Gender Dimensions in Conceptualisations of Homelessness: Theoretical and operational (in)visibility

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Abstract

This Integrative PhD Chapter draws together a selection of work chronicling a decade-long journey of development in thinking about how homelessness is perceived, understood and responded to. It reflects upon my engagement with research and policy, demonstrates the impact my work has had on service strategy and design and reviews my contribution to homelessness theory.

Using ten example publications, presented under four themes, the chapter explores the role of my work in highlighting the failure to properly consider gender, in both academic debate and in-service design. It demonstrates how, while homelessness services have supposedly moved towards more personalised models, which are intended to recognise and respect the strengths, choices and opinions of homeless people and deliver bespoke services to meet their needs, little account has been taken of women's experiences, needs or opinions.

The chapter starts by introducing the different conceptualisations of homelessness and explores the debates around what is *meant* by homelessness. The discussion of my work begins by presenting an overview of the ten publications. An analysis of these publications is presented within four themes. Firstly, I use my work to inform a critical review of reductionist taxonomies of homelessness, that delimit homelessness causation simply to *housing need* and secondly by discussing how my work led me to re-examine existing thinking about the *human* dimensions of homelessness. The third theme I explore is inclusivity which considers the *social and economic inclusion* of homeless people and where my work added to my understanding of the multidimensional nature of homelessness. Finally, the theme of gender is discussed, exploring how the woeful underrepresentation of women in homelessness research has undermined our understanding of homelessness, weakened strategy and limited service effectiveness. The chapter concludes by presenting a case for reconceptualising homelessness, with the human dimensions of homelessness, which must include gender, at the core.

Contents

Acknowledgements

List of publications submitted

1. **Bretherton, J.** (2017) Reconsidering Gender in Homelessness, *European Journal of Homelessness*, Volume 11.1. pp 13-33.

2. **Bretherton, J.**; Benjaminsen, L. and Pleace, N. (2016) "Women's Homelessness and Welfare Systems" in Mayock, P. and Bretherton, J. *Women's Homelessness in Europe*, London: Palgrave Macmillian.

3. **Bretherton, J.**, & Pleace, N. (2016). *Crisis Skylight: Pathways to Progression: Second Interim Report*. London: Crisis.

4. **Bretherton, J.** and Pleace, N. (2015) *Housing First in England: An evaluation of nine services.* York: University of York.

5. **Bretherton, J.** and Pleace, N. (2014) *An evaluation of the Broadway Skills Exchange Time Bank.* York: University of York.

6. Pleace, N. and **Bretherton, J.** (2013) 'The case for Housing First in the European Union: A critical evaluation of concerns about effectiveness, *European Journal of Homelessness*, Volume 7.2. pp 21-41.

7. Pleace, N. and **Bretherton, J.** (2013) 'Measuring Homelessness and Housing Exclusion in Northern Ireland: A test of the ETHOS typology', Belfast: Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

8. **Bretherton, J.** Hunter, C. and Johnsen, S. (2013) 'You can judge them on how they look…': Homelessness Officers, Medical Evidence and Decision-Making in England, *European Journal of Homelessness,* Volume 7.1. pp 69-92.

9. **Bretherton, J.** and Pleace, N. (2011) 'A Difficult Mix: Issues in achieving socioeconomic diversity in deprived UK neighbourhoods', *Urban Studies*, Volume 48 Issue 16, pp. 3433 - 3447

10. **Bretherton, J.** and Pleace, N. (2011) *Reasonable Preference in Scottish Social Housing*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Author's declaration

Due to the nature of contract research many of the publications submitted for consideration here are co-authored. These are often reports and journal articles emanating from commissioned research with colleagues. It is highly unusual in this type of research environment to undertake research alone and therefore publications inevitably reflect this. However, the co-authored articles and reports presented here are examples of my work where I am lead author (in seven cases) or where I am co-author (in two cases). Please see the attached Statements of co-authorship of publications for details of this.

Statement of co-authorship of publications

2. Bretherton, J. Benjaminsen, L. and Pleace, N. (2016) "Women's Homelessness and Welfare Systems" in Mayock, P. and Bretherton, J. *Women's Homelessness in Europe.* London: Palgrave Macmillian.

The above book chapter was written as part of an edited collection *Women's Homelessness in Europe* for which the candidate was also Co-Editor. The candidate wrote the first drafts of the chapter with input on European data from Lars Benjaminsen of the Danish National Centre for Social Research and Nicholas Pleace who reviewed later drafts.

3. Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2016) *Crisis Skylight: Pathways to Progression: Second Interim Report*. London: Crisis.

This report was the second annual report of a three-year, mixed method evaluation of the Skylight programme, a national level intervention designed to enhance employment, education and training among homeless people. The research was the largest single piece of research to be commissioned by Crisis in its history. The candidate wrote the first draft of the report, drawing mainly on the previous 12 months of longitudinal tracking of 135 Skylight 'members' which was undertaken by the candidate with the co-investigator Nicholas Pleace, who also helped to revise further drafts and added statistical analysis.

4. Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2015) *Housing First in England: An evaluation of nine services.* York: University of York.

This report was based on research commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Homeless Link (the English federation of homelessness organisations) and presented the results of an evaluation of nine Housing First pilots in England. Housing First is potentially the most significant innovation in responses to long-term and repeated homelessness developed in the last 30 years and this was amongst the first significant evaluative research conducted on Housing First in the UK. The candidate was principal investigator and wrote the report with input from Nicholas Pleace who also worked on the project.

5. Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2014) *An evaluation of the Broadway Skills Exchange Time Bank.* York: University of York.

This publication is a report that was based on a three-year longitudinal study of the innovative Time Banking initiative at Broadway (now part of St Mungo's), a major London homelessness service provider. The candidate, as principal investigator, led the research which largely consisted of a tracking exercise of those people utilizing the Time Bank over three years. The candidate was lead author of the final report with input on statistical data from Nicholas Pleace.

6. Pleace, N. and **Bretherton, J.** (2013) 'The Case for Housing First in the European Union: A critical evaluation of concerns about effectiveness", *European Journal of Homelessness*, Volume 7.2 pp 21-41.

This journal article draws on my original research and on joint invited presentations given at the European Network of Housing Research conference in Lillehammer, Norway and at the Joint Annual Conference of the East Asian Social Policy Network (EASP) and the Social Policy Association (SPA) in York, (both 2012). These presentations drew on two pieces of work, the evaluation of a Housing First pilot in Camden (funded by SHP for which the candidate was Co-investigator) and an international study, commissioned by the Simon Community of Ireland, focused on the role of Housing First in the Irish national homelessness strategy, for which the candidate was principal investigator. The article was co-authored as both authors had contributed equally to the conference presentations and the refinement of those presentations into this peer-reviewed paper.

7. Pleace, N. and **Bretherton, J**. (2013) 'Measuring Homelessness and Housing Exclusion in Northern Ireland: A test of the ETHOS typology'. Belfast: Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

This report is based on a study commissioned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to look at the utility of employing the European Typology of Housing Exclusion and Homelessness (ETHOS) in Northern Ireland. As Co-investigator on the project, the candidate contributed to all elements of the research and led on the interviews with homeless people in Belfast day centres. The candidate provided the analysis of all interview data and co-authored the final report.

9. Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2011) 'A Difficult Mix: Issues in achieving socioeconomic diversity in deprived UK neighbourhoods', *Urban Studies*, Volume 48 Issue 16, pp. 3433 – 3447.

