Homelessness, Motherhood and Education: An Exploration of the Experiences of Homeless Women with School-age Children in their Care

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Abstract

Housing has long been understood as a necessity for a liveable life, for many a safe and secure home has been taken for granted. With an ever growing 'housing crisis', where the amount of social housing has declined, where private rents are increasing, and work is, for many, becoming more insecure and precarious, housing insecurity and homelessness is becoming more prevalent.

This thesis contributes to the scholarship on female specific homelessness, focusing on the intersections of housing, homelessness, motherhood and education. I consider the emotional and affective consequences of these political decisions on the lives of individual women and their families. I explore the effects of navigating housing, homelessness and education systems simultaneously; a set of issues which remain relatively under-researched. The work presented draws on accounts from women who were experiencing housing that was lost while being the mothers of school-age children, and practitioners working in the fields of housing and education using semi-structured interviews.

The research found that living in temporary accommodation caused significant disruptions to the women's identities, and to their children's education. The thesis explores the ways in which homeless women in Manchester are able to make decisions around their futures, and the futures of their children, when faced with systemic barriers to housing and education and when battling with the emotional and affective impact of mothering through crisis periods of homelessness. It also finds that teachers, while keen to support families experiencing homelessness, were insufficiently prepared or trained to support the kinds of behavioural, physical and emotional effects of homelessness which clearly interrupted children's schooling.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Research

This project explores the impact of homelessness on children's educational experiences as this is understood by homeless women living in temporary accommodation in Manchester, England. This empirical research adopts a qualitative approach to exploring the lives of homeless mothers, focusing more specifically on how they navigate routes to and through their children's educational life courses in times of precarity and housing crises. A feminist epistemological framing is used here to develop a better understanding of the emotional and affective remnants of potentially traumatic experiences.

This research focuses on the perspective of mothers as mothers most often, occupy the role of primary caregiver and carry out daily domestic duties related to the child, particularly in lone-parent families (Tyler, 2008; Quaid, 2018; Nayak and Kehily, 2014). Although it is recognised that the number of lone-parent families with male parents are increasing and social norms that position women as primary caregivers may exclude male single parents from research agendas (Wade, Veldhuizen and Cairney, 2011; Ugelvik, 2014), it is not within the scope of this research to address this group. In the public and social imaginary women are still routinely associated with practices of care, homemaking and maternal responsibilities (Bimpson, Parr and Reeve, 2022; Blunt and Dowling, 2006), and, though the function of the home extends beyond these factors, the domestic space of 'home' is where these practices are most often explicitly enacted and where the construction of a maternal identity is largely formed (Bimpson, Parr and Reeve, 2022; Casey, Goudie and Reeve, 2008). When the home is no longer available as a space in which maternal duties can be exercised in private, the disruption to a woman's mother identity and her ability to parent with established routines is significant (Shelter, 2016). The number of families becoming homeless is increasing rapidly (Shelter, 2021) making this an important juncture at which to consider the impact that such a life event has.

It is also imperative to consider the factors that have contributed to the economic climate in which so many are facing economic and housing precarity. For decades, homeownership for owner occupied properties has been conceived as something to aspire to, but it is now suggested that people under 35 who do not already own their own homes are unlikely to be able to buy their own homes unless they have familial wealth on which they can rely (McKee et al., 2017; Burn-Murdoch, 2023). Instead, property is increasingly bought as an investment for owners to rent to tenants in the private rental market (Aalbers, 2016). Around 4.6 million people are now living in private rental properties but for many, this is an increasingly unaffordable option. The Office for National Statistics (ONS:2023) states that rental costs are rising at the fastest rate since 2006, having increased by 6.2% in 2023 alone across England, with many now spending 50% of their total income on rent (Stone, 2023). Beyond this, the costs of running a home are also increasing, fuel bills for electricity and gas have increased exponentially, with the ‘price cap’, intended to protect bill payers from rising costs issued by energy companies, is expected to increase by a further 5% in 2024 (Ofgem, 2023).

We are living in a time of multiple crises, with the housing crisis resulting from these rising costs, a financial crisis that sparked an austerity response in which social welfare, benefits and services most often used by women and children were cut (Shelter, 2021; Quaid, 2018; Vize, 2019) and a cost of living crisis that is disproportionately affecting the already disadvantaged (Karjalainen and Levell, 2022) and making food, warmth, clothing and shelter seem like a luxury. For many, the effects of these multiple national crises have exacerbated already precarious financial situations and have contributed to the rise in homelessness.

This study considers what it feels like to live through these crises through a feminist lens, it focuses on how mothers living in precarious housing situations navigate their homelessness and their children’s education during times of crisis. Much of the current social sciences literature concerned with homelessness often fails adequately to engage with female-specific homelessness and the nuanced narratives of women’s experiences, and most particularly those women who have children (Bassuk and Beadslee, 2014). In an attempt to contribute another perspective to the growing field of homelessness literature, and to give voice to those neglected from previous research, this research focuses on women living in precarious housing situations. The image of homelessness that often still exists in the public imaginary is one of ‘rooflessness’ and neglects those living in inadequate, unsafe and overcrowded dwellings (May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2007; Busch-Geertsema, Culhane and Fitzpatrick, 2016). People who are homeless in a ‘roofless’ way are met with responses of insecurity, violence and repulsion especially when they frequent public urban spaces (Crisis, 2016). To adopt an overt, public homeless identity risks physical expulsion from city spaces as homeless bodies are policed and removed from public view (Smith and Hall, 2013) as they are understood to hinder consumption practices for businesses by their very presence (Petty and Young, 2020; Smith and Hall, 2013). Although some women do experience ‘rough sleeping’, these are most often lone women without dependent children (Bretherton, 2017; Gonyea and Melekis, 2017). It has also been argued that women who do experience their homelessness in this public way have more cause to hide their position than men; for fear of violence and sexual assault (Watson, 2016; Weinrich, 2016). Women who do occupy these public spaces are subject to the same scrutiny that homeless men encounter (Jackson, 2012; Brumley et al., 2015; Gonyea and Melekis, 2017), such as increased surveillance and vitriolic reactions from passers-by who consider homeless people to be unsightly, out of place and a threat to desirable spaces (Casey, Goudie and Reeve, 2008; Sniekers, 2018).

This research, as well as offering deeper insights into the experience of female homelessness, considers how being and becoming homeless, a circumstance experienced by a growing number of people, also affects children’s education engagement and mothers’ decision-making practices surrounding their children’s schooling. Whilst educational progress, outcomes and school teaching strategies are routinely and scrupulously monitored, in reality there is very little attention paid to how well homeless children fare in these spaces. In England, the principles of the modern education system are inextricably linked to the belief that good educational attainment inevitably leads to a more productive and globally competitive workforce (Education Reform Act, 1988; Tranter, 2012; DfE, 2010), and ensures the country's economic growth (Gibb, 2015; Chang, 2010). In our society, gainful employment in a well-paid role is seen as an indicator of success (Jones, 2011, Dorling, 2010), and educational success is a significant determinant of access to the labour market, making it a focal point for government monitoring, reform and scrutiny. However, where there is much attention paid to exam results, attendance data and teacher target driven data, it is remarkable to see that there is still no data to indicate the ways in which educational attainment or engagement is affected by homelessness.

The number of school-age children experiencing homelessness is rapidly increasing, with at least 125,760 children living in temporary accommodation (DLUHC, 2023a) indicating a 67% rise in ten years (ibid.); failing to consider how their educational journeys are affected by such an experience also fails to consider the impact childhood homelessness could have on their futures. A recent study by Shelter (2023) found that 47% of families experiencing homelessness had been forced to move to another school after having to move to new temporary accommodation and that 22% of homeless children have moved to new schools on multiple occasions. The study also found that 62% of those families having to transition to new temporary accommodation, were given less than 48 hours' notice, meaning that families were perpetually in motion, unable to settle and had little time to acclimatise to the idea of moving house and moving schools. This recent study offers some insight into the disruption that homeless families and homeless children face in relation to their education but does not consider the experiences of families considered to be facing 'hidden homelessness', that is, those accessing informal, and not officially recorded, forms of temporary accommodation such as staying with friends and family.

This research contributes to addressing this significant gap in our understanding of the distressing condition of many homeless families by focusing on the question of how mothers navigate precarious circumstances, and by examining the feelings generated by being compelled to seek housing and education, and the constraints they face in doing so. The lack of investigation into the intersecting social 'space' comprising homelessness motherhood and children's education leaves a void in debates about inclusion and equality, which it is hoped that this research will contribute to filling.

