’. Cal is aware of his strength now, and although it is his strength that allowed him to

53 Further conceptual discussion on homeless identity follows in Chapter 8.
54 In most cases, the erratic behaviour caused by the homelessness event had stopped when they had met with the right support. Once it had stopped, interviewees did not want to be associated with the same behaviour. Their wish was for an immediate change of status, from homeless person to ‘my old self’, but this did not happen – they were moved on to temporary accommodation, which they felt, in outsiders’ perception, did not completely change the homeless status. Interviewees’ status and perception of HSS are further discussed in Chapter 6.
eventually leave the homelessness situation, that strength was not present at the ‘lowest of low’ moment of homelessness.

The following passage further explains the concept of inner strength, its ability to elude the individual in the hardest life moments and the difference between the ‘homeless homeless’ and the interviewees that ‘inner strength’ brings about:

‘And then explaining it to most of my friends which were only sixteen, seventeen, and it was like oh, why did you do it? And I sat down and spoke to my best mate a couple of months ago and she said, ‘cause she knows what I went through, she asked me, she was like, I know you haven’t spoke [sic] about it, but what was it like [the homelessness episode]? I said, horrible. I said it was just getting into debt and more debt and more debt. I said, but yeah but the buzz was good going out nightclubbing every night. Being on a high, as they called it at the time. And I think, I didn’t do me any world, world of good. And one of her mates [one of Tara’s friend’s ‘mates’], she works as a teacher, said to me, well, said to Lisa [Tara’s friend], could you ask Tara if she would come into school and speak to the children? And I went, no. She went, why? [I said] I haven’t got the confidence to go in and like speak to them about it. She went, not even if the teachers and all that were there and all that? And I was like no, I couldn’t do it. I just couldn’t do it. But now I think I could. I think I could go into a school and speak to the children about what I went through and what it was like for me and what I had, and obviously what I had lost.’ (Tara, 40, flat)

The paragraph is divided into two sections. The first section describes the difficulties, isolation and financial loss of being homeless and a drug addict: ‘I said it was just getting into debt and more debt and more debt.’ Whilst accepting that she felt good at that moment in time (‘the buzz was good going out nightclubbing every night’), Tara is critical about this stage in her life: ‘I didn’t do me any world, world of good’. This is a statement through which she distances herself from her former homeless persona. The second part of the interview opposes Tara’s homeless self to the new person she is today. Whilst she did not have the strength to talk about her misfortunes in front of an audience then, she feels ready to do it in the present: ‘I think I could go into a school and speak to the children about what I went through and what it was like for me.’ Her present self is empowered - has the ‘strength’. Thus in the process of leaving homelessness, Tara had to find and gained her ‘inner strength’. Even more, the mere mention of the fact that she has been asked to tell others about her experiences
represents a change of status for Tara. Her status has changed in the eyes of the ‘others’ – she is not ‘homeless homeless’ any longer.

The latter part of Tara’s paragraph introduces a theme present through many interviews: the need to take a stance and speak/act for others, from the new position that interviewees found themselves in: the model/the role model.

5.5.5. The role model

Other interviewees adopted a similar role in their new position (after the homelessness event) as Tara, quoted above. Having surpassed the most difficult moment in their life, interviewees made an effort to prove that their previous and future life were worthwhile. Through its brutality, intense physical trauma and emotional exhaustion, the homelessness event threatened to erase the prior individual. This was therefore followed by an attempt to reinstate themselves. Discourses of praise and achievement referred to the former individual, the present one or even at remaining the same individual (same strength of character) during the homelessness event. Thus in the following paragraph, Jimmy illustrates, through the means of an anecdote, his continued interest in the human life and art. The story portrays him as a hero and a role model to the sixteen year old boy, who, following Jimmy’s advice and attention, manages to get off the streets and into education:

‘There was also a young kid there; I remember he was about sixteen, seventeen. And we hung out together and I was just nineteen, twenty at that stage, and what I did was I took him to the Tate Modern and we spent two days, and then because of my art background, I shared like, to show him Rothko and you know, explained it all to him, and actually he kept saying to me he wanted to become an artist and get off the streets. So then he was put into a youth hostel for two weeks and he was out. He got into school. So that I was quite happy with that, you know, so I hope he’s painting, I don’t know. Because he left his family when he was sixteen and he ended up on the streets because home life was really difficult for him and then he ended up trying his luck in London. So I just hope that he does something, yeah.’ (Jimmy, 30, shared house)

Further discussion on anecdotes in the narratives takes place in Chapter 7 – section 7.3.3.
The story was told to illustrate the sense of community existing on the street, but it was also inserted at the point of narration when the story-teller’s identity was at its lowest, after having mentioned several periods of homelessness, mental illness and a general sense of being lost which culminated with Jimmy walking the streets of London naked and pouring paint all over himself.

The story begins with emphasis on the ‘young kid’ whom Jimmy met in the street. Jimmy and the ‘young kid’ thus shared the same situation at this point in narration: they were sleeping rough in the streets of London. Jimmy’s position at this point announces notions of being different and somehow better than other homeless. This type of differentiation between homeless people is observed in other homelessness studies as well (Boydell et al 2000). Jimmy is the mentor who finds himself as the main character of the story, but his situation is not that of a usual hero, as textbook heroes do not generally sleep rough. Jimmy’s status is recovered when stating his special skill: ‘with my art background’. The action unfolds rapidly from this point onwards. The boy Jimmy is mentoring manages to leave ‘the streets’ and gets access to school. Through this hero story, the balance of power is transformed. Even though he finds himself on the street, at his ‘lowest’, Jimmy maintains his previous humane qualities which led him to helping a young boy ‘get off the streets’. This, combined with the other trait which Jimmy retains from his previous self - his artistic knowledge, work towards distancing Jimmy from the other people in the street.

Another mentor is Kate. Throughout the interview, Kate struggled to maintain a positive attitude regarding herself and her reactions in different situations. She became self-critical at times regarding her decision to give up her children to the social services. The following anecdote is Kate’s attempt to protect herself from the aforementioned self-criticism:

‘My landlord for my flat, I go and talk to him now, cause he’s trying to find me another flat, cause we got on that well, and I convinced him to take on housing benefit tenants. He was absolutely no way, not taking housing benefit tenants, if anyone had mentioned it ... and I convinced him that housing benefit was the way to go. And he’s now doing the same thing as well. He’s just bought two blocks of flats, and he’s gonna let them purely to people on housing benefits. Unfortunately they’re in Hastings and I don’t wanna live up there, but […] cause he’s quite well off, he’s gonna start a move in company as well. And the removal company is going to prioritize people moving into his flats. So yeah, I’ve completely changed his opinion of housing benefits. Which took a long time.
Six months into my tenancy, he still wasn’t happy I was on housing benefit. Because we kept having a few minor problems with housing benefit. Because there isn’t enough housing that supports families, I’m like, why doesn’t someone just take the initiative. And go and buy a plot of land, you see it on TV every morning, people buying houses and building [housing developments]. But they always seem to be doing it for themselves, for the money, and it’s like, I don’t want the money, I want to make sure there’s a home for every child, and do it that way.’ (Kate, 24, flat)

Kate is different from other homeless in the story – she is someone who changes prejudice: having accessed accommodation when on benefits, she manages to convince her landlord of the value involved in housing people on benefits. Progressively, Kate becomes the person who changes opinion, a militant for the rights of people on benefits and a general benefactor who is worried about ‘every child’ at danger of becoming homeless. Her discourse is cumulative in building this image. From one gesture – a discussion with her landlord to convince him to house people on housing benefit, Kate becomes the person who takes the stance: ‘why doesn’t someone just take the initiative’. Kate uses absolute terms to reflect her landlord’s transformation following her advice: ‘completely’, ‘absolutely’, ‘purely’. Thus his initial reaction was a plain negative: ‘he was, absolutely no way, not taking housing benefit tenants’. Following Kate’s discussion and personal model: ‘he’s gonna let them purely to people on housing benefits’, ‘I’ve completely changed his opinion of housing benefits’.

Kate uses hyperbolae and complete opposites to differentiate herself as a role model among the homeless people, and thus someone who transcends homelessness. It is her position as a leader which distinguishes her among the other homeless.
5.6. Summary: Interviewees’ definition of ‘single homeless person’

To sum up, interviewees’ own definition of ‘single homeless person’ was problematic. The element most difficult to define was the homelessness event. Interviewees mentioned its existence as part of their life story, but focused on placing it on the outside, as an event which was distant.

The following paragraph is a synthesis of the main definitional issues discussed in this chapter. It also clearly expresses the difference between the interviewees and the people still on the street, which was dealt with in this chapter:

‘I have the strength. You know? If you haven’t got that mental strength, you can’t do it. It is your complete lack of mental health, your complete lack of self-esteem, you really just do feel like the lowest. Of the low. And it’s particularly hard, because it’s a lot of people, who like me, who wound up on the streets, a lot of people who you know, it has just been a combination of bad luck, things happening, you know, I mean there is people who, like I said they are people who have been destined to be on the streets, those people never had that self-esteem, but particularly hard on the people who fought a long way, and that’s the most dangerous aspect of it - it’s your complete lack of self-worth, you really just do feel worse than an animal, you know.’ (Cal, 47, shared house)

It was initially difficult to integrate the above paragraph into one singular section of the present chapter, as its richness touches on all of the sections discussed. In fact, the quote is a concentrated description of the message interviewees felt they needed to get across, whilst at the same time it announces deeper issues of justification and blame.

At a first reading, the quote offers the clearest presentation of the ‘single homeless’ individual. The opening phrase of the paragraph, ‘I have the strength’, suggests that Cal situates himself among those who have the ‘strength’ to emerge unharmed from the homelessness episode. This strength, firstly not physical, but ‘mental’, is required to fight the psychological aspect of homelessness - the lack of self-esteem. Cal mentions the unavoidable impact of the homelessness situation on someone’s mental state: ‘your complete lack of self-esteem, you really just do feel like the lowest. Of the
low’. The repetition emphasises the finality of the situation: this is the absolute deterioration of self, according to Cal: ‘the lowest. Of the low’. There is nowhere lower to go from here. This magnitude of the situation was common to most interviews when describing the homelessness situation. This latter part of the phrase functions as a concentrated definition of the homelessness situation: the ‘lowest of the low’.

The next phrase in the above paragraph introduces a comparison between the interviewee and the ‘people who have been destined to be on the street’. This phrase indicates a hierarchy among individuals who experience the homelessness episode. Thus, ‘ending up on the street’ is accepted as something that can happen to anyone (including to people like Cal), but remaining in that state belongs only to those who ‘have been destined to be on the street’, ‘have been destined’ being used here pejoratively. This latter point is further consolidated by ‘those people have never had that self-esteem’, so an implication that those people lack the willpower necessary to leave the ‘lowest of low’. This marks the beginning of an antithesis between those still in the homelessness situation and those in accommodation at present, as well as an announcement of the stages of homelessness and the hierarchy between them, further discussed in Chapter 8. The paragraph also includes issues of justification and blame. Cal mentions the ‘combination of bad luck, things happening’ to account for his becoming homeless. He removes blame and responsibility from his instance of homelessness. The homelessness event becomes something which has occurred as ‘bad luck’ and despite the interviewee’s inherent value. Thus the individual is not diminished during the telling of the homelessness event. At the same time, by removing self-blame from this, the episode of homelessness can be told accurately, in its unpleasant details, for what it is. This latter need to tell the dark attributes of homelessness was apparent across interviews and it was developed in the first part of the present chapter. Issues of justification and blame, which are present in all discourses and across all chapters, are further discussed in Chapter 8.

Cal traces an invisible line between two types of people: ‘a lot of people’ - those who exit the homelessness episode, like him, and ‘those who have been destined to be on the streets’. The first category is the one who contains ‘a lot’ – the majority, and where Cal wants to situate himself. These are the people for whom homelessness was particularly hard, but who ‘fought a long way’ to leave it. ‘Fought a long way’ makes the distinction between the people like Cal (‘like me’) and the ‘homeless homeless’ definitive.
Further, in the third sequence of the paragraph, Cal continues self-definition via juxtaposition. Now the attention is turned towards the people who ‘have been destined to be on the streets’. What characterises them is their ‘lack of self-esteem’, and it is suggested, an inability to fight back in difficult circumstances, as the discourse returns to the interviewee’s own experience in describing, once again, the extreme difficulty of living on the streets: ‘that’s the most dangerous aspect of it, it’s your complete lack of self-worth, you really just do feel worse than an animal, you know’. The paragraph concludes with the comparison with an ‘animal’ when out on the streets, which reinforces the meaning of the earlier ‘lowest of low’ phrasing of the same event. Comparison to animals and even a mention of ‘sub-human’ were frequent in the interviews with regards to the homelessness experience.

The quote communicates a message which was present in many interviews: a need to characterise the homelessness event as a critical moment, intensely painful and psychologically damaging. This moment is also presented as a potential period of transition to a dimension which was deemed beyond humanity (‘like an animal’) and which none of the interviewees felt they had remained in. The paragraph also reveals the interviewee’s feelings of success and achievement of not having crossed the fine line between ‘a lot of people’ and the ‘people who have been destined to be on the streets’.

5.7. Conclusion

The present chapter has focused on the homelessness stage in the interviewees’ lives, defined in the interviews as ‘me at my lowest’.

The first part of the chapter provided a description of the homeless state. The chapter presents interviewees’ efforts towards building a more complex and realistic description of what ‘homeless’ actually means for them. Homelessness was described as the most challenging and traumatic episode experienced by the interviewees. Everything connected to homelessness was expressed in hyperbolae and absolute terms. Interviewees described homelessness as chaos and themselves as lacking control of the situation.

In service provision, homeless is an either/or category and included all participants in the study. However, for the interviewees, the difference between themselves and the people on the street was substantial and worth exploring. Their discourse worked at
distancing themselves from the people in the street and always from their own previous homeless self. The chapter endeavours a more correct placement of the ‘single homeless person’ in the homelessness hierarchy as suggested by the interviewees.

It was thus apparent that a real issue for the interviewees was the unwanted transition in status which happened between having a home and being homeless. Many interviewees felt they were stereotyped in the ‘homeless’ bracket and they remained there even when they had left the street or the event of homelessness behind them. Because of this, a second transition, from homelessness back to ‘with a home’ was needed.

A social comparison was at work in the description of homelessness. On the one hand, there were the interviewees who saw themselves as having exited the most difficult homelessness stage. On the other hand a homeless ‘other’ was shaped. The description of the ‘homeless homeless’ was done by accumulation of negative features, some of these subhuman: ‘lowest of low’, ‘lacks mental strength’, ‘was destined to be on the streets’, ‘worse than an animal’ etc.. The crucial difference between the ‘homeless homeless’ and the interviewees was that the latter had managed to overcome the homeless experience and found themselves at HSS in the present, thus in another stage, deserving a different status. There was a fine line between what was considered acceptable by the interviewees (such as becoming homeless in the first place) and what was seen as an attribute of those ‘destined to be on the streets’. Remaining in the homelessness situation belonged to the latter.

The intermediary space where interviewees situated themselves at the time of the interview was problematic to define. Defining homelessness and separating it from ‘single homeless person’ was important for the individual’s perception of self. The single homeless person’s identity was made up of a series of presentations of self. Chapter 5 has described the first presentation of self, constructed through negation: the ‘single homeless person’ is not homeless (any longer). All ‘homeless homeless’ attributes are what the ‘single homeless person’ chooses to disassociate from: ‘I am not a beggar’, ‘I am not stupid’, ‘I have the strength’ etc. In the following chapters, the definition of the formerly homeless person, now living in supported accommodation develops, and alongside this, a complex presentation of self emerges.
CHAPTER 6: The complexity of ‘home’

6.1. Introduction

Chapter 5 presented interviewees’ perception of homelessness and the definitional challenges that the appellative ‘homeless’ issued. Chapter 6 presents interviewees’ description of life at HSS and their perception of their status whilst living there. HSS is a large organisation, which had seven different accommodation projects at the time of the study. It remains in fact the second largest housing provider in Sea City and although a charity, at the time it was receiving large amounts of funding directly from the local authority in order to continue to provide housing. The type of social housing it offered ranged from different levels of shared housing - where bathroom/toilet facilities would be shared, to self-contained housing - where interviewees would have access to their own bathroom, kitchen and sometimes their own lounge. Large hostels would have up to almost a hundred rooms with shared kitchen and bathroom/toilet facilities. Shared houses were five bedroom houses with shared kitchen and bathroom/toilet facilities. One-bedroom flats were found in projects generally placed on the outskirts of Sea City. Alcohol was allowed in all housing, but in shared properties its consumption was forbidden in the communal areas. Drug use was not allowed anywhere in HSS housing.

The table on the next page lists all projects managed by HSS and the type of housing they offered. All names are anonymised. ‘Banding’ refers to the category allocated by the Council, where Band 2 was expected to provide more dependent housing and Band 3 would be similar to living in the community.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of project</th>
<th>Type of housing</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Council banding</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HSS1</td>
<td>shared</td>
<td>Two residents sharing kitchen, bathroom, toilet, in two-bedroom flats (96 residents in the hostel)</td>
<td>Band 2</td>
<td>Cal 45, Danny 19, Gerry 40, Laura 35, Paul 60, Sam 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>HSS2</td>
<td>Self-contained</td>
<td>Studios or one-bedroom flats (60 residents)</td>
<td>Band 3</td>
<td>Chris 46, Eric 44, Jimmy 30, John 46, Kate 24, Michael 47, Mickey 70, Murray 45, Neil 29, Paula 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>HSS 3</td>
<td>shared</td>
<td>Five bedroom houses with two shared toilets, shared kitchen and shared bathroom (25 residents)</td>
<td>Band 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>HSS 4</td>
<td>Self-contained</td>
<td>One bedroom flats on the outskirts of Sea City (40 residents)</td>
<td>Band 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>HSS 5</td>
<td>Self-contained</td>
<td>One bedroom flats on the outskirts of Sea City (33 residents)</td>
<td>Band 3</td>
<td>Alice 66, Gerard 63, Pace 46,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>HSS 6</td>
<td>Self-contained</td>
<td>One bedroom flats on the outskirts of Sea City (33 residents)</td>
<td>Band 3</td>
<td>Allen 23, Bob 70, Carly 54, Darron 63, Julie 53, Leanne 59, Phil 52, Tara 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>HSS 7</td>
<td>Self-contained</td>
<td>One bedroom flats on the outskirts of Sea City (smaller project) (11 residents)</td>
<td>Band 3</td>
<td>Iain 41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It became clear at an early stage of analysis that interviewees wished to differentiate themselves from the homeless ‘other’. Chapter 5 presented a list of the features which substantiated this difference. Thus the resident in supported housing who had formerly been homeless had a socially acceptable dress code; they were intelligent; they gained new skills and hobbies; they were emotionally capable; they were role models and had a ‘home’. The present chapter develops on the latter, the interviewees’ concept of home and the aspects where HSS did not qualify as home – and subsequently the impact of this lack of home on interviewees’ perceptions of self.

Interviewees communicated a complex concept of home. They acknowledged the value of HSS, as a ‘stop gap’ between homelessness and a future ‘home’, but they also emphasised the features of HSS which made it ‘not home’. The chapter centres on those aspects of HSS which were seen as valuable by the interviewees, while pointing out along the way the aspects which made HSS not home. Following the introduction, the chapter is separated into four sections (6.2., 6.3, 6.4. and 6.5.). Each section describes one feature of HSS which interviewees considered essential for their well-being. Each section also describes the missing features within that essential quality which made HSS not feel like ‘home’. The figure underneath illustrates where ‘home’ was placed in reference to interviewees’ perceptions of their present status. The figure builds on figure 5.1., adding another level to interviewees’ definitions of self.

**Figure 6.1. Interviewees' concept of ‘home’**
6.2. HOME IS: A broader area than a house

In interviewees’ accounts, four characterisations of ‘home’ emerged: 1) broader area than just a house, 2) stability; 3) supportive; 4) rehabilitative. Within each attribute, which was in fact found at HSS, there were subtle nuances which, the interviewees felt, were lacking at HSS and thus made the picture of ‘home’ at HSS incomplete.

The first attribute of home was that home was actually perceived as more than just a house. Home was, for the interviewees, the city they lived in at the time of the interview. This section is divided into two parts: the present section highlights how the city became ‘home’ in interviewees’ perceptions, while subsections 6.2.1. and 6.2.2. show why HSS was not fulfilling all attributes of home for the interviewees, from this perspective.

Sea City played an important role in interviewees’ description of ‘home’. When asked what they found crucial for their well-being, some individuals identified geographic location. Many interviewees had been displaced from their place of birth, for various reasons: they had run away from family, from a failed relationship or from an addiction, they had changed their job. After having lived in Sea City for several years, most people did not plan to go back where they came from and all called Sea City their ‘home city’. Interviewees often mentioned the qualities of the city had been the deciding factors to stay on, before friends or other circumstances. Interviewees referred to a combination of factors: the ‘amazing lifestyle’, the cultural ‘buzz’, the array of opportunities that the city offered but also the walks on the seafront, the small and not too imposing city centre and being able to walk everywhere:

‘I quite like living close to the seafront. Close to the centre of the town, and close to the seafront. From where I live, I can walk anywhere.’ (Julie, 53, flat)

‘I love Sea City, I love the place, it’s just buzzing 365 days a year. It’s my home, I’ve lived here eleven years, it’s my home. I go back to [town in the Midlands], I go back there, you go for a few days and it’s great because everyone’s making an effort but would I want to go back there and live? Never. I live here in Sea City now, I know a lot of people here, got a lot of friends here.’ (Pace, 46, flat)
Sometimes continuing to live in Sea City was the sole reason for continuing to reside at HSS. Having been offered better accommodation in other counties or towns, interviewees had refused it and were still waiting for something adequate for them in Sea City. In this context, ‘home’ became a broader concept for the interviewees and it encompassed Sea City.

The following two sections offer the first indications of the reasons why, despite the features which were home-like, HSS was not fully considered ‘home’ by the interviewees.

6.2.1. Reasons why HSS was not fully ‘home’: a) the perceived connotations of HSS

Unlike Sea City, which was a desirable place to live in, HSS had a different status for the interviewees. The public perception of HSS was considered an issue. Interviewees felt that HSS did not differ much from the perceived connotations of homelessness. Kate expressed her frustration at feeling ‘stigmatised again’, in a similar way to when living in the street and in other previous temporary accommodation. She particularly referred to the ‘cans of alcohol’ in the street in front of HSS, which she felt did not characterise her. Paul spoke of the unfair associations with the homeless individual when living at HSS, in clothes style, habits and behaviour:

‘And [after his friend found out where he was living] she went: well, I’m not surprised, you know, you don’t tell people when you’re in trouble! Cause every time I went to [adjacent location to Sea City], I was clean, tidy, which is not the image of someone who is in HSS, you know.’ (Paul, 60, independent flat)

It was in fact such associations that the interviewees had made an effort to eliminate from their public image, as Chapter 5 also showed.

Acknowledging the ‘modern face of HSS’ was considered important for differentiating from the homeless stereotype. Thus Allen complained about the negative connotations and stereotypes coming from the media: ‘they see it on TV programmes’ (Allen, 23, independent flat).

56 The strong connection with Sea City felt by the interviewees was reflected against the increasing difficulties in housing people in that area. In fact more and more emphasis was being centred on relocating homeless people away from the densely populated areas, such as Sea City, to the outskirts of the city or altogether in other regions (Single Homeless People Strategy, Sea City 2007-2013)
flat). Chris (46, shared house) stated he had understood what HSS really was by being housed in this housing system himself, but most of his friends, and the population’s general perception was of HSS as the home of those who failed. Thus a negative image was perpetuated in the media. Chris declared he had been surprised, when he had entered the supported housing system, to discover the extent of its development and the range of support it offered. He also pointed out the impact made by the difference between perception and reality in terms of housing:

‘There is a bit of stigma on the whole HSS thing, you think, people don’t see the modern face of HSS. When I was in London, there was an HSS down Waterloo Street (...) and in those days it was a proper dog’s house basically, people were drinking spirits, and that still is the big image for HSS.’ (Chris, 46, shared house)

At the time of the study, HSS did not encourage a profile in the media, in fact it made an effort at generally not having any media presence, as the media was perceived as only focusing on the negative connotation of organisations such as HSS. Many other homelessness charities had the same approach at the time of the interviews. The situation had changed at the time of writing up, with large charitable organisations becoming more involved in the media sphere, having a voice in public debates and taking a stance at a political level. In a future study, it would be interesting to investigate how and whether interviewees’ feelings of shame towards living there and attempts at justifying their accommodation in front of their family and peers changed once the media representation of HSS became more sympathetic.

There was thus a coexistence of positive and negative features connected to living at HSS. On the one hand, living in Sea City belonged to the ideal future where people ultimately wanted to situate themselves. There was no negative commentary connected to Sea City. It was always presented as the city of choice and even more, the ideal city. On the other hand, HSS carried similar labelling connotations to life ‘before HSS’, and thus a period in interviewees’ lives which they wanted to disassociate from. Interviewees presented their strategies for not revealing their address to potential life partners, employers or close relatives.
6.2.2. Reasons why HSS is not fully ‘home’: b) The deep sense of loss of home

Women made the unsuitability of HSS as fully ‘home’ clearest. When asked what their ideal home would be like, some women referred to their lack of knowledge of what ‘home’ should be and at the same time refrained from providing a detailed picture of their ideal home:

‘A.C.: What is a home for you? Tara: A home? For me? I was hoping you wouldn’t ask that question. I don’t know, because from the time I was born to obviously the times I was grown up, I don’t think I’ve really had a home, even though I had a home with my mum and my real dad, but I just don’t, it felt like it didn’t feel like home. And now, I can’t really say this is my home, because it’s not. I don’t know what a home is. I seriously don’t know because I’ve never had a home. So…’ (Tara, 40, flat)

In the above paragraph, emphasising the lack of a home was more important for Tara than providing a description of an ideal home. She stated a ‘home’ should ‘feel’ like it. Tara thus acknowledged that the house she had lived in with her mother and stepfather did not ‘feel’ like home – it did not have the sufficient emotional significance of a home. She continued: ‘I can’t really say this is my home because it is not’, thus not including HSS in her concept of ‘home’.

Whether by explaining their inability to conceptualise ‘home’ (like Tara, above) or through lengthy descriptions of an ideal, but not existent home (like in Laura’s descriptions of an ideal home, in section 7.5.2.2.), there was generally more exploration of the subject of ‘ideal home’ in women than in men’s discourses. The need for a ‘home’ appeared to be more acute for women, but this could have been connected to their more transitory status. According to HSS indicators, women moved on more frequently and less successfully. Many women’s housing histories revealed inadequate housing. Kate (24), Laura (35) and Tara (40) had moved from one temporary form of accommodation to the next. Kate described this process as ‘being bounced from bed and breakfast to bed and breakfast’ (Kate, 24, shared house). On the day of the interview, Laura (35, shared house) had just moved for the second time within HSS. Before I could send her an interview transcript, she had moved again.
There were differences between women and men’s paths through the system. This could be because women in single accommodation were, from a housing perspective, more challenging housing cases than the men. Pregnant or with children at the initial encounter with the system, they needed to be housed safely. However, due to often complex mental health diagnoses and their own frustration with the system, some women reacted badly to most accommodation and tended to be moved on quicker (sometimes losing their children in the process and thus having to leave the services specialising in family support). This in turn led to a ‘vicious circle’ of move ons and continued frustration and resentment towards the system and a concept of home which was barely tentative:

‘But it's unsettling, I am so used to moving, I just take it all in my stride now. And I am like: if the removal van doesn't show up, I will get a taxi. It really doesn't bother me anymore. I've done it that many times... It's like, I've got to go again. And again, and again. And it's like: keep going! (...) I think, in the space of five years I have moved seventeen times. In five years.’ (Kate, 24, shared house)

The above paragraph announces the issue of move on and temporality, which form the subject of section 6.3.2. of this chapter.

These findings of an acute sense of loss of home in women’s accounts resonate with studies on women’s reactions to homelessness (Adtkins et al 2003, Padgett et al 2006, Casey et al 2008). Due to the small research sample, these findings are only tentative and, like section 7.5.2.2. further develops, the persistence of this motif in women’s accounts could be simply a difference in interview style, ultimately denoting a need for both homeless men and women to aspire to something outside of their present situation. The representations (or lack of representation) of home do however add another level to the complexity of ‘home’ as a concept, its inexistence being experienced as deep loss.

57 These observations refer to HSS and are collected mainly from the organization’s performance indicators for the years around the research.
### 6.3. HOME IS: Stability

Although HSS was not seen as fully ‘home’, it had certain attributes of home, which the interviewees valued. The first one was connected to the larger area where HSS was located – Sea City. This section discusses a second attribute of HSS which was valued by the interviewees: stability, at the same time highlighting the reasons why, despite having stability, HSS did not fulfil all requirements of ‘home’ for the interviewees. This section is concerned with defining ‘stability’ as an attribute of home, while section 6.3.2. presents the feature of HSS which counteracts stability: move on.

Stability (in other accounts ‘certainty’, ‘continuity’) was at the forefront of discussions about HSS and ‘home’. It was identified by interviewees as essential for their well-being. HSS was described as a haven of safety by those interviewees who had experienced intensive move ons beforehand.