The candidate was lead author of this peer-reviewed journal article which drew on two pieces of research carried out by the authors. Each of the authors led one of the research projects. These were Study 1:

> **Bretherton, J** and Pleace, N. (2008) *Residents' views of new forms of high density affordable living.* Coventry/York: Chartered Institute of Housing/Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
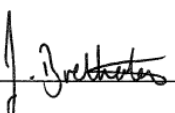
And Study 2:

> Pleace, N., Quilgars, D., Jones, A. and Rugg, J. (2007) *Tackling homelessness: housing associations and local authorities working in partnership.* London: The Housing Corporation.

10. Bretherton, J. and Pleace, N. (2011) *Reasonable Preference in Scottish Social Housing,* Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

The candidate was lead author of the peer-reviewed final report of this Scottish Government commissioned research project which examined the role of reasonable preference law in Scottish social housing allocation. The candidate was principal investigator on the project and carried out the bulk of the research with additional statistical analysis from Nicholas Pleace.

Signature of Nicholas Pleace: _____
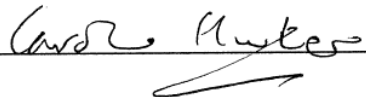
Signature of Candidate: _____
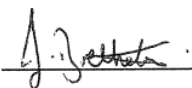
Date: _____29/09/17_____

Statement of co-authorship of publication 8

8. Bretherton, J. Hunter, C. and Johnsen, S. (2013) 'You can judge them on how they look…': Homelessness Officers, Medical Evidence and Decision-Making in England, *European Journal of Homelessness*, Volume 7.1. pp 69-92.

The above article was the product of a research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) entitled: *The use of medical evidence in homelessness decision-making* for which the candidate, Joanne Bretherton, was the main fieldwork researcher (the research team comprising Professor Caroline Hunter as principal investigator and Sarah Johnsen also as researcher). The candidate was the lead author on this article.

Signature of Professor Caroline Hunter: _____

Signature of Candidate: _____

Date: 30/3/17 _____

Introduction

This Integrative Chapter for the submission of a PhD by publication draws upon ten publications taken from a significant research portfolio in the field of homelessness spanning 13 years. Utilising the publications, the chapter chronicles the developments in my own thinking and shows how I reached the conclusion that there must be a radical reconceptualization of homelessness, centred on recognising gender within a broader reorientation that seeks to fully understand the human beings experiencing homelessness and leaves behind inaccurate, reductionist taxonomic approaches.

Homelessness services are increasingly personalised, reflecting research evidence showing how individual actions can shape pathways through homelessness. This research shows the increased effectiveness of services that draw upon the capacity of homeless people to determine sustainable exits from homelessness for themselves, including so called strength-based approaches. My own work, drawing on these ideas, shows how the often-differentiated experiences of women who are homeless, are being almost entirely overlooked.

This Integrative Chapter begins with a brief critical overview of the debates on the nature of homelessness causation and the arguments about what constitutes 'homelessness', before moving on to state my hypothesis. The chapter then draws on the ten publications from my work, to both illustrate how I arrived at this hypothesis and the evidence I have gathered to support my ideas. The chapter also discusses the need to improve the evidence base in several areas. The ten publications being submitted here are discussed using a theoretical narrative that demonstrates the evolution of my thinking, explored through four substantive themes of work:

- Moving beyond reductionist taxonomies of homelessness;
- Conceptualisations of homelessness;
- Inclusivity; and,
- Gender.

Debates on the nature of homelessness

Until the mid-twentieth century, homelessness tended to be seen in much the same way as poverty, the extremes of which were seen as either being caused by indolence or by illness. Like poverty, homelessness was caused by either "sin" or by "sickness" (Gowan, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2016). It has been argued (Neale, 1997; Fitzpatrick, 2005) that analysis of homelessness moved away from these individualistic explanations towards more 'structural' arguments, which saw homelessness as a result of the collateral damage caused by capitalist (and later Neo-Liberal) labour and housing markets. This work, which argued for expansion of the

welfare state to stop homelessness, is described as falling out of favour as it could not show a clear causal relationship, i.e. if people became homeless simply because of socioeconomic marginalisation, why was it the case that homelessness was actually relatively unusual, even in free market-led societies like the United States (Neale, 1997). A 'new orthodoxy' emerged that argued that people became homeless not because of individual characteristics, Capitalism or insufficient welfare service provision, but as a result of all these variables working in combination. However, research asserting this new orthodoxy, that homelessness results from a combination of individual and structural factors had the same failing as structural arguments, the hypothesised causal mechanisms were not clearly demonstrated, this research did not really show *how* homelessness was happening (Neale, 1997; Pleace, 2000).

In practice, this narrative of individualist 'sin' and 'sickness' explanations, supposedly followed by structuralist, welfare-system based explanations and finally by the 'new orthodoxy' of combined individual and structural causation does not really reflect the realities of homelessness research. In part, this is because work focusing on 'sin' and 'sickness' has never gone away, because purely 'structural' explanations barely exist as a genre within homelessness research and because most research has, for decades, drawn upon variants of the new orthodoxy (Pleace, 2016).

One response has been to try to make the new orthodoxy work by looking for patterns, creating precise taxonomies of homelessness that would allow causation patterns to be pinned down clearly and by extension, more effective services and strategies to be built (Fitzpatrick, 2005).

However, the idea that homelessness can be reduced to relatively simple patterns of causation has been increasingly challenged, with factors such as individual action and choices – the human dimensions of homelessness – being increasingly viewed as important in understanding trajectories through homelessness (McNaughton-Nicholls, 2009; Lee *et al.*, 2010; Parsell and Parsell, 2012; Pleace, 2016).

Research on women's experiences has been infrequent and has sometimes been undertaken within a different conceptual framework. Feminist scholars, who framed and interpreted women's homelessness within patriarchy (Watson with Austerberry, 1986; Watson, 2000) have been criticised for 'overemphasising' gender relative to social class, welfare systems, individual characteristics and the agency of homeless women (Neale, 1997).

As is discussed below, the definition and measurement of homelessness has also tended to emphasise male experience for several reasons. Women experience family homelessness, as lone parents with dependent children whose homelessness is often linked to domestic violence, at disproportionate rates. Family homelessness is highly

gendered, in that it is experienced *mainly* by women, across Europe and the USA, as well as in the UK (Pleace *et al*, 2008; Shinn *et al*, 2015; Baptista *et al*, 2017).

Family homelessness, alongside the associations with domestic violence, is also strongly associated with poverty and, in many instances, can be resolved by access to settled, adequate, affordable housing. The presence of children in homeless households also activates welfare systems designed to protect children from physical and emotional abuse and from the extremes of poverty and has been seen as 'protecting' lone women parents from sustained homelessness (Baptista, 2010).

Homelessness among lone adults, which unlike family homelessness can become sustained or recurrent and have a mutually reinforcing relationship with high and complex support needs (Kemp *et al* 2006), creates challenges for policymakers and services and interest among researchers. Women appear to be much less numerous than men in lone adult homelessness. This has meant that persistent or recurrent homelessness among lone homeless adults, has been seen as largely 'male' in nature (Mayock *et al*, 2015).