1.2 Research Questions

The core objective of the research presented in this thesis has been to understand how homeless mothers with children in their care navigate routes through homelessness and to examine the related issue of what impact this has on their children's education. Female-specific homelessness is relatively underexplored in the academic literature that exists around homelessness, and less explored still is the problem of maternal homelessness and the impact that such an experience has on educational engagement. This research seeks to contribute to this knowledge gap by asking three research questions:

1. How is homelessness felt and experienced by homeless mothers with children in their care?

2. How do homeless mothers seek to engage with and navigate their children's educational pathways?

3. How do homeless mothers experience opportunities or constraints in relation to the educational choices that they make during times of crisis?

1.3 Approach to Research

As highlighted above, there are political and academic reasons to further investigate the experience of homeless mothers and the impact of such an experience on their children's education, but it is also important to consider the personal drivers that have led me to this research topic. It is inevitable that qualitative research is influenced by the researcher's own perspectives and experiences of the world and, as such, cannot exist in isolation. It has been noted by Allen that a researcher's positionality is an "accumulation of 'background thinking'" (2005: 990) over a person's life. Founded on personal experiences, these 'background thoughts' - are subconsciously consulted, to inform thought processes, behaviours and conceptions of the world. It is therefore important to be self-reflexive as a researcher and to provide transparency when these perspectives directly influence the research aims and analysis (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002; Baglieri at al., 2011). It is important for me to relate that, for many years, I lived without a safe and secure home. I was homeless. I experienced homelessness in many forms: I stayed on the sofas of friends and for short periods in their spare rooms, I occupied houses with strangers who became threatening, and I slept in bus stops. I did not, however, during my sustained periods of homelessness, access local authority or charitable services that are designed to provide homelessness assistance: I did not know where to turn.

I understand how it *feels* to be homeless. I understand how it feels to be outside of the bounds of what is considered to be a 'normal' or traditional way of occupying accommodation. I understand how it feels to have my education disrupted by instances of homelessness and the overwhelming emotional response to losing one's home. What I cannot claim to understand is the feeling of motherhood, of navigating the homeless experience with dependents and the way that securing accommodation and schooling for one's own children provides emotional drivers that inform decisions and strategies around housing or schooling. I also recognise that there is not one way to 'be' homeless, there is not one way to perceive being or becoming homeless and there is not a ubiquitous emotional response that such a circumstance engenders, and it is for this reason that this work takes seriously the nuances and individual responses to homelessness as important contributions to knowledge.

Whilst the initial plan for this research was for me to utilise some of these experience directly, employing an autoethnographic element to the work in certain parts, it became clear that this approach was not an ethical one given that my experience does not exist in a vacuum and in contextualising this experience I would not be able to anonymise the others around me and would risk revealing details of their lives that they have not consented to sharing. I discuss this further in chapter 3, but for now, it is perhaps enough to say that my own lived experience of homelessness has informed my desire to shed more light on this particular issue and on the feelings that are created, provoked, shifted and sustained through homelessness.

1.4 Thesis Structure

The next chapter, chapter 2, reviews the academic literature related to the research topic. The review draws together and critiques literature from the fields of homelessness, housing, motherhood and education, but recognises the intersections of these research topics available to review in current UK academic literature is limited.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach that underpinned this research and the methods that were utilised to gather and analyse the data. Though theoretical underpinnings are discussed throughout this thesis and throughout each chapter, chapter 3 outlines the feminist methodology and ethos that I conducted this study with.

To address the research questions qualitative research was undertaken, the responses to the interview questions and subsequent analysis are presented through three empirical chapters in which I first present the voices of the people that I spoke to in ethnographic accounts, before moving on to providing a more in-depth analysis that positions these contributions with current arguments and scholarship. The insights provided within these chapters aid our understanding of how it feels to be homeless and how homelessness affects educational experiences and engagement. I organise these chapters through differing experiences of homelessness (people who are 'sofa-surfing, those living in hostel accommodation and people who are practitioners that have experience of working with homeless people), not to compare the experiences or to suggest that people who have occupied similar dwellings have similar experiences, but as a means of establishing some commonality from which the themes could be drawn.

In the first of the analysis chapters, chapter 4, 'Life in Someone Else's Space' explores the experiences of several women who were 'sofa-surfing' and temporarily staying with friends and family.

Chapter 5, 'Life in Someone Else's Hands', is the second analysis chapter which presents the narratives and contributions of those women who were residing in hostel spaces with their children. It first presents women's narratives before drawing on relevant literature and emergent themes to analyse the data. This thesis utilises the terms 'hostels' and 'women and children's centres' to refer to the temporary forms of shared accommodation that the families were living in, whilst there may be distinction between these terms by people working within the field, they were colloquially referred to interchangeably by the majority of people that I spoke to and captures the social conceptions of such spaces.

The third analysis chapter, ‘Life Supporting Other People’s Lives’, in chapter 6, gives insight into the responses from practitioners who frequently work with homeless families, this includes teachers and staff working in women and children’s centres (also referred to throughout as hostels). As is the case with the other two analysis chapters, in depth narrative accounts are given prior to a formal qualitative analysis of the data offered by the practitioners that I spoke to.

The final chapter in this thesis, chapter 7 offers a conclusion to the study, outlining the overall themes that have been presented and discusses the key contributions of the study. This chapter also suggests ways in which we might move forwards, the limitations of this work and considerations for future study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the work already undertaken in the field of homelessness and education. It will first consider what 'home' is believed to be and what it means to be 'homeless', before moving on to give an overview of the ways in which homelessness is measured and perceived. The chapter then moves on to review the literature on female specific homelessness, the effects of homelessness on motherhood and on education.

2.2 The Tensions Between Home and Homelessness

The concept of 'home' is not easy to define; for some 'home' is a feeling of tranquillity, security located in the mental constructs or emotions (Gonyea and Melekis, 2017), for others 'home' is a physical, material roof above their head that allowed them boundaries between private and public realms, a space in which they could be 'themselves' (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2018; Kaika, 2004; McCarthy, 2013) and for children 'home' is understood as the space where significant family members, or their primary caregiver lives (Kirkman et al., 2010).

The relationship between 'home' and 'homelessness' is socially constructed as a set of dichotomous positions (Lancione, 2023; McCarthy, 2018), though this has been contested by several academics who maintain that one can be 'homeless within the home' (Bennett, 2011; McCarthy, 2018; Baupitt et al., 2011) - inadequate, overcrowded or violent 'homes' can leave families vulnerable to negative consequences such as a decline in physical and mental health, or the lasting effects of trauma (Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2007; Johnstone et al., 2016; Radley, Hodgetts and Cullen, 2006). Although 'home' is constructed as a fixed entity that is often associated with physical space, the concept of 'home' is taken for granted and means significantly more than a physical dwelling (McCarthy, 2018). A *sense* of home has been acknowledged by a number of studies as more important than the physical house that was inhabited (Bennett, 2011; Chamberlain and Johnson, 2018; Gonyea and Melekis, 2017) and Easthope (2004:134) describes the home as an 'emotional warehouse', a place in which emotions could come to the fore and form part of the everyday lived experience. The concept of 'home' is understood as the result of continuous physical and emotional processes to make a space feel safe, comfortable and private, and has typically been perceived as taking place within a house. However, Parsell (2011a) argues that the concepts of 'a home' and 'a house' should not be conflated. 'Home' is experienced subjectively and residing in a house permanently is not enough, on its own, to experience the feeling of being 'at home' and, as Baxter and Brickell (2014) acknowledge, the notion of being "at home" is rarely complete, instead, is a feeling that can fluctuate: the potential for disruption or destruction of one's home space is always a possibility (ibid.). Where people are able to feel "at home", this is usually understood as the result of 'good' decision making practices. Conversely, mainstream understandings of homelessness construct people who live without a traditional form of 'home', that is, a physical dwelling that they could control and that provided security and continuity (Dupuis and Thorns, 2007), as passive inhabitants of the alternative space they occupy, and often disregard the agency homeless people have over establishing the feeling of 'home' outside of formal or more traditional housing structures.

For those who are traditionally housed, the ability to construct a sense of home in dwellings not typically designed for domestic occupation is perceived as impossible. However, this has been contested, and recent scholarship has argued that people living in alternative forms of accommodation still engage in 'homemaking' practices to construct their environment as homely (Lancione, 2019; 2023; Pleace, O'Sullivan and Johnsen, 2022; Lenhard et al., 2022). Sheehan (2010) suggests that in some cases homeless participants felt 'at home' in a public square because that was the location at which they engaged in activities they associated with homeliness, such as consuming meals, meeting with friends and recovering from illness. This finding was also echoed by Johnsen et al. (2008) who indicated that living publicly was a shared experience that allowed homeless people to feel socially connected and autonomous in their decision-making practices, not constrained by the social boundaries of a formal house. In some cases, the feeling of 'home' was absent, despite living in a house, this was attributed to feelings of unease or a lack of safety, often due to inadequate conditions or instances of domestic violence (Brush et al., 2018; McCarthy, 2013).