Safety and security were considered essential for personal development, and initially HSS seemed to adequately provide for both. In fact, interviewees emphasised that the stability, continuity and certainty which they had found at HSS had been essential in feeling able to leave homelessness behind them:

> ‘A.C.: So when everything is going badly, what is the thing that makes most difference?

> Chris: I think I was looking for certainty, for continuity. After the accident, I was moved about to three different hostels. I was in one for two weeks, then three weeks... And then HSS1, and that was very confusing. You're literally living out of a suitcase, and that's not the best position. And then my keyworker [helped; and Chris moved to HSS3]. And as I say, coming here, the big thing was continuity. Then access to internet and so on.’ (Chris, 46, shared house)

The above paragraph contains three important elements which start to provide a picture of the perceived influence of HSS over its residents’ well-being. Firstly, Chris mentioned the ‘certainty, continuity’ that HSS undoubtedly offered. Following a series of temporary move ons – in fact, Sea City Council's\(^\text{58}\) approach to homelessness -,

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\(^{58}\) Sea City was a city with a rising number of homelessness. However, the Government policy was to reduce homelessness to zero, so Sea City’s solution was regular homelessness counts, followed by immediate pick up of homeless people off the streets and housing them in temporary accommodation which, due to severe housing shortages in Sea City, could be
Chris had finally reached HSS3. This provided a quiet and safe environment which, as follows in the interview, he held in high regard for his recovery. Secondly, Chris mentioned the help from his keyworker. Keyworker support is further discussed in this chapter, in section 6.4. In Chris’s interview, other factors (such as amenities, ‘access to internet and so on’) only came third in the list of things that made the most difference.

It was the participants’ view that stability of accommodation also had an impact on successful recovery from previous addiction. Interviewees reported that at HSS they had found protection from the temptations and dangers that could occur on the street or in inappropriate accommodation. Pace, an ex-drug-addict, described how any type of change of housing could lead him back on the addiction path. He felt safe in his flat in HSS and was scared of having to move on, as he felt this could lead to a change in routines and lifestyle. At HSS, Pace felt protected from the dangers of the street:

‘As for where, where do I go from here, I mean, obviously I realize I’m, I’m supported. (…) Now, that [move on] scares the shit out of me. (…) After all those years of living like that [homeless], not knowing where the next meal’s coming from, where the next tenner’s coming from, where you’re going to sleep that night, a bit of security [at HSS], it’s great, and it’s you know, I feel safe, I know the police ain’t going to come crashing through the door, or any drug dealers or bad people and that. I feel safe, but I also know it ain’t forever, you know, if I sit here and think about it too much, my mind will…’ (Pace, 46, flat)

For Pace, HSS provided the comforting and safe environment where he could finally (after twenty six years of drug abuse) stop using heroin. The fact that HSS was at the time a zero tolerance housing association regarding drugs, coupled with living in a flat, made Pace feel protected and isolated from easy access to drugs. While at HSS, he had managed to stay off drugs for the longest amount of time in his life (two years).

Whilst not considered ‘home’, HSS was seen as a good interim space. It offered the security and protection that other (previous) types of temporary accommodation did not provide and it was seen as a realistic chance to recover. At the same time, many interviewees referred to their fear of moving on from the sanctuary of HSS. This forms the subject of section 6.3.1.

inappropriate for their specific needs (see Chapters 1 and 2 for more details). This would be only later followed by a process of assessment and referral to appropriate accommodation to meet people’s housing needs.
6.3.1. Reasons why HSS was not fully ‘home’: c) move on

Move on was a prominent and challenging subject. The pressure to move on was a constant reminder for the interviewees that HSS was not ‘home’. At the time of the analysis, move on was one of the essential concepts within homelessness strategies at a national level. Move on, in a Supporting People definition, was ‘a planned, supported’ process of change of housing, which involved ‘developing the necessary skills to maintain a tenancy, as well as dealing with the practical challenges of finding and setting up a home’ (Supporting People, 2008:1). Move on implied quick moves through housing schemes, in order to allow for new vacancies for people on the street. The concept was presented as part of the Integrated Care Pathway in section 2.4.5. This section shows how move on was not welcomed by HSS residents, as they felt it led to unwanted emotional and physical upheaval.

For a large number of residents, HSS was not the first type of temporary accommodation. In fact, they might have gone through a series of temporary dwellings, for most of their lives. Rather than being the exception, temporality defined their lives. Every move on caused disruption, depressive or anxious moments and led to a lack of permanence which interviewees described as damaging for their motivation. Laura described her life as a build-up of chaotic elements where lack of stable accommodation exacerbated her general state of anxiety and unhappiness. When asked what she would have changed in her life if she had the opportunity, she identified the lack of stable housing:

‘Permanent accommodation. That is always number one in my head. Instead of moving around like a lost parcel. ‘Cause [because] temporary, temporary, temporary and I'm still bidding’ (Laura, 35, flat)

The following two subsections present two types of attitudes to move on, depending on length of time at HSS and type of housing accessed.

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59 Bidding, in the local authority terminology, was the process through which housing applicants were trying to access new local authority housing. All available local authority housing is published in a dedicated newsletter on a monthly basis, and the housing applicants ‘bid’ on the properties they believe would be suitable to them. The local authority then verifies the ‘bids’ against certain criteria and the applicant finds out if they were successful. Many of the people I interviewed had been ‘bidding’ without much success (no available housing for them) for a considerable number of months.
6.3.1.1. Length of time at HSS, inability to move on and involuntary dependence on HSS

On the one hand, HSS (and specifically certain housing within HSS) provided a safe, supportive environment which ensured quick recovery from the homelessness event, as shown in section 6.3. On the other hand, prolonged time spent in supported housing led the individuals to fear move on and change. On a personal level, HSS housing was causing an involuntary dependence which the interviewees found hard to escape.

Some individuals had lived in supported accommodation for many years. Julie stated that she had grown used to and maybe even dependant on the security that this offered. She found the prospect of moving daunting:

‘It [HSS 6] feels quite secure. Cause there's gates. So people can't come in unless they live here. And the staff are always nice. I feel quite looked after. It makes me not want to live on the outside somewhere.

A.C.: What do you mean?

Julie: I got used to the security here. And the supported accommodation. And to live on the outside somewhere where I'd probably not really know people... Be on my own. I suppose not have a support worker, I'd be on my own quite a lot... Makes me anxious. In some ways I'd like it. But in some ways I'd feel quite anxious and quite lonely I think. I don't get to know people very easily.’(Julie, 53, flat)

Julie felt she benefitted from the feeling of intimacy that HSS offered - living elsewhere was considered to be ‘on the outside’. She had lived at HSS for over twenty years and her story was similar to other people who had been HSS tenants for a number of years. The difference was that at present Julie had to be pushed to move on, due to Government policy. Further in her interview, Julie explained the difference between herself in the past and herself in the present. In the past (twenty years earlier) she felt she had more confidence and an ability to do things independently. In the present, her anxiety would stop her from performing a lot of the tasks she would have done in the past:

60 Before Supporting People, the lack of move on rules led to many residents being housed at HSS for a long time. Some of the interviewees had lived there for over twenty years.
‘I think I was more confident then [twenty years ago]. [Then] when I was working, I was more confident, I had more friends, I was out a lot more, I was working, I was with people more. I did have more confidence. I wish I could get some of that back really. I didn’t have a lot of the problems I have now. I wasn’t so nervous. I didn’t think about things so much. Now I seem to be in my head, I think about things, I let things stop me, I analyse, I worry too much, stopping myself. I wasn’t doing so much of that then.’ (Julie, 53, flat)

The change in character coincides with the length of time spent in HSS and thus in supported accommodation. Julie classed her anxiety, lack of self-confidence, inability to ‘do things’ in a ‘problems’ category. Her ‘problems’ infringed on her wish to behave in certain ways (more outgoing, more at ease when around people). There was a discrepancy in Julie’s interview from her personality ‘twenty years ago’ and herself now. Thus, she believed she was more outgoing, more sociable and more confident in the past, whereas in the present she found she was ‘a lot in my head’, ‘stopping myself’. It is also interesting that Julie saw work as a catalyst for self-confidence and self-esteem: ‘When I was working I was more confident’61. For Julie, living at HSS removed the social element from her life: ‘I was with people more, had more friends’. In fact, the paragraph details a lot of the problems many long-term interviewees felt they had. Social (and intimate) relationships, sports, mobility (ability to drive and owning a car) were all diminished after a long time spent at HSS. The recounting of similar lifestyle changes across interviews containing similar life stories or of people who had spent a long time at HSS suggests a connection between diminished self-confidence and living at HSS.

When asked if she felt ready to move, Julie said she saw moving like ‘starting all over again’ or losing her ‘safety blanket’, and was not excited at the prospect. This is similar to other interviewees’ attitude to move on. Thus increased length of stay at HSS created a supplementary need, for further social housing, or continued living at HSS. Increased time spent at HSS led to an institution-based life there, and for some residents, even significant personal relationships. Paula’s only meaningful intimate relationship which functioned like a mutual partnership had developed at HSS, with one of the residents:

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61 Work was starting to be, in 2010, the recognised route into the future and moving on and it became one of the best options to leave the supported housing system after 2012. Further discussion on work and life skills follows in section 6.5. and in the Discussion chapter (Chapter 8).
‘And all these years I’ve been here and I met Paul, I lived here, and now I’m fifty four, been there all those years [over twenty years]. And I’ve been happy here, you know (…) Talking to Paul and going to cafés and that, and enjoying myself, you know, having laughs and jokes and things. He’s sort of changed my life, he has, you know.’ (Paula, 54, shared house)

Whilst most long-term residents interviewed accepted they did not find move on easy, there were others who blamed the system for not moving on. When asked whether he was actively looking for a different place to live, Darren was evasive. He further admitted he had actually been postponing move on for a while, unwilling to change his present accommodation and stability which came with it:

‘I think one of the problems of being a late-middle aged, single man, homeless in this town, is that you are at the absolute end of the list. (...) I’m not sure I agree with that. I think more equality in getting people moved on [is needed]... there’s always that feeling, I’ve always suspected that any seventeen year old girl who gets herself pregnant and wants a place to live will probably get it long before I do. And I tend to think why... Why are her needs greater than mine? I mean a lot of it is that children’s needs are now greater than everybody else’s. Which is something that I totally disagree with. (...) So I think they [children] should just be treated the same as everyone else. Does that sound cruel and vicious?’ (Darren, 63, flat)

The above quote highlights an existing issue, of ‘single homelessness’ always being perceived as ‘at the absolute end of the list’ and therefore appropriate housing for individuals in Darren’s situation being rarely available. Throughout his interview, Darren stressed the pressure he felt since the move on rates had been in place. However, as it will be further highlighted, HSS was lenient about move on rates62. It took a personalised attitude towards move on, based on personal ability and emotional readiness.

At the other end of the spectrum, interviewees who had recently moved to HSS or had only spent a few years living there saw HSS as a temporary stage and in fact embraced move on. Their discourse was, rather than focusing on HSS (some interviewees barely

62 At the time of the interview, two year move on was pushed by the local authority. This has since been removed as a condition for living in supported housing in Sea City.
mentioned it), concentrating on their future and on their ideal life and housing beyond HSS. This 'progressive' attitude is discussed at length in Chapter 8 and does not form the subject of the present chapter, as it does not actually refer to HSS, but rather to a future ideal of self.

6.3.1.2. Shared housing and attitudes to move on

As presented at the beginning of the chapter, HSS offered two types of housing, which differed largely in terms of levels of dependence. Shared housing involved shared cooking and toilet facilities, whilst self-contained accommodation was a flat with its own kitchen and bathroom.

Those living on shared premises were acutely aware of the temporality of their accommodation and wanted to *move on*. People living in flats were more reticent at the prospect of *moving on* and seemed overall less disturbed by the temporality of their accommodation. The independent cooking facilities and having their own bathroom and more privacy were seen as important for longer term living. Darren's interview exemplifies the attitude of those living in self-contained accommodation:

‘This place suits me. I find virtually nothing bad about it. I found this a very amicable space, I got enough space, I could do with a little bit more, but who can’t? I mean, if there’s only me, even if I won the lottery on Saturday, I’d probably still only go out and buy a one bedroom flat, you know. Cause what’s the point of having a ten bedroomeed house if you’ve not got actually any intention of living with nine other people?’ (Darren, 63, flat)

The quote above suggests Darren found HSS comfortable enough for occupying it for a non-determined amount of time and in fact, as the quote from the previous section suggested, he was not convinced of the necessity of his *moving on*.

Privacy was one of the two unequivocal features which differentiated a house from a ‘home’. People in shared housing often said that the inability of being alone at will was one of the main ‘minuses’ of HSS:

‘Yeah, I mean, you do sometimes feel like in a goldfish bowl, that has been the biggest problem with me, it’s actually been the shared kitchen. Because I mean, we’ve all been through a time when we really can’t face people, and, when you’re cooking for yourself there, you never know who’s gonna come barging
in... you know, there's a lack of privacy there, can be quite depressing.’ (Cal, 45, shared house)

Due to the difficulties of sharing, for some individuals, living in HSS could lead to isolation and leading a life mostly in private. A lot of interviewees mentioned being a ‘private person’, living mostly in their rooms and controlling socialisation to only bare necessities:

‘A.C.: And what is a home?

Chris: A door, a front door. Somewhere where I can have people visit me, like anyone else would. And really a place where to rebuild my life, in terms of the life I live in and my social life.’ (Chris, 46, shared house)

Thus the people living in shared accommodation differentiated HSS from ‘home’ through the absence of a ‘front door’. ‘Closing the door’ or ‘having a front door’ referred to a different style of living, where privacy was respected. Further, Chris explained this had an influence on ‘the life I live in’ and ‘my social life’. Later in his interview, he explained he was a sociable person and liked to have a lot of people and his daughter around, whom he was keeping away from HSS while living there. The ‘life I live in’ refers to the lack of privacy that living in a community, with a set of rules and regulations, involves. ‘My social life’ implies there was a substantially different type of socialising taking place at HSS. This announces a discrepancy between the individual’s life outside of HSS and living at HSS which is further developed in Chapter 7 and which is linked to different definitions of self at different points in the interviewees’ lives (in Chapter 8 – the Discussion chapter).

Section 6.3.2. has thus illustrated that move on was viewed differently, depending on the length of time spent at HSS and the type of housing accessed. These differences were important for their policy implications, and are further detailed in Chapter 8.
6.4. HOME IS: Support from others

Alongside location and stability, support from others was another feature of HSS which was considered valuable by the interviewees and was seen as an attribute of home. This section is concerned with presenting the value of having someone to support them for HSS residents and also their criticism regarding features of the support provided by the institution which they thought could have improved.

Gerard explained that he had found in HSS the slow-paced and accepting environment where he could recover. He saw his stay at HSS as an evolution:

‘A.C.: Since HSS 5, what impact did that [living in supported accommodation] have on you?

Gerard: Good question, Alex. It's been slow but sure. Everyone was very patient, especially Colin [keyworker, anonymised here]. I find I'm able to live more or less a normal life. There aren't other restrictions other than I have to see him once a week and pay the rent and stuff. But then you expect that anyway. And although it's not completely secure, it does carry a feeling of security, which is important, of course. I've been able to be supported, I suppose, horrible word, in things that I've been doing, nobody has said no you can't really. And I've evolved into ... I have suddenly decided I should have more people over, not too horrendous but...' (Gerard, flat, 63)

Until HSS, Gerard stated he had been trying to cope with his chronic depression, but often found himself in situations when he would have to face people’s lack of understanding towards his, at times erratic behaviour. At several points in his interview he mentioned HSS had been essential for his ‘well-being’. He had in fact not had any ‘episodes’ while living there. The first part of his answer mentions the lack of pressure at HSS. Pressure, especially social pressure had been one of the most difficult factors to negotiate in Gerard’s life before HSS. At HSS ‘everyone was very patient’ and ‘it’s been slow but sure’. In another part of the interview he mentioned: ‘HSS staff were not too overbearing’. The first part of the quote thus conveys a definition of HSS as a controlled environment, where progress is slow but sure, where there is support but no pressure and the expectations are realistic.
Chris’s interview mirrors an attitude predominant among interviewees, with regards to the support provided by HSS staff:

‘And then my keyworker at HSS, she really helped me get through all the paperwork. That was essential, as I couldn’t face it, it was too much. She did a lot of work and a lot of research and finally got me here [HSS2, shared housing on the outskirts of Sea City].’ (Chris, 46, shared house)

Upon entering the homeless support system, Chris, like many others, had found it difficult to make sense of. Chris had therefore felt grateful when staff had offered their support to make sense of this new environment and institutional system, increasingly determined by complicated paperwork, in which he found himself at a loss: ‘I couldn’t face it [the paperwork], it was too much.’ (Chris, 46, shared house) Help from keyworker was mentioned by other interviewees as an important element in their recovery and ‘staying off the streets’. The amount and complexity of paperwork, combined with the (recently homeless) individual’s physical and mental weariness, made achieving this task on their own almost impossible. If paperwork (such as referral and benefit forms) was not filled, the person could have been evicted.

Chris also valued HSS’s unique personal approach. Chris felt he could communicate with staff at all levels and had in fact developed a support relationship with his cleaner, mentioning that on one occasion he had even felt the need to express his gratitude by buying her sweets, an incentive not endorsed by internal housing regulations:

‘A.C.: Was there one thing or person who made a difference?’

Chris: Mary the cleaner. She’s a mum and a grandma, she’s seen it all. She’s really sweet and talks to me. I look forward to her coming in sometimes. Just to... chat. And she’s got a good sense of humour as well.

A.C.: Sounds really nice. I hope she knows that.

Chris: I bought her some sweets the other day. So yeah, she does. ’(Chris, 46, shared house)

In the quote, Chris refers to Mary ‘talking’ to him. This was interpreted, by him, as a way of being acknowledged, in a non-institutional manner - a way of affirming Chris’ ‘normality’, a concept which is in fact dealt with further in this chapter.63 Chris was not

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63 See section 6.4.3.
the only one voicing feelings of gratitude towards certain members of staff who, the interviewees felt, had helped them cope in critical moments of loneliness or difficulty and due to whom they believed they found themselves in what they perceived to be an overall privileged position. In fact, another interviewee, Bob, said he had attended the interview only in order to say how ’wonderful’ all the staff were. In their research on homeless women’s use of public spaces, Casey et al (2008) mentioned the ‘gradual shift’ taking place in certain relationships between the rough sleepers (in their study) and their gatekeepers, from ‘tolerance to helpfulness’. In the present study, the regular contact between residents and staff led to a deeper understanding and supportive relationships, which the interviewees felt were worth noting.

This section showed that interviewees accepted and appreciated the support they were receiving at HSS and the personal connection with some of the staff. At the same time, interviewees mentioned several features connected to the institutional provision of support which contributed to HSS not feeling exactly like a home. These were: the fact that they had to experience change (of support, of keyworkers etc.) even when they did not choose the change, the fact that sometimes the people allocated to support them would not have been their immediate choice, especially in terms of age differences and the fact that HSS did not provide them with the ‘normality’ of living in their own home. These three features are discussed in sections 6.4.1., 6.4.2. and 6.4.3.

6.4.1. Reasons why HSS was not fully ’home’: d) attitudes to change

Although, as exposed in the previous section, there were cases of residents forming a particularly good bond with certain staff members, HSS and Government policy at the time encouraged equal and fair treatment of their residents, and included in this was the emphasis on having to change keyworkers and thus ensure everyone received a holistic style of support. This for some people was a difficult situation to accept:

‘I’ve been with Jill [keyworker] quite a long time, but she said I have to see the other woman that works here [another keyworker]. I don’t really want to change, but I think they said I’ve got to.

A.C.: Did she [manager] say why?

Julie: Well, just to have a change, and I suppose she thinks the other lady can perhaps help me more, in different ways. But I’d rather stay with the one I’ve got.’ (Julie, 53, flat)
Throughout the interview, Julie underlined her lack of social skills, low self-esteem and phobia of making new acquaintances. Julie admitted to and regretted a social inadequacy: ‘I tend to get rather quiet around people’ and she stated she felt most comfortable when she did not have to interact with new people or be exposed to new situations. Changing her keyworker was thus not a preferred option for her. Talking to me – accepting the interview, was the exception, rather than the rule, in Julie’s case.\(^6\)

Consistency and continuity of housing was considered important. Furthermore, continuity of keyworker was perceived essential for interviewees’ recovery. Changing a keyworker implied for the interviewees telling their story over and over again and having to build new relationships and trust every time. Interviewees viewed this as a constant breech of intimacy. Changing the keyworker was also perceived as an additional challenge to an already challenging situation.

6.4.2. Reasons why HSS was not fully ‘home’: e) importance of the keyworker’s age for the interviewees

Keyworkers played a central role in interviewees’ lives and recoveries. Paul said he had had both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ keyworkers. In the paragraph below, he described a ‘bad’ keyworker:

‘But also, it’s having the confidence and the trust of the person you’re talking to. I’ve said in the past, on some occasions, some of the keyworkers, I feel they are not street wise. (...) I’ve seen it, whether it’s being a bit too condescending, a bit too nice, I’m not saying be aggressive or verbally [aggressive], but I think you need to have that, how do I put it, streetwise attitude! [In order to be a good keyworker]’. (Paul, 60, independent flat)

In the quote above, investing ‘confidence and trust’ in a keyworker equates with the keyworker having a ‘streetwise’ attitude. Paul suggested there was a need for the keyworker to mirror their client’s behaviour in order to ensure an efficient and trusting relationship.

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\(^6\) Julie’s motivation for accepting the interview confirms the discussion, in Chapter 4, about the fit of qualitative interviewing in homelessness studies. As anticipated in the literature (Ravenhill 2008, Hanninen and Koski-Jannes 1999, Da Silva 2007 etc.), in many cases (Julie being one of them), the method chosen ensured not only ease of communication, but a real eagerness on the interviewees’ part to tell their story. I have met Julie in different settings and situations since; she was never as open and talkative as she had been throughout the interview. Julie announced at the beginning of the interview that she wanted to tell me her story and in fact, from that moment on, she ‘poured’ narrative until the end.
relationship. He specifically referred to the new, younger staff and their lack of 'life experience'. Interviewees saw 'life experience' as an ability to understand the past homelessness event, which was essential for starting a relationship based on trust. Being treated with respect and dignity was an on-going theme in the interviews. Younger keyworkers were less trusted at behaving like this than older ones. Youth was defined as a 'problem'.

The following quote touches on age once again and delves further, into the need for specialised qualifications for keyworkers:

‘A lot of them I just found a little bit naive. I think youth [in keyworkers] is always a bit of a problem. I assume your degree is in social work, I remember at HSS1 [where Darren had briefly lived], someone's degree was in Geography. I was thinking, that's ok, HSS is giving them some training, but she was twenty three years old! Basically this was her first job out of university, where she was a geographer. I think this is the most useless subject to study... but how that related to any social work or the concept of people on the margins of society, I really... I didn't find her helpful at all.' (Darren, 63, flat)

At the time of the interviews, there had been a historical lack of specialised training. Support work would most often be a starting job and (in the years before Supporting People), a social work degree/ social studies had not been required. The profile of the job is slowly changing at present, with more social studies graduates eager to take a position in this field as a career prospect in its own right. The people who reported the discrepancy between support workers’ qualifications and the work they were supposed to do were interviewees who had resided at HSS for a number of years and had met many keyworkers who, they felt, had lacked specialisation in the field. In the quote, Darren considered a 'social work degree' as a confirmation of the keyworker’s abilities to deal with the case of a person 'on the margins of society' and thus his case too, as someone housed together with those people on the 'margins of society'. In the above paragraph, Darren relates to my status as a qualified worker rather than the disputable role of an interviewer.

Age was consistently mentioned in connection to respect and value. In young people’s narratives, experience was used to add weight and importance to their own narrative.

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65 As this chapter and the next show, Darren did not see himself 'on the margins of society' any longer, but believed HSS still partially reflected this status.
66 The complex issue of my role as a researcher and worker at HSS has been previously discussed in Chapter 4.
Experience was always juxtaposed with young age, in a generally accepted value system where older age guaranteed authority. Thus young people always invoked experience to make up for their youth (‘she understands everything! She [her daughter]’s seven going on seventeen’; ‘I’m twenty four going on fifty, that’s how much experience I’ve had’ - Kate, 24, shared house), whereas older people saw the direct connection between age and experience as a given and professed bewilderment when they had not been treated according to their ‘age’: ‘I’m a certain age now [implying older]. I should know better than most [in reaction to a shop assistant ignoring his opinion]!’ (Mickey, 70, flat).

In my experience of working as project worker at HSS, interviewees’ attitude to age and their implying of a hierarchy according to age reflected the historical attitude of HSS staff and management, who treated older homeless people with more respect. Other studies (Van Doorn 2003, Wardaugh 1999, Casey et al 2008 etc.) warn of the existence of differences in treatment among homeless people. Even more, in order to safeguard residents’ dignity, staff would sometimes prioritise the older generation when offering access to more independent accommodation. There was thus a tendency of an infantilising approach towards the younger generation, which created in its turn a reaction of justifying their own age. In response to this, the young people interviewed presented themselves as much older than same age people outside of the homeless circle and refused being treated as (or even housed with) even younger individuals:

‘But the Lounge… Majority of people who live in the Lounge are eighteen. I was twenty four just turned, and I didn’t want to be stuck with people six years younger than me.’ (Kate, 24, shared house)

Even more, reactions to move on also differed according to age. Older interviewees reported having ‘given up’. They would ‘bid’, ‘fill in the paperwork’ only to comply with the system on a superficial level. They stated that their actual intentions were to continue to reside in the housing that they had grown used to. Older clients found the prospect of leaving daunting. These interviewees were also more resigned and appreciative of their present accommodation. Younger residents were more critical. They believed supported housing limited their self-development options, it acted like a ‘prison’ and was not ‘proper housing’.

Most of the older people interviewed lived in self-contained housing. This could have been a result, in some cases, of extensive time spent at HSS, during which they might have moved from dependent towards more independent housing, but in other cases it
might have been connected to the implied increased respect towards older people showed by the staff, as mentioned above.  

6.4.3. Reasons why HSS is not fully ‘home’: f) Despite the support and stability, it only creates an aspiration to normality

The previous sections built an image for HSS as ambiguous in status. It was accepted as interim accommodation which, by offering good location, stability and support, ensured increased emotional and physical comfort. It was also seen as an evolution from the homeless state - the ‘lowest of low’. However, HSS was not viewed as ‘home’. While living at HSS, interviewees suggested they aspired to ‘normality’, a feature of ‘home’ which could not be fully found at HSS.

In the following quote, already cited in section 6.4., Gerard mentioned the ‘feeling of security’ at HSS, which made him feel at ease. He contextualised this within ‘supported’ housing: ‘I’ve been able to be supported, I suppose, horrible word’. On the one hand Gerard welcomed the support and acknowledged its necessity for a balanced life, on the other hand ‘support’ had negative connotations for Gerard’s perception of self, as it implied dependence. Further on, his mention of ‘normality’ is important and bears a discussion of its own:

‘A.C.: Since HSS 5, what impact did that [living in supported accommodation] have on you?’

Gerard: Good question, Alex. It’s been slow but sure. Everyone was very patient, especially Colin [keyworker, anonymised here]. I find I’m able to live more or less a normal life. There aren’t other restrictions other than I have to see him once a week and pay the rent and stuff. But then you expect that anyway. And although it’s not completely secure, it does carry a feeling of security, which is important, of course. I’ve been able to be supported, I suppose, horrible word, in things that I’ve been doing, nobody has said no you can’t really. And I’ve evolved into ...’ (Gerard, flats, 63)

67 This staff attitude towards the age of HSS residents was changing as I was doing my research, as an increased number of young people had started to access the service, but the general attitude still resided among residents interviewed for the present study.

68 For a fuller version of this quote, see page 170.
Many interviewees mentioned normality as something essential in the period immediately following homelessness. Normality made a connection between what the individual used to be before the ‘lowest of low’ and where the individual aspired to be after HSS. Normality was defined in minute details and it was generally an aspiration, not fully fulfilled in the present accommodation. In the above quote, Gerard defined life at HSS as ‘more or less a normal life’. The ‘restrictions’ and being ‘supported’ functioned as a reminder of what HSS was not: it was not normality in the true sense of the word, for Gerard. The quote is important for another reason as well. The last sentence voices a feeling which emerges through many interviews: ‘I’ve evolved into…’. Essentially, interviewees viewed HSS as an ‘evolution’, a stage superior to being in the streets and to their previous mental and emotional (and ultimately material) state. At the same time and equally important, this was a process not yet finished, merely progressing toward the ‘normal’ state, which was placed in the future (further discussed in Chapter 7).

Jimmy’s elaboration on where he would be in the future delved further into this aspiration to normality:

‘A.C.: And where would you be five years from now?

Jimmy: Five years from now I’ll have property of my own, a car of my own and a business of my own. It’s living, you know what I mean? It’s, even if it’s not owned property, even just a place of my own, where I can put my own stamp and feel at home, you know. Buy nick-knacks and whatever makes you, so, that would be the thing, and having a car is not that far off, it’s only if you can buy a cheap second hand car for four-hundred pounds. And, and having a business if you’re earning enough, covering client expenses, and an adequate life, it’s not too much to ask, I don’t think. It’s not like I’m taking over the world or want a mansion or, you know, just, just normal, to have normality, just a little, people coming over for cups of coffee or a glass of wine.’ (Jimmy, 30, shared house)

In the above paragraph, normality goes beyond a specific status quo, into a projected image of ‘living’ Jimmy’s desired life. A home, mobility, friends (‘people’) and feeling useful were among the essential pillars of ‘normality’. HSS was not a ‘home’ in Jimmy’s interview. At HSS, Jimmy felt restricted by the barriers to real social interaction and to personalising the space (‘where I can put my stamp and feel at home’; ‘buy nick-knacks and whatever makes you’). Normality was thus mentioned as an unattained aspiration in the now and therefore a concept of the future after HSS. The mention of normality...
is essential, as it reveals a need of conceptualisation of self as different from HSS and as aspiring to something else, beyond HSS.