Some academics have suggested that there may be cultural/patriarchal interpretations of women's homelessness that may also help explain the lack of attention it has received. The argument is that women's homelessness is interpreted as extreme deviance from the socially constructed norms of femininity, roles such as 'mother' and 'carer' (Wardhaugh, 1999; Löfstrand and Thörn, 2004; Hansen-Löfstrand and Quilgars, 2016).

When this argument is combined with survey and administrative data generally suggesting women are underrepresented among long-term and repeatedly homeless lone adults, as discussed below, the relative absence of research on women is more understandable. Women's homelessness is interpreted as a more 'extreme' break with expected social norms than male homelessness (Wardhaugh, 1999) and thus may be expected to be more 'unusual', an expectation the available numbers appear to reinforce (Bretherton and Pleace, forthcoming 2018).

The differentiated causation of women's homelessness, both as lone adults and as parents, while often noted, has not really been explored. Women experience homelessness triggered by domestic violence and abuse, by men, at exponentially higher rates than is the case for men (Mayock *et al*, 2016).   When attention has been paid to the relationships between domestic violence and homelessness, it has been used as an explanation of the apparently lower rates at which women experience lone adult homelessness. The argument is that women's homelessness is prevented and stopped by domestic violence services (refuges and related services), rather than emergency accommodation and hostels/supported housing targeted on homeless populations (Baptista, 2010) and also often recorded as case of 'domestic violence'

rather than 'homelessness' (Baptista *et al*, 2017). The possibility that experiences of domestic violence might influence women's trajectories through homelessness, such as in avoidance of services used by men, has received relatively little attention (Bretherton and Pleace, forthcoming 2018).

The limited attention paid to women's experiences of homelessness, as I argue within this chapter, reflects a lack of consideration of gender dynamics which is a failure across social scientific research. Assumptions, rather than tested hypotheses, that it was a more extreme and thus more unusual social problem when a lone adult woman became homeless, that women were protected from homelessness because of welfare systems when they had children with them and that lone adult homelessness was male, led to a lack of attention being paid to gender.

Definition and visibility

Homelessness among lone adults has been debated and discussed largely in terms of male experience. In part, this is because of the ways in which homelessness has been defined and counted, which internationally, has often been focused on people living on the street and in various forms of emergency accommodation (Pleace, 2016b).

In the UK and in Scandinavia, 'hidden' or concealed forms of homelessness is accepted as part of the social problem, i.e. someone sleeping on a sofa in a house owned by family or friends because they have nowhere else to go is 'homeless'. Whereas someone would not be defined as homeless in France, Italy or Spain unless they were sleeping rough (living outside, in a tent, car, abandoned building) or were in a homeless shelter (Busch-Geertsema *et al*, 2014; Culhane, 2016).

There is a distinct pattern in gender representation among lone adults in homelessness statistics. The narrowest definitions of homelessness, as people living rough or in emergency accommodation (homeless shelters, which might only provide a bed and food on a night-by-night, first-come, first-served basis or charities distributing food or sleeping bags) tend to report low numbers of women. As the definition broadens, to encompass more settled forms of homelessness services, the 'hostels' or purpose-built staffed, supported temporary accommodation used in many economically developed countries, the proportion of women increases.

Finally, once the definition encompasses hidden or concealed homelessness – the person on the sofa because they have nowhere else to go – women start to become more numerous. This pattern is evident across the economically developed world, EU member states, OECD member states and the UK all show the same pattern, in those countries or areas where data on hidden homelessness are actually collected (Busch-Geertsema *et al*, 2014; Pleace, 2016b).

What this pattern suggests is that women can experience homelessness in different ways than men, with some more recent work (Mayock and Sheridan, 2012; Mayock *et al*, 2015), indicating that women tend to avoid homelessness services in which many men are present and rely more on informal arrangements with family, friends and acquaintances to keep a roof over their heads. American and UK work on family homelessness has suggested that lone women parents with children often 'exhaust' informal options, staying with family, friends and others, before resorting to homelessness services (Pleace *et al*, 2008; Shinn *et al*, 2015). It is not yet entirely clear how far this is the case for lone adult women, but the research that has been done shows lone adult women experiencing recurrent and sustained homelessness, can alternate between 'hidden' homelessness and living rough (Reeve *et al*, 2006; Reeve *et al*, 2007; Mayock and Sheridan, 2012). When women sleep rough, there is some evidence that they conceal themselves, avoiding the potential risks of sleeping visibly on the street (Moss and Singh, 2015).

Of course, the experience of hidden homelessness exists among lone adult men and other homeless groups as well. However, there is consistent, statistical evidence that women increase in number when 'hidden' homeless populations who are involuntarily staying with someone else are counted (Mayock *et al*, 2015; Reeve, 2018). A problem here, highlighted by my own research is that hidden homelessness, because it is precarious, is hard to count by survey methods (albeit that the Census provides some data on concealed households) while administrative datasets are often not set up to record anything other than rough sleeping (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013). Even countries with more sophisticated data collection on homelessness face challenges in estimating and counting hidden homelessness (Busch-Geertsema *et al*, 2014).

Defining the exact parameters of homelessness is challenging. As has been noted elsewhere, definitions and responses to homelessness are always political acts, to define homelessness as people living on the street narrows the scope of the problem and allows the issue to be presented as both unusual and, because appearances suggest it, as apparently associated with 'sinful' and 'sick' patterns of causation. Widening the definition, to people who have a roof over their head, but who have no home, creates a different picture, because it makes the numbers much larger and it suggests systemic failure, of housing and labour markets, of housing policy, ultimately society itself (Anderson, 1993; Pleace, 2016).

It is perhaps more helpful to define homelessness less in terms of the places in which it occurs, than in terms of what an individuals or households lack in terms of a suitable, adequate, affordable and secure place in which to live. Here, I have found the work I have undertaken on the ETHOS typology (publication 7) useful, because

while ETHOS has limits, it defines homelessness as an absence of the physical, social and legal domains of home (Edgar *et al*, 2004; Bretherton and Pleace, forthcoming 2018). A woman sleeping on someone's sofa, or in their spare room, lacks a physical space of her own, she has no privacy, she does not control her environment. She lacks the social space of home, where she can control who enters the personal space in which her closest and most important relationships would normally be centred and she has no security, both in the physical sense, but also in terms of tenure. There is no legal recourse, nothing that gives her any rights to the space she is living in. Looked at this way, homelessness is equally present when someone physically lacks a roof and when they are forced to resort to sleeping on someone's sofa. It can of course be dangerous to sleep on the streets, but it may be no safer to be sleeping on someone's sofa, homelessness is the absence of what we understand by 'home', it is not a roof, it is the private space, the social space and the physical and legal security of having somewhere to live that is yours.

The possibility that homelessness among lone adults has simply been misinterpreted as 'male', because researchers have not been looking in the right places seems absurdly simple. However, the evidence that women tend to take differing paths through homelessness is mounting, and this does raise the question as to whether gender may be shaping experiences of homelessness (Bretherton, 2017). Women experience hidden homelessness at higher rates, conceal themselves when sleeping rough and avoid male dominated services, such as homeless shelters largely occupied by men.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis explored by this Integrative Chapter, drawing on my published research, is that there is evidence that the human dimensions of homelessness and in particular the experiences of homeless women have been largely neglected by the social scientific work conducted on homelessness to date. My hypothesis is not that homeless women always have consistently different experiences from men. I am not making an argument for a modification or replacement of existing taxonomies of homelessness with one centred on gender, instead my hypothesis asserts that while attention is now being paid to homeless people as human beings, rather than resorting to reductionist imagery, a key part of that analysis is missing, the experience of homeless women. I argue that my work has significantly advanced the case to explore the nature of homelessness more carefully, to look at the gender dynamics within the individual human experiences of homelessness.