There is an assumption that a sense of home cannot be felt when occupying space in shelters designed for homelessness. However, Clapham (2003) asserts that homelessness is a process rather than a static position, and at the point at which shelters are accessed they may well be seen as a reprieve. When personal belongings that are tied up with meaning, memories and fond associations are brought with people into shelters, these spaces can begin to be felt as homely. As highlighted by Lancione (2019) a home can be built in places in which people can express autonomy through organisation of possessions, express their cultures and world views within demarcated spaces, form physical and emotional connections and in some way shut out public perceptions, even when others, who live in more traditional home-like spaces, might perceive this as impossible. Home can be found, and home can be made without a house in which to do that from; home is a feeling which need not be physically materialised. As Blunt and Dowling (2006) put it:

> "Home is a series of feelings and attachments, some of which, some of the time, and in some places, become connected to a physical structure that provides shelter" (2006:10).

It is also important to consider that the concept of home still brings an association of being a gendered space; a space in which patriarchal norms are still expected to be enacted by women (Johnston and Valentine, 1995; Reeve, 2018). As Blunt and Dowling assert, "material and symbolic geographies of home…are often embodied by women" (Blunt and Dowling, 2004:3) through historically gendered household tasks and expectations that women should be primarily responsible for caring and nurturing activities most often enacted within home spheres (Hayden, 2002). For some, a sense of pride has been derived from maintaining a 'good' home, and the loss of that carries feelings of shame and guilt (Gurney, 1997). For others, this pressure to maintain these gendered roles can be oppressive and contribute to a sense of alienation where a woman's identity is overshadowed by the expectation that they should be the primary caregiver and housekeeper (Blunt, 2005). When women who have children become homeless, they often maintain the responsibility of caring for their children and find alternative forms of accommodation to meet the needs of themselves and their children, often by staying with friends and family or in other forms of temporary accommodation such as hostels of local authority funded rooms at low-cost bed and breakfast establishments (Mayock and Sheridan, 2020). The use of different forms of temporary accommodation have grown in recent years due to the rising numbers of homelessness and housing precarity in England and we must now turn to the driving forces behind this continuing growth before exploring what female specific homelessness is experienced and the affect of homelessness.

2.3 Rise in Homelessness

Homelessness has increased exponentially in England in recent years with the number of those recognised as homeless in April-June 2018 as 58,660 households, this does not include those who are living in temporary accommodation, staying with friends or family, those considered intentionally homeless, nor those who have not sought local authority assistance with their homelessness (MHCLG, 2018). On 30th June 2018, 82,310 households were living in temporary accommodation, a 71% increase from 2010, these households included 123, 630 children (ibid.).

The rise in homelessness has been attributed, in part, due to the shortage of available social housing that could offer many on lower incomes a safe and secure place to live. There are many factors which have contributed to the lack of available affordable housing and the 'Right to Buy' scheme established under Thatcher's government in the 1980s, which offered tenants of council properties the opportunity to purchase their dwelling at a discount (Kentish, 2018), has been identified as one such factor. Between 1980 and 2014, 1.8 million council houses were sold (Cole et al., 2015) from the public to the private domain. For Pain (2018) the selling off of public housing under the Right to Buy scheme since the 1980s has been extremely detrimental. She argues that this practice is enacted as a 'slow violence' against people living in poverty, wasting residential opportunities and contributing to the rise in homelessness. The scheme, alongside poor investment in rebuilding new council houses, and increased processes of gentrification, have contributed to homelessness in the UK (Murie, 2016). As of March 2022, there were 1.21 million households on the waiting list for social housing, a 2% increase from the previous year (Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, 2023), after a total net loss of 165,000 social homes in the 2012 to 2022 period (Shelter, 2023). In 2021/22 alone, 21,638 social houses were either sold or demolished (DLUHC, 2023a), in this same period only 7,500 new social houses were built, meaning that in 2022 there was a net loss of 14,100 social houses

(DLUHC, 2022; Shelter, 2023). This has played no small part in the increase of homelessness as people cannot access social or affordable housing and are pushed into an increasingly expensive private rental market. The average rent prices for private rentals in Manchester now sits at £1,600 per month, or £400 per week (JLL, 2023; Jobling, 2023). Looking at this in comparison with the 2022 average social housing rent costs of £94.31 per week across England (Regulator for Social Housing, 2022) where the monthly rental costs less than one week's average private rental costs, it is clear to see why social housing and affordable housing options are necessary. As the private rental costs continue to soar, the stock of social housing continues to decline, and the average salary remains stagnant, the disparities between the richest and the poorest members of society's access to housing becomes ever more evident.

In Manchester, as a way to alleviate the numbers of people experiencing housing crisis, the city council has committed to building affordable housing, that is, housing that is not more than 80% of the average market rent. Despite making this public commitment to building affordable houses, in 2018 out of 15,000 new houses built in the city and 12,900 people on Manchester's social housing waiting list, no new builds in the area were 'affordable' and were sold or rented at or above market costs (Pridd, 2020). Although there has been conversation around affordable properties resolving housing insecurity, this evidently has not come to fruition with more and more social housing being sold off under the Right to Buy scheme and 'affordable' housing being unaffordable to those most likely to be already excluded from the housing market (Ellis and Laughlin, 2021). The plans to solve the housing crisis by building more homes have not worked and alternative solutions to 'dealing' with people presenting as homeless have been sought.

As discussed above, the growing number of people in housing need continues to rise, O'Leary and Simcock (2022) suggest that alongside processes of gentrification and the commitment to sell off social housing, that this rise in housing crisis is, in no small part, also being driven by the government's relentless focus on 'welfare reform', largely through austerity measures, that continue to affect negatively the most vulnerable in society. One such strategy to cut the housing welfare costs came in the form of the 'under-occupancy penalty' outlined in the *Welfare Reform Act 2012*, and more commonly known as 'The Bedroom Tax'. The impetus behind this under-occupancy penalty was framed as an individual's moral obligation to take only what they 'deserve' or to otherwise face a penalty, the DWP stated: "tenants will be able to choose whether to occupy appropriately sized accommodation, or pay towards accommodation which is larger than the needs of their household" (DWP, 2012:7). It was construed as a way to better manage the available social housing stock so that larger families on the waiting list could be appropriately homed, though this strategy disregarded barriers that prevented this redistribution of houses to be successful in this (Bogue, 2019). In practice, many people were (and remain) reluctant to move from a house they had established as their 'home' over many years and, even occupants who did want to move into a house with less bedrooms could not do so as there was an inadequate amount of smaller properties for them to relocate to (Clarke et al., 2014). Without appropriate places to move to, many people remain in the social houses that they already occupied with reduced amounts of housing benefit or universal credit payments and struggle to cover the shortfall they now faced in their rent payments, leaving them vulnerable to poverty and homelessness through arrears-based evictions (Shelter, 2016).

In these new reforms single people under 35 were a targeted demographic for benefit cuts and under the policy became ineligible for full housing benefit entitlement with the introduction of the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR). The SAR limited under 35s to claiming the cost of renting one room in a shared house, encouraging people to live in houses of multiple occupation (HMO), though as Ellis and Laughlin (2021: 304) state: "there is exceptionally limited availability of private rental sector housing below the SAR amount" leaving people little option but to enter into informal housing agreements to meet their budgets. In some circumstances the lack of strict regulation of HMOs has led to dwellings becoming overcrowded, ill-maintained and unsafe for those residing there (Clair, 2021), with many reporting significant detrimental impacts to their mental health (Barratt, Kitcher, Stewart, 2012)

Under the *Welfare Reform Act 2012*, in a bid to streamline benefit payments, multiple benefits were abolished and instead Universal Credit was introduced to cover the majority of means-tested benefit payments (and excluding health or disability based payments) and a stringent benefit cap was introduced. The benefit cap limits the amount a person is entitled to claim in welfare payments, outside of London this cap is set at £13,400 per annum for single adults and £20,000 per annum for lone parents with children (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2022). Affordable housing prices are not tied to the amount of rent that can be covered under this benefit cap, but rather, tied to the market rental or sale prices in each locality, meaning that many 'affordable houses' are unaffordable to welfare claimants under this policy. This lack of choice in the housing market is not only determined by the tenants' ability to cover the rental payments each month, but in the private rental sector landlords have the power to refuse to rent a property to anyone at their discretion, and in many cases landlords refuse to rent to people in receipt of social welfare payments (Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2017). This discretionary approach to rental agreements has also been detrimental to renters who have been impacted by the turn to low-paid, short-term insecure employment contracts in recent years (TUC, 2021) with many people now working on zero-hour contracts that makes renting in the private sector almost impossible due to the lack of secure wage payments required to prove that they can fulfil rental payments each month (Sanders and Allard, 2016; Lusher, 2017). This growing gap between house prices, rent costs, benefit limits, insecure employment, landlord discretion, and affordability is leaving many without a home, and as such contributes to the rising number of homeless people in England (more on this below).