6.5. The ‘social psychology, rehabilitation and life skills’ at HSS

Alongside the previously discussed categories (location, stability and support from others), work and life skills represented an important feature of HSS. The following quote opens the discussion on this important characteristic of HSS and the value of employment.

“That [just a roof for the rough sleepers] still is the big image for HSS. They [the public] don’t see the social psychology, the rehabilitation and the life skills, they don’t see that. They just think it’s people that have lost the plot, or people that are dysfunctional, or people that don’t care - that's not true. There's a lot of people that do care. ‘(Chris, 46, shared house)

Thus, for Chris, the ‘social psychology’, rehabilitation and life skills were important elements for his own self-definition. In the quote, they are presented in direct antithesis with ‘people who have lost the plot, or people who are dysfunctional’, these being qualifications which Chris had used in his interview to define the ‘homeless homeless’. Often when discussing their plans for the future, interviewees would employ official terminology: ‘life skills’, ‘rehabilitation’, ‘social psychology’ or ‘social skills’.

The paragraph, as in many other interviews, is more than just an attempt at filling outsiders’ gap in knowledge. It is a reinstatement of the persona that is acceptable to himself, his peers and the outside society. Work, ‘reimproving myself’, ‘rehabilitation’, life skills were at the core of this ideal self. The quote thus opens discussion on the role of work and education on interviewees’ lives. In 2010, the time of the interviews, there was not clear distinction between the value of work, life skills training, volunteering or other types of unpaid work (such as internships, work experience) in policy. The main benefit of paid and unpaid work was conferred by its therapeutic and inspirational nature. The above quote and in fact the entire study pinpoint the meaning of employment for the interviewees. In the above quote, ‘the social psychology, the rehabilitation and the life skills’ go beyond mere connotations of employment. Work contributes to reversing the homelessness effects and getting back to a better, more acceptable self, before the homelessness incident. For the interviewees, employment
had a large remit and it included being engaged in a college course, voluntary commitments or life skills opportunities.

The mere result on the individual’s well-being and self-worth was considered enough for moving someone further on the Integrated Care Pathway and thus outside of the supported housing system. However, since 2010, the Government agenda became increasingly focused on employed work. None of the people interviewed were in employed work at the time of analysis, but many who did some type of volunteering, non-paid type of work or courses, had assimilated a discourse of progress and a positive outlook.

Under the Welfare Reform (October 2013), work became primarily ‘paid work’. The present study shows not only the value of staggered and personalised approaches to going back to work, but also the importance of any type of education or (paid and unpaid) employment in ensuring aspirations, goals and a vision beyond the supported housing system:

‘So they [general public] probably expect us all stay around town instead of going home and drinking ourselves into a stupor. I mean, until they’ve actually realised you as a person, and [that you are] not doing the wrong things, but actually trying to improve yourself. Because I actually try to improve myself by going to college and different things like that.’ (Allen, 23, flat)

In the following paragraph, when asked how he was feeling, Michael answered rather with his plans for the future, which included working hard at re-establishing himself in his former community:

‘I: How are you feeling now?

Michael: Work focused. In the last couple of months I’ve been looking for work. With the economic crisis it’s harder. There’s a lot of people that need a new job. I could be a trend watcher, to see the trend as it emerges, for a strategist who is doing the trend analysis, there was this one job, good salary, 1,600 applications!’ (Michael, 47, shared house)

Being engaged in a work-related activity facilitates a rejection of ‘homelessness’ related terminology and stereotyping and a request to be seen differently from the ‘homeless homeless’.
6.6. Summary: HSS as an interim substitute for home

The chapter presents HSS as another complex concept, alongside homelessness, opening a window into abstract notions of ‘home’.

HSS was seen as an intermediary, a good substitute for home. Following the highly unstable life of previous temporary accommodation or the street, HSS was seen as a haven of safety, certainty and support. HSS offered some features of ‘home’ – stability and support being among them -, but although safe and essential for recovery, HSS was not viewed as ‘home’. Privacy and ‘normality’ were among the features of ‘home’ that HSS could not reproduce. Also Sea City was seen as a city of choice and was predicted as the place where the interviewees would live their lives beyond the interim period at HSS. Thus ‘home’ became a broader concept and it extended to a city. Lastly, the chapter presents an attitude to work and life skills which is essential for the individual’s definitions of self. Work and voluntary courses are equally seen as differentiating the interviewees from the ‘homeless homeless’ and thus important for their identification as persons in supported housing. Further discussion on identity struggles for people living in supported accommodation follows in Chapters 8 and 9.
CHAPTER 7: ‘I would like to start at the beginning...’: Narratives of single homelessness

7.1. Introduction

Chapter 7 engages with the narratives of the ‘single homeless persons’ as a whole and thus further explores what the interviewees’ perceptions of homelessness and ‘single homelessness’ were.

The chapter is divided into four sections. Section 7.2. reiterates main narrative typologies in other research, an in-depth discussion on narratives having already taken place in Chapter 4. Sections 7.3. and 7.4. present the two levels of classification of narratives found in the study. Section 7.5 offers examples and further insight into each of these typologies. Lastly, section 7.6 provides a conclusion for the chapter.

7.2. Narrative typologies

The interviews in the study were designed to allow for narrative development. Interventions were kept to a minimum and the interviewees as narrators were allowed to develop stories of particular importance to them. This was based on the concept underlining narrative analysis that people are in a continuous process of constructing and deconstructing their life meaning (Lieblich et al 1998). An in-depth presentation of narrative analysis and narrative analysis classifications takes place in Chapter 4 (Sections 4.3. and 4.4.).

Chapter 7 takes the homelessness stories as a whole, as they were told by the interviewees, and thus engages with the issues of self-representation and idealisation of self (Riessman 2008) that emerge when telling a story. This chapter looks at the events the interviewees chose to reveal and inquires what the succession of those events in the narration tells us about their concept of homelessness.

In the process of analysing the narratives, typologies emerged. Classifications in previous studies separated narratives according to structure, into: progressive, regressive and stable; according to the role the narrator played in the story, into:
romance, tragedy, comedy and satire (Lieblich 1998); and according to the restoration of identity, into: restitution narratives, chaos narratives and quest narratives (Frank 2013), or into: contingent, moral and core narratives (Bury 2001) 69. Elements of Frank, Lieblich, and Bury’s classifications of narratives have been applied to the present study, albeit with variations.

The process of analysis of narratives took place in two stages. A first categorisation was based on reading all stories and paying attention to individual utterances and messages suggesting a classification. Secondly I applied three main questions to the narrative categories formed: 1) Why is the narrator telling the story in this specific way? 2) What message was the narrator trying to convey? and 3) What is it about homelessness and/ or temporary housing that creates this type of narrative? This chapter is the result of this combined process of analysis.

From the perspective of style, direction and content of narratives, two levels of classification emerged from the interviews. The main classification, into ‘progressive’, ‘regressive’ and ‘static’, unlike in previous studies (Lieblich 1998), concentrated on the temporal rather than the plot direction of the narrative. The study makes a parallel between the homelessness event and the chronical illness event which changes the individual’s conceptions of their life (Bury 2001, Charmaz 2006). In the second level of classification six different narratives emerged, according to their different contents: stories of acceptance, iterations of regret and loss, progress stories, reset stories, disassociation stories and disempowerment stories (section 7.4.).

7.3. First level of classification: Main narrative typologies according to their narrative style and time direction

Telling their life story allows individuals to perform their identities (Riessman 2008) over and over again and to refine their story in the process. Narrative interviewing is particularly effective in research of traumatic life events, which generate fear or loss of different kinds (such as loss of relationships, of mobility, of status, bereavement etc.) and which therefore have an impact on someone’s conception of their life. All stories in the present study centred on the event which disrupted interviewees’ identities: the homelessness event – the ‘lowest of low’ (Cal, 47, shared house). The style and structure of narration depended on whether the homelessness event was resolved and

69 See Chapter 4 (sections 4.3. and 4.4.) for further presentation of these classifications.
transformed into a learning exercise and positive experience or whether, even though a thing of the past, it still lingered on the present status. This led to a first levels of classification, according to style, which issued two main narrative categories: linear and broken. The different style of narratives was essential for the meaning they carried.

A secondary classification was applied to linear narratives only, according to their direction in time. This led to three subcategories: progressive, regressive and static narratives. The first level of classification of narratives thus leads to the following categories of narrative: a) linear, which includes: linear progressive, linear regressive and linear static and b) broken, which does not separate into further categories. There was an almost equal amount of interviews belonging to each of the two main categories among the twenty eight interviews included in the analysis.\(^{70}\) The following two sections describe the different traits of linear and broken narratives and figure 7.1. offers a summary of the levels of narratives presented above.

**Figure 7.1. Linear vs. Broken narratives**

![Diagram of Linear and Broken Narratives](image)

### 7.3.1. Linear narratives: linear progressive, linear regressive and linear static

Linear narratives told the individual’s story in a Labovian (1967) manner (introduction, main body of narration, conclusion, moral\(^ {71}\)), ordering events in consecutive order. Linear narratives subdivided in progressive, regressive and static, according to the

\(^{70}\) As mentioned in Chapter 4 (section 4.7.1.), two interviews were not included in the analysis, due to the ethical concerns regarding the participants.

\(^{71}\) See Section 4.5.1. for a detailed description of the narrative structure that Labov and Waletzky proposed.
time they focused on. Progressive narratives narrated the past, but concentrated on the future, goals and plans and saw the past as a mere lesson for the future. Regressive narratives largely narrated the past. Occasionally they would include expressions of guilt or regret. They didn’t comprise aspirations or plans for the future. A large part of the regressive narrators were older interviewees who enjoyed being reflexive and celebratory about the past. In static narratives, interviewees were neither venerating nor blaming the past, but they recounted it succinctly. At the same time, there was no positive reference to the future and no grand plans. Interviewees dealt with one day at a time and celebrated small, daily successes in maintaining sobriety (generally these were addiction narratives) without exploring strategic plans for the future.

An important characteristic of all linear narratives was that they were not attempts to justify their narrator’s life choices. Issues of the past were seen as resolved by the interviewees and it was the narrator’s choice to either simply tell their life story (in regressive and static narratives) or to narrate their story whilst making plans for the future (in progressive stories). The event of homelessness, which populated all these narratives at some point in the past, was resolved and assimilated as integral part of their past. In Bury (2001)’s definition of narratives, these stories were ‘contingent’ (explanatory).

7.3.2. Broken narratives

The second category of narratives according to narrative style - the broken narratives - substantially differed from linear narratives in style. This coincided with a different focus on the homelessness event and the interviewee’s past. Broken narratives narrated disparate episodes in no immediately apparent order, similar to the style reported in Frank’s chaos narratives (2013). In some interviews, there would be time distortion: past, present and future would mix or interchange. Events would be equally distorted, with certain events told on more than one occasion but in different ways. The only consistent element of these interviews was a permanent need of the narrator to justify and interpret.

Their style was important, as it was connected to meaning and contents. ‘Single homeless persons’ in temporary local authority or charity-led accommodation are required to tell their life story over and over again, to housing and local authority officials, supported housing workers and health staff. Through repeated iterations, these stories acquired a definite style.
A message or explanation of the homelessness event naturally took shape. Linear narratives presented an accepting, explanatory (‘contingent’) message, whereas broken narratives had not yet come to terms with the homelessness event and became attempts at justifying it. They were justifying narratives – ‘moral’, in Bury’s (2001) classification.

7.3.3. Differences in style between linear and broken narratives, according to occurrence of anecdotes, and a discussion of anecdotes

All stories included anecdotes: short diversions used to illustrate a fact or simply appearing to make the story lighter. In linear stories, the placement of anecdotes at various points of narration was not random, but rather a meaning-making exercise. Even when present frequently, the side stories, anecdotes and visual moments did not encumber narration, but were used to a purpose: to reinforce a point, to show the main character in a better light, or simply to add colour to the story. The narrator would decide to discuss certain aspects of their story by providing an example, in further detail. Following this, the narrator would return to the main storyline. Figure 7.2. offers an example of a classical linear narrative. The anecdotes Paul told, in the order he told them, are in the white filled boxes.

Figure 7.2. Paul’s linear narrative (with anecdotes)\(^72\)

* Paul, 60 years old, used to live in a flat, now moved to ‘independent’ housing

\(^{72}\) The shading in the figure marks the main ‘life events’ Paul mentioned in the narrative, in the order he mentioned them: childhood, homelessness, present life (housing, lifestyle), future (prospects).
In broken narratives, once an anecdote was introduced, it generally changed the rhythm of narration and the time of reference. From that point onwards, the story progressed on a different theme and at a different time. The shift would happen again and again with each new anecdote/deviation. The following figure illustrates the difference in style of narration between linear and broken narratives. The broken narrative displays stories in no apparent consecutive order.

**Figure 7.3. Gerard’s broken narrative (with anecdotes)**

* Gerard, 63 years old, living in a flat

As mentioned above, in both main types of narratives and alongside the main narrative streak, anecdotes punctuated, supported or enhanced the narration. Most commonly their placement at various points of narration was not random, but rather a meaning-making exercise.

There were a lot of types of anecdotes and to do justice to all, further space and analysis would be required. I have separated the anecdotes in: those supporting the main story, those adding a secondary message to the narrative and those enhancing the identity work taking place in the narrative. Many had secondary uses, such as conversational addition or painting the background, but meaning was attached to all.

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73 The shading in the figure marks the ‘life events’ in Gerard’s interview, in the order they occurred in the interview.
Underneath is a table of anecdotes found in the study. Subsections 7.3.3.1., 7.3.3.2. and 7.3.3.3. use one anecdote each to illustrate each of the categories underneath: support for main story, secondary message and enhanced identity work.

Table 7.1. Anecdote types in ‘single homeless people’ narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support for main story (added facts)</th>
<th>Secondary message (making a secondary point)</th>
<th>Enhanced identity work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drinking anecdote (about giving up alcohol)</td>
<td>Living at HSS</td>
<td>Hero/leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification anecdote</td>
<td>(Lack of) models (about ‘other’)</td>
<td>Help of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovery anecdote (including recovery from injury, from addiction, from breakdown)</td>
<td>‘Nice gentle souls’ (HSS residents)</td>
<td>Bravery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fish tank (coping strategies)</td>
<td>Relationship (girlfriend/boyfriend support)</td>
<td>Narrative of importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling/children relationships</td>
<td>Road trip (about a personal journey)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of occurrence</th>
<th>Paul (5 anecdotes), Alice (10), Mickey (2), Julie (6), Tara (5), Kate (1), Laura (4), Murray (2, reoccurring), Allen (4), Danny (3), Pace (4)</th>
<th>Paul (2), Chris (5), Gerard (7), Darren (6), Tara (1), Murray (1), Jimmy (8), Alice (3)</th>
<th>Paul (3), Chris (3), Cal (5), Michael (4), Jimmy (4), Paul (3), Laura (3), Danny (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Mainly linear narratives

Mainly broken narratives

There was not a perfect match between these categories and the main, linear vs. broken category of narratives, but most of anecdotes supporting the main story appeared in progress narratives, whilst the last two categories (secondary message and enhanced identity work) appeared in broken narratives.74

74 A table including all interviews in one of the two main categories (broken or linear) can be found in section 7.4.
7.3.3.1. Support for main story: the fish tank anecdote

This subsection uses Paul’s anecdote about the fish tank to illustrate the first type of anecdotes found in the single homeless narratives: support for the main story. A large number of anecdotes had as their main purpose to subtly emphasise a point or to make an affirmation stronger within the main storyline.

Paul inserted the story of the fish tank in his narration after telling me that he had recovered from alcohol on his own (without any outside support) and similarly he had exited homelessness of his own accord:

‘One thing that did happen, I inherited a guy, who wasn’t very well, he got Parkinson's. And because I'd done care work, long story, I adopted him. And his family were not local. I used to pop up and chat with him in the evenings, and ... he passed away. And I spoke to the family and they live in [adjacent town], so they had to come down and clear the flat. [The deceased person’s daughter asked:] Is there anything in the flat that you want? Now I'd been to the flat many many times, but you don’t look. So I went to the flat: [I asked myself:] what do I need? There was nothing. But he had a fish tank, this size [approximates size with his hands]. Never had fish in it, but he’d got everything: the pump, the lights. She said: would you have that [the fish tank]? I said, I know nothing about fish!! I haven't got a clue, I know how to eat them! And I said: I'll take it and if I don't make any use of it, I'll give it to a care home or something like that ... So I took it, cleaned it all up, put some water in it, it's got all the lights ... no fish, no plants, no nothing. And on Saturday night, I'd watched so much rubbish on television, it was drivin' me mad. I love to read. (...) I put the light out, I'd been reading for nearly three hours... I said, blimey! Anyway, the pet shop opens on a Sunday. So I went down and I said: I know nothing about fish, and I bought three fish, but they’re not gold, they’re multi-coloured ones, they cost me about three pound. And I bought some plants, got home, got it all set up, put the lights on - it was fabulous! And now I've got seven gold fish! And I wake up in the morning, I go: good morning! It's things like that that makes you think... I know it's not a big responsibility, but it's something you have to think about. I'm a silly old bugger!’ (Paul, 60, independent flat)

The story of the fish tank confirmed Paul's affirmation of his complete recovery – he presented himself as someone who could now assume consistent responsibility, in taking care of fish. Whilst being light-hearted about the added responsibility (‘I know
it’s not a big responsibility’, ‘I’m a silly old bugger’), Paul narrated the story in detail and the way it was narrated suggests this was a story which is in fact meant to show his ability to take on responsibility. The story starts with his reluctance to take on the task (‘I know nothing about fish, I haven’t got a clue!’) and finishes with him successfully maintaining seven gold fish. In an overall context of elaborating on his role as a resident representative to the Board of HSS and his renewed relationship with his children, his recovery on his own etc., the fish tank story comes as another confirmation of Paul’s new, responsible self. This anecdote supports the main story.

Paul’s narration was linear and, as will be shown later, static in time direction. Paul was not concentrating on elaborating on the future, but aimed to give a clear rendition of the past and present. The fish tank anecdote contributed to this.

7.3.3.2. Secondary message: the road trip

This subsection uses the road trip anecdote to illustrate the second type of anecdotes found in the study: the ones aiming to provide a secondary message to the main narrative. The subsection uses two accounts of road trips: Alice’s and Paul’s.

Various ways of travel, eloping or escaping were present in many narratives. The road trip was generally situated before the homelessness event, and it was recounted as a ‘different’ experience, which reminded the narrator of a secondary stage of their life.

Generally described in picturesque terms, the road trip came as a solution, at the moment in the interviewees’ lives when ‘things started to go wrong’ (Alice, 66, flat), generally just before the homelessness event. Thus, Alice narrated the episode when, due to her mental illness, she didn’t feel she could live with her aunt anymore. She stated she had decided to ‘run away’ – so she co-opted a friend in planning a trip ‘up North’:

‘I got into her Range Rover[caravan] and she got in, and off we went [up North]. And then her mother lived in West Midlands. That's quite far. So we stopped there, we got clean and changed and bathed etcetera, had some nice food and then we went off again to Carlisle. I don't know if you know what Carlisle is like, but it's as flat as a pancake. And it's very very marshy. And in wet weather there’s a flood. However I didn't ever know that, I only ever knew it freezing cold. And anyway, Georgie [her friend] went back home. I think it was September, yes it was. It rained and rained and rained.' (Alice, 66, flat)
Alice went on to describe her adventure in the North as different to what she had expected. She returned South after the winter, broken and poor: ‘too much silence got me ill’. Shortly after her return, Alice started to attend to her emotional issues. Later on in the interview, Alice stressed the importance of her road trip; she said she had never since felt ‘freer’ and that this was a reminder that in the past she had been able to embark on a challenging mission.

In the paragraph underneath, Paul described his travel to Jersey, with a friend:

‘I'd been going out with a girl, which was a waste of time, and he [friend] had just finished going out with a girl... and I was working. And he said: do you fancy going away? I said: where to? He went: a holiday; do you fancy going to Jersey? [I said:] Why not? It cost us sixteen pound to get there and we were there within three weeks. We got to the airport in Jersey. Nowhere to live, no job, no soul. And we did everything. We worked on farms, we worked on bars, [helped with] the chairs on the beach and we survived. And I did that for four years. It was brilliant. Young, free and single. The only reason we got back was – we got bored.’ (Paul, 60, independent flat)

Paul stressed the casual nature of his decision: ‘do you fancy going? – why not?’ The anecdote reflects an improvising, ‘free’ personality with which Paul does not associate with any longer. Throughout his interview he had been stressing his maturity, calculation and even conservatism when taking decisions. The above anecdote was not in character, but it was adding a different perspective over Paul’s person as a whole – it showed that he had once been spontaneous and youthful.

Other anecdotes narrating the road trip were even more detailed. They always referred to a finite event of the past (looking for the lost father, running away from broken relationship etc.). On one occasion, the road trip kept repeating, as the narrator found his life revolved in circles. Thus in Jimmy’s account, when life spiralled out of control in the UK, he would flee to South Africa, and he would return to the UK if he lost control of his life in South Africa.

The road trip contributed to the narrative and to the definition of self in a secondary way: it added a different perspective of the narrator: the youthful narrator, the adventurer, the individual caught in between two worlds. In this way, the road trip contributed to the building of identity, as suggested in the literature (Snow and Anderson 1987, Montgomery et al 2009, Lovell 1997).
7.3.3.3. Enhanced identity work: The hero anecdote

This section discusses the hero anecdote as an illustration of the anecdote type which was used to enhance the identity work taking place in the narrative.

Enhanced identity work anecdotes were placed alongside the main narrative, but emphasising the narrator’s image. Concentrated in meaning, this type of anecdote was intended to focus on the definition of self. For instance, in a disempowered narrative, the main role this type of anecdote had was to reveal the worth or value of the narrator, whose actions were otherwise rendered powerless by the unfortunate streak of events/abuse from other people etc.

In broken narratives, the hero story was placed to help recover loss of identity. The story appeared when the narrator needed to boost their image or give weight or meaning to a specific event or attitude.

Cal’s account was filled with descriptions of his good deeds towards other homeless people or people who were more vulnerable than himself. He believed everything in his life had collapsed all of a sudden (due to an accident) and through no fault of his own. From having a job, a married life and children, to losing all, living homeless in graveyards and forests and being diagnosed as alcoholic. In the quote underneath, Cal is attempting to recover the perceived loss of self, by presenting himself in a different (positive) light:

‘I mean, I've been cooking in an old people's home - it's disgusting! There is this one place, I was a weekend cook there, and when I started working there, they warned me about this lady. They said, there's this blind lady, she had had an operation and she got left blind, so she had ended up getting stuck in this home, they said, she’s really fussy... I'm cooking all this crap, I'm trying to do the best I can, [it's] rubbish, you know, [I try to make it taste] decent, and I talk to her. I say what's wrong with this food? She told me what was wrong with the food, so I fix that, and she said: I haven't had a fruit in a long time, and you know what, the entire time she had been in this home, they hadn't bought her a bit of fruit. So I went and bought her fruit, she was so grateful, she never gave me any trouble. But guess what, she died two weeks after that, but I think she died possibly a little bit happier...’ (Cal, 47, shared house)
The fragment on the previous page has the features of an anecdote, as it is a story within a story. It has a beginning, middle and end, it benefits from its own style and its own message. The story starts with a first sentence setting the scene: ‘I’ve been cooking in an old people’s home - it’s disgusting!’ The role of this phrase is to underline the difference between the place Cal worked at and the present environment, where he lived. This already placed the old people’s home in a different, ‘other’ category. There are other qualifiers along the way, placed to emphasise the undesirable status of the ‘old people’s home’ as well as of the woman Cal had decided to help: ‘they warned me about this lady’, ‘[it’s] rubbish’, ‘I’m cooking all this crap’ etc. The story’s ‘complicating action’ (Labov and Waletzky 1967) is when Cal decides to ask the ‘lady’ what was wrong with the food. He then explains that getting a piece of fresh fruit had meant a lot for his protégée (‘she was so grateful’). The story closes with the woman’s death, making Cal’s gesture even more significant: ‘she died two weeks after that, but I think she died possibly a little bit happier’.

The anecdote presented Cal in a favourable light (Goffman 1963). This was done by placing the anecdote a short while after Cal recounted the homelessness event. The story aimed to transmit a message of generosity and helpfulness, Cal being presented as the person able to act when others could not. Hero anecdotes put the narrator in a better light and redeemed an identity rendered frail by the previously narrated circumstances.

7.4. Second level of classification: narrative typologies according to contents

Returning to the classification of the narratives of single homelessness, a further typology, according to main content of the narratives emerged. This typology continues to refer to the interview as a whole. Six types of narratives appeared: the acceptance story, the progress story, the iteration of regret and loss, the disassociation narrative, the disempowered narrative and the reset story. Some of these stories belonged to the linear category, some to the broken narrative, as described in the table on the next page. The quotes from the fourth column in Table 7.2. are extracted from the interviews and offer further insight into the content of the narratives, as the interviewees expressed it.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAIN CATEGORY (according to style)</th>
<th>SUBCATEGORY</th>
<th>Main features of narrative</th>
<th>Narrator (Gender, Age, style of housing)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Linear: ('contingent' — Bury, 2001)</td>
<td>Regressive (in time)</td>
<td>Acceptance story</td>
<td>Clarification/explanation, Reflexive over past</td>
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<td>Iterations of regret and loss</td>
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<td>Sad, but at peace with past, Declaration of a future peaceful existence</td>
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<td>Progressive</td>
<td>The progress story</td>
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<td>Declaration of a goal and plans for the future, Goal by manipulation ('slightly different story', Danny, 18, shared flat)</td>
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<td>Static</td>
<td>The reset story</td>
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<td>Recovery from addiction (all stories), Interviewee has been through organised process of recovery (Emmaus, AdAction, Narcotics Anonymous)</td>
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<td>Broken ('moral' — Bury, 2001)</td>
<td>Disassociation narrative</td>
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<td>Justifying, Act of fate, 'Somebody else's fault' (Darren, 63, flat), Mental illness</td>
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<td>Deempowered narrative</td>
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<td>Justifying, No control, Life takes control (Laura, 35, shared flat), Others assume control (Iain, 41, shared house)</td>
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The figure underneath illustrates both classifications combined:

**Figure 7.4. Linear vs. broken narratives according to content**

Some stories belonged to two sub-categories. For instance, Kate’s story was one of loss and regret, but at the same time it had elements of a progress story, as Kate had found motivation to change her life around and presented goals and plans for the future. Only two stories crossed the boundary between regressive and progressive. They both belonged to young individuals. Kate and Tara’s narration of the past was regressive, but their orientation to the future progressive.

In terms of style, there were other features that distinguished narratives. For instance, the short and long version, specialised language, fact distortion etc. These are details of style and have already been discussed in the methodology chapter.

### 7.5. Types of stories told by HSS residents

Section 7.5. discusses examples of each of the six types of narratives found in the present study, according to their contents. This takes into account the overarching categorisation into linear and broken narratives and progressive, regressive and static. As noted above, the six narratives of homelessness were: the acceptance narrative,

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75 I use ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ interchangeably, as an accepted narrative convention (Earthy, Cuncev and Cronin 2015).
the iteration of regret and loss, the progress narrative, the reset narrative, the disassociation narrative and the disempowered narrative.

7.5.1. Linear narratives

As could be seen in table 7.2., four types of narratives followed a linear style of telling the story: the acceptance story, the iterations of regret and loss, the progress story and the reset story. The present section discusses each of these stories.

7.5.1.1. The acceptance story (a linear regressive form of narrative)

The acceptance story belonged to the linear category. These were the simplest stories to listen to, as their narration was consistent in time, space and characters. The acceptance story had been told and retold over and over again. It was sometimes rich in side stories which were used to clarify its purpose.

Alice’s story (66, flat) was linear, full of illustrations and reflexive over her past. Alice narrated a homelessness experience which dated before policy requirements of emotional and financial support (thus before Supporting People) – she told she had had no clear support from institutions during her homelessness (and before HSS), or if there was support, she had not been made aware of it. She had slept rough, in ‘cardboard city’ after her parents died. Although from a wealthy family, she had had no financial or emotional support for most of her life. Alice spent a lot of time narrating the episode of homelessness in detail. She was proud of having survived it:

‘But I can remember my sister-in-law, when she visited me in doo-da [a shelter], she came and saw him [Alice’s boyfriend] and she said: it absolutely stinks in here! And it did, really really did. And he asked me to marry him. And again, I’m always saying yes to these people… I think I said yes. I can’t remember if I said yes then, or later. We went to visit a priest [continues with story of attempting to get married].’ (Alice, 66, flat)

As she narrated, Alice was reflexive, but not judgemental over her life choices: ‘I’m always saying yes to these people [who were trying to take advantage of her situation]’. However in the end Alice did not try to make sense of her story. She rather accepted it as it was, leaving the listener to draw conclusions from it. She did not blame anyone for her misfortunes, simply narrated her adventures without regret or judgement. In a later passage, when asked if she would change anything to her story, she mentioned
an initial regret of never having married and not having children, but explained that decision was not haunting her anymore.