Publications overview

In this section I will present a brief outline and overview of the publications that are submitted alongside this Integrative Chapter.

Two of the publications are final reports based on research commissioned by government. Publication 10, was a mixed methods study combining a survey with extensive interviews with social landlords. 'Reasonable Preference', a set of legal requirements on social landlords to focus on acute housing need had produced a broad orientation towards tackling homelessness across the sector. However, the law was ambiguous and based on preconceptions rather than evidence, which meant it did not reflect the realities of housing need as effectively as it should.

Publication 7, critically assessed the utility of the European Typology of Housing Exclusion and Homelessness (ETHOS) for Northern Ireland. ETHOS was designed to encourage full representation of homelessness using broadly comparable data across Europe. The work centred on attempting to populate ETHOS with existing data, interviews with professionals and with 40 homeless people centred on what they regarded as 'homelessness'. The research highlighted the challenges in measuring homelessness, highlighting that 'hidden' homelessness really cannot be seen clearly through existing survey methods or by administrative systems.

There are limitations in this kind of commissioned research as government wants specific policy questions – which it has framed – answered in a way that addresses its needs. Neither piece of work was commissioned on the basis that specific consideration should be given to gender, which meant the potentially differentiated experience of women were less thoroughly explored than was ideal.

Three publications reported research funded by the charitable sector. Publication 5 reported the results of a three-and-a-half-year action research project on *Time Banking* for homeless people. Time Banking uses time providing services as currency, an hour of time provided to a Time Bank 'earns' an hour of time credit which can then be 'spent' on an hour of another Time Bank participant's time. A cohort of homeless people were tracked and observed in Time Banking activity. The model conceptualised and approached homelessness in a different way, centring on social integration, economic participation and engaging with the community as a response to homelessness.

Publication 4 reported a study into nine Housing First pilots in England. Housing First represents another innovative response to homelessness. This mixed method research showed that ensuring homeless people had real control over their lives produced much better results than existing services. Housing First moved away from 'sin' or 'sick' conceptualisations of homelessness and towards an approach that

recognised and emphasised the human dimensions of homelessness, recognising and responding to the specific needs expressed by each individual.

Publication 3 centred on the evaluation of a major programme of education, training and employment services called "Skylight". The aim of the research was to evaluate how effectively the Skylights were fulfilling their self-defined remit of *progression* (Crisis terminology), i.e. whether Skylights improved physical and mental health, social integration, reduced worklessness and promoted housing stability. This was a large piece of work, tracking 158 homeless people using the service over two years, conducting multiple focus groups with other homeless people using the service, staff interviews and interviews with external partners. The findings of this interim report showed a picture of homelessness that was in stark contrast to the images suggested by some earlier research. Again, homeless people could not be simply categorised into 'sick', 'sinful' or 'poor' groups. Some were regaining progress in what had been lives characterised by economic and social integration and by stable housing, prior to the events and/or experiences that had led to homelessness, others were moving towards employment for the first time in their lives, while some experienced upward and downward swings as their needs and situations changed. Some were in a position where they were not able to move towards paid work. The research showed the limits of 'simple' solutions to homelessness. Work often did not pay enough to sustain housing, even when it was secured and when homelessness was ended, isolation, worklessness and poverty did not necessarily end with it.

Again here, due to the nature of the funding environment of contract research, somewhat limited flexibility was held by the research teams in terms of methodology. Publications 5 and 3 could have benefited significantly from a more in-depth look into pathways into, through and out of homelessness. This could potentially have helped us to better understand the extent to which men and women may have traversed these services, in differing ways. Funder expectations did not encompass that type of analyses – instead, and understandably, service impact was at the fore. However, I was able to return to data from these pieces of research several years later and, looking at the data through a different lens, subsequently wrote Publication 1.

This chapter draws on four peer reviewed journal articles. Publication 9 examines tensions between the pursuit of socioeconomic mix in urban neighbourhoods and the roles of social landlords in meeting acute housing need. My analysis of two research projects highlighted how socioeconomically disadvantaged groups were perceived as a threat to neighbourhood attractiveness and cohesion, highlighting the ways in which images of homeless people (and social rented tenants) produced

distorted, negative, responses from housed people and from both social and private landlords.

Publication 8 found similar discriminatory practice. This paper drew on my work on an ESRC funded project examining the practices of local authority homelessness officers when using medical evidence in decision-making on housing applicants who were applying as 'vulnerable' under UK homelessness legislation. This research focused on three case study local authorities in England. A mixed methods approach was employed, including vignettes, a review of redacted case files, interviews and focus groups. The research found that homelessness officers were the key actors in deciding whether an applicant was 'vulnerable' and used often arbitrary and unsystematic processes, laden with assumptions about the people applying for help, to arrive at their decisions.

Publication 6 draws upon presentations I gave at two international conferences and two pieces of research on Housing First in the UK (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013a; Bretherton and Pleace, 2015). Housing First has been viewed with some suspicion in Europe because it is an American model (Johnson *et al.*, 2012; Consoli *et al.*, 2016; Quilgars and Pleace, 2016; Parkinson and Parcell, 2017). Conversely, European models of Housing First have been criticised for lacking fidelity to the original American model (Greenwood *et al.*, 2013). Reviewing my own research and the wider evidence base, the paper concluded that the emphasis on recognising the humanity and diversity of homelessness at the heart of Housing First, meeting the needs that homeless people express, is core to effectiveness.

The fourth paper is Publication 1. This paper represents the culmination of several years of research, analysis and thought. I argue that gender has been woefully neglected in academic research and in wider debates about homelessness. Women's pathways through homelessness are not uniform, but there is evidence of major differences in causation and trajectory compared to men (Baptista, 2010; Mayock and Sheridan, 2012; Shinn *et al*, 2013). Evidence that women's experiences may often be distinct from those of men had been disregarded as existing conceptualisations and methodologies were developed when homelessness was, inaccurately, seen as a predominantly male phenomenon.

Publication 2 is a book chapter that reviews and discusses the relationships between European welfare states and women's homelessness. The chapter argues that there are data that indicate women's and men's relationships with welfare systems may be different, but that many variables may influence how and whether women interact with welfare systems. The chapter considers whether the gendered nature of homelessness may even transcend any effects that are currently assumed to exist

between welfare regimes and the nature and extent of homelessness (Benjaminsen and Andrade, 2015).

All of the publications outlined above have had significant levels of impact both academically and in policy terms. The majority have had high rates of citations on Google Scholar, several led to further funded research and my participation in academic debates on homelessness at international level, in respect of my work on Housing First, now part of UK homelessness strategies and most significantly, in my role in the Women's Homelessness in Europe Network (WHEN) that I co-direct. WHEN has directly influenced a change in focus across academic research, the homelessness sector and policy to look in more detail at the experience of homeless women.