These reforms to benefit payments were introduced not only as a means of reducing the country's fiscal deficit in the short-term, but with the broader aim of re-establishing 'fairness' between the tax-payer and those claiming benefits with the Conservative government claiming that people in receipt of benefits were experiencing an unfair advantage by receiving social assistance with the then Prime Minister David Cameron stating that the benefit cap would stop the “culture of entitlement” of benefit claimants (Cameron, 2012). But, in the quest for fairness, housing inequality, and as such homelessness, has proliferated.

Alongside these policy reforms, processes of gentrification, whereby properties are sold to wealthier owners or investors and through which market and rental prices are driven up, have also contributed to the increase in homelessness in England. Gentrification can be defined as: “The transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use” (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2013), is a process by which everyday lives and everyday practices are disrupted by sustained economic transitions with the aim of ‘improving’ city spaces and attracting economic capital to deprived areas. ‘Positive growth’ is attributed to a perceived ‘betterment’ of local services and facilities, such as: shops, leisure centres, restaurants, art galleries and so on (Watt, 2013; Florida, 2002). This, however, fails to acknowledge that the ‘improved’ services that begin to flourish in these areas, are often misaligned with the needs of those who are local to the area (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005; Davidson, 2009).

Those living in urban environments are most often affected by processes, such as gentrification, that drive up living costs and instances of displacement that dislocate people from their social networks and leave them more vulnerable to housing precarity (Knight, 2015; Hall, 2018). In many ways gentrification is posited as the only solution to regenerating cities in decline, as Slater suggests: “Those in the path of urban transformation are presented with a false choice: they can either have decay or gentrification” (2009:297). The instances of visible poverty and homelessness are positioned as the reason for a city’s decline, rather than as symptomatic of wider processes of establishing hierarchy and social exclusion (Marcuse, 1985; Smith, 1996). Management strategies have been adopted by successive governments in a bid to ‘contain’ poverty into concentrated areas of urban spaces (Cheshire, 2006; Amore et al., 2011; Bauder, 2002; Cloke, May and Johnsen, 2008; DeVerteuil, 2003; 2006), rendering poverty invisible so that cities can be seen as successful and fair. That ‘sink estates’ have widely been accepted and unquestioned, raises concerns that such clear physical divisions are so distinctly embedded they are seen either as inevitable or natural (Sparks, 2012; Dorling, 2011).

Spatial division may contribute to accepted social understandings and that estates are imbued with particular meanings, spaces are assigned stereotypical views along with the people who reside within them (Slater, 2018; Del Casino and Jocoy, 2008), council estates are often portrayed as risky, overrun with criminal activity, familial instability and entrenched in worklessness. Where this discourse is perpetuated, it is often the residents of council estates that are blamed for the social and economic disadvantage they face, rather than acknowledging the lack of useful amenities, suitable infrastructure and other affordable housing options (Pinoncely, 2016). As Hanley (2007) recognises, council estates and other pockets of affordable social housing have been, and continue to be, designed to keep residents of the city with lower income contained in specific urban areas. In many cases, the ‘containment’ of poverty leads to an exacerbation of social ills that are potentially the result of a barrage of oppressive policies that disproportionately affect the poorest in society. People are forced to share spaces with people out of necessity rather than choice, leading to social tension rather than social cohesion (Lancione, 2016).

Once the possibility of gentrification becomes evident to local residents, even if significant displacement has not occurred, the neighbourhood tensions and threat of imminent change can lead to stress and frustration about a possible and presumed future of urban exclusion (Slater, 2009). The services on offer, in most cases, do not meet the basic needs at an affordable cost for residents facing exclusion and finding shelter, employment that meets the living wage and being treated with dignity and respect without having to adapt behaviours to a newly emerging middle-class neighbourhood, often remain priorities for those struggling with the lived realities of gentrification in process (Marcuse, 2014). For those reaping the economic benefits of gentrification the advantages of such a process outweigh the consequences; where processes of gentrification lead to dispossession, people being priced out of areas and increased risk of eviction for low-income households (Paton and Cooper, 2016), these effects of gentrification and urban regeneration are then often pathologized and displacements are attributed to poor personal decisions of the dispossessed rather than the accumulative factors of urban policy that surround them.

These displacements people face are not only physical but also emotional (Atkinson, 2015; Marcuse, 2014), as Robinson (2011) recognises, the everyday traumas of living precariously, particularly when children reside in one's care, are often neglected. Losing one's home and having an individual responsibility to source housing, without a systemic foundation of welfare support (Hall, 2018), leaves people vulnerable to the exploitation of others through having to share temporary unsuitable accommodation, feelings of indebtedness to those they reside with and higher levels of insecurity (Ellis and Laughlin, 2021).

The rise in homelessness has increased at an alarming rate, with Shelter recognising that the number of people living in temporary accommodation has increased by 74% in the past ten years (Shelter, 2023), and as such it is important now to consider how homelessness is considered and managed as safe housing continues to elude so many.

2.4 Managing Homelessness

Over the past decade the responsibility to manage housing and homelessness have been devolved from central government responsibility to individual councils, often on very limited budgets that do not allow for the supply of social housing building at the rate the demand for them is increasing (Manchester City Council, 2022). Councils, therefore, state that they are searching for other ways in which these housing needs can be met in their localities without having to build new properties, such as: repurposing abandoned commercial spaces for residential use, renovating disused and ill-maintained properties and committing to ensuring more affordable housing is available in the private rental sector. For those outside of the social housing system and searching for affordable housing in the private rental sector, the erosion of housing-based welfare support leaves many tenants unable to 'choose' where they want to live, as costs in the private rental sector continue to demonstrate a steady escalation, particularly in urban areas whose industries are thriving (OLeary and Simcock, 2022; Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2017). The devolved responsibility to local council also means that the building of affordable houses is geographically uneven and often, as city spaces become more desirable, the profit generating potential councils predict takes precedence over stable social and affordable housing opportunities (Atkinson, 2004; Watt, 2013; Florida, 2002).

The UK allocation system to formally access homelessness services is based on two categories: Statutory homelessness – those considered to be in emergency need, such as those classed as unintentionally homeless with dependent children – and non-statutory homelessness. People assigned to the non-statutory category are those who are considered to be 'single' and intentionally homeless and as such are not seen as a priority need and are not entitled to emergency assistance according to legislation (Housing Act, 1996; Homelessness Act, 2002; The Homelessness Priority Need for Accommodation Order, 2002). In these cases, people are most often forced to rely on charity assistance and informal networks for support to live (Schiff, 2003). In addition, for some people experiencing homelessness the stigma attached to such a position was so strong that they remove themselves from their 'home' cities to avoid their communities discovering their circumstances (May, 2000; Belcher and DeForge, 2012). This not only makes accessing services harder due to poor local knowledge and dislocates social networks that can provide emotional support, but also makes people more vulnerable to exclusion. A 'local connection' is required for local government to provide housing assistance, those who move away from their families and connections to new cities therefore have no local connection and are at risk of receiving no help from local authority services (Jackson, 2015). When resources are spread so thin, local authorities are not likely to offer assistance when they are not obliged to do so. Fitzpatrick and Pleace (2012) argue that these legislative measures are inadequate and require significant improvement to assist people living in vulnerable positions.

For those who are approved as experiencing 'statutory homelessness' the local council is obligated to housing assistance and secure a home for their occupation but with so few permanent housing options available immediately for the growing number of homeless people, especially families, short-term solutions are being relied on more frequently. Families are now being given accommodation in hostels (where limited spaces are available), Bed and Breakfast and other forms of short term accommodation where families are expected to move frequently and with very little notice (Crisis, 2018) The low number of suitable housing options severely impacts those experiencing homelessness in a negative way, especially homeless families who find high mobility and insecurity disruptive whilst waiting for permanent housing (Fitzpatrick and Pleace, 2012): the system designed to deal with homelessness is ill-equipped to deal with the numbers of people entering it.

And despite the impetus for housing benefit reductions and benefit caps being a reduction in government spending, the spending on providing short term temporary accommodation in hotels, B&Bs, hostels and the facilitating of multiple moves prior to permanent housing, is a cost that continues to rise, with a 430% increase from 2010/11 to 2019/20 and it has been argued that building more social housing would be a more feasible solution to a reduction in overall spending (LGA, 2021). In 2019 the spending on temporary accommodation rose to £1.2billion, with the vast majority, 87%, being paid to private providers (MCHLG, 2020; Shelter, 2020). At the end of 2020 there were 95,370 households living in temporary accommodation, an 8% increase on the previous year (Barker, 2021).