For narrators of stories of acceptance, the interview did not pose a moral threat to their self. The event of homelessness existed and was narrated, but formed intrinsic part of their life story. It was accepted as part of a new (post-homeless) persona, and shaped it in equal measure as other significant events in the narrator’s life, such as living in institutions, mental illness or break from family.

Acceptance stories were devoid of moralising elements. They were illustrations of the interviewees’ lives. Paul stated his motivation of painting a true image of the ‘single homeless person’. Paul’s story was one of the most structured and easy flowing narrations, in terms of style. He spoke almost without interruption and offered a clear sequence of events. Paul also mentioned he had told the same story many times beforehand, as he now found himself at the end of his supported housing journey; this might be an explanation for the specifically synthetized style of his narration. His story provides a paradigm for the acceptance story, which is a story meant for clarification. It starts ‘from the beginning’ – the moment when his life started on a path towards eventual homelessness - and enunciates a series of important elements along the way: the emotional and mental fatigue (‘I was mentally and physically exhausted’); the house as reference point; the harmful acquaintances; the stressful job; the lack of understanding from the partner; the break-up of the relationship which culminates with selling the house and thus the beginning of homelessness:

‘I would like to start at the beginning and I think it might then roll over into... Err, it started about twelve years ago. I had a very good job. And used to do a lot of mileage (...). And one of my friends got killed in a car crash. You were on call twenty four hours a day. While the print paper was working, we were on call. He lived up in Birmingham, he got called at four o’clock in the morning, went on the motorway, somebody was going the wrong way and killed him. And it made me think. Cause I used to make a lot of miles, and I was away from home at least three nights a week, and then I ended up covering his area. (...) And I was in Manchester one day. And I used to stay up there. And it got to about three o’clock in the afternoon and I rang the office and I said: I’ve had enough. I’m absolutely exhausted. And I drove from Manchester to Liverpool, that’s about one hundred and sixty miles, and I couldn’t remember the drive. I was so mentally and physically exhaustion. And I thought, that’s it. I am not going back on the roads. To cut a long story short, I resigned, at the time I got a partner. I
had a very nice house, and the idea was that I would take a year out, we would sell the house, we would downsize and I would spend a year doing up the new property. We sold the house, we bought an old cottage, I started work on it, and after three or four months, my manager where I used to work rang me up. He said: I got a job for you. (...) I said: I don't want it! [Went on to describe argument with girlfriend] I said [to his girlfriend]: I'm sorry, but I'm not getting back on the road. I said: if you [girlfriend] want me to kill myself, fine, I'll go. So she went to her mother's. (...) And I put the house up for sale, 'cause the house was in my name, sold it, she had more than a half, and all the furniture, everything, and I came out [broke] ...' (Paul, 60, independent flat)

Paul's narration was a continuous streak of 'and': 'and I was away'; 'and it made me think'. Whenever a phrase did not start with 'and', a meaningful event would be narrated. Paul was aware of the length in narration and attempted to shorten the story: 'to cut a story short'. The succession of events without break stopped with the loss of the house and the homelessness event. After a short break for water, Paul went on to tell the rest of his life story, in the same explanatory narrative style.

The motif of the house appeared in several narratives and it posed difficulties for interpretation. Its position in the narrative did not initially seem natural. It was not located in the restful, problem-free sections of the narrator's life, but rather it was found just before the crisis event. Following comparison across several narrative sequences, it emerged that location in the narrative was important. For instance, in the above paragraph, Paul initiated his story by explaining when he had started to experience a lack of emotional balance: once his workmate died in a car crash. He realised that he needed to change something, so he decided to buy a cottage. The house was Paul's last attempt at salvaging a 'normal life' (in his definition later in the interview). The house, here and in other interviews, was an oasis of safety and security and working on it offered Paul a tangible proof that everything would be alright and difficulties could be remedied. The house was mentioned again only when 'normal life' could not be maintained any longer, in fact the house was the last tangible thing Paul lost before the crisis moment. This is the only reference to a 'house' for a large part of the interview. After homelessness, HSS follows and, as discussed in the previous chapter, the interviewees did not see HSS as 'home'.

What happened after the crisis moment - homelessness and HSS, was an unsettling period in Paul's life, but in the acceptance story, it was still narrated in an accepting and reflexive fashion:
‘I’ll be honest, it wasn’t a shock [arriving at HSS]. Possibly because I had seen [hostel at HSS] for what it was. But beforehand I had had no idea it existed… you know, it wasn’t part of my life, I had no reason to know… Like the guy selling the Big Issue… Yes, I’d buy the Big Issue, but I wouldn’t have understood the reasons why. Now I understand that. And I don’t condemn anyone. Certainly don’t judge the book by its cover. People judge me by my cover, they think I am what I am… [refers to his style of dress]. Yes, I’m flash, but underneath, I was that person, with the dog.’ (Paul, 60, independent flat)

The acceptance stories were the clearest, most linear and least moralising of the interviewees’ accounts. They were regressive in style, as they focused on narrating the past, rather than looking to the future.

7.5.1.2. Iterations of regret and loss (a linear regressive form of narrative)

Another linear and regressive narrative was the iteration of regret and loss. These were non-blaming linear accounts of the individual’s life, where regret was the dominant feeling. The interviewees felt regretful of their life choices, but they were altogether at peace with it. The stories included the telling of shameful, regretful behaviour such as addiction or burglary. The discourse was filled with a vocabulary of shame: ‘I’m not proud of what I’ve done’; ‘I’m ashamed’; ‘I feel sorry’. However, the narrator declared they had come to a resolution with their past and in some interviews there was also a declaration of a future peaceful existence. The resolution with their past was what differentiated the iterations of regret and loss from other narratives which included feelings of shame and unease about the past (such as the disassociation narrative).

Tara’s interview was filled with her description of her feelings of regret, shame and sorry about the drug and alcohol abusive part of her life:

‘Uhm, er, well when I was up at [project outside of HSS], it was all drugs, drugs, drugs, drink, drink, drink, drink up there. (…) It was just all the drugs in there, and I was just getting really bad, I was getting behind on my rent, going out drinking every day, drinking alcohol, spending all my money and not eating. And that’s what it was like, it was all drugs. It’s drugs, drugs, drugs, drink, drink, drink. And I was thinking to myself: no, I can’t go through that anymore, I was making myself really ill. It took me a while to get off, not to have any drugs. (…) And then now looking back, I keep saying to myself: Tara, you were the stupidest bitch, sorry for saying that word, you were the stupidest bitch for
getting involved with drugs in the first place. Because before I was taking like, I'm not proud of what I've done, in my past, I regret it. I was four and a half months pregnant with my daughter, but I had a really bad addiction to speed, I was taking that quite a lot. I was like, seven grams of that a day. And it was just making me really ill, and when I went cold turkey, when I found out I was four and a half months pregnant with my daughter, and I was thinking: oh, what damage have I done to my daughter, that was my main concern, my daughter. ‘Cause at the time I didn't know I was pregnant. And then, erm, lucky enough I stopped, and it was cold turkey and, touch wood [knocks on some wood] I haven't gone back - have an odd can of beer and basically that's it for me.’

(Tara, 40, flat)

The story was one of reconciliation with the drug ridden part of her past. Tara did this in an explanatory and detailed fashion. Each iteration of the regretful past would speed up the process of healing. Tara talked in great detail about her regret and the facets of her regret: regret for spending money on addiction, regret for distancing herself from her childhood friends, regret for abusing drugs during pregnancy. Her regret was clear, focused and targeted, and it only referred to the past, not to the present situation.

When describing how her children had been taken away from her, Tara emphasised the lack of support from social and legal services at the time. This was an attempt at clarifying the event to herself and it was not, as such, an attempt at reducing her own blame - she accepted full responsibility for it -, but rather to explain the helplessness and lack of support she had felt on that occasion. She believed the event would not occur in the same manner in the present time:

‘Obviously I was going through to social services and saying: look, I couldn't cope with the children and at the time I couldn't, I was being honest with them. Erm, and then they set it up for once a month at the weekend that I just have a couple of hours at the weekend on my own without the children. And then the next minute I knew, it was like, oh excuse me, the court case was brought, and it was like: wow, hang on a minute. And they said: right we're taking the children off of ya [sic]. (…). No, took them off me while I was in court, while I was in hospital. And I turned round and I said: well, I think that's out of order, trying to appeal against it, went back to court and they just wouldn't have it. So it was like: well fine, don't give me a chance to explain what happened. (…) I know it's not their fault for what they done and everything, everybody said you can't blame them. I'm like, I'll blame them because I want to blame them. I was
like, blaming them instead of blaming myself, sort of thing. And now it’s just like, well no, it was my fault being in a domestic violent relationship, and not getting out of it, basically when I had the choice to do so. It was just like: well fine, if they want to carry on [to take the children away], that’s fine, I thought, yeah.’ (Tara, 40, flat)

The narrative is two-faceted. In the first part, Tara blamed the services for depriving her of contact with her children. Towards the end of the narrative, she assumed blame, almost as if this were expected of her after saying that ‘everyone said you can’t blame them’. This was a narrative that had changed, probably following numerous key-working meetings and counselling sessions, into the stance the institution and its staff would take. Throughout Tara’s story, two feelings co-existed. On the one hand, helplessness when confronted with adversities of life and regret about past behaviours. On the other hand, an understanding of previous mistakes and even a proclamation for a better life. There were progressive elements in Tara’s discourse.

Thus, in some iterations of regret and loss, the regretful story could turn into a positive experience through the means of the interview. On the one hand, for the narrators of stories of regret and loss, the interview might have offered an opportunity to remember past experiences and narrativise those moments (Riessman, 1993). On the other hand, it was seen as an opportunity to share the experience with a much larger audience and to turn it into a lesson for people in the same situation:

‘Every sort of problem you can link to each other, I have definitely had it. And if my story helps other people not end up in this situation I am in, then so be it! Like I say, if it stops someone else end up as I am now, at twenty four nearly twenty five, starting my life again, trying to rebuild from nothing when you had everything’. (Kate, 24, flat)

In the stories of loss and regret, fault was assumed. This allowed the narrator to move on and have a positive or neutral outlook over the rest of their lives. Generally, people narrating stories of loss and regret had been through the supported housing system for a number of years and in that time they had had counselling and other similar talking

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76 Tara’s story found itself in-between ‘regret and loss’ and ‘progress’ – one of the few narratives which crossed classifications. This classification does not claim strict boundaries between stories, as due to the qualitative nature of the data, overlaps are possible. The classification does provide, however, an overview of the identity work performed by the interviewees through the means of their narratives.
therapies, which might account for the structured approach to their life stories and the clear ‘admission’ of regret and guilt.

7.5.1.3. The progress story (a linear progressive narrative)

Another type of linear story was the progress story. Unlike the acceptance story and the iterations of loss and regret, the progress story had a different time direction. It was a progressive narrative, where even when the teller narrated the past, there were a large number of references to the future. The interviewee’s attention switched from the past to the future. The past was ‘done’ and therefore considered not worth dwelling on, whereas the future was projected as full of opportunities. The progress narrative remained, like the regressive ones, explanatory (‘contingent’, Bury 2001). It was told linearly, in easy time sequences. It always included a declaration of goals and purposes for the future. This made it a much stronger narrative. Generally all elements included in the narrative served the purpose of reinforcing the goal for the narrator themselves and for the audience. Progress narratives exhibited a positive, fresh outlook on life.

Allen’s story for example had few anecdotes adding meaning. The main storyline was maintained from beginning to end. It was clearly divided into three stages: ‘me at home’, ‘me abusing drugs’ and ‘me now’ (recovered). Allen did not deviate from the time sequence of these three stages. He was focused on his message for each stage. In ‘me at home’, he stressed the lack of emotional support from his parents, in ‘me with drugs’ he stressed the importance of a peer group, in ‘me now’ he focused on his pride at having achieved everything on his own. He finished with a positive outlook on his new life:

‘So I chose the happy time. Just like having clarity on who you are, it’s just taking baby steps for now, and then sort of taking the big steps in the future, when you realise who you are and what you’re doing.’ (Allen, 23, flat)

Allen had started using drugs and alcohol when he had left home (a little before his sixteenth birthday). After a period of homelessness, he had registered as homeless with Sea City council and had been moved from hostel to hostel until HSS. With the help of family and friends, he had recovered from his drug abuse. He maintained sobriety by keeping himself active and busy and reasserting his new found independence: ‘I’ve become my own person’. His account was rich in vocabulary which appropriated every action: ‘I evaluated myself, looked back and thought’. He owned all
successes and took great pride in recovery. He did not justify his previous life choices, but did qualify them as ‘wrong’, without dwelling on them. His story was concentrated on goals and the next step in his life.

7.5.1.4. The reset story (a linear static narrative)

The last of the linear narratives was the reset story. The reset story was another factual and linear narrative. Its direction was static - focused on day to day life rather than the future or the past. The reset story was still an explanatory, descriptive story, as the teller did not blame anyone or pass the guilt, nor attempt to extract moral value from its narration. This type of story was characteristic of people who had been through a process of rehabilitation.

Pace, for instance, told the story of his long (twenty eight years) drug addiction, as if from an objective outsider’s perspective. He did not blame the services for always being evicted and did not blame anyone or anything else for his long-term addiction. In the following paragraph he told of one of his many evictions in a matter-of-fact way:

‘Yeah, yeah, I had five years in there [another project in another city] and then on new year’s eve I'd been away for a couple of weeks, so I'd been, I'd been on a cruise, I came back to Sea City just for the new year, and it all kicked off on new year’s eve: I'd drunk three bottles of vodka, I wasn’t that silly taking heroin anymore, I’d done some rehab, but I was still drinking and smoking cannabis, and like so it all kicked off and I assaulted another resident. And for good measure I assaulted the manager as well.’ (Pace, 46, flats)

In the above paragraph, Pace described losing his housing due to using alcohol and drugs and being aggressive thereafter. He was precise about the type of drugs he was using and the effects they had had on his reactions. He was (as often during reset story interviews) presenting the cause of his eviction in a light-hearted and detached way: ‘For good measure I assaulted the manager as well’.

Pace further declared he was aware of the positive aspects of not being a drug addict at present (at the time of the narration):

‘Because, when, when you’re in that addiction, you’re trapped, it’s like, making money, getting drugs, doing drugs, making money, getting drugs, doing drugs, and you can never get out of that triangle. (…) But no one wanted to, I could, I couldn’t just like, pack my rucksack and bugger off for three days. [Now I]
Wouldn’t have to, don’t have to think about oh, where am I going to get my drugs from for three days, no. I’ve got the freedom to do what I want now. Which is good.’ (Pace, 46, flat)

Pace’s story was structured around his former addiction. Even before the interview, he had clarified when his addiction had started, when it became worse and when it started impacting on his lifestyle. This clarity in story-telling was more prominent in reset stories than in other interviews and it might have been connected to the different route into the housing system of people with addictions. Pace’s story had become clear and structured, following a story line and a clear goal, through purposeful repetition. He was a member of Narcotics Anonymous, where he had experienced a lot of written therapy. He acknowledged it was ‘all that written work’ that kept him sober and resisting addiction for such a long period of time:

‘Getting clean and sober and sort of sitting down and having a bit of a look at my life and I mean, all this written work I’m doing, the twelve-step first year, it’s all about past behaviours, and things that have happened. It’s, you sort of look at all that.’ (Pace, 46, flat)

Addiction was central in Pace’s story. His life was constructed around strategies of coping with relapse and although dry for a long time, he did not consider himself independent from addiction. His narrative reflected this – it was static, stuck in the present, in the moment in time when he was not using drugs, but unsure of what the future might hide. Because of this lingering fear of restarting drug use, Pace was reluctant to move to more independent accommodation. His was an addiction narrative, influenced by institutional discourse (in this case, the NA fellowship jargon, which stressed, among other aspects, taking each day as it comes) and orientated towards means of maintaining equilibrium rather than moving on. Pace’s story lacked regret or any other intense emotions. He mentioned only having experienced full emotions since he had stopped using drugs, and this had overwhelmed him:

‘That’s the thing as well, feelings. Having feelings, you know - what’s all that about? Feelings? I’ve never had to deal with them, half a crown of gear and a bottle of vodka, feel what? Yeah it’s … so I’ve never done, never did feelings, you know, you ain’t [sic] got feelings when you’re conning someone, or robbing somebody or , you know, it, it’s … I don’t know, I’ve got to wash up or I’ve got to run to the shop or, anything but a feeling. But I don’t like feelings, but it’s part of life, ain’t it?’ (Pace, 46, flat)
The reset stories were without exception stories about addiction which had been overcome through a painstaking, voluntary and conscious process. This gave them a specific style and different voice to all other narratives, characterised by complete lack of blaming and concentration on the present. These addiction narratives were similar in style, structure and content to the AA stories identified in studies of narratives of addiction (Hanninen and Koski-Jannes 1999).

7.5.2. Broken narratives

Disassociation and disempowered narratives belonged to the ‘broken’ narrative category. In contrast to all types of linear narratives described in the previous section, broken narratives were not told in a linear fashion. In these narratives, the life story did not flow in a conventional rhythm. It was often interrupted, moved forward or backward at great speed, or simply cancelled, the story thus going to a completely different subject. When telling a broken narrative, the teller concentrated on the identity work and not the story as such. In some linear types of narration, the teller would experience joy just by sharing an interesting story with their audience. In broken narratives, each story had a clear identity weight.

In broken narratives, after always being exposed at the beginning, the homelessness event shaped the whole interview. It was quintessential for the interview and its telling occurred without prompting. The rest of the narrative worked towards indicating a sense of morality for this event.

7.5.2.1. The disassociation narrative (the first type of broken narrative)

In the disassociation narrative, the interviewee perceived homelessness as denigration of self. The narrative was constructed around the narrator’s attempt to disassociate themselves from this event. The narrator aimed to build a new persona or to return to the previous, pre-homelessness one. The story was the best channel for ‘reverse passing’ (Frank 2013), as it offered the teller metacontrol. As main creator of the story, the teller could change the meaning of the homelessness experience.

Before I asked the first question, Chris told me the reason for his homelessness in one paragraph:

‘I got homeless when I went bankrupt, eighteen months ago. Because of the credit crunch. I lost my home. And when I lost the house, the same day I had
an accident. I hit the back of my head. My skull got open. I had major concussion. Delirious. I was walking around the streets of Sea City for six weeks. I have vague memories of sleeping in parks. And then a friend saw me, and I hadn’t shaved or washed for six weeks, he was concerned and he rung an ambulance. And they took me in, they did a CAT scan, showed that my skull was pretty damaged and I don't remember much, I was in hospital for a couple of months. In a neurological unit. And then because of that, that helped me get into the HSS scheme. It was first at HSS1 and I came here [HSS2] just before Christmas. And really, [I am now] sort of in the process of recovery, once I get my life back together, basic social relationships, finances, that sort of thing.'

(Chris, 46, shared house)

The reason for Chris’s homelessness included the unexpected act of fate which was out of his control (an accident), his state of delirium whilst living in the streets (again, when he did not exercise full control of the situation), the hospital and then living at HSS. He also mentioned his expectation of going back to his usual self, thus indicating that in his view there hadn’t occurred any denigration of self in the process: ‘once I get my life back together’. Although factual, Chris’s first paragraph is illustrative of the whole interview. It was already populated with blaming vocabulary (‘because of the credit crunch’) and it included a first allusion that the present self was not his accepted self (‘sort of in the process of recovery’). He hinted at the fact that life as he lived it at present was not the life he defined himself by: ‘once I get my life back together’. Chris went on to present his advanced technical skill in economics, his affiliations with notable academics and his prior reputation to which he hoped to return as soon as possible:

‘I was running my own business, Management Consultant. Specialising in innovation and product development and advanced manufacturing techniques. Doing quite a lot, talks, I worked at [notable] University with a friend of mine, looking at their five year plan. ‘Cause you know, their funding changed. So I was helping them with that. And that’s quite a sense of achievement. Because if you read the Vice-Chancellor’s statement, it was literally one of the reports in my book.’ (Chris, 46, shared house)

The presence of the homelessness event at the very beginning of the interview, combined with the presentation of the discrepancy between his present status and his previous job, stressed the importance the homelessness event had on Chris. It was
viewed exclusively as an unexpected and mismatched denigration of self. Even more, further in the interview, Chris explained his homelessness as an act of fate:

‘There is that saying that in life the biggest stresses are: death in the family, moving home, losing your job, well, all three happened to me. Being in an accident as well. And being on the street.’ (Chris, 46, shared house)

Although he did not voice this, it was clear from Chris’s narrative that he saw homelessness as a fall, an act of fate difficult to make sense of. Therefore it needed to be seen as temporary, until ‘I get my life back together’. Later in the interview, he mentioned he refused to get involved in the running of the project where he lived, as he saw himself in transition there. This temporary element as well as abstraction of any guilt in the process was important for Chris’s well-being. Chris exited the homelessness persona by referring back to his past self.

In the previously discussed stories of regret and loss, fault and loss were assumed, and the narrator managed to move on to a different stage of their lives. In the disassociation narrative, any control over own actions or decisions was passed on. There was much more lack of control than in the loss and regret stories.

Similar to Chris, Cal opposed his lowest point to a period in his life which he considered successful. Cal’s loss of status had been significant. He became homeless suddenly, following a series of unfortunate events: losing his business, his home, his wife and having an accident. He eventually tried to commit suicide, which was in his presentation ‘quite embarrassing’. Following description of his breakdown, he told about managing to carry on and turning the negative events in his life into something positive (opening a charitable bookshop) which had him at the centre:

’[drawing the sketch of the bookshop] um, so we got all these offices, so what we’ve done, we opened up a bookshop. So what we have actually done, it’s the most open plan bookshop ... the writer is now sitting [in the centre]...which is appropriate... All round the outside of his office, and the wall and here, is books. 77 So literally, the whole of the free space is absolutely full with books. You know, everyone just walks through the door here, just walks past all these bloody books. And there is yours truly, nice little armchair, there, nice little table there, reading lamp there, donations box there!’ (Cal, 47, shared house)

77 Cal was known among staff and residents at HSS for his knowledge regarding books and for having owned a bookshop in the past.
The story of the bookshop placed Cal at the centre of attention, in a socially dignified position, benefitting from goods which acknowledged his librarian status: armchair, table, reading lamp. Cal did further work on recovering his status by separating himself from the rest of the homeless. Having slept in the streets for extensive amounts of time, he felt he had the strength to come out unharmed but stronger. The homelessness event had helped him understand his strength.

In the broken narrative, talk about the interviewees’ different definitions of self happened through the narrative streak, but also outside of the main narrative, through the means of illustrating anecdotes. The anecdotes became pieces of the self-definition puzzle. Such were the hero stories told abundantly by Cal in order to illustrate the difference between himself and other homeless and his ability to help, from his privileged position. I found numerous instances of anecdotes which helped define the interviewees, as already presented in section 7.3.

7.5.2.2. The disempowered narrative (the second type of broken narrative)

The disempowered narrative was another type of broken narrative where interviewees’ story unfolded in a non-linear and fragmented way. Moving further than the disassociation narrative, in the disempowered narrative, the story-teller and main character of the narration completely lacked control. Control was taken over by others or the narrator felt life had taken control over their own actions. These were, similarly to disassociation narratives, justifying narratives, where blaming on external factors took place and the interviewee was not at fault. In these narratives, feelings took a leading role, especially feelings of loneliness, shame and fear.

Laura’s story was told from the perspective of the victim. Throughout her life, she had found herself in difficult situations, experiencing no control over them. Her first episode of homelessness had occurred at the end of her relationship with a violent man. Her story was filled with feelings of shame and fear.

‘I walked home that night. I didn’t know what to do... And so, then there was a knock on the door. And I said watch, Andrew, ‘cause he would always look outside the window... And by magic, he did. There was [sic] eight policemen down at the door and he says to me: what have you done? And I kept down and said: oh, I don’t know. And he went downstairs, like he couldn’t care, he was like, come on, just drop me in jail, he wasn’t frightened at all, cause he was in prison before... and he said: oh yeah, this is a cushy life, isn’t it? [life in jail].
So then I had a doctor in Cheltenham, he chatted me over and took pictures of me. And then I had to write like a statement. Of how it all [violence] happened. I had to sit down till one o’clock in the morning. And then I had to go back. And I was alone, and no support. Nobody came around to see if I was ok, I was on my own, clutching this big huge rabbit, because I was... I was just crying my heart out into it, ’cause I was afraid. They thought I was an illegal immigrant carrying suitcases, he actually said that to me, I felt really, I felt ashamed, that I was classed as something like that, which wasn’t true!’ (Laura, 35, flat)

Laura’s story culminated with her crying and the recording stopping for a while. She described lacking control over all events in her life: ‘they [in this case, police men] just pushed me to any old thing’. Throughout her narration, a feeling of being unable to cope was prevalent. Laura did not narrate any event in her life where she had found herself in a position of being able to cope. At the beginning of her interview she stated: ’It was just me and I just couldn’t cope at all. That is how I became homeless’. Her mental state played a big part in the imbalance: ‘my anxiety got the better of me’. During narration, she often cried or mentioned having cried at specific moments in time: ‘I was getting to tears’. In her story, men appeared to attract her in a cycle of damaging events. She lost control early in the relationship: ‘I totally broke down, I couldn’t concentrate on anything.’

Like all broken narratives, Laura’s story was fragmented in structure as well as in style. It moved rapidly from stunning sets and lovely people to desperate situations, homelessness and anxiety:

‘And that’s when we came to Wales and I visited Ben for a little while, and I met his family, and they were quite old fashioned. Had their own garden at the back, they’d grow their own vegetables and... just very old fashioned. (…) And it was one of the best times I have ever had. In my mind and in my life. It was so lovely and I met so many people. It was great! (…)

And I said; you know, I really do feel for you [for Ben], I love you. But what he said [in response] to me hurt like hell... He wanted me to be the mother of his children, but now he said: no, I don’t want you to be the mother of my children now. That tore me like a knife. Absolutely threw me. And whenever I saw children and babies... oh my [she would be tearful]!’(Laura, 35, flat)

People who narrated linear stories were more concise than those telling broken narratives. A significant difference between men and women in terms of style of
narratives was the above description of beautiful places. Description of idyllic spaces and situations was common to many of the women interviewed. All these descriptions depicted happy situations, functioning home setting, benevolent family and partners. The narrator placed herself in the middle. This is consistent to reports in the literature of formerly homeless women making a distinct effort in painting a normal life with its usual contingency, in contrast with their present housing situation (Radley et al. 2005). This, corroborated with findings in section 6.2.2., shows a need to aspire to a situation and status outside of the homelessness situation. Chapter 8 further develops on interviewees’ placement of the self into an aspirational future, in order to deal with the homelessness event.

Another example of the disempowered narrative was lain’s story. lain had been living in supported accommodation since his early twenties. His uncle Terry, who had been taking care of him, had found him a place with HSS once lain’s mother had died. lain spoke in a disempowered style about the events in his life. There was always someone leading him to new accommodation or new activities. Decisions had been taken away from lain:

‘And then when my uncle left, my cousin took over. When my dad died, my cousin phoned me up, asking me to meet her, so I went up there, I met her, having smokes and that, having a good old chat.’ (lain, 41, shared house)

Narratives of disempowerment were generally told by long term residents. Disempowerment, already present in the relationship lain had with his family, had continued at HSS, where until recently most needs had been straightforwardly met for the residents.”78 lain was used to the institutionalised reality, so when asked what he would do/where he would be in an ideal world, he declared he would do some more fishing with a friend of his. He did not see his situation as temporary or unfortunate (as it was seen by the shorter stay residents). lain did not see beyond his present housing situation.

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78 Until 2009, many HSS projects had provided full board for their residents: breakfast, lunch and dinner throughout the week. lain lived in the old hostel, where there had been common meals three times a day and a team of cleaners working 9-5 throughout the week.
7.6. Use of institutional language in supported housing narratives

The present section discusses the use of institutional language in the narratives. Institutional discourse was present in all narratives. To a greater or lesser extent, everyone, including myself, had adopted the language of supported housing. There was a difference though in terms of appropriation of meaning or just form of language.

In the narratives directed at the past or when the interviewee saw no path to progress, the institutional discourse was only present at a surface, language level. In progressive narratives, Government discourse was present at a deeper level. It changed the narrative and the interviewees’ attitude to their own life, from self-defeatism, sometimes depression, to an enthusiastically positive attitude. This was obvious in Tara’s progressive second half of the interview. In her story, Tara was almost an objective observer on her own life story. However, Tara was fighting with depression. She was aware of her need to improve her emotional state, but the traumatic events in her life and the long story of instability had made her reluctant to open up to further change. Opposition to change happened even when change was supposed to be a positive experience. She was reluctant to accept the move from a shared flat to a self-contained flat.