Moving beyond reductionist taxonomies of homelessness

In the UK, homelessness is often seen as the result of flawed housing and labour markets, as a result of vulnerability, such as having to escape domestic violence or being at risk due to mental illness, or as a choice (Lowe, 1997; Fitzpatrick and Pleace, 2012). Academic research has tended towards reductionist models of homelessness too. Homelessness researchers failing to recognise the human dimensions and reducing homelessness to housing market failure (O'Flaherty, 1995; Quigley and Raphael, 2001) or using an over simplified 'pattern' of characteristics, often based on statistical associations with severe mental illness and drug use, to 'explain' homelessness (Mossman, 1997; O'Sullivan, 2008).

The first of the four themes that form the theoretical narrative presented in this Integrative Chapter, considers the prevalence of crude taxonomies and is evidenced through publications 10, 9 and 8. The common thread, that these three publications highlight, is the existence of simplistic housing allocation policies, based on inaccurate and judgemental responses to homelessness. Images and constructs rather than the lived experience of homeless people are shaping policy and service responses (Philips, 2000; McNaughton-Nicolls, 2009).

Publication 10 illustrates a simplistic response to homelessness. Crude categories that did not reflect the true nature and complexity of housing need had proven too impractical to use. The research highlighted the limitations in attempting to define and respond to homelessness simply in terms of 'meeting housing need'. Existing research has highlighted the inherent limits of housing-only responses to sustainably ending homelessness among lone adults with complex needs, just as it had identified the limitations of attempting to 'treat' homelessness, without providing a settled home (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2010). The reasonable preference

research showed that attempting to reduce acute housing need and homelessness to a simple taxonomy was impractical. There was another dimension to this work, in that reasonable preference law categorised some people as in legitimate housing need, but did not encompass everyone who might experience homelessness, some were defined as more 'deserving' than others. The tendency for homelessness and social housing laws in the UK to identify some groups as more 'deserving' than others is longstanding and has been noted elsewhere (Lowe, 1997; Fitzpatrick *et al*, 2009).

Publication 9 shows clear discrimination, based again on simplistic, negative, cultural images of what 'homeless people' are like, rather than hard evidence. Social landlords and mixed-tenure housing schemes were supposedly focused on meeting the most acute housing needs but wished to avoid spatial concentrations of poverty which were associated with weak social cohesion and other negative area effects (Galster, 2007; Galster *et al.*, 2010). The first study that the paper draws on (Bretherton and Pleace, 2008) found that owner-occupiers were opposed to living alongside lower income renters. The second study (Pleace *et al., 2007*) showed that housing associations viewed certain groups of statutorily homeless households as risks to neighbourhood cohesion.

The comparable results of these two studies prompted me to explore the potential tensions between policies designed to house those in greatest need and the emphasis within urban policy to avoid spatial concentrations of poverty. The thinking for this paper centred on questioning two constructs, of homeless people as 'permanently' poor with high support needs, and as 'causing' spatial concentrations of poverty that in turn created 'broken' neighbourhoods, when they were rehoused, in shaping strategy and policy, in a context where the evidence base for each set of assumptions was, at best, ambiguous.

Similarly, Publication 8 provides evidence highlighting the dangers of discretion in the application of the English homelessness legislation, as officers were making biased, assumptive decisions based on preconceived ideas of 'homelessness'. The research found that homelessness officers were the key actors in deciding whether an applicant was 'vulnerable'. Cultural constructs of homelessness were found to create preconceptions in officers that created bias against homeless applicants. Images of homelessness, rather than hard evidence, were found to be central in assessing which homeless people were 'service worthy'. Inconsistent decisions emerged from a complex interplay of multiple influences. Interpretation and personal judgements were at the fore in the assessment of homeless applicants.

The work presented here demonstrated to me that these responses to homelessness and housing need were flawed. Ideas about homelessness were too simplistic,

homeless people are not all the same, exhibiting single sets of behaviour, reactions and needs.

My key interest, reflecting questions also raised by ethnographic research with homeless people and critical analyses of the images surrounding definitions and responses towards homelessness, lay in developing new ways of exploring and understanding homelessness. The key challenge I wanted to meet is well expressed by Join-Lambert (2009, p.3) writing about the roles and impact of social statistical research on the debates about homelessness in France:

Many literary works, qualitative surveys and research projects, for the most part anthropological and sociological, have analysed the typology of and the paths taken by people living on the margins of society, but without succeeding in influencing the shared images deeply rooted in our collective unconscious.

American research has advanced similar ideas, the work of Culhane and others in the United States on longitudinal analysis of administrative data has been instrumental in undermining the simplistic assumption that homelessness was 'caused' by the closure of long-stay psychiatric hospitals (Kuhn and Culhane, 1998; O'Sullivan, 2008). Burt, writing about US survey data in 2001, raised the same sort of questions about the use of characteristic-based taxonomy to 'explain' homelessness (Burt, 2001, p. 775):

For virtually every characteristic other than the extreme poverty that is the common denominator of the homeless condition, it is rarely the case that half, or even one third, of homeless clients have that characteristic in common. Even factors thought to be strongly associated with the probability of homelessness, such as childhood abuse or neglect and out-of-home placement, characterise only about a quarter of homeless people. Clearly, this level of diversity and the widely varying points of vulnerability to homelessness, given conditions of extreme poverty, belie the idea of a homeless population, or of simple solutions to homelessness.

Other critics have also argued that 'taxonomies' of homelessness exaggerate individual variables, such as mental health problems and downplay or ignore economic and social factors. Taxonomies of homelessness have also been criticised for associating 'homelessness' with sets of characteristics that also clearly exist in the general population (Lyon-Callo, 2000; O'Sullivan, 2008; Pleace, 2016).

However, academic debate about homelessness in the UK, Europe and USA can still revolve around popular images of homelessness. Evidence that homelessness should not be reduced to crude constructs of housing market failure or specific sets of characteristics is widespread (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2010), but it is not the predominant narrative. Some academics, such as Fitzpatrick (2005), have

continued to argue in favour of taxonomies, focused on individual characteristics, saying they have failed to provide a clear expository framework only because they are insufficiently fine-grained, while others continue to focus on structural factors, such as housing markets (O'Flaherty, 2010).

Conceptually, the reduction of homelessness to constructs, which Gowan describes in the US context as the 'sin-talk' of homelessness as moral failure, the 'sick talk' of homelessness as a product (largely) of mental illness and the 'system-talk' of homelessness resulting from housing and labour markets, create what can be regarded as a succession of conceptual failures (Gowan, 2010). It is almost, as Join-Lambert (2009) describes in France, as if researchers cannot quite focus on homelessness, always reaching for simplistic images, in spite of what their own findings are telling them about a more complex reality.

The dangers of systems that were designed to process *images* of homelessness, rather than respond to individual need, were becoming increasingly evident to me. My work around women's experience of domestic violence and the relationships between domestic violence and homelessness was also beginning to highlight the absence of consideration of gender within research on homelessness. Other research was also highlighting how services were processing *images* of homeless women, rather than recognising their specific needs (Dordick 2002; Hansen Löfstrand and Quilgars, 2016).