2.5 Perceptions of Homelessness

The concept of home is one that is taken for granted by the majority of housed people and is constructed as the norm and as such, those who fall outside of these boundaries, those who are 'homeless', are understood as deviating from these socially shared understandings (Radley, Hodgetts and Cullen, 2006). Titchkoksy (2012) identified that people may have their personhood disregarded because of a perceived inability to enact social norms. Deviation from these norms may be met with prejudice and constructed as the result of a personal failing (Sutton et al., 2014) that disorders a civilised space (May, Cloke and Johnsen, 2007; Harter et al., 2005). Normative values become so entrenched in dominant discourse, that exclusion of homeless 'outsiders' is legitimated by portraying them as 'less than fully human' (Belcher and DeForge, 2012: 931; Penderson et al., 2015) and consequently, unentitled to space occupancy (Kennelly and Dillabough, 2008). It would be over simplistic to suggest that social structures carve out these areas of normalisation as a matter of natural course, rather, people in their repetition of traditional behaviours, reproduce and reinforce these standardised behaviours (McCarthy, 2013). As Shildrick states: "Each of us, however we are embodied, is complicit in the construction and maintenance of normative assumptions" (2012: 30), there is, arguably, no part of social life that escapes comparison, a measurement and judgement against others where the 'norm' is constructed (Davis, 1995) and the tensions between 'the housed' and 'the houseless' is one such area.

Homeless people have been vilified and constructed in the public imaginary as a threat to public safety and to the respectability of English cities, and their very existence in city spaces have been problematised as deviant and distressing (Stevens, 2022; Cooper, 2005). This has been expressed in recent years through the government's 2023 'Antisocial Behaviour Action Plan', in which homelessness, particularly in the form of rough sleeping, is conflated with antisocial and destructive behaviours: positioning homelessness in and of itself as antisocial and disruptive to 'good' communities, it states that homelessness needs to be "tackled to restore pride" (DLUHC, 2023b: 27). The stereotype becomes one which constructs homeless people as dangerous, criminal and disordering, all of which are feared by the general population due to the perceived risk to safety (Pain, 2006; Fenster, 2005; Hargreaves, 2015). In an effort to eliminate rough sleeping and perceived 'anti-social behaviour', public spaces have become increasingly unwelcome and hostile environments for 'rough sleepers', with changes to physical structures that prevent sleeping in these spaces such as 'anti-homelessness' spikes on the ground, arm rests that prevent laying down on park benches, dispersal music in parks and city centres, 'anti-begging' posters and an increased Community Support Officer presence who have increased powers to 'disperse' homeless people who are rough sleeping through Public

Space Protection Orders (Stevens, 2022; Booth, 2022). These physical adaptations function as visible indicators that homeless people do not belong, both to homeless people themselves and the wider public who access these spaces, furthering a sense of mistrust in those the designs are intended to exclude (Stevens, 2022). In this way space is politicised by creating an 'us and them' dichotomy that maligns social groups and creates a perception of that group as 'feared' and 'other' to the ideal social citizen (Garmany, 2011). Risk is associated with engagement with those groups which results in social and, in the case of homelessness, spatial segregation (Bondi, 1998; Pain, 2006). Homeless people become the scapegoat to which fear and blame for city's decline can be attached (Abu-Orf, 2012; Alexandri, 2015). By portraying these processes as a necessity to protecting the public's safety and security, this way of thinking can become (mis)understood as 'common sense' (Ahmed, 2014) and becomes so engrained in public imagination that the exclusion of these groups, in this case homeless people, becomes legitimated and seen as natural (Hennigan, 2018; Tulumello, 2015). Their exclusion can be seen as a result of their own behaviours and bad decision-making practices, rather than considering the wider systemic factors that contribute to economic and housing precarity such as the rising cost of living, the unaffordability of in the private rental market, diminishing stocks of social housing and the increasingly inequitable access to social welfare payments and services.

In recent months there have been further efforts from the state to remove 'roofless' homeless people from residing in public view and blaming homeless people for their own circumstances, as the Home Office sought to criminalise charities who provided street-homeless people with tents to sleep in, by proposing a legislation that would allow fines to be given to those charities that do and by giving the police more powers to move people who are occupying tents in city spaces (Foster and Fisher, 2023). The then Home Secretary, Suella Braverman (2023), then took to a verified social media account to further this agenda, stating:

> "We cannot allow our streets to be taken over by rows of tents occupied by people, many of them from abroad, living on the streets as a lifestyle choice. Unless we step in now to stop this, British cities will go the way of places in the US like San Francisco and Los Angeles, where weak policies have led to an explosion of crime, drug-taking, and squalor…What I want to stop, and what the law-abiding majority wants us to stop, is those who cause nuisance and distress to other people by pitching tents in public spaces, aggressively begging, stealing, taking drugs, littering, and blighting our communities."

This legislative measure has not come to fruition, but by suggesting that these ways of occupying public space in alternative, and often difficult ways is a matter of choice, especially when such a suggestion comes from a senior government minister, people are blamed for their homelessness and constructed as a naturally 'excludable type' (Titchkosky, 2010; 2011), whose way of embodying the world is inherently abnormal, deviant from the status quo and threatening to 'good' communities. These stereotypes may be perpetuated by media outlets and contribute to social understandings which in turn limit access to educational and employment opportunities and work to maintain cycles of deprivation (Bailey, 2009; May, 2000). For those experiencing homelessness, Averitt (2003) suggested that these judgements also become internalised and contribute to a devalued sense of self. Due to this fear of judgement and stigma, homelessness, as an aspect of one's identity, is often misrecognised or actively denied and help is not sought for fear of revealing oneself as 'homeless': this depiction of homelessness and homeless people as 'less than' is so engrained in the public imagination that people in unsafe or inadequate housing do not recognise their own homelessness (Deck, 2017).

The vast majority of those included in homelessness statistics are incorporated due to their position of visible 'rough sleeping' on city streets at the time a count took place, these numbers are circumstantial, and based on a very restricted definition of homelessness, and do not give a true reflection of the number of homeless people (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014). Amore, Baker and Howden-Chapman (2011) have critiqued the current approach to defining and measuring homelessness, they assert that a lack of an internationally agreed definition means that many are being left without assistance due to an inability to consider those at risk of housing exclusion and wider definitions of what it means to be without a home. Roche (2004) also notes that statistics on homelessness are unreliable as people who are 'hidden', are overlooked as they don't fit the expectation of what a homeless body looks like and where they are expected to be. The multiplicity of homeless identities and experiences are diminished or else ignored entirely (Snow and Anderson, 1987). In an attempt to address these concerns, in 2005 FEANTSA established the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) which offered a framework through which different forms of homelessness could be considered, monitored and reported (FEANTSA, 2005). This framework provided a more nuanced way to look at homelessness to not just consider those who are 'roofless', but to also encapsulate those who are 'houseless' (that is, with a place inside to sleep but with no permanent residence), and those who are living in insecure or inadequate housing, which in turn extends our conceptualisation of homeless categories. The current definitions of homelessness not only impact upon who is included in measured accounts of homelessness, but also serve to influence social function, available services and treatment of those who are the subject of those definitions (Clarke et al., 2015). Those who are unrecognisable as homeless based on mainstream views are then more likely to be considered as 'undeserving' and therefore unable to access services (Schiff, 2003).

Homeless people are not a homogenous group and the commonality of a shared fate in terms of housing seems a tenuous link to unify people (Mayock et al., 2011). Yet in the public domain such people are grouped together and referred to as though all who are homeless share morals and values: 'the homeless' (Belcher and DeForge, 2012). This group is arguably imbued with negative connotations which undermine the humanity and individuality of homeless people. People often believe that they understand what it means to be homeless, without considering the nuances of homeless experiences (McCarthy, 2018). Because there is a presumption that we already know the causes and experiences that homelessness entails, the concept remains largely taken for granted and unquestioned (Harter et al., 2005). The narrow view of homelessness as a form of moral bankruptcy and a personal lack of responsibility is insinuated in current legislation and guidance that comes from government. In Manchester's housing strategy, for example, in an explanation for why housing support has been withdrawn they suggest: "The support we have provided has at times kept people dependent rather than raise their aspirations to help them move forward in their lives" (Manchester City Council, 2020), the struggle to find permanent secure housing is attributed to a lack of aspiration, a commitment to "worklessness" and a reliance on benefits is positioned as a choice, disregarding the reasons why people become dependent on social assistance. The structural factors that influence disadvantage are regularly minimised and government has tended to frame discussions of poverty in terms of a binary distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor (Garthwaite, 2011). This creates a rhetoric of 'shirkers and scroungers' (Wheeler, 2018; O'Hara, 2015) that perpetuates the stereotype that those experiencing poverty are in those positions due to their own negative life choices (Kennelly and Dillabough, 2008). It is arguably in the interest of the hegemonic group to construct poverty as a personal failing to alleviate guilt and portray this phenomenon as natural and thus inevitable (Dorling, 2010).