However, when she did eventually move on, she talked very positively about the experience and called it ‘a big step forward’. Her discourse changed. It became positive and uplifted:

‘I think moving from [shared flat project] and moving into here, it’s, it’s like a big step, step forward now for me. It’s my own flat and if I don’t want to see anybody, basically I don’t have to see anyone, but then I thought it’s just, really doing my, it’s not doing me any good drinking every day and that, and then not paying my rent and then I used to get into debt, and worrying about how to get out of debt and everything else. But, I thought, since I’ve moved down here I’ve said if I can get into [HSS4], I would be, I would be a lot more happier [sic], but I think it’s just having that big step, moving from there to here and then I wasn’t exactly sure of what to expect from here. But it’s OK, I love it here, pity I couldn’t stay here for the rest of my life.’ (Tara, 40, flat)
The words Tara was using were similar to the way move on was described in the Independent Care Pathway. The institutional narrative was interwoven with the personal, factual one. There was in fact more emotion in the discussion about her place of stay than in her own private life account. The ‘big step up’ was a typical way of expressing move on in HSS. It was also referred to by Tara as a change in her status and self-esteem. A connection between place and self-esteem appears in other homelessness literature (Stephenson 2003, Boydell et al 2000, Casey et al 2008 etc.) and it became apparent in other homelessness narratives in the study (such as Laura’s narrative). The place of stay can also take different meanings and in fact in the present study it extended beyond HSS, as explained in Chapter 6.

Institutional discourse was apparent in progress narratives too. Allen’s discourse was organised in admitting his ‘wrong’ choices, how he had felt in the past, reasons for being out of work, and what he needed to do at present in order to achieve a ‘normal’, ordinary life. His story was charged with up-to-date terminology and positive, goal focused talk:

‘Yeah, ‘cause I do wanna do voluntary and I do wanna get out there… Because I have worked before I lived on benefits. But my mental health deteriorated, that’s when I started being on benefits, because I was not in the fit state of mind. To say: well, I’m gonna go to work. ‘Cause I knew that my head was not totally dealt with yet. And I needed to take a step back and just say: well, I’ll focus on different things. (…) Because I didn’t have all the qualifications… and then when I was ill, I went back to college and got the qualifications. And now I’m restarting my whole life again. So I’m going full circle and then I’m re-improving myself and my life for the better.’ (Allen, 23, flat)

Firstly, the terminology that Allen used to qualify his illness is typical terminology used on social and HSS assessments: ‘my mental health deteriorated’, ‘I was not in the fit state of mind’. Secondly, the way he referred to his period of being out of work also mirrors institutional discourse. Key-working meetings were populated with discourse around ‘taking a step back’, refocusing, improving the person through courses and training, restarting a life. Thirdly, the structure of the above passage follows almost exactly the structure of a key-working session. It starts with a statement of intention from the interviewee: ‘I do wanna do voluntary and I do wanna get out there’. It continues with a brief explanation of the interviewee’s situation, or their life story: ‘my mental health deteriorated… I was not in a fit state of mind’. It goes on with a discussion on what the interviewee should do in order to achieve their goal – in the above quote
this is rather more general: ‘I am going full circle and reimproving (sic) myself and my life for the better.’ This is in fact the only aspect in which the above paragraph is different from a key-working session: there is much more work towards providing a picture of the interviewee as a whole, with goals and ambitions and values beyond the ‘mental health’ episode. The end of the paragraph also suggests Allen feels in control of his present and future situation. This was in fact common to all tellers of stories of progress and it coincided with the current policy at the time of ‘empowering’ people residing in supported housing.\(^79\)

All narrators of progress stories were young (between eighteen and thirty one years old). This language of control and confidence in a future outside of HSS in younger people’s discourses compliments findings in Chapter 6, which associates an opposite language of having given up and a retrospective attitude with the older residents of HSS. Younger people were less disenchanted with the concept of move on and more eager to find the right type of housing for them, often outside of the social housing system.

Kate was another one of the individuals using similar terminology to Allen’s. In fact, she repeated the phrase ‘starting my life again’, which Allen had used:

‘And then here I am now, at twenty four, literally starting life like a sixteen year old. I’m just starting to do some GCSEs, I’m just starting to do some courses as well, you know, I should have done this eight years ago now, and I haven’t. (…) Here I am now, at twenty four, nearly twenty five – I’m starting my life again’. (Kate, 24, flat)

Kate’s interview was populated with referrals to age. Still twenty four years old, she was classed by the system as a ‘young adult’. However her discourse referred to an even younger age: sixteen. Her reference to a younger age is pejorative, she refers to ‘starting like a sixteen year old’ as ‘starting my life again’. Her allusion to ‘building a life’ also suggests Kate sees growing old as building something — gathering experience, gathering things, all of which is assumed to make a better individual. This hierarchy of age, where young is less valuable than older, resonates with the age issues discussed in Chapter 6, especially relating to age equating with life experience and wisdom and leads to a wider discussion on the role of the institution and its related policy in building

\(^79\) I have direct knowledge of the structure of keyworking meetings at HSS, having conducted them personally at the beginning of my supported housing career.
this attitude towards youth. This discussion continues in Chapter 8, with some reflections on potential changes in the housing system.

If Allen’s story reflected his feelings of self-empowerment and control, other progress stories referred to control of the system, rather than of self. Danny also told a story of progress, but his plans for the future were solely connected to the institution. Danny had learned to manipulate the social housing system and its policies to his advantage.

Danny was young (19), but already used to the way the local authority worked and perfectly aware of the correct steps and attitude needed to reach his goals. His interview boasted with confidence that he would get a flat in the near future and not stay much longer at HSS. Danny accepted rules only to the extent to which they helped him reach his goal. He attended key-working meetings because not knowing your keyworker was recognised to hinder getting a flat. Apart from accepting minimum hostel regulations, he was used to cheating the system. He emphasised that he had managed to get a dog illegally from RSPCA, by asking his sister to pose as his owner.

What was most surprising was the fact that there seemed to be no moral consequences or acknowledgement of a moral value system behind Danny’s actions. There was no attempt to explain his many unlawful actions. There was no one to blame, simply because Danny did not believe his actions were wrong. The interview was focused on his goal (flat and job) and nothing else mattered:

‘A.C.: Where do you think you’ll be in five years from now?

Danny: In a flat. With a job.

A.C.: What kind of job?

Danny: Don’t know, just a job. Any job. So long as it’s a job. Fireman would be good.’ (Danny, 19, shared house)

Interaction with the institution was opposite in Danny’s and Allen’s stories. Allen had embraced the language of the institution and used it to move his life forward. Danny used the language of the institution and specifically the guidelines of the Integrated Care Pathway to move himself forward materially. He did not seem to actually embrace the concepts. Even though in very different ways, the institutional discourse was

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80 Especially section 8.6.
apparent in many interviews and in progress narratives it could linked with people’s actions to exit (to move on from) HSS.

7.7. Summary

This chapter presents the issues encountered by interviewees when trying to adopt the concept of homelessness as part of their biographies. All interviewees included the ‘lowest of the low’ in their narrative and it was in part their attitude to this event and the way they had assimilated it that led to different narratives and definitions of self thereafter.

All narratives included discussion of a significant and life changing event – homelessness (whether street homelessness, temporality of accommodation or sofa surfing). In this context, narratives were divided between those where the homelessness event was unresolved (these were the broken narratives) and those where the same event was not seen as something that needed justification (linear narratives). In linear narratives there was no apparent identity struggle and therefore no justification needed.

It was in the ‘broken’ narrative that the denigration of self happened. Narrators of broken narratives had gone through a ‘status degradation ceremony’ (Goffman 1963). Within those, narrators of disassociation stories felt they had been stripped of their old, socially acceptable persona in an unfair and mismatched way. Narrators of disempowered narratives experienced loss of control during the homelessness event and thereafter.

Linear narratives separated between progressive, regressive and static. Progressive narratives were charged with a positive language and a view towards the future. They were also mainly told by younger people. Authors (Radley et al 2004) reported strength of self in early phases of homelessness and suggested early intervention could lead to reducing later life deprivation. Findings regarding the strength of self at different stages of the person’s life story are carried through to the discussion chapter (Chapter 8).

The present typology of narratives is only heuristic. Not all data matches perfectly and it is closely connected to a specific, supported housing type of project. However, a strong suggestion of different strengths of self at different points in the person’s life story is important and is further discussed in Chapter 8.
CHAPTER 8: Discussion

8.1. Introduction

Chapter 8 pulls together the findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 into a conceptualisation of single homeless identity, which takes into account recent homelessness studies as well as contemporary ideas of identity.

The interviewees’ need to narrate their life stories in their complexity led to an intricate interweaving of concepts, arguments and theories. A need for definition and positioning of self in the ‘single homelessness’ situation became apparent. The present chapter situates the study within the contemporary homelessness literature and presents a theoretical discussion in terms of self and identity. It does so by drawing on theories of stigma, perspectives of the relationship between a stigmatised body and self, modern conceptualisations of home and theories of ‘social time’. The chapter ultimately contributes an understanding of the identity struggles experienced by the ‘single homeless people’. In doing so, it positions the ‘single homeless people’s presentation of self in a conceptualisation of identity which is closest to the ‘Third Space’ (Shilling 1999, Bennett 2008) approach.

This discussion starts with a presentation of the evolution of the research aim (8.2.). It then summarises the main sociological findings of the study, which relate to homeless people’s concept of identity (section 8.3.). Section 8.4. presents the tools used by the homeless people to formulate their identities. This discussion takes place by drawing both from the thematic findings and from the homeless narratives, the similarities between the two showing consistency which confirms a personal approach to identity by the homeless people, which is further analysed in section 8.6. Section 8.5. discusses notions that did not manifest as expected in the study and offers some tentative explanations on why this might be the case. The latter part of the chapter (section 8.6.) situates the conceptualisation of the homeless self in the current study in terms of immediate literature on homelessness and wider literature on identity.

In the chapter as well as throughout the thesis I argue that ‘single homeless person’ was a dominant policy label, which did not match the way the interviewees defined themselves. In Chapter 8 I have therefore replaced this term with others which I believe would better characterise (and be accepted by) the interviewees. These other appellatives are: ‘individuals who have been homeless, and now live in supported housing’, ‘interviewees’, ‘HSS residents’, ‘formerly homeless individuals’.
8.2. Evolution of the research aim

The main aim of the study was to gauge the existence of a ‘single homeless person’ category at an individual level, from the participants’ own perspective and to understand what ‘single homeless person’ meant for the interviewees. The main areas I aimed to explore were: the messages that the interviewees wanted to convey through their narratives, their perceptions and definitions of ‘home’, their considerations of personal and social networks at HSS and outside of HSS and the place and impact of the homelessness event in their life stories. As the three findings chapters showed, through the means of qualitative, narrative style interviews, the study developed this initial set of aims in order to better capture what the interviewees were trying to convey.

Each of the analysis chapters (5, 6 and 7) was based on a different starting point. Chapter 5 presented formerly homeless people’s need to identify as different from the ‘homeless homeless’ and the impact of the homelessness experience on their emotional and physical situation. Chapter 6 contributed a conceptualisation of ‘home’ to interviewees’ definitions of themselves. Although HSS presented some qualities of a home, it was seen as a temporary substitute. Chapter 7 presented the ways in which people who had been homeless told their homelessness and post/ pre-homelessness stories and showed a time direction in their story-telling. Some concepts identified by other studies (Ravenhill 2008, Butchinsky 2007, Parsell 2011), such as: ‘time’, ‘move on’, emotional and physical impact of homelessness were considered important by the interviewees and therefore became additions to the main aims and further in this chapter are considered within the interviewees’ conceptualisations of identity.

8.3. Formerly homeless people’s concept of identity: an overview

Homeless literature to date presents homelessness as an experience leading to identity struggles. Homeless people are seen as either ‘compensating’ for a stigmatised identity through imaginary projections or purposeful deeds (Lovell 1997), or adopting a specific homeless identity (embracing, distancing, fictive storytelling - Snow and Anderson 1993). Existing homelessness literature identifies the homelessness event as a significant change in someone’s life, similar in importance to changes in career paths or sudden life crises and thus potentially leading to a process of search for the self. Even more, the process of becoming homeless is generally seen as a ‘great loss’ on more than one dimension (Sommerville 2012).
My study aligns itself to the homelessness qualitative research body in acknowledging the importance of the homelessness event in the initiation of a search for self, an exploration, by the homeless individual, into their own identity and what it is that defines them. I too argue that homelessness, the stigma it carries and the perspective of the other (including the relationship with the institution and the informed other, such as the researcher) leads to the individual creating a narrative of self, which might have been less obvious if the breach of self – the homelessness event – had not happened. My study distinguishes itself from previous ones in the way the interviewees approached the disruption in identity – the homelessness event. Rather than seeing the homelessness event solely as a breach, the interviewees had a more complex approach, of ‘working their way’ through the deeper meanings of this event and eventually appropriating it as part of their identity. The way the interviewees used the homelessness event as well as other concepts as tools to forge an identity is discussed in the first part of the present chapter. This leads to an in-depth discussion of the homeless people’s concept of identity, which takes place at length in the second part of the chapter.

In brief, this chapter integrates the interviewees’ conceptualisations of identity into the Third Space (Shilling 1999, Burkitt 2008) presentation of flexible individualities, but which, despite the challenges and pressures experienced, maintain a strong sense of the core of the self that makes them unique. My approach to the homeless people’s identity formation accepts the possibility of a decentralisation of identities in contemporary societies; however, I maintain that there are parts of own identity which persist in individuals’ definitions of self and ultimately help ground the homeless individual. I acquiesce that identities can go through changes, imposed by personal circumstances and social context, and that these changes can lead to variations in the elements which retain value for the individual. However, despite all these changes, the homeless interviewees continued to refer to their self as easily recognised – retaining the same main qualities which belonged to the self before the homelessness experience. It was this strength of self that the interviewees ultimately wanted to transmit to the interviewer and it is this strength of self which places their conceptualisations of identity in the ‘Third Space’ approach.

The current study shows that the acceptance, by the individual, that they might shape their identities in any way they saw fit and using any tools they deemed appropriate (in

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81 For a more detailed discussion of differences between this study and other homeless studies, see section 8.6.
the present case, reformulating concepts such as ‘home’, ‘homelessness’ and ‘time’, rather than concepts that they felt might have constrained them), offered the homeless person an opportunity to reflect on and better assess their situation. In this process, they were not devoid of decision making powers, but rather appropriated the tools that they decided to use to re-assert their identities. In fact, this is consistent with the Third Space idea that in a different modernity, not fixed by social parameters, the individuals ought to feel more empowered. The interviewees’ articulations of identity might not be structured around the usual parameters, such as class, gender, race etc., but are equally not fluid and devoid of meaning (Shilling 1999).

The following section takes a closer look at the tools used by the homeless participants in formulating their identities. Each of these reformulations (‘home’, ‘homelessness’ and ‘time’) taken separately (in section 8.4.) and considered together (in section 8.6.) showed a consistency of the essence of the self, which remains recognisable to the individual despite difficulties. Some of these tools used by the homeless person to explicate their identities were revealed in the study during the thematic analysis (especially ‘home’), some appeared exclusively during the narrative research (‘time’), whilst ‘homelessness’ was shown as meaningful to the interviewees throughout the analysis.

These descriptors of their identity that the interviewees chose to bring into focus were essential in engaging and coping with the realities of homelessness and ultimately in helping to describe the participants’ identities, which were defined by a consistent strength of self.

8.4. Tools used to reassert the self by the formerly homeless people

The following three sections present the main concepts that the formerly homeless individual engaged with and reformulated in order to best represent their situation. As the previous section briefly mentions, the interviewees used these as tools as positive devices to assert the continuity of the core self. These tools were: ‘home’, ‘homelessness’ and ‘time’. Each served the function of framing existing insecurities, uncertainties or breaches to the self, in an overall attempt to state the continuity of the core self. Section 8.6. links these concepts with the reformulations of the homeless identity.
8.4.1. Home: ‘multidimensional’, aspirational and connected to length of time and ‘age’

‘Home’ and ‘housing status’ were among the tools which the interviewees used to present their selves. These were signalled as significant by the interviewees both in their narratives but mostly as stand-alone themes revealed by the thematic analysis.

The concept of ‘home’ was redefined and reformulated by the interviewees, as follows. Firstly, ‘home’ was ‘multidimensional’ for the interviewees. ‘Home’ lost its restrictive meaning of the ‘bricks and mortar’ of where someone lived, and extended beyond a hostel (HSS, in this case) or a residential area, to a city (Sea City – in section 6.2.), to meaningful individuals (the keyworker, when talking about housing – in section 6.4.) and to a general feeling of stability in the ‘home’ (section 6.3.). ‘Home’ thus became a ‘multidimensional’ (Somerville 2012) concept, not fully attained at HSS.

Secondly, ‘home’ was aspirational. Chapters 5 and 6 revealed an unmet need for a home in the interviews. Having a home was projected towards the future (section 7.5.1.). An ideal homeless persona was reliant on the existence of an (ideal) home, which incorporated material goods, a role in society and a social life or a meaningful relationship (sections 6.2., 6.3, 6.4. and 6.5.). There was an unattained aspiration towards an ideal home, which was important for setting a ‘goal’ and contributing to a perspective towards the future (a ‘goal’ of home – Kellett and Moore 2003). In direct reference to this, the declared aspiration to ‘normality’ was important in the definition of ‘home’. Work, ‘home’, ‘reimproving myself’, ‘normality’ were aspirational elements reserved for the future and important because they denoted a continued aspiration towards an ideal core, through the difficulties of the homelessness episode and beyond life at HSS, towards an aspirational ‘goal’ of home. Not all interviews revealed the same aspiration for ‘home’. People who had lived in institutions for a long part of their lives declared a sense of loss when talking about home and an inability to live outside of supported structures. The occurrence of these lifestyle changes for the people who had spent a long time at HSS suggests a connection between diminished self-confidence and living at HSS for longer, which was reported in other studies (Jones and Pleace 2010) and which should be considered in policy. This point is further developed in Chapter 9.

82 The existence of this ‘goal’ of home and the time in narrative when it appeared were important, as this revealed the most appropriate moment for intervention, for a successful move on and out of supported housing. This concept is further considered in Chapter 9.
Thirdly, ‘home’ was connected to age. On the one hand, ‘old’/‘older’ was presented as a preferred category compared with ‘young’. ‘Old’ was perceived as ‘experienced’ and wise, in opposition to ‘young and inexperienced’ (section 6.4.2.). In interviewees’ discussions about ‘home’, age became controversial: youth was seen as a problem. When talking about support workers, youth was directly connected to lack of training, lack of experience and ultimately therefore, lack of empathy. Older age equalled respect, value and authority. Experience was juxtaposed with youth.

On the other hand, older people were generally housed in self-contained flats, while younger people were housed in shared accommodation. Younger interviewees highlighted the existence of (assumed) prioritising according to perceived merit or respect of age. In their attitudes to housing, all progress stories were told by the younger people, whilst an opposite, retrospective attitude came across from older people’s stories. This language of control and confidence in a future outside of HSS appearing in young people’s discourses could be connected to a general institutional and policy emphasis of ‘early intervention’ and is further discussed in Chapter 9.

‘Younger’ and ‘older’ were social constructs, changing according to staff’s, society’s and residents’ own definitions. These differences in the construction of ‘age’ and its close connection to housing are important when designing policy and are therefore developed from a policy perspective in Chapter 9. An interesting aspect of this tentative conceptualisation of age in the present study is the lack of stigmatisation or mistreatment of the older population. In this sense, age did not manifest as I expected in the study. Previous homelessness studies discussed the ‘diminished status’ that older homeless men (and women in particular) could experience in homelessness. Even more, research suggested that this marginality could further lead to lack of support and isolation (Washington and Moxley 2008). Generally, research focuses on ensuring equality of treatment of older people in mixed age contexts. In the present study, the opposite seemed to have happened: an intrinsic awareness of the potential marginalisation of older people had brought these people to the fore. The reasons for this could be directly connected to the institution researched, since age was only mentioned in relationship to housing.

83 Gender was another topic which manifested differently to how I expected, and this is discussed in section 8.4.
8.4.2. The stigmatising homelessness event

Reformulating the homelessness event was another tool used by the homeless interviewees in the presentation of self (De Ward 2007, Juhlia 2004). The homelessness event was present in each person’s life story and was recounted in detail. The current section shows the homelessness event as present in interviewees’ lives and having an influence in the process of identity construction. The section also contributes to showing that, despite being faced with stigma and significant breaches to their identities, the interviewees maintained elements of a core of self.

In the study, the interviewees expressed a need to set the right context for their moment of homelessness: placing it in time and space (Chapter 7) and making the right delimitations between them and the ‘other’ homeless (Chapter 5). The use of the ‘homeless homeless’ characterisation was interchanging: sometimes it was used for defining the homelessness moment and at times it was used to distance the interviewees from the stigmatising past. This need to disassociate and the interchanging of concepts is important from a conceptual perspective and for the implications in policy (Chapter 9).

Another important idea connected to homelessness as a stigmatising event is the social comparison (the hierarchy among homeless people) which emerged from the interviews and the disassociation from the ‘tramp’/‘homeless homeless’ individual⁸⁴. (Chapter 5). The series of antitheses presented in Chapter 5, between the ‘homeless homeless’ and the interviewees, apart from defining a boundary between the interviewees and those who remained in the streets, also presented their consistent work on themselves, through coping mechanisms and sheer will, to maintain a particular definition of self. Even more, these elements of disassociation from the person on the street: ‘I am not a beggar’ etc., also involved permanent performances of self, in order to clearly define and maintain outsiders’ perceptions – thus a permanent, rehearsed and planned ‘refashioning’ of self and actions (Goffman 1959, Bury 2001, Thomas 2004) which was aimed at preserving the perception of a consistent core of the self remaining despite the stigma and the difficulties encountered on the way.

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⁸⁴ This separation between social housing residents and the ‘homeless homeless’ existed on more than one level, it included living in social housing, as well as aspirations, a certain physical appearance etc., as the chapter further shows.
8.4.3. Management of stigmatising homelessness event by turning it from a negative, to a positive - counteracting the ‘felt’ stigma in two stages

The emergence of the homelessness event as an attribute of the past which had to be negotiated during the interview led the interviewees to employ creative measures (Shilling 1998) to include this ‘lowest of the low’ in their life stories. The interviewees accepted a loss of status, but they made consistent attempts at recuperating their previous identity. Whether positive or negative, the homelessness event was a central experience narrated in the interview.

Feeling homeless is, according to Farrugia (2013), an ‘acute act of suffering’. Using a different theoretical framework, Farrugia’s findings reverberate with findings in a range of recent studies: Boydell et al (2000), Radley et al (2005), Casey et al (2008), Jhulia (2004), De Ward (2007) and in the present study, particularly a disassociation from the general concept of homelessness and a reinforcement of participants’ personal positive features in order to obscure the general negative connotations implied by homelessness.

In other studies, the homelessness event was removed from the presentation of self as a negative experience, leading to a ‘great sense of loss’ of the self (Boydell et al 2000) and a need to reformulate the lost identity (Van Doorn 2003, Farrugia 2013) or it was not featured at all – the participants concentrating on other elements of their biographies (Jhulia 2004, De Ward 2007). In contrast with those studies, in the current study, many interviewees appropriated (recovered) the homelessness experience as something which contributed to a more realistic presentation of the individual – it was 1) **vilified and justified** and 2) **reconstructed** and eventually turned into positive experience. In Boydell et al (2000)’s study, participants felt pride in their past selves, but not in their present stigmatised selves. In Butchinsky (2007)’s study, time spent outside of engaging (and considered valuable) activities was defined as ‘empty time’ and was attributed to the homelessness experience, which was seen only as a negative. In the present study, such a breach between past and present, followed by a reformulation of identity, did not happen (Tara’s, Paul, Allen’s narratives in Chapter 7). Even though the homelessness event was similarly life-changing, for the interviewees in this study it was more important to show a continuity of the pre-homelessness self, a strength and resilience of self which by this tenacity continued to
reaffirm the true identity of the individual. In this way, rather than breach the self, the homelessness event helped it become stronger, enriched and reaffirmed.

Thus the homelessness event constituted an opportunity for redefinition. Telling their life story offered interviewees an opportunity to rethink and reshape the way they told the homelessness event and ultimately to make sense of it and thus to attempt to counteract the effects of the ‘felt’ stigma, the type of stigma potentially more damaging for the individual (Scambler 2009). This is in fact consistent with reformulations of the impact of the physicality of homelessness to the body on identity, which see the illness (which is similarly presented as the homelessness event) as an opportunity to refine and reformulate the identity (Schneider and Remillard 2013, Bury 2001, Thomas 2004). Bury (2001) shows how the body under attack from illness learns to reconcile who it is now with the old self. Shilling (2008) takes this idea further, describing how those whose self is under attack employ creative measures to rebuild their identity. These creative measures can include anything, from projecting towards future or past experiences that recover the loss of status, to differentiating between different periods in a person’s life and dwelling on the positive ones.

To further explicate the above noted process, the interviewees’ understanding and presentation of the homelessness event went through two main processes which ensured reconciliation and involved work on the interviewees’ identities. Often in the same interview, the homelessness event was justified and vilified (described as an inherent evil which was thus even harder to surmount) and then it was reconstructed by many interviewees into a character building exercise. Through the means of narration, the homelessness event was turned from a biographical event with negative connotations, which would have initially needed biographical distancing, to a positive, even essential element of the interviewees’ self. The following paragraphs describe the two processes the homelessness event went through in the interviewees’ accounts: justification and reconstruction.

Firstly, the homelessness event was justified. Through the process of narration, the homelessness event became included into formerly homeless persons’ daily lives. By justifying it, the interviewees’ life story was easier to reconcile. The justification was built on an initial vilification of the homelessness event. This was done through the means of detailed descriptions of all its negative aspects. Epithets associated with homelessness ranged from ‘fear [of life]’, chaos, loss, to ‘subhuman’, ‘worse than an animal’ to ‘lack of control’. The homelessness event was presented as a traumatic experience, outside of interviewees’ control. It involved intense suffering and a great
trial of the individual’s will (Chapter 5, especially section 5.5.4.). This led in many cases to a need of justification, which was made through mentioning biographical details (abusive parents, foster care, significant death, illness, divorce/separation – in Chapter 6) or through bringing up social reasons (drinking culture in the air forces, peer pressure, education or the social system – in Chapter 6).

Following this process of justification, the impact of the homelessness event on the construction of self was at its most powerful. Even though stigmatising, the homelessness event became an acceptable part of individuals’ life stories. It was presented as an act of life, which had to be experienced and surpassed\(^{85}\), and this experience had altogether been meaningful for the individual.

Secondly, interviewees made an effort to point out the essential difference between them and the ‘other’ homeless. Leaving the homelessness event behind was of paramount importance. Thus the process of justification was not enough for the long-term positive portrayal of the individual. The difference between the other homeless and the interviewees was that the latter had managed to leave ‘the lowest of the low’ state and saw themselves now on the way to recovery. The individual was presented as passive when homelessness happened - it had not been their choice - , but they needed to have agency in order to exit it.

In the context of movement from one stage of the interviewees’ lives to another\(^{86}\), the homelessness event became an essential, character-building and thus positive element. It was *reconstructed*. Justification of the stigmatising (Bury 2001) or homelessness event (Finfgeld-Connett 2009, Montgomery et al 2009, Adkins et al, Radley 2005) is often highlighted in research. It is the reconstruction of the homeless event, and further, its integration in the future, on an identity spectrum, that interests the present study and is further discussed in the concluding sections of this study.

As will be further discussed in this chapter, describing the homelessness event was part of a larger process of negotiation of self. Once it was overcome, its significance changed. The homelessness event was not denied, it stayed as an experience of the past, but the temporal separation became crucial for the correct portrayal of self. The concept of time became prevalent (and it is further discussed in section 8.4.4.).

\(^{85}\) In the instances when the homelessness event was not accepted and still lingered as a stigmatizing event of the present, identity work was disempowered and the individual was looking towards their past. This difference in interviewees’ accounts, present specifically in narratives of disempowerment and disassociation, adds another level to this analysis – a time perspective, which is further developed in section 8.4.4.

\(^{86}\) Stages and personas of homelessness are discussed further, in section 8.4.4.2.
The interviewees’ own identity positioning could be briefly summarised by: ‘I was homeless, but I have never been one of the ‘homeless homeless’ and now I have exited homelessness’.

Through the narratives, the interviewees made successive attempts at regaining or rebuilding a persona that could be acceptable to their peers, to outsiders and to themselves. In this narrative process, the stigma associated with homelessness was erased. These different personae of the homeless individuals are presented in the next section.

8.4.4. Interviewees’ complex concept of time

Time was another concept which was important for the interviewees. In fact, time was another tool facilitating the description of interviewees’ identity as influenced by changes in their lives, but with a consistent sense of a core.

From a narrative perspective, time was often broken, extended, stretched or compressed, for the purposes of the story. The present study develops on a ‘relative’ (Harvey 2009) definition of time, as ‘social’ (Durkheim 1895) and ‘multilayered’ (Adam 2004, Adam and Groves 2007). Past and future become real in relationship with the present and time becomes a ‘multilayered, complex fact of life; multiple in its forms and levels’ (Adam 2004).

Time was meaningful for the ‘fashioning’ (Riessman 2008) of identity. The interviews fashioned different ‘levels’ of time (Adam 2004). Homeless people’s time involved a past, present and future which was ‘infinitely flexible’ (Adam 2004) and in permanent reformulation. This variety of levels and intensities of time is discussed as an intrinsic part of homeless people’s narratives in Chapter 7 and further, conceptually developed here.