The inherent challenges and limits of taxonomy, as a way of processing, researching and understanding the world, have long been recognised. Taxonomies that try to reflect the true complexity of social phenomena tend to become an amorphous mass of many, sometimes barely differentiated, groups, while the temptation to create simple, or at least useable, categorisations can mean that certain variables are ignored, while others are simplified, bending the populations being studied into categories that do not actually represent them (Bowker and Leigh-Star, 1999). A key concept here is the idea of the 'data double', a recorded version of an individual that is less complex, less nuanced, or which may bear little relationship to the person themselves, which researchers and administrative systems can create without the individuals having much, or any, say over how they are represented (Pleace and Bretherton, 2006). Taxonomic attempts to understand and explore social phenomena have inherent flaws, because of this tendency to misrepresent – at least to some degree – in order to produce categorisations that can be used, the human dimensions of homelessness become lost when the main attempts to understand it centre on trying to group people, rather than recognise a reality of diverse, inconsistent human beings whose decisions and choices – not just their experiences and characteristics – shape their trajectories through homelessness.

My experiences on these three pieces of work brought the simplicity, indeed the crudity, of taxonomies of homelessness into sharp relief. The 'sick' and 'sinful' (Gowan, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2008 and 2016) pictures of homelessness shaped responses to homeless people at the level of individual bureaucrats (administering the statutory homelessness system), in how some social landlords reacted to homelessness as a threat to neighbourhood cohesion and in the framing of laws governing access to social housing.

The idea that gender may be shaping experiences of homelessness could be read as an assertion that existing taxonomies need to be revised or expanded, as gender itself could be the basis for a new taxonomy of homelessness. This is not my hypothesis. I contend that false, over simplistic images of women's homelessness are at the root of the problem. Inaccurate images of homeless women as an extreme, and therefore 'unusual', break from the socially expected roles for women, and flawed methods that, effectively, failed to look for women have limited our understanding of homelessness.

However, while there are, it seems very likely, patterns within women's homelessness that *can* make it distinct from that of men, that distinction is *not* absolute. Gender can, I assert, have a measurable influence on homelessness trajectories, but that is not the same thing as arguing that gender *always* differentiates the experience of homelessness. Gender, in other words, may produce tendencies towards certain patterns of homelessness, but homeless women will not always be different from homeless men. As I discuss in the next section, another aspect of my hypothesis stresses the need to recognise the diverse human experience of homelessness, women do not have a single set of experiences, but their experiences may differ from those of homeless men enough that we need to explore any differences. Women are also not visible enough in existing homelessness research. The point is that we need to understand what the experiences of homeless women are and hear their voices.

Conceptualisations of homelessness

As I started to reconceptualise homelessness, I began to consider the *human* dimensions in more depth, thinking critically about the limits of even the more elaborate taxonomies (Fitzpatrick, 2005), and how those experiencing homelessness themselves think and feel about their situation and the services set up to respond to their needs. Several research projects and subsequent publications enabled me to look at this in more detail. Under this theme, *Conceptualisations of Homelessness* come publications 7, 6 and 4. These publications show how my research led me beyond a

reassessment of simplistic constructs of homelessness and towards reconceptualising homelessness in terms of individual, human, experience.

The research looking at using ETHOS in Northern Ireland demonstrated the inherent flaws in taxonomic approaches and highlighted significant gaps in knowledge. ETHOS has been the subject of considerable criticism (Amore *et al.*, 2011; Brändle, G. and García, 2015) which has highlighted incompatibility with established definitions, the absence of recording of the duration of homelessness and serious flaws as a guide to enumeration, such as counting elements of *potential* homelessness alongside actual homelessness (Sahlin, 2012; Amore, 2013). Yet as I looked at ETHOS in real detail, I began to view the core problem in a different way from other critics, who had focused on issues with design, instead ETHOS itself seemed, as other taxonomies, to be founded on a misconception that homelessness can be reduced to a small set of subgroups.

The work also highlighted the gaps in our understanding of homelessness. ETHOS took no account of hidden homelessness, youth, some aspects of long-term and recurrent homelessness and paid no attention to gender and women's experience of homelessness other than in relation to use of domestic violence services by homeless women. For me, the research emphasised that classifications of homelessness might be flawed in another sense, i.e. they were based on *partial* data on the lived experience of homelessness, alongside being influenced by the preconceptions of homelessness discussed under the first theme.

My extensive work on Housing First showed that service effectiveness was also clearly linked to moving beyond taxonomic explanations of homelessness. Services that recognised each homeless person as an individual were more effective. Publication 4, highlighted how Housing First moves beyond the simple constructs and service responses to homelessness discussed in theme 1, being designed to define each homeless person as an individual, recognising a human right to housing and maximising choice and control for homeless people, so that they define their own support package. This important piece of primary research demonstrated how a service focused on enabling choice and control for homeless people can have significantly better outcomes than inflexible services, designed around preconceptions of who homeless people are. The study showed that innovative services could fracture the limited conceptualisations of homelessness that my earlier work had highlighted.

British versions of Housing First took the choice and control given to homeless people in the original Housing First service and extended it, placing less emphasis on pursuit of 'recovery' and more emphasis on self-determination and the employment of strength-based approaches, recognising and respecting the capacities

of homeless people. This moved beyond the original American Housing First model, which had retained some assumptions that homeless people would behave in certain ways that needed to be changed (Hansen-Löfstrand and Juhila, 2012) towards a point where it was becoming truly user-led.

Earlier models of homelessness service assume homeless people exist in pre-defined subgroups, which they attempt to 'treat' through a standardised set of support, medical interventions and behavioural modification (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007). Housing First represents a 'non-taxonomic' response to homelessness which outperforms earlier 'taxonomic' services, that provide standardised responses based on the idea that homeless people are always reducible to a few subgroups (Tsemberis, 2010; Pleace, 2016a).

As noted, this tendency to sort and label homeless people in quite simple ways has been countered by arguments for producing taxonomies that offer more detail (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Pleace, 2005). However, my own analysis was now persuading me that any attempt to categorise homelessness, on the assumption that consistently distinct subgroups existed, was probably inherently flawed. Not only were the preconceptions flawed, but huge gaps existed in the data on homelessness, so that whole dimensions were not properly understood, including women's experiences. New research was also appearing on gender, arguing that women's experience of homelessness could often be distinct (Bowpitt *et al.,* 2011; Mayock and Sheridan, 2012; Reeve, 2018).

Others have made arguments that have taken the objections against employing taxonomies of homelessness to their logical conclusion, i.e. arguing that homelessness does not, in practical terms, exist as a consistent social problem with clearly definable parameters (Neale, 1997; Pleace, 1998; Williams and Cheal, 2001). My own sense was that while there was considerable variation in experience of homelessness, and gaps in information, the human experience of homelessness was something distinct from other forms of poverty and exclusion, both in terms of the nature of the experience itself and with respect to the kinds of help, provided by services like Housing First, which homeless people needed.

The work on Housing First also led me to reconsider how homelessness was being responded to. Housing First recognised the human dimensions, but was essentially a housing led-response, with sometimes mixed results in respect of socioeconomic integration and improving health and wellbeing (Raitakari and Juhila, 2015; Quilgars and Pleace, 2016). Also, the research undertaken for Publication 4 brought to my attention the experience of homeless women, who were over-represented, in terms of the 'expected' gender ratio, of long-term and currently homeless people with high support needs. My earlier research on Camden Housing First (Pleace and

Bretherton, 2013a), had also hinted that the experiences of homeless women might be distinct from those of homeless men. Looking at Housing First and the way in which it worked raised questions for me as to whether a continued focus on housing, even employing a user-led model, was necessarily the best way to meet individuals' needs.