One of the key views informing homelessness policy, and thus guiding public perceptions of homeless people, is a medicalised one (Gowan, 2010). This positions homeless people as a homogenous group of passive recipients of public welfare and charitable interventions, failed humans in need of 'fixing' (Johnsen, Cloke and May, 2005; Parr, 2000). This medicalised view is evident in the stringent rules set out by hostels (Cooper, 2016; Neale and Stevenson, 2015), in the conditional approach to providing assistance to homeless people (Lancione, 2014) and in more overt narratives of distrust of homeless people in posters hung around cities that actively discourage people from offering money to homeless people (Morris, 2018), that all point towards a less-than-human view of homeless people, seen as a homogenous group of vagrants, underserving of unconditional assistance. A group of people who need to be 'dealt with' and those who need to be 'cured' from their defective choice making practices that are falsely constructed as the reason for their homelessness.

To explore this view of homelessness more carefully it is useful to borrow theory derived from the field of Critical Disability Studies, that is: the stigma, challenges and physical barriers that disabled people face are to be understood as social issues and should not be attributed to whatever impairments their bodies may have: the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990). This approach to viewing the disabled person not as flawed, but as prohibited from participation by an ableist and exclusionary society, was a far cry from the medical model of disability that viewed disabled bodies as inferior, incapable, sub-human and in need of a 'cure' (Goodley, Runswick-Cole, Liddiard, 2016). Non-disabled bodies were considered to be the norm and therefore socially valorised (Holt, Lea and Bowlby, 2012; Goodley, 2010) and disability, as such, was (and often still is) portrayed as a deviation from this: as an abnormal problem that needs to be, and should want to be, corrected (Kittay, 2006; McLaughlin and Coleman-Fountain, 2014; Titchkosky, 2011).

The work of Teresa Gowan (2010) also talks to the conceptions of homelessness and homeless people, both by homeless people themselves and from outsiders looking in. She notes that there are commonalities in narratives that frame homelessness with competing discourses. Gowan contends that these framings of the causes homelessness can be considered as: an individual's moral failing (sin talk), a pathologized medical view (sick talk) and systemic failings (system talk). Both sin talk and sick talk place the blame for homelessness within the individual. Where the homelessness is blamed on 'sin', that is a person experience homelessness because of 'bad' choices that they have made, the homeless person is most often treated with contempt and excluded from participating in social life. When homelessness is medicalised, that is, seen as a disease, as inevitable and a 'problem' that can be fixed, the homeless person is 'treated' in an attempt to cure the ills that have led to their homelessness, such as referrals to housing, budgeting and employment specialists. On the other hand, she considers that some people consider homelessness to be a failure of systems and structures that drive people into poverty and make it difficult to escape that only wide-scale social change can resolve.

2.6 Provision for Homeless Women

Given that this research is focused on the ways in which mothers navigate both strategies and routes through homelessness and education, I now turn to consider how mothers experience homelessness and how female homelessness differs within the discourse that usually surrounds homeless people. In the UK the records that indicate the number of people considered homeless are based only on those who are visible in public spaces, therefore the intentional invisibility of women in this field ensures that they are often unaccounted for in government statistics (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014). It has been argued that homeless women are viewed as being 'double outsiders' (Radley, Hodgetts and Cullen, 2006: 438) or exist on 'the margins of a margin' (Cresswell, 1999) as the mainstream focus on homelessness has largely been that of a male experience which equates homelessness with negative stereotypes such as being unkempt, aggressive and criminal (Broadhurst et al., 2005; Oliver and Cheff, 2014). In the main, female homelessness is more often associated with economic marginalisation and instances of domestic violence (Brush at el., 2018; Gregory, Williamson and Feder, 2017) rather than issues such as drug use and criminality that are discursively intertwined with mainstream understandings of homelessness, though are more often associated with lone male homeless experiences (Bretherton, 2017).

The nature of homelessness in women is often distinctly different from the stereotypes portrayed of 'street-dwelling' homeless people more often associated with men (Sikich, 2008). Rather, the majority of homeless women in England tend to take shelter with friends and family, as opposed to accessing services (Soodeen, 2016), accounting for just 26% of homelessness service users (Crisis, 2016), which often renders them 'hidden' and unrecognised as needing assistance. In these instances, women have reported fleeing their 'homes' in pursuit of a safer environment that escapes domestic abuse (Baupitt et al., 2011). In many cases, this was a profound decision that mothers of dependent children were faced with: whether to risk an unknown homeless future, or to remain in unsafe and in some cases abusive circumstances (Bailey and Eisikovits, 2015). Whilst neoliberalism promises 'choice' as a positive and fundamental aspect of the ideology, the 'choice' to remain homeless is not understood or valued and remains outside of the acceptable social 'norms' even in exceptional circumstances.

The state intervention that has been noted as necessary for relieving the financial pressures of living precariously has not been established, rather, deepening austerity policies have continued to negatively affect women and children in disproportionate ways (Robson and Robinson, 2013). Funding has been withdrawn from women and children's services, childcare, rent and food costs are soaring while wages have stagnated, and the government have neglected to build new social houses at the rate required (Bennett, 2011; Phipps et al., 2018; Slater, 2018), leaving homeless mothers vulnerable to economic, social and housing exclusions. These funding cuts have not been experienced equitably and local authorities in socioeconomically deprived areas have demonstrated a steeper decline in their public spending budgets than areas which have lower levels of disadvantage (Clifford, 2021; Beatty and Forthergill, 2016), with cities in the north of England being hit the hardest (Gray and Barford, 2018). These unequal spending budgets were compounded by a reduction in central government grants to local authorities, cut by 40% in real terms between 2009/10 and 2019/20 (MHCLG, 2021; Atkins and Hoddinott, 2020), and a reduction in individual welfare payments to those in financial and social need (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2021). Welfare payments have been slashed, despite the increase in living costs and a rise in people approaching local authorities for support with homelessness and financial crises. This approach to cutting budgets is set to continue with the government announcing in 2023 that there will be a reduction in payments for those on low incomes in an attempt to "realise their potential [and] to support more people into work" (DWP, 2023). This reform to welfare payments does not take into account the structural reasons that a vast number of people are working on insecure zero-hour contracts and still on a low income, and those who cannot work for various reasons, instead, positioning those on low or no incomes as irresponsible and as a burden to the state.

Despite public perception and media propaganda surrounding poverty and homelessness that suggests people are workshy, lazy and responsible for their own disadvantage (Shildrick, 2018; Gerrard and Farrugia, 2015), the majority of homeless women maintain regular employment (Slater, 2018; Phipps et al., 2018; Pennington and Weekes, 2018), but are most often employed in low-waged, precarious positions such as zero hour contracts (Quaid, 2018; Pashkoff, 2014) and many have had to turn to charity to meet their basic needs, such as feeding their families (Dowler and Lambie-Mumford, 2015; Wheeler, 2018). However, there are considerably less provisions available for homeless women than for homeless men, this is attributed to the prevalence of men on the street and the assumption that women do not represent the homeless population to the same degree (Baupitt et al., 2011). There have also been suggestions that women who were experiencing life in temporary or insecure housing that would be considered as the 'hidden homelessness', would not consider themselves to be homeless, nor seek assistance in resolving their position for fear of social judgement. Women feared that revealing their homelessness would guarantee that they were looked down upon and would invoke a publicly ascribed identity that would evoke negative repercussions and as such in some cases women work on their outward appearance to conceal their homelessness (Sniekers, 2018; Goffman, 1959; Sutton et al., 2014) and stake a legitimate claim to space (Casey, Goudie and Reeve, 2008). There is an argument that once a homeless identity has been ascribed to a person it is then difficult to establish any other identity (Parsell, 2011b), as conceptions of homelessness pervade public imagination in such visceral ways that it becomes all encompassing (McCarthy, 2013; Oliver and Cheff, 2014). To maintain a sense of their own personal identities, it seems that the publicly ascribed 'homeless' identity and the associated negative connotations of such a label must be rejected and worked against.