The stigma of the homeless event required, as shown in the previous sections, increased identity work at reconciling interviewees’ lives in the new context. Yet another concept was needed for the redefinition of the self: the placement in time of the homelessness event and of the homeless self. It is worth noting that the homelessness event was always biographically part of the past. None of the interviewees found themselves in what they described as ‘homelessness’ at the moment of the interview. Two presentations of time could be found in interviewees’ narratives. Some narratives had a chaotic perception of time (broken narratives), while others presented time linearly, on a scale from childhood to adulthood, with the
homelessness event integrated as an element of the past (linear narratives) (Chapter 7). Whether the life story was narrated in a biographical time order or not, time was stretched around certain events and homelessness was one of them (in terms of time spent narrating them, but also the unreliable amount of time they claimed they spent in the streets, as it is further shown).

Throughout their story-telling, interviewees’ description of self was time-bound. Three different stages (personas) in the development of self became apparent: ‘me at my lowest, ‘me at HSS’ and ‘me in the future’. In what follows, section 8.4.4.1. presents interviewees’ concept of time. Section 8.4.4.2. defines and discusses the three personas appearing in the interviews and shows how, with all these reiterations of the self (through an accumulation of personas), all the interviewees were doing was to reinstate the persona that they considered essential for their self-definition: ‘me before HSS’, which can also be seen as the core of the individual.

8.4.4.1. Conceptualising past and future, which can move to present

Clarke et al (2005) introduced the concept of ‘braided time’ in relation to homelessness, experienced when events interlock and circle around each other the same way as braided hair does. In the present interviews, the biographical distance from events became unimportant during a process of modifying and reinstating time. Through mentioning the homelessness event (‘me at my lowest’), the individual was performing a recovery of time, a conceptualising of their past in order to ultimately fashion a different attitude to certain moments in their lives, which in turn led to a further redefinition of self. Thus certain elements of time stayed in the past, whilst others were recovered, as necessary elements of the present, and especially of the future. Among many examples, there is Cal’s vivid description of his librarian position, which, through its place and weight in the narration, became part of the present, even though biographically situated before the homelessness event: ‘and yours truly, nice little armchair, [sits] there’ (Chapter 7, section 7.5.2.1.) An element of the more distant past (preceding ‘me at my lowest’), through its importance for the self, this past event became absorbed in the present and/or the future. Other, future events were restored in the present; the choice of which events were brought to the present belonged only to the narrator, who took decisions which were important for the definition of self (see Jimmy’s description of his future life as an imminent occurrence in section 6.5.).
The individual thus had full discretion in manipulating time and deciding what elements of their life story belonged to the past, what elements belonged to the future and what elements were those of the present (Adam 2004).

Firstly, the interviewees’ past was nuanced (Adam 2004). There was an unresolved past; this could include the homelessness event or particular aspects of this event, such as the difficulties of living in the street, or the lack of meaningful relationships (Chapter 5 offers many examples of unresolved past). The unresolved past was particularly obvious in narratives of disassociation and disempowerment (in Chapter 7-for example, in Chris’ account of his accident). There was a resolved past. In this past, the homelessness event was included and accepted. This was apparent in narratives of acceptance, progress and reset (Chapter 7 presents Allen’s story of homelessness until the moment he reached HSS as an accepted occurrence). There was a glorified past – the pre-homelessness past. This past was transferred to the present and to the future and was very important in the definition of the present and the future (projected) self (this includes Cal’s account of his work at the bookshop, in Chapter 7). There was a forgotten past – the elements of the past which the interviewees said they had forgotten, as ‘not important’, ‘not relevant’, ‘too tough’, thus applying further discretion to the presentation of their past (especially in disempowered narratives, like Laura’s stories of love and breakup, in Chapter 7). There was an unreliable past, professed often by those with drinking/ drug taking histories, who argued memories of their past had been distorted outside of their will (in Chapter 7, Pace presents the details of his drinking and drug-taking as uncertain, due to unreliable memory).

Through the means of metaphors, iterations or suggestions, the interviewees made sense of their stigmatised past, their temporary present and their uncertain futures. Rather than static, their past was in a process of alteration, reinterpretation and modification through story-telling, in order to suit the present. The interviewees’ purpose was not only an explanation of the stigmatised present, but also working on their past and reformulating it helped conceptualise their lives and thus ultimately better understand themselves. No iteration was in vain. A great amount of time was spent in the interview on recounting the past, because it was the past that needed most reconfiguration. This also helped bring the past closer to the present, where elements of the past (even though in biographical terms sometimes quite distant) were still considered relevant. This was the case in the disempowerment narratives, where the past was the present and the future (like in lain’s narrative, who saw no change in his situation for over twenty years – in Chapter 7, section 7.5.2.2.).
Secondly, telling the future was done in a different way, not corresponding to the biographical time. As shown above, elements of the past were brought into the present. At the same time, elements of the future were brought into the present. Bringing essential elements of the future into the present made the future easier to cope with as it became less daunting. Adam (2004) notes this is the case especially regarding events which have the potential of changing lives – be this in a physical or transcendental way. Even more, the elements of the future which were brought to the present were specific and detailed (Michael's description of his future home with a garden – Chapter 6, Kate's dream job as a property developer – Chapter 5). Adam (2004) argues that mentioning actions of the future moves them to the present. In the study, most interviewees enumerated actions of the future in painstaking detail and colour. This made the future change from a mere ideal to an imaginable reality. This action further ensured safety, certainty and security and ultimately helped reinforce the self. The formerly homeless person now in supported housing could be seen as an individual with a recovered past and an achievable, transcended (Adam 2004) future.

In interviewees’ perception of time, past and future were used to a similar purpose: the past was purposefully recorded in a specific way, in order to support the future. In the space of the narrative, biographical time coexisted with this new, altered time. The next section presents the three homeless personas, as three delimitations (manipulations) of time.

8.4.4.2. The three personas of the formerly homeless individual: ‘me at my lowest’, ‘me at HSS’ and ‘me in the future’

In the narrative, the self was manipulated through time, in a process which allowed ultimate agency to the individual. Interviewees were able to create reality and change it, legitimise past and present practices, define and redefine the self within the boundaries of the interview.

The present section centres on discussing three different stages which emerged from telling the homelessness stories and draws on findings from both narrative and thematic analysis. When referring to their present situation (as residents of HSS), interviewees described it as a transitional stage, on their journey from homelessness, through to being housed in supported housing, to post homelessness. There was a declared need to differentiate between the three stages: ‘me at my lowest’, ‘me at HSS’

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87 This transcendence to the future was not visible in narratives of disempowerment and disassociation, which were largely directed to the past. Recovery of the pre-homelessness self was less possible in these narratives and has consequences for the policy (Chapter 9).
and ‘me in the future’. I have named the three personas using appellations extracted from the interviews.

Section 8.4.4.1. has already illustrated a flexible concept of time, based on social and personal circumstances rather than biographical details. This section adds another dimension to this conceptualisation, by presenting the existence of three different personas in interviewees’ definitions of self. This contributes to a clarification of the interviewees’ presentations of self.

The first persona - ‘me at my lowest’, more visible in Chapter 5, was connected to the homelessness event and was viewed as a past stage in interviewees’ lives. ‘Me at my lowest’ referred to the physical and psychological difficulties implied by homelessness and was the most problematic aspect for the interviewees to accept and integrate in the presentation of self. As shown earlier, this is where the social comparison with the ‘other’ intervened. As biographical disruption, the homelessness event posed increased difficulties in terms of integration within the presentation of self.

‘Me at HSS’, most obvious in Chapter 6, represented the interviewees in the present – at the moment the interview took place. Although having overcome their ‘lowest’, interviewees did not feel they had exited the homelessness route, and had to face living in temporary housing at HSS. Moving into secure accommodation was expected to bring about a definite change in status and a natural progression from associations with homelessness. However interviewees felt they lingered in an in-between space between the homeless persona and a new, transformed self.

Finally, ‘me in the future’, appearing throughout the analysis chapters, but most obvious in Chapter 7, was seen as the stage which reflected the quintessence of the individual, outside of the homelessness scenario. Most interviewees took time to describe qualities of this self that they believed characterised them. Many interviewees believed they would return to their initial and thus true character and would regain many of the above mentioned qualities when they finally exited homelessness and supported housing. ‘Me in the future’ thus connected two moments in time in interviewees’ lives: before and after the homelessness event, as these two merged into something that the interviewees saw as their core.

Interviewees described themselves as living in a transitional stage, from homelessness, through to living at HSS, to post homelessness. There was a clear need to differentiate between the three stages: ‘me at my lowest’, ‘me at HSS’ and ‘me in the future’. When faced with a crisis moment (Shilling 2008) – the homelessness
event, interviewees’ sense of self was strengthened. As shown in Chapter 5 and from a narrative perspective in Chapter 7, the crucial difference from the ‘homeless homeless’ was considered to be temporality. The interviewees saw their status permanently evolving, from their old self into the homelessness event, through living at HSS and eventually back to ‘normality’ and thus to a self which shared values with the pre-homelessness self. If for some interviewees mere mention of the homelessness event imposed a risk to the correct positioning of self (which was meant to be outside of homelessness), for the majority of the interviewees the subtle difference was between the act of becoming homeless and staying in that situation.88 ‘Me at my lowest’ was described in detail in the interviews, but was faded in the descriptions of the present situation. In the present (‘me at HSS’), the interviewees declared they had managed to overcome the homelessness event and maintain an acceptable persona. In the future, they believed they would belong to the ‘a lot of people’ category (Cal, Chapter 5) - those successful in leaving the homelessness event behind.

Although in biographical terms the three personas succeeded each other, from a narrative perspective there were temporal movements in all directions. The appearance of these three personas in the interviews adds another dimension (and is used as an added tool by the interviewees) in painting an image of the formerly homeless person as someone who went through subsequent life changing events, but who has managed to overcome them and maintain a core of their individuality, thus integrating this perspective of self in a ‘third space’ conceptualisation of identity, as the remaining of the chapter discusses.

8.5. Tentative findings on gender

Upon starting the study, I had expected to find a gendered component to the interviewees’ presentations of themselves, their peers and the institution they lived in. In fact, early research questions did include queries about gender representations in social housing and about learned and instinctive gendered behaviours (Marchbank and Letherby 2007, Washington and Moxley 2008, Casey et al 2007). However, during the interviews I did not feel that gender manifested as I had expected for the specific...
homeless group researched. Even more, due to the small sample of women, any findings about gender can only be treated as tentative.

As described in Chapter 4, I interviewed fewer women than men, and generally had a smaller sample of women than I had initially expected. This occurred naturally, as the residents in all HSS properties were mainly men, even though HSS was open to referrals from both men and women. Unlike the makeup of the town, Sea City, which was approximately 50% male, 50% female, in HSS a maximum 10% of the residents were women. Upon querying this with the hostel workers and managers, I found out that some of the women referred to the projects were refusing accommodation at the housing interview stage, giving as feedback the general public perception of HSS as accommodation for men. This resonates with other homelessness studies (Goode 2007, Jhulia 2004) which reported a reluctance from the homeless women to engage in support services, in order not to perpetuate what could be interpreted as a ‘felt’ stigma of homelessness. Goode (2007) found that women would rather perpetuate the physical state of street homelessness than registering as ‘homeless’ through housing agencies.

Gender differences appeared to manifest, if only tentatively, in two instances. Firstly, a potential gender difference could have been constituted by the sense of ‘lack’ that the women reported when discussing home - a ‘lack of home’, or inability to define home. Some women referred to their lack of knowledge of what constitutes a home, and even further, they refrained from providing a detailed picture of their ideal home. In fact, research has shown that the loss of ‘home’ can be more apparent and more profound for women rather than for men and even more, that men recover easier and faster from this loss (Adkins et al 2003, Padgett et al 2006, Casey et al 2008). It could be argued that a gendered perspective of the traditional, old fashioned perceptions of ‘home’ as a space inhabited mainly by women might still be inhibiting women from coming forward to access supported housing and might also have been the reason why those women who were interviewed kept their discourse so gender neutral.

Secondly, a difference in language was notable through the interviews. In the few instances (two) when they did discuss home (following further probing on my behalf), women seemed to describe home in idyllic vocabulary and long descriptions. It remains unclear whether this is a difference in substance or style. Some authors do report more nuanced and picturesque style of descriptions in homeless women's interviews rather than men's (Padgett et al 2006, Ravenhill 2008), as a matter of personal preference. This difference could therefore simply be a difference in interview style, ultimately
denoting a need for homeless men and women alike to aspire to something outside of their present situation.

Ultimately, the hesitations around describing the ‘ideal home’ added another level to the complexity of ‘home’ as a concept, its lack being experienced as deep loss by both men and women.

From a gender perspective, in a subsequent study it would be interesting to explore whether for a different research group the same tools for defining their identities continue to exist and have the same significance as in the present study, both for men and for women or whether indeed, as suggested here, women bring different conceptualisations to their discussions of home and homelessness.

8.6. A definition of the ‘single homeless’ person

The last part of this chapter shows how the interviewees used the tools described in section 8.4. (home, homelessness and time) in order to build their own conceptualisation of identity. I aim to build a bridge between contemporary conceptualisations of identity, existing homelessness studies on identity (Juhlia 2004, Ravenhill 2008, McCarthy 2013, De Ward 2007, Harter et al 2005, Parsell 2011, Butchinsky 2007) and my own research. The study stresses the need for the two sides (homelessness studies and identity literature) to continue to engage in a dialogue, in order to understand the homelessness experiences in their complexity.

The present study has found a continuation of the pre-homeless self when living in supported housing, despite the adversities the individual had to face, when experiencing the homelessness event and beyond it. This strength and resilience of the self was seen as the true identity of the individual. The elements of the biography which remained important for the interviewees (the homelessness event and the temporality of housing being among the most notable) reasserted the pre-homelessness self, helping it become stronger, better and reaffirmed. The core of the self did not change, but the way it was defined became richer and the narrative created around it more substantial.

The previous sections have already shown that the homelessness event had a significant impact on interviewees’ sense of self-worth, causing the need for the redefinition and the reconstruction of the homelessness event as a meaningful event and a renegotiation of the concept of home. The sections have also shown a movement
through time, through the intermediary of three ‘personas’ and non-biographical ideas of time.

**8.6.1. Differences from other homelessness studies**

The current study aligns itself with previous research (Harter et al. 2005, Ravenhill 2008, Parsell 2011) in restating the importance of delving into homeless people’s concepts of identity for a fuller and more accurate representation of their perceived status, their ambitions and their role in the community. I have noted two main differences from other research, which bring a further nuanced perspective over this research area.

The first difference is one of status and it is consisted of the location of the interviewees and their position within the homelessness community. Though having all experienced episodes of homelessness, all participants in the study lived in rehabilitative, goal-focused projects (in HSS) at the time of the interview. Accommodation was secure, though temporary and not self-owned. Interviewees thus found themselves in the ‘space between’ homelessness and non-homelessness. Even though they retained memories of the homelessness experience, they had all exited street homelessness (even if just recently). In this context, the prevalence of the concept of homelessness in their discourse and even more, its central role in their narratives gained a different significance from an identity perspective, as it had been carried through to a non-homeless setting and time of their lives; this element of their biography still proved to be important in the definition of self, beyond the biographical time of the event. Rather than removing it as a past experience (like other studies had shown), the homelessness event was brought into the narration in order to facilitate definition via juxtaposition. This suggests that, from an identity perspective, the homeless category is wider-reaching than the homelessness event itself. Whether as far as terminology, the word ‘homeless’ should be used is a different matter, and one that is discussed further in Chapter 9. However, the stark presence of the homelessness event in all interviews places the research of the ‘single homeless person’ alongside other ‘new’ homelessness, emerging as a reaction to a more complex and changing society, thus alongside: substance-using homeless mothers (Goode 2000), older African women (Washington and Moxley 2008) or women on the brink of losing their home (Adkins et al. 2003). ‘Single homeless person’ becomes, in my study, a type of homelessness that
should be researched on its own, as distinctly different from ‘rough sleeping’, but still belonging to the ever increasing field of (‘new’) homelessness research.

The second difference, already alluded to in the chapter, consists of a nuance in the interviewees’ attitude to their identities and the traumatic or challenging events of their lives. Similar to other homelessness studies, it became clear that once confronted with the homelessness event, participants’ identity experienced a series of challenges. Following Snow and Anderson’s (1993) study of homeless identity types, research such as Ravenhill (2008), Radley et al (2005) and Davies et al (2010) have mentioned displacement of self in homelessness studies, in other words, the homeless people expressing the need to identify with different facets of their identities which often characterised either passed or projected stages in their lives. Similarly, the people interviewed in the present study had experienced repeated challenges to their core, through the homelessness event, other traumatic events in their lives and the change of housing status. Unlike in other studies, each of these encounters added a deeper level to the definition of identity, which enriched their definition (even though not always positive) and most importantly, was not challenging the existence of a core, pre-homelessness, self. From a narrative perspective, every new life event played a role in convincing the outsider and the narrator themselves of the actual strength of the core of the self – that part of the individual which remained the same despite other changes. For many, presentation of self involved looking to the future and seeking a continuation of the person’s core beyond HSS. By reinstating meaningful past events - such as Darren (63)’s attempt at helping the old lady or Jimmy (30) initiating the younger boy in the beauty of art - through the means of story-telling, it was the present self that gained more depth, further justification and a correct placement. The narrative had an essential role in refocusing the attention on the formation of self.

Similarly, from a thematic perspective, every concept brought to the fore in the interview (for instance, home or length of stay) worked to the same effect – to help build, in an iterative fashion, the understanding that although external elements might have changed, the individual remained the same. For instance, someone’s housing status changed on several occasions during and following homelessness; however, whether homeless or in some sort of temporary housing, the person remained the same: aware of their belongings (even though those might have been entirely immaterial) and concerned about the appearance of their abode. Examples of this

89 Newly researched forms of homelessness
90 Both events pointing to the teller’s sustained ability to behave in a ‘decent’ (Cal, 46) manner
continuity which defines the core of the self are abundant in the study and range from Danny (19)’s, Allen (23)’s or Darren (63)’s pride with the aspect of their flats and with memorabilia they retained to Alice (70)’s cherished memory of the family painting once gifted to her by her rich aunt.

Thirdly, the present study invites the possibility that conceptualisations of time can have a leading role in homeless people’s attitudes to their experiences and to themselves. Previous studies (Farrugia 2011, Boydell et al 2000) announced a movement, of the homeless self, through time. Notions such as ‘braided time’ (Clarke et al 2005) and homeless life maps (Ravenhill 2008) started to emerge. My study places time in a substantial role: I argue that time and the ability to consider the self in a social conceptualisation of time confers the self the opportunity to change. The self changes more than once, while the interviewees mention a present, past and future persona. The past persona, before the homelessness event, was less aware of the true meaning of homelessness, but had a strong core of personal and social values, and often, a clear status in society (an important job or position, a clear role in the family). The present persona (‘me at HSS’) was marked by the homelessness episode (‘me at my lowest’) and was therefore more aware of what homelessness actually meant and it was influenced by the homelessness event. Whilst having been through a journey of self-discovery (Alice mentions the journey ‘up North’ as an opportunity to self-reflect and change – in Chapter 7) and education in the hidden aspects of homelessness (both Chris and Cal explain they have only understood the true meaning of homelessness by living through it – in Chapters 5 and 6), the present self maintained a consistent core (Paul’s reflection on the difference between the clothes he was wearing and his ‘good’ inner core is one example – in Chapter 5). This core of the self, which was worthwhile and which, it was specified by the interviewees, was the reason for pulling through the homelessness experience and beyond it, was maintained by reiterations in the narrative as well as by maintaining a perspective to the future, by constant references to the future persona, and to the goals and aspirations of the future.

One similarity to other homelessness studies (Ravenhill 2008) is that many of the stories told by the formerly homeless people had a rehearsed quality and a focused audience. The rehearsed quality was more obvious in certain narratives (as discussed in Chapter 7), with some narratives taking the form of the traditional tale. The focused audience was made obvious through the means of audience prompts: ‘you know, sociologically’ (Chapter 4), through status affirming anecdotes (Chapter 7) and through references to housing related matters which would only appear in a professional
keyworker-client relationship (as detailed in Chapter 5). Many of the stories in the study had been told and retold during regular house visits, keyworking sessions, assessment events, life skills/housing interviews etc. Apart from their obvious practical purposes, these story-telling sessions had contributed to a clarification of self.

Through the means of justification, blaming, self-deprecation or self-adulation, and through bringing the past, present and future together, the person’s sense of self was in fact being strengthened. From the interviews, a definition of the formerly homeless person, now in supported accommodation emerged. Their definition was not completely congruent with the Government definition, but it was a definition of self. This definition included those elements which the interviewees considered important for their definitions of self: stigma (in its physical and emotional complexity), home and time. The formerly homeless person, now residing in supported housing, was:

- Someone who had been homeless in the past, and was therefore aware of the physical as well as emotional difficulties implied by homelessness: the chaos, the constant movement, the extended concept of fear, with its emotional implications;
- This person had thus been touched by the stigma, but, as follows underneath, had managed to overcome it (and turn it into something positive);
- Someone who, unlike the ‘homeless homeless’, had exited the homelessness episode, which was now in the past;
- Someone who possessed the following qualities: benefitted from a clean and tidy appearance, was intelligent, had a willingness to improve themselves, had emotional strength and was a role model for the people around them, and
- Someone who, because of their core strength, believed they could access a future outside of HSS and of supported housing - someone who had aspirations.

8.6.2. Integrating formerly homeless people’s identity in a wider identity discussion

This final section presents the interviewees’ framing of their identities in a wider identity context. The study shows that it remains crucial to question how homelessness is

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91 This last point was sometimes missing in the narratives of disempowerment and disassociation, and is informative for policy, as Chapter 9 details.
constructed and to explore how these constructions influence the solutions offered and the policies developed.

The study combines the ‘Third space’ (Burkitt 2008) flexible approach to identity with the renewal of the body in new symbolic interactionism and with notions of social time and a complex and multi-layered concept of home. I argue that it is important to acknowledge the permanent process of reformulation and reconstruction faced by the modern individual, whilst at the same time acknowledging the strength of personal values and habits accumulated prior, during and after the homelessness event.

As contemporary societies change, the self also is affected. The homeless individual is surrounded by a variety of voices which can be at times disconcerting. These can range from new technologies to new policy and institutional ways of framing homelessness, in terms of deadlines, progress and achievement. This multitude of voices offers the individual a multitude of hypostases that they could enact. At the same time, the overarching social narratives, which used to be consistent, are now fragmented. Different value systems might apply to the same situations; political concepts are multiple and wide-ranging; beliefs are more varied and more confused.

The danger that the homeless person faces in this context is that in this confusion, their identities could become confused too and exposed to a diversity of intentions and possibilities. Giddens (1991) argues that in the process of fluidization of identity where the individual is given complete freedom to construct themselves, the person can lose control of their sense of self – they can lose their ‘ontological security’ (the ability to sense order and security regarding their daily lives and predictable, certain events of their daily lives). Giddens argues that the removal of all certainties and all facts which were known and pre-existing for the individual can lead to a lack of ‘answers’ to existential questions, this in turn leading to anxiety. Bukitt (2008) defines this new reality of the contemporary individual as a ‘chronic state of doubt’. However, unlike Giddens (1991), Burkitt (2008) sees this ‘chronic state of doubt’ and the wide ranging options available to the individual as a unique opportunity to reformulate the self, in the best possible way the individual sees fit. Instead of leading to breakdown of identity, the individual is given further choice and agency to describe their identities in the closest, most intimate and most personal way, and not according to already existing structures or codes.

The present study takes Burkitt’s understanding of the contemporary world in conceptualising homeless identities. I argue that notwithstanding this potential bi-product of what Giddens calls ‘late modernity’ (total freedom coupled with anxiety at
the loss of self and loss of ontological security), the homeless individual uses their newly emerging freedom to construct a version of themselves which they agree with more, is more personal and is less influenced by outside concepts. The study takes the view (Burkitt 2008) that in this fluidization of identities, the individual makes even stronger attempts at stabilising concepts and finding coherence to their lives. The self is re-created reflexively, with the help of others, and an important part in this reformulation is played by the constant process of creation and recreation of biographical narratives.

My study supports Burkitt (2008)'s understanding of the core of self as the consistency of the most intimate characteristics of our being. This is a ‘core rather than a unified self’: ‘a feeling of a centre to our being, of existing as I in the world, without this ever being unified into a fixed and unchanging entity that has no contradiction, indecision or univocal tensions of many different voices’ (Burkitt 2008: 190). This core of the self is open to some degree of change or reformulation, or fine-tuning in relation to others and to the surrounding voices and environment, however this is not an unstable or equivocal self. These changes to the individual are defined by Burkitt as social selves, reactions of the individual to the relationships with others. It is this conceptualisation, of a core self, with new answers to newly emerging social tensions, that the current study adopts as closest to the interviewees’ definitions of self.

In fact, those aspects of their lives which could potentially have broken or unsettled the homeless identity (such as reactions to the stigma of homelessness as breach of biography) were in this context brought together by the interviewees. The purpose for this was to situate the self in an interim geographical space (in the institution), but also in a secure emotional space, the ‘me in the present’ identifying itself in its important, defining features, with the ‘me before HSS’, thus with a ‘me’ which continued to exist, despite changes and nuances initiated by life events.

Instead of defining their world simply through the intermediary of class, gender or race, the homeless people reflected on the interests and values meaningful to them. It was these concepts that became tools in depicting the self. Some of these tools had been announced by previous studies (such as ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’), whilst others became significant specifically to the participants in the study – ‘time’ – and, even more, their unique appropriation of time became meaningful and worth exploring. These tools used by the participants to describe their identities were employed in order to create a coherent biography, which drew its strength from the times before HSS and survived through and was strengthened by the homelessness event, among other biographical
events. All these tools became part of their current presentation of self and helped them situate the self in their contemporary realities. For example, the first challenge Paul (60) experienced was his wife’s vehement opposition (Chapter 7) to him quitting his job. The realisation of the stigma connected to unemployment had the potential to erase the previous persona (of a committed, passionate individual, who was intensely proud of his job) that Paul had constructed. From that moment on, Paul faced consecutive challenges, amongst which one he chose to dwell on was the changes of ‘home’ from a secure, owned home which he shared with his wife, to the mobility of living in his car, to eventually living rough and at HSS. Despite these constant challenges to his identity, Paul maintained the conviction that he remained the same person. This was expressed in a multitude of ways: in his declaration that whatever clothes he wore, he was still the ‘same person’ underneath (Chapter 6), by underlining that the friends who stayed with him through his difficulties were those who knew him from before and believed he was still the same ‘guy’ (Chapter 5) and not least through numerous anecdotes from his life before, during and after homelessness (Chapter 7), which always portrayed a person whose core features remained the same: stubborn, but kind, sociable and able to make friends fast, a family man yet not an ideal husband.

The study revealed complex perceptions of self and a permanent need to clarify the interviewees’ concept of self through and after the homelessness event. Throughout the interviews, the core of the individual remained, even though events, attitudes around it and their own status changed and differed in meaning and strength. Reformulating and re-evaluating attributes of their identity that remained meaningful to them (such as home, homelessness and time) was essential in engaging and coping with the realities of their present and past situation; however through all of these changes, the interviewees permanently recovered and referenced back to the self that they believed uniquely characterised them: the ‘me before HSS’, which perpetuated, in its essential elements, in the ‘me in the future’. Each individual chose what they believed were the characteristics which best defined their core. Among the most encountered attributes were: remaining a motivated and ambitious person, despite difficulties, one who could go back to their job, vocation or calling (Allen 23, Michael 46, Jimmy 30); remaining a fundamentally ‘good’ person, who was capable, in the worst moments of their lives as well as in the best, to help others, to thus empathise with others outside of their immediate realities (Cal 46, Jimmy 30, Kate 25); remaining a family person and thus resisting the disjointed life in the street (Gerard 63, Darren 63, Michael 46) or combinations of these features.
Through the means of the narrative and by bringing the three identity ‘tools’ (home, homelessness and time) to the forefront, the interviewees built a ‘career’ (Sennett 1999) – a personal narrative of inner growth which helped them to deal with the changes imposed by homelessness. Homelessness literature suggests transcending the homelessness experience by trying to pass as the person’s better self (Snow and Anderson 1993, Radley et al 2000, Jhulia 2004). In the present study, even more, the homelessness event was used more flexibly, it became part of the interviewees’ identity – an asset to show their ‘strength’ (Cal, in Chapter 5). Among the examples of creative measures employed by the interviewees to deal with the stigmatising event and to retrieve the core of their self, there were: allusions to interviewees’ previous work or social status (such as Jimmy’s allusions to his work in the media, or Michael’s high powered job account – both in Chapter 6); comparisons with the homeless in the street, which would favour the interviewees (throughout Chapter 5); anecdotes which showed others’ gratitude/ appreciation/ trust etc. (in Chapter 7); or justification of the homelessness event (such as Darren’s explanation that he had been ‘destined to be in the streets’ due to his family history – in Chapter 5).

To sum up, the interviewees showed a complex concept of identity. It was neither rigid (completely pre-determined by housing limitations, rules and structures), nor completely fluid and thus adrift from any restrictions. The interviewees’ concept of identity belonged to the ‘Third Space’ approach. Through self-reflection, the interviewees used concepts important to them (such as home, homelessness and time) in ways which suited them best, in order to reaffirm and reformulate their identities. They became empowered in using their homelessness experiences, their present status and aspirations to the future, in creating an identity that they felt best reflected them.