Alongside raising further questions about the validity of taxonomic conceptions of homelessness, my work on these research projects led me to question the entire logic of taxonomy. Reductionist approaches were failing to see the individuals experiencing homelessness, and the cutting edge of service provision for homeless people was moving beyond some academic research in terms of its conceptualisation and response to homelessness.

Inclusivity

Theme three, *Inclusivity*, looks at homelessness service responses aimed at social and economic inclusion. These services acknowledge the broader human consequences of homelessness, seeking to address educational and economic disadvantage, social isolation and health and wellbeing. Under the theme *Inclusivity* are Publications 5 and 3 and these two pieces of research further demonstrate the importance of personalisation, i.e. respecting and responding to individual choice, in the design of effective service responses to homelessness.

The two publications submitted within the theme of *Inclusivity* serve to illustrate the progressive transformation in service responses to homelessness. Services, such as Time Banking and Skylight, represent a shift in focus, highlighting different aspects of the *human experience* within homelessness. They acknowledge broader responses are necessary, around social and economic integration, increased self-esteem, confidence and motivation, as well as health, wellbeing and housing. The Skylights focused on supporting and enhancing individual capacity in respect of economic and social integration for homeless people. The ideas underpinning Skylight, indeed the idea of homeless people as ready for work, education and training, rather being seen in terms of a mix of housing and support needs, were distinct. Skylight 'normalised' homeless people, it used a different conceptualisation, it defined them as unemployed, as needing training and education, a very different image from the seeing homelessness in terms of 'sin' or 'sickness' (Gowan, 2010).

The work on Skylight and Time Banking helped formulate my ideas and arguments for a reconceptualization of homelessness, because these services expressed the needs of homeless people as being something both *distinct* from and *beyond* housing need. Time Banking and Skylight services proved that homelessness did not have to

be thought about primarily in terms of housing and showed me that there could quite different approaches in conceptualising and responding to homelessness. This is not to suggest a service like Skylight ignores housing need, but it would not necessarily prioritise it above social and economic integration, whereas Housing First, for all its progressive qualities, would (Tsemberis, 2010; Pleace, 2016a).

Recognising not only the human without a house, but the human without relationships, friendships, who lacks reasonable life chances and good physical and mental health is crucially important in delivering an effective response to homelessness and, conceptually, to arriving at a way of understanding homelessness that has both clarity and rigour. O'Sullivan (2008, p.78) notes:

Contemporary social science research has placed housing centre stage in preventing homelessness, exiting homelessness and achieving residential stability, and the issue of providing housing for those that find themselves homeless is, in itself, relatively uncontroversial. However, how best to assist homeless people to achieve sustainable secure housing is subject to considerable debate.

My concern is that debate about homelessness must move on from a fundamentally flawed focus on housing and treatment needs because there are so many other dimensions to homelessness. Services like Skylight and the Time Banking initiative show that defining homelessness largely, or solely, in relation to housing position is illogical.

The idea that homelessness is often regarded as being somehow 'disconnected' from wider society and, by implication, from wider human experience is not new. Farrugia and Gerrard (2016) extend arguments originally made by Pleace (1998) that homelessness is treated as a discrete analytical object as if it is external to broader inequality. Others have criticised the tendency to explain homelessness in terms of deviance, with some arguing that de-humanising people experiencing homelessness has often been at the core of policy responses (Carlen, 1996; Mossman, 1997; Lyon-Callo, 2000; Dobie, 2002; Carr and Hunter, 2008; Dwyer *et al.*, 2015).

Attempts by cities to clear their streets of people sleeping rough, or 'warehousing' them in what is termed 'emergency' accommodation that turns into a permanent residence, is seen by some researchers as an expression of these attitudes (Mitchell, 1997). Cross sectional studies of people in emergency accommodation in the US reported 'shelterisation', the idea that difference and deviance in homeless people was being generated by living in shelters (Grunberg and Eagle, 1990), fuelling the idea that homeless people were somehow 'not the same' as other people. Later work, on family homelessness, hidden homelessness and longitudinal and ethnographic analysis, severely undermined the idea that there was a 'culture' of homelessness (O'Sullivan, 2008), but such ideas still circulate, even if there is strong

evidence that homeless people are clearly not somehow distinct from other human beings (Pleace, 2016).

Lancione (2016), writing about the experience of homeless migrants in Italy, has argued that homelessness people are conceptualised as 'meaning less', 'having less' and 'being less' than ordinary citizens. Society, he argues, both processes their homelessness using these images and also draws on these images to design services. Stigmatisation and the use of 'deviance' as an explanation for homelessness, like taxonomies or reducing homelessness causation to macroeconomics, is inherently flawed, because, like those other 'explanations' it fails to see the human beings at the heart of homelessness. Somerville (2013, p.384), notes:

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.

My concerns centre on the human dimensions, on not reducing homelessness to economic position, housing position or what amounts to a diagnosis or a classification based on an idea of deviance, but on recognising and responding to the increasing evidence that it is individual human beings that experience homelessness. The goal of my work is to understand homelessness in a new way.

Gender

There is one other assumption about homelessness that must be challenged by new ideas and new research, the idea that homelessness is predominantly a male experience. The final theme of this Integrative Chapter looks at gender and how, up until this point, a focus on male experience has dominated research, debate, and policy and service-level responses to homelessness.

The tendency to focus on single homeless men on the street is beginning to change. New research is indicating that women are experiencing homelessness in greater numbers than previously thought and that women can also have distinct trajectories through homelessness (Mayock and Bretherton, 2016). As understanding grows, our understanding of who homeless people are must extend to exploring the effects of gender and representing the experience of homeless women.

Women will not all have the same trajectories through homelessness or always have experiences differentiated from those of men. At the core of my arguments is the necessity of seeing the individual human beings in studying and responding to homelessness, and, if we are to understand those human beings, we have to see and understand the women, as well as the men, who experience homelessness. Under the theme *Gender* are Publications 2 and 1.

Publications 2 and 1 critically assess a series of longstanding assumptions:

- Lone adult women experience homelessness at much lower rates than men.

- Much of the difference is explained by women having children, as welfare, health and (where present) social housing systems will 'protect' a household containing children to a much greater extent than they will a lone adult.

- When lone adult women do experience sustained and recurrent homelessness, they do so for very similar reasons to men, i.e. comorbidity of severe mental illness, addiction, poor physical health and the extremes of social and economic exclusion, including contact with criminal justice systems.

These assertions look increasingly uncertain as our data improve. Women appear to be more likely to use informal arrangements in response to homelessness, friends, family and acquaintances, to keep a roof over their head (Baptista, 2010; Mayock and Sheridan, 2012; Reeve, 2018). Women are homeless but are not properly counted because they may avoid services where large numbers of men are present and do not allow themselves to be visible on the streets. Homeless women may be in different places than men, rather than being significantly less numerous (Bretherton and Pleace, forthcoming 2018).

The idea that women experience sustained or repeated homelessness for similar reasons to men is also undermined by the data surrounding causation, which in respect of lone women, women separated from their children and lone women parents, show homelessness resulting from domestic violence and abuse at an exponentially greater level than is reported among men (Mayock *et al.,* 2016).

Research, beyond my own work, indicates there are other assumptions about women's homelessness which can also be challenged. For example, the flawed assumption that women experiencing homelessness will very often be involved in sex-work (Löfstrand and Thörn, 2004) or that when they are involved in sex- work, homeless women can be reduced to stereotypical, uncomplicated 'victims' (Harding and Hamilton, 2009).