One of the most prominent factors identified in women 'coping' with homelessness are the social networks they can draw upon. Phipps et al. note that social connections are a 'key human need' (2018:6). Informal networks can both provide advice and information regarding where to access formal aid, and much needed emotional support. Many studies however, have noted the distress that women face when these links have been exhausted (Radley, Hodgetts and Cullen, 2006; Theilking et al., 2017). Accessing accommodation with friends and families can lead to overcrowding and in such instances, relationships can become fraught and lead to conflict (Zlotnick, Tom and Bradley, 2010; Averitt, 2003). Sutton et al. (2014) found that an internalised guilt, rather than a pressure from their host family, saw the breakdown of these living arrangements; homeless women saw themselves as a burden. Though in some cases the networks homeless women relied upon, such as family and friends, detailed the positive effects of providing support for their own well-being and sense of self (Sznajder-Murray and Slesnick, 2011), others expressed frustration at the pressure of providing continuous emotional comfort in times of need. These grievances were exacerbated when they perceived that their advice in exiting homelessness was ignored (Gregory, Williamson and Feder, 2017).

Despite the assertion that supportive social connections can be linked to better well-being and less frequent episodes of homelessness (Phipps et al., 2018), some studies have depicted the negative impact some networks can have upon stability. A study by Mayock, O'Sullivan and Corr (2011) found that upon their exit from homelessness, this group often emphasised the importance of distancing themselves from 'bad' networks who they felt could jeopardise their perceived progression. Maintaining contact with the 'wrong' networks was perceived as risky and increased the chances of repeating damaging behaviours such as drug use (Sniekers, 2018; Backett-Milburn et al., 2008; Bottrell, 2009).

If women present as homeless without children in their care they are considered to be 'single' and not in priority need. However, when women have children in their care the local authority must consider them a 'priority need', that is, their housing needs must be considered immediately (Housing Act, 1996). Though this is determined by policy, this has not always been apparent, and many families have been turned away from services due to insufficient places and a lack of available support. The absence of a social safety net, the diminishing funding that is available for women and children's services, alongside a lack of affordable or social housing means that many women have had no choice but to seek support through informal networks to meet their housing needs. I now turn to explore the impact of these factors for women who have children in their care at the point they become homeless.

2.7 Motherhood in Crisis

In the UK the mother is most often presumed to be the primary caregiver (Crook, 1999; Quaid, 2018) and single-parent families are predominately headed by women (McCarthy, 2018). Bretherton (2017) argues that women are subjected to housing exclusions at higher rates than their male counterparts across the whole of Europe, which is reflected in UK statistics, especially when considering those families with dependent children who experience homelessness; of whom, 45% of families living in temporary accommodation were lone parent households with a female applicant, compared with 3% of applicants with a lone parent male applicant (MHCLG, 2018). Despite this, landlords have admitted an inclination to reject housing applications from those in receipt of benefits, especially if the applicant were a single female with children (Pearlman, 2018; Johnstone et al., 2016; McCarthy, 2018), making the private rental sector inaccessible to many. This refusal to rent to welfare claimants by private landlords and rising rent costs has intensified the need for state intervention in finding housing solutions for those whose living costs now exceed their income (Wright, 2018; Slater, 2018; Mayock and Parker, 2017); the majority of those facing poverty maintain paid employment but most often in precarious, low-paid positions, with a growing number of zero-hour contracts especially for women (Slater, 2018; Phipps et al., 2018; Pennington and Weekes, 2018).

Where the state has withdrawn financial backing for services relied upon by those who are most likely to be significantly affected by austerity regimes, they relinquish responsibility and familial and social networks are increasingly relied upon to facilitate each other’s well-being and stability (Hall, 2018). There has been, what Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar (2017: 335) call, a “re-privatisation of care”, that is, a retrenchment of social support and a shift towards familial support as “the bedrock of society” (ibid.). Families are given the responsibility to provide care for each other without limits and those who do not provide such care are stigmatised. Mothers are most often expected to provide a sense of maternal care throughout their children’s lifetimes, not only in terms of emotional support, but increasingly in terms of finances and housing too. In the rolling out of the Welfare Reform Act, this obligation to provide housing within the family became explicit, as the Prime Minister David Cameron (2012) stated: “Can’t afford a home of your own? Tough, live with your parents”. Parents are charged with the duty to produce responsible and productive citizens. Neoliberal policies charge citizens with the duty to become self-sufficient and adapt to any social ills (Mckenzie, 2015), it is argued that parents are constructed as enforcers of these social norms, intended to be producers of the next generation of ‘good’ neoliberal actors (Quaid, 2018; Best, 2017); should that aim not be achieved, the legitimacy and quality of parenthood is questioned (Bottrell, 2009; Lawson, 2007). However, there is little recognition in the political arena of the intense emotional labour involved in supporting people in need

(Runswick-Cole, 2013) without engagement in the formal economy many single mother's daily work routines are undervalued or else dismissed entirely (Hogenboom, 2021). For homeless mothers there has been a recognition of an overwhelming sense of shame associated with periods of homelessness, they had adopted a negative self-view derived from an inability to prevent their children from experiencing homelessness (Bradley, McGowan and Michelson, 2018). When the family is positioned as the sole provider of care and support, any interruption to the ability to achieve this as expected can be internalised as a moral and personal failing.

Family support was seen as crucial for resilience and coping with episodes of homelessness (Sanders, Boobis and Albanese, 2019; Crook, 1999). When this was unavailable or inconsistent, this was regarded as a contributing factor to ongoing periods of homelessness (Rutton et al., 2012). Begun (2015) recognised that some women viewed having children as a way to extend their own family network and believed children could rectify issues in romantic relationships. This, however, was often not the outcome and women found themselves as a lone parent without supportive social networks (Krahn et al., 2018; Begun, 2015). In some cases, women identified their children as their predominant support system, with older children often being given caring responsibilities for younger siblings (Averitt, 2003).

Research shows that often for many women, becoming homeless with children in their care are afraid that their homelessness would result in their children being separated from them and removed from their care by social services (Reeve, 2018; Morriss, 2018). This fear then presents a difficult dilemma in which homeless mothers must decide whether to try and hide their homelessness, or when this is not possible, whether their children should still reside in their care and search for accommodation or look for other places for their children to temporarily stay. But this process is not an easy one, emotionally, logistically or bureaucratically: Bimpson, Reeve and Parr (2020) found that in many cases homeless mothers sought temporary accommodation for their children, mainly with immediate relatives, whilst they navigated their journey through homelessness to avoid their children having the disruption of multiple moves. In these cases once women had arranged this short-term alternative accommodation for their children they then presented to their local authorities as homeless and were considered single and as such, no longer in priority need. Bimpson, Reeve and Parr (ibid.) also found that this meant that they were only offered single-bedroom flats which could not house their children and if they were to turn down this offer of housing they were then considered 'intentionally homeless' and no longer entitled to housing assistance from the local authority. For those parents who did already have social services involvement, this inability to be re-homed with enough rooms for their children presented a barrier to being able to have their children returned to their care.

When women, who still have their children in their care, have to engage with institutions or services related to their care or housing it has been reported that there is a distrust of service providers who felt that the practitioners were judging them and 'looked down' on them (Sznajder-Murray and Slesnick, 2011). Women living in shelters or hostels are often obliged to follow strict rules as a condition of their placement within the centre, this can include rules about who can visit, curfews, cleanliness and often courses that they must attend either for education or parenting (Vostanis, 2002) and as such, hostels have been reported as both a place of sanctuary that allows for a safe space in which to reside, and a place that stifles familial freedom and restricts autonomy (Sznajder-Murray and Slesnick, 2011). Another concern for mothers experiencing homelessness was having to contend with the comment of outside voices, and not only of those charged with leading 'good parenting' classes, but from other service providers or the host of the accommodation in which they were staying. Having to "parent in public" was seen as detrimental to achieving a consistency in their approach to parenting as parental authority was routinely undermined (Mayberry et al., 2014; Kissman, 1999), made them doubt their own abilities as a parent (Bradley, McGowan and Michelson, 2018) and contributed to an overwhelming sense of being judged (Holtrop, McNeil and McWey, 2015), adding to the already stressful endeavour of resolving their homelessness.

2.8 Purpose of Education in England

Education is seen as key to a successful life and a route out of poverty for their children's futures so it is important to now consider where this belief has come from and the current perceptions and experiences of the education system in England. There is a growing government focus on education as a means of improving the country's economy (Reay, 2017; Bowers-Brown, 2016; Gibb, 2015; Chang, 2010) which shift the aims of education from personal and individual development, to a system that aims to increase capital productivity (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010; Broadhurst, Paton and May-Chahal, 2005). This is driven by the pressures of globalisation and the need to compete, *The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper 2010* set out the priority for schools as such: "what really matters is how we're doing compared with our international competitors. That is what will define our economic growth and our country's future." (DfE, 2010: 3). The increased competition within schools has exacerbated pressures for teachers which has, in many cases, relegated already disadvantaged children into more marginalised positions within the classrooms, as teachers focus on those who they believe will achieve well in government monitored tests (Reay, 2017; Yarovaya, 2015). It has been widely acknowledged that poverty regularly leads to educational disadvantage (Reay, 2017; 2007; 2001; Bowers-Brown, 2016; Hollingworth and Archer, 2010), though the additional pressure of being homeless has been little explored.