The formerly homeless interviewees thus had a ‘deeply embedded sense of who they were’ (Shilling 2008: 169), which led them to pursue a search and recovery of their past self and a reinstatement of this self into the future. The desired purpose for these continued iterations of self was transcendence over the homelessness state and situation, into a projected self and future which would be acceptable to the interviewees and others.

An often encountered criticism of the ‘Third Space’ and one that I have alluded to throughout this chapter, is the extent to which the ‘reformulation of social categories’ is available to all individuals and, in the present context, determines the homeless selves in the same way and to the same extent that it would happen with people who
had more opportunities to reformulate the self (Burkitt 2008). The study shows that, despite not having the same opportunities as other individuals within their reach (i.e. changing a job, or own looks, own style), the homeless individuals maintained a social grounding with characteristics which were important for them, and, in the same fluid way, they redefined those concepts to suit them. These social conceptualisations did not disappear, they were merely reformulated.

The simple action of listening to homeless people’s life stories and interpreting them in close connection to their accounts allowed for this identity work to take place, issuing a portrayal of the ‘single homeless person’ deeply grounded in their own perception of self. The way the interviewees referred to the events and concepts they chose to redefine became more nuanced through conducting a qualitative investigation. An analysis through the lens of contemporary identity theories places the identity work done by the homeless people in a larger identity context and sheds light on where the ‘single homeless people’ situated themselves. In this context, the homeless people do not appear devoid of decision making powers over their own identities. They operate changes and redefine their identities with the tools they have at hand: even though still bounded by rules and structures, the person acts and reacts and is reflexive regarding their own redefinition. The tools they are using are those that are within their reach, and centre on conceptualisations of ‘home’, ‘stigma’ and ‘time’. A transcendence into the future is possible, and leads to aspirations and goals which are important for the physical move on and out of homelessness.

Whilst the present study aligns itself to recent homelessness studies (McCarthy 2014, Jhulia 2004, De Ward 2007, Harter et al 2005, Butchinsky 2007) in arguing for the continued need to build a bridge between homelessness qualitative studies and contemporary conceptualisations of identity, it advocates that the complexity of homelessness as a concept (as revealed by this study and existing literature) requires a placement of homelessness, as a potentially stigmatising experience, within the identity building processes of the people affected by it. A continued dialogue between identity theories and homelessness studies is necessary in order to build in a coherent way a deeper understanding of the homeless self and of the weight of the homelessness event on the self.
CHAPTER 9: Conclusion

The last chapter of the thesis summarises the main sociological (section 9.1.), methodological (section 9.2.) and policy (section 9.3.) contributions of this research, in three subsections.

9.1. The sociological contribution of the study

The study has used a combined narrative and thematic approach to understand single homeless people's attitudes to themselves, their home and their status in the housing system. In the context of the homelessness research field feeling more confident about qualitative research and in a policy context emerging from financial cuts to the sector and the crossover of two governments, the study shed light on this particular category of people within homelessness (the ‘single homeless person’), which was under researched.

I found that the homeless person’s definitions of self were different to the Government definition. The single homeless person engaged in a consistent process of reaffirmation and reformulation of self. I argued that in a world characterised by a ‘deepening level of reflexivity in everyday life’ (Burkitt 2008), it became even more important to recognise the individuals’ ability to change and adapt to the new conditions of their environment, whilst at the same time having an engrained ability to create a sense of a core identity. Factors and situations around the formerly homeless interviewees changed, and the way they referenced their identity was different (devoid of certain social constructs and introducing others), but through these redefinitions and reasserted narratives, the homeless individuals did not lose their sense of identity and their sense of self was not adrift. Remaining pivotal in the interviewees’ definitions of self were: home, homelessness and time.

Intersecting narratives with a sociological and policy level brought new dimensions to understanding the single homeless person. Ultimately the study offers a challenge, a counter-narrative to policy terms. This style of interviewing and analysis brought different concepts to the fore, such as a time component to homelessness narratives.

The study supports the already initiated and on-going dialogue (Jhulia 2004, Butchinsky 2007, Goode 2007, Ravenhill 2008) between identity theories and homelessness studies as necessary in order to build a deeper understanding of the
homeless self and of the weight of the homelessness event on the self. Furthermore, this study brings together theories about home, stigma, time and identity.

For the interviewees, home was multidimensional. It reached further than a hostel, a residential area, to a city and a general feeling of stability and security. Age and length of time at HSS remained concepts which influenced the identity of the formerly homeless person, when referring to ‘home’. Different age interviewees referred to home differently and had different requirements from HSS and the support at HSS. Length of time also influenced attitudes to home. Those who had resided at HSS for increased amounts of time found subsequent moves harder.

The homelessness event was perceived as stigmatising, but the stigma was turned into a positive in some of formerly homeless people’s narratives. It was seen as an opportunity to delve further into definitions of identity, towards establishing an acceptable present self. The homelessness event was integrated in interviewees’ identities through extensive descriptions and through a complex process of legitimation: vilification, justification and eventually reconstruction were all methods employed in dealing with the assumed stigma of the homelessness event. For most of the formerly homeless people, the result of this process was an appropriation of the homelessness event as another means of constructing the present self as a better self.

Contributing to this construction of an improved self was interviewees’ concept of time. Time was used flexibly, in the narrative and in perceptions of future, present and past, in order to underline two main issues which were considered essential for interviewees’ self definitions: leaving the homeless persona behind and aspiring to a better persona.

Three personas emerged from formerly homeless people’s narratives: ‘me at my lowest’ (which included the homelessness event), ‘me at HSS’ and ‘me in the future’. Time was stretched, extended, compressed or broken for the purpose of fashioning of identity. Elements from the past were brought in the present. These could be: elements of a ‘glorified’ past, which involved a pre-homelessness persona who had distinguishably positive attributes and thus could not be confused with the ‘homeless homeless’; elements of the past brought in the present could also be moments of homelessness, which through their juxtaposition with positive facets of the present, made for the portrayal of a deserving present self. Glorified elements of the future were equally brought to the present, this action appropriating them in the present – they became real in the ‘now’ and contributed to a portrait of a better self.
In the study, it became clear that the homeless individualities emerging from interviewees’ discourses needed to be interpreted in a context of multiple selves (Burkitt 2008). The study showed that the core of the formerly homeless person did not disappear. The individual reformulated the world around them, to better fit with the homelessness experience, and in this process used a fluid idea of time. These reformulations of self led to a complex image of the individual living in supported housing, for whom the term ‘single homeless person’ was not all encompassing.

The study aligns itself to contemporary qualitative investigations of homelessness, which identify researching homeless identities as important and worthwhile. The study thus has a sociological contribution, in advocating that the complexity of homelessness as concept (as revealed by this study and existing literature) requires for a placement of homelessness, as potentially stigmatising experience, within the identity building processes of the people affected by it. I propose a dialogue between identity theories, homelessness studies and my own qualitative research, in order to build a thorough understanding of the ‘single homeless person’.

The study also has methodological and policy implications, which are described as follows.

9.2. Methodological strengths: telling a personal story

The research methods used in this study and the strengths and limitations of these methods were discussed in Chapter 4. This section presents the influence of these methods over the study findings.

An important methodological innovation of the present study is the merging of thematic and narrative analysis in researching single homeless people. Following narrative interviews, I used the tiered approach of thematic analysis to extract codes, themes, analytical concepts and eventually formulating theory in the first two chapters: homelessness and home. Then I analyzed interviewees’ narratives as a whole in producing a narrative perspective of their lives. Narrative interviews and thematic analysis are used more and more frequently in homelessness studies (Ravenhill 2008, Jhulia 2004, DeWard 2007), however rarely applied to ‘single homeless people’ specifically. The study takes the view that qualitative research and in particular narrative research gives interviewees the ground for presentation of self. In narrative interviews, the interviewee is encouraged to tell their life story, in any way they see fit.
The sociologist is informed by the repetitions which naturally occur in the telling of the life story, as it is these reiterations which contain most meaning. At the analysis stage, I used thematic and narrative analysis combined. The interviews issued both types of data.

The interviews thus passed through two filters of analysis: firstly a thematic approach, which allowed specific themes connected to homelessness and the institution to unfold, secondly a narrative approach.

Thematic analysis involves a staged style of coding. From codes, themes and analytical concepts emerged, which eventually led to the formulation of theory. This essentially involved no prior assumptions about the data and thus full grounding of the findings in the interviews with the single homeless people. The thematic approach helped guide the analysis towards the main sociological themes which influenced the participants’ perceptions of homelessness and themselves. During this analysis, it became clear that some social categories were used differently by the interviewees compared with other studies. By using a narrative approach, the interviewees’ accounts were placed at the centre of the analysis and this added a different way of presenting the findings, which brought their perspective to the fore. Chapter 7 showed that through iterations, regressions and repeated telling, a coherent and complex image of the individual in supported housing was formed. By being allowed to narrate their life stories, the interviewees felt that they were able to provide a more holistic (and therefore more truthful) perspective over their lives and understandings of homelessness (Section 4.5.).

The study demonstrates that a combined thematic and narrative analysis approach, which focuses on the individuals’ own reflection of their current and past situation and where the discussion is led by the formerly homeless person rather than the interviewer makes for a different type of data and a better understanding of the way formerly homeless people define themselves. Talking to the researched individuals, rather than about them, and in a way which makes sense to them, leads to richer and more complex information. This type of interviewing gave participants an opportunity to tell stories of themselves which were meaningful to them; by narrating their life stories, individuals were able to relate their own, very personal and conceptually rich vision of the world and of self. Even more, by being able to tell their life stories, the formerly homeless people found a further opportunity to introspect and identify what they considered essential to their self – the aspects which they referred back to or identified as essential for the future, and which made coping with the biographical breach of the
homelessness event easier. This enhanced sense of self was essential for constructing a definition of identity. The study reveals a constant process of re-affirmation and reformulation of identity through different phases of homelessness, and during the research interviews themselves. Looking at individual people and understanding their own perspective, how they saw themselves and definitional issues is thus one of the main strengths of the research.

Another methodological innovation was the analysis of anecdotes within the narratives and the discussion of their importance in the interviews, as well as of their placement within the narratives and how this interfered with the meaning conveyed. This attention to the detail in the narrative is specific to this study. Anecdotes served an array of purposes (from mere interruptions in the narration, to meaning-changing exercises) and by identifying them as specifically significant for the interviewees, I was able to delve further in the construction of the homeless narratives. Anecdotes were particularly important in the ‘broken’ narratives, as they were used as the main tool to ‘break’ the narrative from a biographical to a non-linear approach, and with each breach, a new, unresolved issue in the life of the narrator would be introduced and made sense of. Anecdotes were thus functioning as signals for the researcher in the change of meaning.

Narrative research thus helped best to situate the homelessness event within the life stories of the interviewees. I did not set out to construct a generalised pattern, even though some of the findings did eventually point to areas of policy and practice, as section 9.3. further details.

9.2.1. Methodological challenges, differences and reflections

The research method chosen led to a series of challenges for the researcher as well as at times different paths for the research, which required sensitivity to the subject studied, attention to detail and self-reflection. This section presents a few reflections on these challenges and how I dealt with them.

Firstly, the length of the narrative interviews and thus the large amount of data generated by one single interview led to a small scale study, of thirty interviews (out of which twenty eight were included in the present analysis). My layered, iterative and mixed methods analysis led to detailed usage of the unique data, rich in meaning. In fact, not only did I find that I had reached ‘data saturation’ for the themes I chose to explore, but I often found I had to discard (or rather, to archive) data during analysis,
due to its abundance. Even more, studying homeless people’s lives in a narrative way has the additional benefit of revealing important and not readily available aspects of the social life, such as the underlying tension between age and status and the connections between time and identity, which would be very difficult to explore on a predominantly quantitative route. Narrative interviews are also reported as best fitting for studying hard to reach, marginalized groups (Ravenhill 2008), and in fact, this proved to be the case in the present study. In fact, I noticed a difference in reactions between the interviewees I had asked to ‘tell me about being homeless’ and those (the majority) that I asked to ‘tell me the story of your life’, the latter much more readily ‘pouring’ information about their life experience whilst eventually touching on the homelessness event.

Secondly, a challenge of qualitative research is the position of the researcher. In my case, I benefitted from the ambiguous position of an insider (as a former worker) whilst at the same time an outsider (as researcher). Being an insider confers a position of power and trust and therefore requires further care and self-reflection upon entering the field. Even more, interviewing socially excluded people can be problematic and needs to be done in an empowering way (Jhulia 2004). As detailed in Chapter 4, I negotiated my insider status by taking on a more ambiguous and ultimately more neutral role, of someone in-between two worlds: that of the researcher and that of the worker. As worker, I was finely attuned to any sign of distress and able to manage any difficult situation. I also became an ambiguous representative of the housing professional. The ambiguity was created jointly by my known status at HSS, interviewees’ expectations and my evasive acceptance of this status. This interaction in itself was a creative measure, both on my part and my interviewees’ part, of synchronising our perceptions of the world towards a profitable momentary interaction at the time of the interview.

My previous experience played an important part in more than one interview, especially in the emotionally tense situations when I felt prepared to deal with people’s reactions. My previous training as a support worker and experience as a manager gave me increased confidence. Knowing the interviewees led to better quality of data as I knew how they would react and how to prioritise asking questions or take a step back. Having worked with vulnerable people, I found it easy to negotiate different interview situations such as long silences or breaks in narration.

On the other hand, the style of the interviews (narrative interviews) kept researcher intrusions minimal. Narrative research offers complete freedom to the narrator and thus
I felt the research method allowed the interviewees full control over the interview and the story told. In most cases, I felt I was told a story of personal significance, where my interruptions were kept at bay.

Even further, the difference from a housing interview was that the interviewees were not interrupted and they were encouraged to tell their stories in as much detail as they found fit. Interviewing formerly homeless people now housed, I was aware that I might be faced with rehearsed narratives – narratives which had been told time and time again to other professionals and which had eliminated personal aspects or traumatic experiences. However, narrative interviews proved to be different throughout. The interviewees would often repeat themselves or return to previously mentioned themes or subjects, and it was those repetitions and iterations that were most meaningful and that I took into account. I got confirmation on more than one occasion that participant-led interviewing had been achieved: their self-adjustments, their collaborations with me were on-going proof of a successful interview and of rich data being collected.

Throughout the data analysis stage, I maintained a self-reflective attitude. I asked for feedback after each interview and kept a diary. I became aware of the personal characteristics that played a role in the interview: my advanced pregnancy, my age (in my early thirties, rather than twenties, as the majority of support workers) and being a woman. I noted down when each of those thoughts became important and integrated these notes into the main analysis. Ultimately, my own notes and observations, as well as the individual’s own uncertainties and hesitations were built into the main subject of the research, together with the main interview data.

9.3. Policy recommendations

Alongside the sociological and methodological gains, the study also benefits from observations on the policy for ‘single homeless people’. The study contributes to developing a definition of the single homeless person and more widely a definition of homelessness, which, it has already been observed, few studies have endeavored to do (research generally centering on the causes and factors of homelessness). The study shows that not taking account of day to day experiences of homeless people can lead to gaps and misunderstandings in policy.

In a policy context which focuses on cuts and efficiency of services, being able to understand this subtle but existing difference between individuals’ strength of self at
different stages in their lives and their actual ability to move on and turn their lives around could help creating services which are more user-led or user-centred but which in the long term have more efficient results than the one size fits all approach.

As shown in the previous chapter, among the main findings was the interviewees’ reticence to identify as ‘homeless homeless’ and subsequently not identifying with the phrase ‘single homeless people’. Interviewees fashioned a complex idea of self, which included the pre-homelessness persona as one of the main reference points. In most cases, ‘me in the future’ was aspirational, allowing for external intervention and support, open to options and alternatives. It is this non-homeless persona, which is distinctive from the ‘homeless homeless’ and which was considered essential by interviewees, that this section discusses.

9.3.1. Consider ‘multidimensionality’ of home and homelessness in move on policies

Government definitions concentrate on responding to the ‘needs’ of the ‘single homeless people’ (Chapter 1), but a list of these needs (Appendix 1), though exhaustive, does not reflect the social categories which emerged in the study. The ‘needs’ for instance mention the imperative to move on from supported housing, but do not seem to tackle the emotional impact of move on, and even more, the difference between those having stayed longer, and those having spent shorter time in supported housing.

Firstly, in the study, interviewees emphasised the importance of emotional strength in overcoming the homelessness event (‘I have the strength’ – Chapter 5). It is therefore important to recognise the continued need for emotional support (from qualified staff) when homeless as well as immediately afterwards - when living in supported accommodation.

Secondly, the study discussed the dangers of being stuck in one type of housing with limited options to leave, as well as the difficulties of following an integrated supported pathway model in day to day reality. A rigid, two year move on model led to prolonging feelings of unsettlement and instability, whilst de facto it was not observed in most cases. People who had lived at HSS for a long time expressed anxiety at moving and being faced with a different reality (Chapter 6). Acknowledging that people have different needs and that a universal move on approach (which moves people in stages or ‘bands’) might not be feasible for everyone, is important.
A series of recommendations come out, regarding the multidimensionality of home, addressing: stability, support and move on timings.

9.3.1.1. Recommendation regarding move on: diminish number of move ons, to ensure increased ‘stability’

All accommodation offered by the organization was temporary, with a maximum two year stay. However, the ‘slow but sure’ approach that characterised HSS’s attitude towards its residents (in Chapter 6 – a consistent weighing of residents’ chances of success in moving on), was seen as essential by interviewees in their recovery. On an individual level, the ‘slow but sure’ approach appeared to work in providing HSS residents with stability and a chance to settle insecurities and formerly chaotic lifestyles.

This attitude pre-empted changes in policy. In 2010, following feedback from several housing associations of the area, it was accepted that in reality it would take the majority of people housed in supported housing longer than two years to move on in Sea City. Thus two year move on became more guidance than a standard reinforced in practice, following this attitude shift.

Even more, at a European level, there is a philosophical shift from the ‘pathway’ or ‘staircase’ models of housing provision for ‘single homeless people’ to a ‘housing first’ approach, which assumes immediate ‘permanent supportive housing’ without the previous gradual plan (Jones and Please 2010). Although not adopted in the UK (with a few trial exceptions), this new way of thinking is preferred by main homelessness lobbying agencies such as Homeless Link. The present study notes some of the caveats and alternatives.

This research thus suggests that on the one hand, a similar system to Housing First might prove to be appropriate for those people who would otherwise have remained indefinitely at HSS and who could in this way access long-term housing which would be appropriate for a long-term process of building a new post-homelessness identity.

92 The scheme was in pilot stage at the time of analysis. Housing First, already used in the US, involves providing permanent supportive housing for single, homeless adults with serious needs, often with serious mental illness and often co-occurring substance-related needs. The approach provides direct, or nearly direct access to housing, without any requirements to follow detox programs or psychiatric treatment. It is intended to the chronically homeless population, for whom finding stable accommodation can be a real challenge. In the US, positive results, of permanent settlement and housing stability, are already reported (Stergiopoulos et al 2014, Pearson et al 2009).
On the other hand, increased support at the point of moving into supported housing might lead to more people managing to move straight into the community, as is detailed below.

9.3.1.2: Recommendation regarding support: increase support at point of accessing supported housing and according to age

Chapter 7 showed different ability to leave the homelessness state at at different points in accommodation. Progress narratives, which were charged with a positive language and a look towards the future, were generally told by the people who had least stayed in the homelessness situation and/or resided at HSS for the least amount of time. This led to conclude that it was not simply the event of homelessness or living in temporary accommodation that mattered in individuals’ definitions of self, but also the length of time spent in either situation. An extended period of time spent in unsettled housing could lead to the formation of a broken/disempowered narrative.

It is therefore important that intervention should be targeted at the point when the strength to leave the homelessness state is still prominent. Most studies define intervention as mainly ‘early intervention’ (Ravenhill 2008, Van Doorn 1999, Boydell 2000), thus connected to people’s age and therefore having an impact on the amount of time people spend in unsuitable accommodation or in the street. The present study suggests the definition of intervention ought to be more subtle than this. Intervention should not only take place at the point of accessing supported housing, but it should ideally take place at the moment of maximum strength of the pre-homelessness persona. In this study, this would sometimes happen when the interviewees were – in their own definition – young (for example Danny (18), Kate (24), Allen (24)), at other times length of stay would be important for the affirmation of the pre-homelessness persona (for example Cal (46), Darren (63), Paul (60)).

The study thus shows that age and time (in homelessness and supported housing) were important categories making a difference in the interviewees’ perceptions of their future. It is at these crucial points: when someone has just left homelessness and when someone can still be defined and still considers themselves as young, that added support would be most effective. Alongside the Work Programme, the Welfare Reform introduced the Youth Contract, creating increased work opportunities for young people, through apprenticeships, work experience and wage incentives for businesses (DWP 2013). Youth was thus considered important for increased chances of moving on.
However, length of stay and the importance of intervention at the very first stages of living in supported housing, when the individual is at their readiest to think about future plans and move on, is not emphasised in previous or new policies.

At the local level, in 2010, a ‘Move on support service’ was created in Sea City, aimed particularly at offering personalised support to individuals who had recently moved into supported housing such as HSS and were planning to move on to ‘independent living’. The HSS branch of that service supported six people to move out of HSS and into their own flats, during one year. Funding was not renewed in 2011 and the service was stopped. The findings in the present study show such a service could be important, as the interviewees who voiced their readiness to move on and think about the future were those who had not lived in supported housing for an extended time.

9.3.1.3. **Recommendation regarding time restrictions: remove fixed time boundaries in move on procedures**

The study showed there were several stages/levels/personas on which the reconstruction of identity was based. The interviewees did not want to return to the homeless state, and for this they felt they needed to recover their pre-homeless identities, which added value to their future selves. Such reconstruction of the self can be affected by both biographical and social time: it can be instant for some, but it can take a long time for others. At the level of the policy, there therefore needs to be consideration of this need for people to reconstruct their background. This might mean that certain policies (such as the move on policy, access to detox services, employment programmes) cannot be fixed in pre-determined time brackets, but need a more flexible approach. If for some people redefinition of the present self happens quickly and it is at that point that intervention is best (as detailed above) in order to move on and towards their post-homeless self, other people might simply need more time: time to reformulate their past self, time to settle into their present self and time to formulate a future self.

Thus if intervention should be aimed at the earliest moment possible, move on ideally would be considered on a case by case basis.
9.3.2. Inexactness of the term: ‘single homeless person’

The second policy concern regards the label ‘single homeless person’. More than just Government jargon, the words led to connotations which assigned a specific and recognisable role in society, which interviewees felt they did not belong to. One of the main reasons why ‘single homeless person’ could be perceived as a negative label is its semantic closeness to ‘homelessness’. The resemblance in terms leaves no room for differentiation in the social comparison which interviewees used at all times (between them and the ‘homeless homeless’—Chapter 5). Ravenhill (2008) discusses a two way stigmatisation process through the use of labels in housing. Firstly, the homeless people are already cast as outsiders through the definition. Secondly, the homeless people do not feel they are characterised by the term and feel a disproportionate need to justify the label. These points can be extended to the present study. For the interviewees, ‘homeless’ (or ‘single homeless’) became too general (see figure 5.1.) and it was not seen to reflect an actual reality, but rather to reflect the pressure to move on: ‘I was homeless, I do not see myself as homeless anymore; I am still defined as homeless in the policy; I need to leave (move on), or I will become homeless again’. Thus, a ‘degree’ (Link and Phelan 2001) of the homelessness stigma persisted in supported housing.

A possible solution to the perceived loss of status caused by the ‘single homeless person’ label would be a redefinition of the category for the people already housed, replacing, if possible, the term, with wording more specific to the interviewees’ situation (i.e. ‘people in supported housing’, ‘residents of temporary accommodation’ or ‘clients of supported housing’) and thus differentiating among different levels of homelessness. This differentiation would be closer to interviewees’ perceptions of their status at HSS. At the level of voluntary sector organisations, the shift in language was starting to appear. Organisations in Sea City named people in their housing with appellations which appeared following consultation with the people concerned. ‘Client’, ‘customer’, ‘resident’, ‘service user’, ‘young person in supported housing’, ‘individual’ were all terms used at the local level instead the label of ‘single homeless person’.

As Ravenhill (2008) pointed out, institutional language is useful in signalling the stage someone is at, their place of residence and steps which need to be taken by staff who may be unfamiliar with someone’s situation. Even more, institutional language, when used appropriately, could contribute to an overall positive influence on someone’s
attitude to their own life and their future. In the present study, this was often noted, but not in reference to the ‘single homeless person’ label. Thus, other policy terms such as ‘move on’, ‘move up’, ‘pathway’ were welcomed by those individuals who aimed to leave the temporary accommodation of the present (Chapter 6). There is a fine line between a language of blaming and stereotyping on the one hand and a motivating, positive language on the other hand. The latter can be useful for maintaining a positive attitude to life and the future and, more importantly, for contributing to a strengthening of self, which would lead to eventually leaving the supported accommodation of the present.

9.3.3. The value of (paid and unpaid) employment and education

Policies in place at the time of the study recognised ‘daytime homelessness’ – the risks faced by formerly homeless people who, even though housed, still could experience low self-esteem, lack of sense of purpose and lack of ‘clear structure and goals in their lives’ (Jones and Pleace 2010, May 2006, Butchinsky 2007). The present study suggested employment and non-paid work could provide a sense of purpose and a view to the future for the residents of HSS. Whilst the Coalition Government’s Welfare Reform aimed at ‘maximising the incentives and opportunities for people on benefit to enter paid work’, less emphasis was placed on non-paid work. Work and education have different connotations under the 2013 Government agenda. In the Welfare Reform (October 2013), education and voluntary commitments do not fare equally to paid work and do not offer a ‘route out of homelessness’ for ‘single homeless people’. This subsequently leads to individuals being much less interested in unpaid work, but at the same time to an inability to assume and sustain paid work (Fothergill et al 2013). In an assessment of the Work Programme, Morphy et al (2013) asked for the value of ‘pre-employment skills’ to be recognised and reiterated in amendments to the present programme. Their study showed that there were still hardest to reach homeless people who were failed by the programme, people who expressed a wish to work but were not provided with the right type of support to ensure their successful return to work.

More and more services in Sea City focused on providing avenues to employment, rather than volunteering opportunities. In fact, at the organisational level, from 2012, Supporting People introduced performance indicators which monitored the amount of people gaining access to paid employment in each quarter. The present study suggests other types of not paid activities, such as training, education, voluntary jobs,
were meaningful for the interviewees on more than one level. Rather than just functioning as another step towards paid employment, not paid work contributed to a definition of the self with an outlook to the future.

Some interviewees’ declared aspirations to progress while at HSS and beyond opened discussion on the role of work and education in their lives. ‘Improving myself’ went beyond the connotations of work – it referred to reversing the homelessness effects and getting back to a pre-homelessness persona through the intermediary of education and unpaid work.

The study recommends a review of the Work Programme and a restructuring of the support offered, in order to provide more support for those ‘most vulnerable’ or ‘who face most barriers to go back to work’. The present study shows not only the value of staggered and personalised approaches to going back to work, but also the importance of any type of education or employment (paid and unpaid) in promoting and maintaining aspirations, goals and a vision beyond the supported housing system (a projection of ‘me in the future’).

9.4. Concluding reflections

The study found that the homeless person’s definitions of self were different to the Government definition. The single homeless person engaged in a consistent process of reaffirmation and reformulation of self, but through all changes, the core of the individual remained stable.

Intersecting narratives with a sociological and policy level brought new dimensions to understanding the single homeless person. Ultimately the study offers a challenge, a counter-narrative to policy terms. This style of interviewing and analysis brought different concepts to the fore, such as a time component to homelessness narratives.

From a sociological perspective, the study aligns itself with existing qualitative research which advocates for a dialogue between identity theories and homelessness studies in order to build a deeper understanding of the homeless self and of the weight of the homelessness event on the self.

In a policy context which focuses on cuts and efficiency of services, being able to understand this subtle difference between individual’s strength of selves, between the stages in their lives and their actual ability to move on and turn their lives around could
help to create services which are more user-led or user-centred but which in the long term have more efficient results than the one size fits all approach.

From a policy perspective, the study shows a need for offering diversified and integrative strategies that acknowledge the relationships between the government, the family, the community and the individual's sense of self. Ultimately, the study asks for a reflection of a changed society and therefore changed needs in the social policies affecting single homeless people.
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93 An alias for the organisation, which was anonymised.
94 Anonymised.


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95 anonymised
96 anonymised


Appendix 1: Single homeless person – further information and list of support needs at HSS

FEANTSA definition of homelessness

There is a variety of households which could be assessed as homeless. A FEANTSA developed typology of homelessness, ETHOS, separates different types of homelessness in four distinct areas: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing, inadequate housing:

ROOFLESS
1 People living rough
2 People staying in a night shelter

HOUSELESS
3 People in accommodation for homeless people (including temporary accommodation)
4 People in women's shelters
5 People in accommodation for immigrants
6 People due to be released from institutions (prison and hospital) who are at risk of homelessness due to support needs and people who are unable to move on from institutions due to lack of suitable move on housing)
7 People receiving support (due to homelessness i.e. in supported accommodation, including those unable to move on from supported housing due to lack of suitable)

INSECURE 8 People living in insecure accommodation (squatting, illegal camping, sofa surfing or sleeping on floors, staying with friends or relatives)
9 People living under threat of eviction
10 People living under threat of violence

INADEQUATE 11 People living in temporary / non-standard structures
12 People living in unfit housing
13 People living in extreme overcrowding
Definition of homelessness (Jones and P lace 2010):

The break between being housed and being homeless is neither sharp nor definitive. Rather, homeless people may find themselves in a cycle, moving back and forth between the streets and shelters, after a prolonged decline from cheap rental housing, through living with friends or family, to shelters and the street. This sequence also hides many homeless people, contributing to difficulties in counting the population.