Furthermore, Publication 1 argues that this inaccuracy in data on women has caused a failure to take into account the role of agency and the decisions individual women

make when faced with homelessness. While a range of interacting factors, e.g. economics, culture, welfare systems, and housing systems, may influence homelessness, understanding the variations in causation and the role of decisions women make when navigating homelessness is crucial to understanding the roles of gender in relation to homelessness.

There are clear limitations in the evidence base on women's homelessness, definitions that exclude whole dimensions of female homelessness and preconceptions of who homeless people are, centred around false constructs of homelessness being experienced by isolated men with mental health and addiction issues. The failure to fully understand the gendered aspects of homelessness, within a broader failure to see the individual human beings who experience homelessness and the importance of their decisions and actions, is a failure to understand the very nature of homelessness.

This theme demonstrates how my work has evolved to my current principal research interest and focus within the field of homelessness, that of gender in homelessness. My work across the preceding three themes, made it increasingly evident to me that while academic research, homeless strategies and services were moving towards a more personalised holistic approach to understanding and responding to homelessness, gender - the often very different experiences of women - was being overlooked.

Homelessness, despite decades of research, has not been clearly understood because the human dimension has been discounted or ignored and gender, even within newer debates highlighting the human dimensions, has generally been overlooked. It now looks likely that women are homeless in greater numbers than previously assumed and we have clear evidence that their *experiences* of homelessness can differ greatly from that of men. To fully understand the human experience of homelessness, of homelessness as an experience of individual human beings, not as sin, sickness or systems, an understanding of how individual women can react to and experience homelessness is essential. Research and policy attention are slowly transforming and starting to take gender into account and we are working towards a level of understanding that can help us to truly comprehend, and therefore more effectively respond to, the social ill that is homelessness (Mayock and Bretherton, 2016; Bretherton, 2017; Reeve, 2018).

Discussion

There are two dimensions to my hypothesis, the first is that – in some instances – research needs to catch up with service provision. Innovative, person-centred

approaches to service provision, like Housing First, Skylight and Time-Banking, have seen the human beings who experience homelessness more clearly than some research does. Just the idea behind Time-Banking and Skylight, that lone homeless adults both wish to, and can, pursue education, training and work-related activities is a radical departure from the sinful/sick imagery that, as my work on Reasonable Preference, medical priority in the statutory homelessness system, ETHOS and my *Urban Studies* paper show, still pervades bureaucratic and popular conceptions of homelessness.

Similarly, Housing First, which works on the basis that supporting people to exercise choice over how they live and what help they need, indeed to ultimately control most of the process of service delivery, is at odds with reductionist taxonomies that turn homeless people into groups who are too sick, or too sinful or too helpless in the face of the systems (or the patriarchy) that made them homeless, to make their own path out of homelessness. Recognising diversity, seeing the strength and capacity among homeless people and enabling choice is a more efficient way of ending homelessness than could be managed by older services that centred on treatment and a (supposed) need to achieve behavioural modification before even offering housing.

Recognising that people make choices, which may influence their experience of homelessness itself – like women avoiding services full of men – and, that when given the right kind of help, or even just being met with the right attitude, homeless people have the personal strength and resources to find their way out of homelessness, is a key achievement of the service innovations I have researched. Women's voices, women's experiences and their responses are, however, still not sufficiently accounted for, either in service design or in research.

There are, almost certainly, tendencies in experience of homelessness linked to gender, hidden homelessness being much more female than rough sleeping is one obvious manifestation of this, the associations between domestic violence and women's experience of homelessness is another. However, as I have noted throughout this Integrative Chapter, I am not, in drawing on my own research and considering the wider literature, arguing to replace one shallow set of reductionist taxonomies with another. Gender may make certain trajectories more likely, but the effect is unlikely to be consistent and very unlikely to be absolute. Women may experience hidden homelessness at higher rates, but men will experience it too, equally while most people living rough will (probably) be male, that does not mean women do not sleep rough. Again, the point is that we need to explore in order to understand the ways in which gender may influence the diverse human experiences and choices that are the reality of homelessness.

What is missing from the analysis of contemporary homelessness is a proper consideration of gender. The recent emphasis on the human dimensions is welcome but is meaningless unless both genders' experiences are properly explored and represented. There are also simple gaps in information, existing methods have failed to see homeless women because they have been looking in the wrong places and because they have failed to ask basic questions, such as why an apparent gender imbalance was present to begin with (Bretherton and Pleace, forthcoming 2018). In essence, my argument is no more than an assertion that social science needs to reorient itself in respect of homelessness, to recognise the human beings experiencing it and to fully recognise that many of them are female.

In this Integrative PhD Chapter, I have demonstrated, drawing on 10 publications, a coherent body of work that shows my engagement with research, theory and policy. My policy focused research has influenced service design and strategy. I have also been able to draw on this work to develop my own thinking, culminating in the argument for a theoretical reconceptualization of homelessness that accounts for the variations in experience and trajectories, recognising the humanity, diversity and gender of homeless people.

The four substantive themes presented here: Moving beyond reductionist taxonomies of homelessness; Conceptualisations of homelessness; Inclusivity and Gender, show, through my own work, the work of my peers and through the strategic changes in policy and practice, how homelessness services are now giving more recognition to the people experiencing homelessness. Within the themes presented in the chapter, my own contribution to academic knowledge and impact on service design and implementation is evidenced.

This chapter illustrates the flaws in crude taxonomies and discusses the limitations inherent in supposedly 'complex' taxonomies like ETHOS. The chapter also explores my own theoretical journey, as through my work, I began to see the flaws in existing explanations and responses to homelessness.

There is increasing evidence showing that homelessness is an individual *human* experience and not something that can be explained by trying to cluster homeless people into categories. It is also apparent that strategic responses and systems for intervention, that try to cluster homeless people by their needs, are producing services that are inherently limited because they attempt to process 'images' of homelessness, rather than recognising and responding to actual people and their experiences. Research on homelessness has also been compromised because, it too, has been influenced by preconceptions of who homeless people are.

The change in narrative of what is good practice in homelessness service provision, through increased personalisation and approaches such as Housing First, means that

those at risk of or experiencing homelessness have more of a voice in determining their trajectory through and exits from homelessness. As I argue here, research, while increasingly recognising the human dimensions of homelessness, is lagging behind the emphasis on understanding personal experience, needs and supporting choice that is increasingly at the core of mainstream homelessness service provision.

However, it is not enough to say we must focus more clearly on the human, individual, dimensions of homelessness. This is because our conceptualisation of the human experience of homelessness has been founded on a misapprehension about the nature of homelessness, i.e. viewing it as a largely male experience, when this is not the case. While the research agenda is shifting, with more recognition being given to the presence of women in homeless populations, the role of gender in homelessness is not adequately understood. The experiences of women, having previously being woefully under-researched, and often overlooked, are finally becoming visible (Mayock and Bretherton, 2016; Bretherton, 2017), but there is much work still to do.

The work presented above, and indeed my academic career as a whole, have led to my core research interests becoming focused on gender, homelessness and housing inequalities. I intend to be at the very heart of research on women's homelessness, influencing, both through the Women's Homelessness in Europe Network and through my own research, strategies and service models to understand and respond appropriately to women that find themselves in housing need and to change the debates about the nature of homelessness across academic research.

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