Who can access HSS housing? (Shelter 2007)

‘To access long-term housing under the homelessness legislation, a household must make an application to a local authority. The local authority has a duty to house individuals or households who meet the following criteria:

- legally classed as homeless – by having nowhere that is available and reasonable to occupy, anywhere in the world
- in priority need – applying to all households that contain a pregnant woman or are responsible for dependent children; to some households made up of a 16- to 17-year-old or a care leaver aged 18 to 21; or where someone in the household is vulnerable, eg because of old age, mental or physical health problems; or by being in prison, care or the armed forces
- unintentionally homeless – those who have not deliberately done, or failed to do, something that caused them to become homeless, such as failing to make rent or mortgage payments when they could have afforded to do so.

Authorities also have a duty to continue to provide temporary accommodation for these households until settled accommodation can be found for them.’

‘Causes of homelessness

The causes of homelessness are varied and complex. Homelessness is likely to result from the complex interplay between structural and personal factors.

Structural factors
Structural factors may include:

- unemployment
- poverty
- housing market shortages and lack of affordable housing
- how the national housing system operates
- the extent of people’s housing rights
- social trends, such as the increasing incidence of relationship breakdown, and rising numbers of people living alone
- the structure and administration of Housing Benefit
- wider policy developments, such as the closure of long-stay psychiatric hospitals.

Low income, unemployment and poverty are almost universal factors in homelessness.

Certain groups of people in society are more likely to be economically and socially disadvantaged. Groups such as lone parents, people with mental health problems, care leavers and other people leaving institutions, and people from ethnic minorities are more likely to experience homelessness.

**Personal factors**

Personal and social factors relate to the individual, family or community. They play a key role in people’s vulnerability to becoming homeless. These may include one or more of the following:

- individual factors – including drug and alcohol misuse; difficulties at school; lack of qualifications; lack of social support; debts, especially mortgage or rent arrears; poor physical and mental health; and getting involved in crime at an early age
- family background – including family breakdown and disputes; sexual and physical abuse in childhood or adolescence; having parents with drug or alcohol problems; and previous experience of family homelessness
- an institutional background – including having been in care; the armed forces; or in prison.

For many people, there’s no single event that results in sudden homelessness. Instead, over time, the cumulative effects of a number of unresolved problems can lead
to homelessness, and often to repeat episodes of homelessness. A study suggests that it can take about nine years for this cumulative effect to result in homelessness.

Source: www.shelter.org.uk © 2007

LIST OF SUPPORT NEEDS FOR RESIDENTS IN THE INTEGRATED CARE PATHWAY (AT HSS)

Physical health (with several categories, such as: affecting mobility, affecting behaviour, affecting memory etc.)

Mental health

Learning/ communications issues

Alcohol use

Drug use

Legal issues/ convictions

Cultural, faith or lifestyle needs

House management issues

Staying safe

Budgeting and money

Participation in wider community

Future housing needs/ move-on needs

Source: HSS Support Needs Paperwork
## Appendix 2: Details and summary of interviewees' life stories – as part of the analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>Features of the story</th>
<th>Features of the narrative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In short</td>
<td>Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice, 66</td>
<td>Old style homelessness (no support, no social money)</td>
<td>Mental illness</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Features of the story

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>In short</th>
<th>Childhood</th>
<th>Pre-homelessness</th>
<th>During and Post homelessness</th>
<th>Other</th>
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## Features of the narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STYLE</th>
<th>STARTS narrative with</th>
<th>CRISIS point (includes description of crisis/tipping point?)</th>
<th>Digression/ anecdote?</th>
<th>HIS/ her STORY</th>
<th>MESSAGE</th>
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</table>

- **own narrative style**
  - ‘hmm, I’m always saying yes to these people’

- **live in Carlisle.**
  - ‘Too much silence got me ill’

- **There was a regret for not having married and not having had children, but this regret does not exist anymore.**
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<th>NAME</th>
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<th>Features of the narrative</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In short</strong></td>
<td><strong>Childhood</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pre-homelessness</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Allen, 23</td>
<td>Young disoriented. Drugs</td>
<td>Own father left him. Broken family No guidance or support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bob, 70</td>
<td>Drinker</td>
<td>Never</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Orphaned</td>
<td>learnt to live on his own</td>
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<td>Institutionalised from young.</td>
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cope (having a plan). Wants a job. HSS as stopgap.

‘I would not be here without the staff, this is what I wanted to say’
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<td>Childhoo</td>
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<td>Chris, 46</td>
<td>‘new’ homelessness – economic crisis</td>
<td>‘I had a normal childhood’</td>
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<td>Cal, 46 alcoholics</td>
<td>Not narrated</td>
<td>Two children, Keeps contact.</td>
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<td>Carly, 54 Story of the present</td>
<td>Only narrates present life</td>
<td>Avoids mentioning family, even Works at daycentre and charity shop</td>
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<td>Danny, 19</td>
<td>Young person</td>
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<td>Darren, 63</td>
<td>Alcoholism Depression</td>
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<td>Good education.</td>
<td>Unable to adjust: ‘inside I'm a recycled teenager’</td>
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<td>Eric, 44</td>
<td>Drinker, trying to sober up</td>
<td>Started drinking at an early age.</td>
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<td>Gerard, 63</td>
<td>In short: Mental illness, Loneliness</td>
<td>Style: Starts narrative with CRISIS point (includes description of crisis/tipping point?)</td>
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<td>Childhood: Sensitive child, Supportive middle class parents.</td>
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<td>Pre-homelessness: Became unwell in stages. Was married; had house, job, children.</td>
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<td>During and Post homelessness: Keeps contact with children and parents. Likes living at HSS, welcomes the support.</td>
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<td>Other: Faith helped</td>
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<td>Gerry, 46</td>
<td>Drugs: Bullied, drug abuse, no support: 'My mum was my fire'</td>
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<td>Anger: Accidents in sheltered accommodation where he lived</td>
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<td>Fire: Stopped abusing drugs, of his own will. Eyesight damaged - Anger directed at council, for not receiving a flat.</td>
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<td>Other: The story is ridden with anger and blame.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blaming.</td>
<td>little sister, my dad my little brother, I grew up with the TV.</td>
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<td>Brother in psychiatric hospital</td>
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<td>unable to work. Friends support him.</td>
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<td>(helping out a girl)</td>
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<td>allow me to live it</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“Why me? Why am I here?”</td>
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<td>Iain, 41</td>
<td>Mental health institutionalised</td>
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<td>Left home at 14 Step mum, never knew his real mum</td>
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<td>Sofa surfed, drink and drugs in London</td>
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<td>Picked up by HSS staff when he was young</td>
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<td>Keeps contact with</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interesting: the way ‘paranoid schizophrenia’ frames his world</td>
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<td>Fragmented, told in pieces</td>
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<td>When he left home</td>
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<td>NO He sees arriving at HSS as a natural course of his life</td>
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<td>digression</td>
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<td></td>
<td>HSS is his life, he does not see this situation as unfortunato</td>
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<td>Happy with present situation, does not want to change anything</td>
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<td><strong>In short</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Uncle took care of him</strong></td>
<td>brothers and sisters.</td>
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<td><strong>Jimmy, 30</strong></td>
<td>Bipolar.</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
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<td>To-ing and fro-ing: ‘just pack up and go’</td>
<td>Studied art girlfriend is central figure in his life story</td>
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<td>Julie, 53</td>
<td>Mental illness,</td>
<td>Family always helped</td>
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<td>depression, Loneliness,</td>
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<td>insecurity, isolation</td>
<td>With family</td>
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<td>In HSS for 10 years.</td>
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<td>Still sees mother</td>
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<td>regularly. Brother</td>
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<td>keeps himself and</td>
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<td>children away</td>
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<td>Description of ideal</td>
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<td>home: location, number</td>
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<td>of rooms imp</td>
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<td>Story in one paragraph</td>
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<td>Cagey, difficult to</td>
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<td>gain her trust</td>
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<td>Regrets her social</td>
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<td>inadequacy - main reason</td>
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<td>States she has grown</td>
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<td>Mickey, 70</td>
<td>Alcohol</td>
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<td>Neil, 29</td>
<td>Heroin addict</td>
<td>Jehovah's witness. Left home, rejected lifestyle</td>
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<td>Pace, 46</td>
<td>Ex-drug addict</td>
<td>Started drugs at 13, believes he stopped growing: ‘I’m just a kid in a man’s body’</td>
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<td>The activist</td>
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<td>Life was put on hold: 28 years of addiction</td>
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<td>Cope with each day</td>
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<td>Sea City drug scene prolific</td>
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<td>‘In 2008 I got clean’</td>
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<td>Keeps active. NA fellowship</td>
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<td>Fear of going back to addiction is present permanently</td>
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<td>Told many times before (involved in activist activites)</td>
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<td>When he got addicted</td>
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<td>Mentions episode of brother’s death</td>
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<td>Mentions recovery point</td>
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<td>Few</td>
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<td>Believes he has an addictive personalit y</td>
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<td>‘heroin was my life’</td>
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<td>Now i start a new life</td>
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<td>Cannot be cured from addiction: ‘you just have to learn to live with it’</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>CRISIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>point (includes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>description of crisis/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>tipping point?)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>anecdote ?</td>
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<td>HIS/ her</td>
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<td></td>
<td>STORY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MESSAGE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phil, 52</td>
<td>Used to</td>
<td>most important</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>live in care</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assumed poor</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Placed in care</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(he refuses to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>speak about it)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Doesn't offer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>much about his</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>past: 'cannot</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>remember that far</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>back' No contact</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most significant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>part of his life is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>his job as cleaner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focused on present.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does not offer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anything about past</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has lived at HSS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for 13 years,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>considers it home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work is at the centre of his life.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proud of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>responsibilit y and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>his efficiency in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>his job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leanne, 59</td>
<td>Alcoholic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partially deaf,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Older parents</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning disability</td>
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<td></td>
<td>('I was not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At 14 started</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>drinking parents'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>whiskey.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At HSS a long time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends and enemies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>at BH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wanted to talk to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>me as this</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>was giving her</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How her parents</td>
<td>Not apparent. Just slowly drifted into drinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>had her</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moving is very</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unsettling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>Features of the story</td>
<td>Features of the narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In short</td>
<td>Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d from depression</td>
<td>too intelligent</td>
<td>Alcoholic for most of her life, has now recovered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul, 60</td>
<td>Alcoholic, recovered</td>
<td>Cope with each day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>Features of the story</td>
<td>Features of the narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Murray, 45 | Loneliness  
For 27 years  
Depressive mother, left school and home at 16  
Unstable home | CHILDHOOD  
Features  
Pre-homelessness  
During and Post-homelessness  
Other |
|         | Loneliness  
For 27 years  
Depressive mother, left school and home at 16  
Unstable home | In short  
Childhood  
Pre-homelessness  
During and Post-homelessness  
Other |
|         | Various low paid jobs  
Dubious friends  
Estranged from family (sisters, aunts) with exception of his father  
In prison there was company. Both times he gave himself up | N/A  
Requires a lot of intervention on my side  
With main event: I was in prison, I robbed 2 banks |
|         |                | CRISIS point  
(includes description of crisis/tipping point?)  
Digression/anecdote? |
|         |                | HIS/ her STORY |
|         |                | MESSAGE |
|         | Illustrate sense of being lost  
I was so fed up with living on my own!  
Aversion to change. My deal: to have a family. | I was so fed up with living on my own!  
Aversion to change. My deal: to have a family. |
| John, 46 | Learning disability  
His mother helped him while | IN SHORT  
Childhood  
Pre-homelessness  
During and Post-homelessness  
Other |
|         | His mother helped him while | FEATURES OF THE STORY |
|         | Has worked but unable to maintain jobs  
Got to HSS by chance  
Friends, girlfriend and social | N/A  
Requires a lot of intervention on my side  
With main event: I was in prison, I robbed 2 banks |
|         | Wishes his parents saw what he has  
Broken | Message  
When I first became homeless  
Lost his rented flat; ended up under the no |
|         |   | I have achieved: my job  
I will get married |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>Features of the story</th>
<th>Features of the narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In short</td>
<td>Childhood: she was alive. He became unwell when she died.</td>
<td>STYLE: STARTS narrative with CRISIS point (includes description of crisis/tipping point?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-homelessness: His brothers were not able to be there for him.</td>
<td>Digression/ anecdote?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>During and Post homelessness: network are important, as well as his job.</td>
<td>HIS/ her STORY:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other: accomplished</td>
<td>MESSAGE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Laura, 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura, 35</td>
<td>Always feeling on edge. Anxiety.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A: Series of harmful relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Living at HSS for a short time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Importance of work/not working</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jumbled up, unclear. Not one narrative line.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A: N/A</td>
<td>Yes, about: working, ideal boyfriend and his</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activities are quite important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moving on is very unsettling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>Features of the story</td>
<td>Features of the narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In short</td>
<td>Childhoo d</td>
<td>Pre-homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depress sion, anger</td>
<td></td>
<td>Has 2 children, one is not in her care. Struggles to keep the second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate, 24</td>
<td>Strong personality</td>
<td>Young person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>Features of the story</td>
<td>Features of the narrative</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In short</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-homelessness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>During and Post homelesness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>STYLE</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>STARTS narrative with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CRISIS point (includes description of crisis/tipping point?)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digression/ anecdote?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HIS/ her STORY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MESSAGE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tara, 40</td>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Was abused by step-father for 5 years. Left home at 16 to look for real father (did not find him)</td>
<td>Had 5 children. All got adopted. Keeps contact with 2 older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Now wants to volunteer, work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Has friends at hostel, among the men. Doesn't socialise with the women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regrets: should have kept my kids with me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Should have moved out of violent relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Did not want to leave HSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Paula, 54</td>
<td>Long stay at HSS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental health diagnosis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mental illness – diagnosis.</td>
<td>Twenty five years at HSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fragmente d</td>
<td>Loss of baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Several crises points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Relationsh ip made it all matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Did not want to leave HSS</td>
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</table>

Tara, 40 was abused by her step-father for 5 years. She left home at 16 to look for her real father (she did not find him). She had 5 children, all of whom got adopted. She now wants to volunteer, has friends at the hostel, among the men, and doesn't socialise with the women. Her stream of consciousness was disrupted by abuse, and she does not have a home. She regrets not keeping her children with her and not moving out of the violent relationship. She doesn't know what a home is and would love to stay here for the rest of her life. She likes closing the door.

29. Paula, 54 had a long stay at the hostel with a mental health diagnosis. She had several crises points and relationship made it all matter. She did not want to leave the hostel.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>Features of the story</th>
<th>Features of the narrative</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In short</td>
<td>Staff at HSS ‘helped a lot’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Childhoo d</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-homelessness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>During and Post homelessness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>STYLE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>STARTS narrative</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CRISIS point</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digression/anecdote</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HIS/ her STORY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MESSAGE</td>
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<tr>
<td>30. Sam, 31</td>
<td>Alcoholism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alcohol use</td>
<td>'a blur’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>fragmented</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Loss of memory</td>
<td>Not clear.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>HSS is not for ever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wanted to move on quickly</td>
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## Appendix 3: Interviewee details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>FEMALE MALE</th>
<th>AGE (at time of interview)</th>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>IN A RELATIONSHIP</th>
<th>CAUSE FOR INITIAL HOMELESSNESS (given by interviewee as the predominant one)</th>
<th>CHILDHOOD ROUTE (in earn?)</th>
<th>PARENTAL CONTACT</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>HSH 5</td>
<td>On-off relationship</td>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>no specified family issues</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>HSH 6</td>
<td>in relationship</td>
<td>Family breakdown</td>
<td>father left home</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>HSH 4</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>lived in care</td>
<td>lived in care</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>HSH 1</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Heavy drinking and family breakdown; death in the family</td>
<td>no specified family issues</td>
<td>two children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carly</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Learning difficulties and lack of support</td>
<td>does not discuss family</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>HSH 3</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Economic crisis, family issues, death</td>
<td>home killed herself</td>
<td>one daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>HSH 1</td>
<td>partner died</td>
<td>lived in care</td>
<td>lived in care</td>
<td>child with some siblings; pet-a dog, not on the premises</td>
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<td>Darren</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>HSH 6</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Heavy drinking</td>
<td>alcoholic parents</td>
<td>four children, all in contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>HSH 2</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Heavy drinking</td>
<td>no specified family issues</td>
<td>some family, full contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gertrude</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>HSH 5</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>very supportive parents</td>
<td>full contact with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerry</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>HSH 1</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Drug abuse</td>
<td>abuse from close relatives</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>HSH 1</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Lived in institutions for whole life</td>
<td>left home at 14. Stepmother</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>HSH 2</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Bipolar disorder</td>
<td>not supportive family</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>HSH 2</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Learning difficulties and living as an institution</td>
<td>family breakdown</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>HSH 4</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>family very supportive</td>
<td>full contact with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>HSH 2</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Mental Illness, drug and alcohol</td>
<td>mother supportive, but family</td>
<td>contact with one daughter (one of two) and mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>HSH 1</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Mental Illness, loss of unborn child</td>
<td>supportive family</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>HSH 1</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Mental Illness and Heavy drinking</td>
<td>family not supportive</td>
<td>full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>HSH 2</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Heavy drinking</td>
<td>no specified family issues</td>
<td>some siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morley</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>HSH 1</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Heavy drinking</td>
<td>no specified family issues</td>
<td>sailors, friends and others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neil</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>HSH 1</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Mental Illness and Long-term institutionalisation</td>
<td>abuse and lack of support from family</td>
<td>abuse, with father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>HSH 1</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Drug abuse; death of father</td>
<td>family breakdown</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>HSH 2</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Heavy drinking</td>
<td>no specified family issues</td>
<td>two children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>HSH 2</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Heavy drinking</td>
<td>family couldn't cope</td>
<td>children in care, contact with sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>HSH 3</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Learning difficulty</td>
<td>no mention of family</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>HSH 1</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Heavy drinking</td>
<td>no specified family issues</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>HSH 2</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>Abuse, drugs and Heavy drinking</td>
<td>abuse</td>
<td>6 children, in contact with 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Extracts from the Welfare Reform description, DWP, 2013

'We are introducing greater fairness to the welfare and pensions systems by making work pay and reinvigorating incentives to save for retirement. We are doing this while protecting the most vulnerable – disabled people and pensioners.'

‘At the heart of our reforms is Universal Credit. It will create a simpler, fairer benefits system and aims to make sure claimants are better off in work than on benefits. It will replace six main benefits with a single monthly payment for people in work or out of work, smoothing the transition from welfare to work. Universal Credit is designed to make work pay, as financial support will be withdrawn at a slower rate than under the current system.'

‘In April 2013 a Benefit Cap was introduced in four local authorities on the total amount of benefit that working-age claimants can receive.’

‘Housing Benefit has already changed, including the introduction of caps on Local Housing Allowance rates and the extension of the shared accommodation rate to people aged under 35.’

Jobseekers who are ready to work hard and want to get on in life will get all the support they need through Jobcentre Plus and schemes such as the Work Programme, which offers tailored support to the long term unemployed,’

‘But jobseekers who repeatedly refuse to play by the rules face losing benefits for three years under tough new rules.’

‘Since the Social Fund was introduced in 1988, welfare delivery has changed significantly. Social Fund Reform has seen Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans abolished from 1 April 2013.’

‘Expectations that the crisis might challenge neoliberal orthodoxies about how to achieve growth and contain welfare have been confounded. Instead, it has been used as an opportunity to entrench policies that prioritise fiscal ‘responsibility’, seek to reduce welfare ‘dependency’ and promote greater involvement of the private sector in welfare delivery.’

Appendix 5: Keyworking/ support plan example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client’s name</th>
<th>Key worker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Does the Client want a copy of the support plan? Y/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People present (include all parties e.g. Client, keyworker, additional staff, outside services etc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback from other agencies (e.g. reviewing manager, outside agencies, carers)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of previous goals/actions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clients and keyworkers should address these core issues within each support plan. If no outcomes or goals are set this time, make note here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support need area: insert relevant headings from support needs assessment (delete rows not needed)</th>
<th>What would you like to achieve overall in this area?</th>
<th>Goals / actions for this support plan</th>
<th>By whom?</th>
<th>By when?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural, Faith /Lifestyle issues (including needs/requirements in this area and any incidents as victim or perpetrator)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying Safe (including health and safety and child/adult protection)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement and Participation (including work and learning, involvement and complaints)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Housing / Move On needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 6: Interview guide

(list of questions following successive additions, during the interviews)

Introduction

Introduce myself and the type of interview, research subject, go through consent form and answer any questions. Ask them to tell me about themselves (e.g. name, age, how long they have lived here).

Possible formulation of main question

Tell me in your own words your story. I have no set questions to ask you… I just want you to tell me about your life as if it were a story with a beginning, a middle and how you think things would look in the future. There is no right or wrong way to tell your story… Just tell me in any way that is most comfortable.

I really want to hear about your life. Can you tell me about the circumstances which led you to becoming homeless?

Examples of probing questions:

Can you tell me more about that?/ What was the experience like for you?

Interview schedule topic areas/ prompt questions

Experiences of homelessness

- When did you first leave home? Did you ever go back?
- For how long [at a time] were you homeless? What is homeless for them: without fixed abode, or whenever not in permanent accommodation?

Relationships

- Family: Are you maintaining contact with your family?
- What role do you think they played in your life/ recovery etc.?
- Friends: Who are your friends? Do you have childhood friends? Are any of the people you live with your friends?
- Intimate relationships: Does being homeless change this kind of relationships? Does living in single accommodation at times (with visitor rules) make sustaining this kind of relationship more difficult?
- Was there one person/ one thing who was most important in your life?
Addiction/ recovery

- Does the place you live in play a role in your recovery? (Do you think it would have been easier to go through a detox somewhere outside of the homelessness networks?)
- Is addiction a cause for homelessness rather than an effect?
- Did the agencies you are linked with play a role in changing/ shaping your life story?

Location/ concept of home

- Did HSS play a role in your homelessness story?
- Are there places you would never go back to?
- What would you call home?

Community and stigma

- Do you participate in community activities?

Tipping points

- Could you name crucial points when your life radically changed? And why do you think that was the case? How did it happen?
- Was there one most important person/ event in your life which led to you being here today?

Role of support worker

- Do you have a good relationship with your keyworker?
- Is there one particular person who you could say changed something in your life?
- Have you had a lot of support workers along the way?
- Which support services do you think are most necessary (i.e. life skills, addiction, housing, support, pathways to independence).
- Could you have made it here on your own? Would it have been faster, slower, and why?

Being involved

- What do you think would help a person when they first become homeless?
• What would have helped you? (is there anything that would have helped you?) What would have made a difference?
• Do you take part in: hostel related activities and support/ life skills groups?
• How would you change the environment you live in now?
• If you could change one thing in your life, what would that be?

Awareness of policy

• Do you know what the new Government policy on homeless people is?
• How does that affect you?
• Are these changes visible?

Stigma

• How do you think society treats people who are homeless? What has your personal experience been?

Motivation: Why are you here today?

Future: Where would you like to be in five years' time?
Appendix 7: Example of field notes

20.06.2010

Awkward pauses/ breaks in narration were an interesting occurrence. In most cases, breaks were part of a process of adjustment, for the interviewee and myself, to the rigour and boundaries of an interviewing situation. The adjustment was difficult for those who had suffered long periods of isolation or withdrawal from the social world. Sometimes, interviewees seemed to stop or hesitate due to the authority conflict that might emerge. In those situations I realised I was still perceived as the authority I did not want to identify with and felt I needed to remove that barrier. The occurrence of such breaks was extremely rare though.

An unexpected difficulty was the bad sound in the room. I only realised the difficulties of transcribing speech from a room with bad resonance on transcription.
# Appendix 8: Consent form

## CONSENT FORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Please read the following statements and tick the box if you consent.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I voluntarily agree to take part in this study on Homeless people’s narratives in a new Government policy context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I have read and understood the <strong>Information Sheet</strong> provided. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on any aspect of this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I understand the nature, duration, location of this study and what I am expected to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I have been advised on any discomfort that might arise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I understand that all personal data relating to volunteers is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I agree that I will not try to restrict the use of the results of the study on the understanding that my anonymity is preserved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NAME OF VOLUNTEER:** (block capitals)  

**SIGNED:**  

**NAME OF RESEARCHER:** (block capitals)  

**SIGNED:**  

**DATE**
Appendix 9: Information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

Homeless people’s narratives in a new Government policy context

You are invited to take part in a research project on homelessness. Before deciding whether you want to participate or not, please take time to read the information provided and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything unclear or if you would like more information.

Take time to decide whether or not you want to take part.

What is the purpose of the research?

A number of policy changes have taken place in homelessness. These affect institutions such as the [name of institution] and the people benefiting from their services.

This research is part of a doctorate in sociology. I plan to listen to the voices of people who have experienced homelessness in an attempt at understanding what helped
and what were the barriers to getting off the streets and accessing support.

Thus your voice is most important!

Bring your life story, your experience, opinions.

The research involves two stages of interviewing. You are invited to take part in the first stage of interviews, in April 2009.

The interview should not last more than 1 hour and a half. The conversation will relate to your experience of homelessness. If you feel you need more time to tell your story, you will be asked how and when you would like to continue the interview.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded in order to produce an accurate transcript. Once transcription is complete the tape will be destroyed. You will be offered a copy of the transcript.

The study guarantees anonymity It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form.

As a participant, you have the right to withdraw at any time from the study without having to give a reason. Any complaint or concerns about any of the aspects of the way you have been dealt with during the course of the study will be addressed.
Location of the interview: The interview can take place at the hostel/ court or if you prefer not to, we can negotiate another place.

The University of Surrey Ethics committee have reviewed this information, and have given a favourable ethical opinion.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or require any further information concerning this study please do not hesitate to contact Alex Cuncev (a.cuncev@surrey.ac.uk, 01483 686983), or her supervisors Lecturer Dr Ann Cronin (a.cronin@surrey.ac.uk, 01483 686987) or Lecturer Dr Sarah Earthy (s.earthy@surrey.ac.uk, 01483 689452).
Appendix 10: Information leaflet

You are being invited to take part in a research project on homelessness and supported housing.

Before deciding whether you want to participate or not, please take time to read the information provided and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything unclear or if you would like more information.

Take time to decide whether or not you want to take part.

A number of policy changes have taken place in the area of homelessness and supported housing. These affect institutions such as Supporting People and the people benefiting from their services.

This research is part of a doctorate in sociology. I plan to listen to the voices of people who have experienced homelessness in an attempt at understanding what helped and what were the barriers to getting off the streets and accessing support.

Thus your voice is most important!
Bring your life story, your experience, opinions.

You are invited to take part in the second one interview.

The interview should not last more than one hour and a half. The conversation will relate to your experience of homelessness.

If you feel you need more time to tell your story, you will be asked how and when you would like to continue the interview.

Location of the interview: The interview can take place at the place you live at or if you prefer not to, we can negotiate another place.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded in order to produce an accurate transcript. Once transcription is complete the tape will be destroyed. You will be offered a copy of the transcript.

The study guarantees anonymity and confidentiality.
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. **If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form.**

As a participant, you have the right to withdraw at any time from the study without having to give a reason. Any complaint or concerns about any of the aspects of the way you have been dealt with during the course of the study will be addressed.

If you are interested to take part in this study or you would like more information, please contact:

**Alex Cuncev on 07971346312**

The University of Surrey Ethics committee have reviewed this information, and have given a favourable ethical opinion.
Appendix 11: Ethics Committee approval letter

Dr Sarah Earthy & Alexandra Cuncev
Sociology
FAHS

21 April 2009

Dear Sarah & Alexandra

**Homeless people’s narratives in a new Government policy context**
**EC/2009/28/FAHS**

On behalf of the Ethics Committee, I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis described in the submitted protocol and supporting documentation.

Date of confirmation of ethical opinion: 20 April 2009

The final list of documents reviewed by the Committee is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary of project</td>
<td>20 April 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed protocol</td>
<td>20 April 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sheet for participants</td>
<td>20 April 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent form</td>
<td>20 April 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire/Interview Schedule</td>
<td>20 April 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard letters</td>
<td>20 April 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk assessment</td>
<td>20 April 09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRB disclosure</td>
<td>20 April 09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This opinion is given on the understanding that you will comply with the University’s Ethical Guidelines for Teaching and Research. If the project includes distribution of a survey or questionnaire to members of the University community, researchers are asked to include a statement advising that the project has been reviewed by the University’s Ethics Committee.

The Committee should be notified of any amendments to the protocol, any adverse reactions suffered by research participants, and if the study is terminated earlier than expected with reasons. Please be advised that the Ethics Committee is able to audit research to ensure that researchers are abiding by the University requirements and guidelines.

You are asked to note that a further submission to the Ethics Committee will be required in the event that the study is not completed within five years of the above date.

Please inform me when the research has been completed.

Yours sincerely

Aimee Cox (Miss)
Secretary, University Ethics Committee
Registry

cc: Professor T Desombre, Chairman, Ethics Committee