The English education system is built upon a meritocratic premise, in which upward social mobility is a product of personal hard work (Gardner, Morrin and Payne, 2017; Swann, 2013; Friedman, 2014). When this is not achieved the individual is held accountable and structural factors contributing to educational disadvantage are largely ignored (Lawler, 2017; Allen and Hollingworth, 2013). Meritocracy can then be seen as an individualistic concept that disregards the disparity between the stocks of capital available to draw upon between the rich and the poor that allows for such mobility, especially in the field of education (Bathmaker et., al, 2016) and it is necessary to consider how social and economic inequality impacts upon education attainment and what that potentially means for children's lives.

2.9 Inequality in Education

Factors experienced in home environments, in conjunction with pedagogic practices and pupil-teacher relationships, have been found to influence educational attainment and positive experiences of the school environment (O'Donoghue, 2013; Stephens and Gillies, 2012). Children from poverty-stricken backgrounds have been found to fare significantly less well in terms of educational attainment than their middle-class counterparts (Ingram, 2011; Lawler, 2004; Reay, 2001). National statistics show that 24.9% of children who received Free School Meals (FSM) gained 5 or more GCSEs at the government expected level (grades 9-5, equivalent to previous A*-B grade boundaries), compared with 50.1% of those pupils in state schools who did not receive FSMs (DfE, 2018). The polarised educational landscape is particularly evident in urban schools, that are routinely stigmatised in social and political rhetoric, and educate a higher number of children receiving FSMs than the national average (Hollingworth and Archer, 2010; Reay, 2007). When FSMs are considered as an indicator for low socio-economic status, it becomes concerning that there is a distinct lack of data regarding those who are likely to live below the poverty line: homeless children (Fitzpatrick et. al, 2016).

In the current climate, that positions knowledge as a commodity (May and Perry, 2018), the disparity in attainment levels has been associated with negative lifelong consequences in employment and wellbeing for those students from disadvantaged backgrounds (The Sutton Trust, 2019), but has been attributed to a lack of aspiration amongst those living in poverty, rather than addressing structural factors that contribute to disadvantage (Abrahams, 2018; Loveday, 2015). Several studies though have recognised the issue here is not a lack of aspiration (Friedman, 2014, Reay, 2017), but what Berlant (2011) refers to as a 'cruel optimism', that is: a discourse of 'raising aspirations' that makes promises of economic freedom and upward social mobility through education that are at odds with likely realities. The 'do better' attitude is limited by structural inequalities that prevent meaningful participation in education and the workforce beyond. Bakkali (2019) notes that exclusion becomes evident through the national curriculum, through which middle-class values are (re)produced, leaving education inaccessible and irrelevant to lived experiences of those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Fear in relation to education was expressed by parents around the issue of school choice (Ball and Vincent, 1998), despite 'choice' being a predominant focus of Blair's government, who changed the process of school entrance options from selection and ability based, to offering parents more freedom to choose where they wanted their child to be educated within their catchment area (Education and Skills Committee, 2006), however, this has been criticised as only opening up school choice for those who can geographically mobilise to live in areas in which 'good' schools are based (Barber, 2015). It has been argued that for middle class parents the fear of perceived failure is a driving force behind a sustained search for a ‘good’ school (Byrne, 2006; Reay, 2007). A ‘good’ school was identified as one which was able to nurture skills that parents saw in their children (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Reay, 2017). These skills were often perceived as innate or as a ‘gift’ in their child but was, in most cases, nurtured through extra-curricular activities that an increased disposable income allowed for (Williams, Jamieson and Hollingworth, 2008; Byrne, 2006). Reay (2001) suggests that the fear of ‘failing’ as a parent for choosing a subpar school setting was overwhelming for many parents and impacted upon the level of engagement they took in researching available options.

Fear has also been associated with the long-lasting implications of educational ‘failure’ (Tierney, 2015; Murphy, 2011). The concerns some working class parents has been associated more with their child’s immediate educational experience, how they ‘felt’ about a school and was based on more informal knowledge acquisition from their social networks (Ball and Vincent, 1998; Bowers-Brown, 2016). That is not to say that working class parents do not consider the educational or life trajectories that are intertwined with educational success and Jackson (2010) recognises that working class parents hoped for upward social mobility for their children should they attend a ‘good’ school. For both working class and middle-class parents, research has demonstrated that a need to ‘fit in’ and attend a school with ‘people like them’ has influenced decision making practices (Byrne, 2006; Williams, Jamieson and Hollingworth, 2008). A key concern in educational choice was the perception that their child’s habitus would align with those of their peers, of the institution and the staff that they would routinely engage with (Bathmaker et al., 2017; Allen and Hollingworth, 2013). Reay, in her assessment of the experience of working class children in the education system, implores us to consider educational practices and institutions as potentially transformative, always affective spaces; spaces that, imbued with both implicit and explicit power struggles, have the ability to (re)produce one’s perception of oneself, either as a person who ‘gets it’ and deserves to succeed, or as an outsider who does not ‘fit in’ with the status quo. For those who feel as though they do not ‘fit in’, Reay notes that what follows is seemingly impossible, “a balancing act that requires superhuman effort” (2017: 157) that does not end when schooling does. For homeless children the extent of that balancing increases significantly compared to their housed counterparts. Concerns and anxiety has been found to arise from transiency and educational displacement, unpredictability of circumstance and fear of sexual and physical abuse in and out of the school (Hallett et al., 2015; Tierney, 2017), which will be explored further below.

2.10 Homelessness, Education and Motherhood

It has been recognised that mothers are still predominantly the key educational decision makers for their children and have most influence on the school their children attend (Bowers-Brown, 2016). Though processes of school choice are largely discussed as demonstrations of parental agency, the ‘choices’ made fundamentally depend on the available capital parents have to draw upon (Reay, 2000) and the knowledge they have of the school system. In this process Parker (2016) found that working-class parents were most likely to draw on informal information from social networks and base their preferences on the feelings of the child about where they would like to attend school. Scholars have recognised that those with disposable economic resources can geographically mobilise to catchment areas for schools they perceive to be 'good' (Reay, 2007; Abrahams, 2018), those with limited economic resources face constraints and must 'choose' from the schools close to them. However, for homeless women this 'choice' is often disrupted by a need to find shelter (McLoughlin, 2013), that may not be in close proximity to their preferred school, this tension between 'choice' and necessity has been noted as one which causes stress and guilt in homeless mothers (BBC, 2016).

In much of the research surrounding homeless mothers, the women reported having low levels of educational attainment, with many mothers stating that they had left education as soon as possible and not electing to continue on to further education after having bad experiences in schools (Sznajder-Murray and Slesnick, 2011; Vostanis, 2002). The lasting effect of a parent having a negative educational experience and as such having adopted a 'damaged learner identity' means that these attitudes are often, subconsciously, passed on to their children (Reay, 2017). These mothers have been taught not to trust themselves as an educator and as such find interacting with educational institutions emotional and affective, triggering uncomfortable feelings of shame, guilt, rootlessness and incompetence.

As previously identified, those who occupy homeless positions are likely to also experience other traumatic life circumstances, all of which can impact on a child's education (Downey, 2008; Kirkman et al, 2010). Zlotnick, Tom and Bradley (2010) identify that education can help children to acquire the capital necessary to avoid or escape homelessness, though other studies have indicated that these capitals are most closely aligned to middle class values (Reay, 2017; 2007; Hannafin and Lynch, 2002) and the access to these capitals through education are not equitable (Bottrell, 2009). 'Street capital' that some homeless young people have established to manage experiences of poverty and homelessness are devalued within educational arenas (Harter et al., 2005) and parents felt that their children were excluded from schools due to having insufficient access to the knowledge that is valued (Parker, 2016). For many working-class parents this fear of exclusion is not only scholastic, but a fear that their children would not 'fit in' socially within the boundaries set by the school (Wilson and McGuire, 2021; Reay, 2001). This fear of not 'fitting in' is arguably exacerbated for homeless children who face added pressure in this arena as in many cases their homelessness remains hidden due to fear of stigma and the fear that the discourse engenders in peers and teachers (Miller et al., 2015; Aviles de Bradley, 2011). To be perceived as the stereotypical homeless person risks exclusion and students often work to resist these identities (Aviles de Bradley, 2011; Hargreaves, 2015; Miller et al., 2015) to avoid the trauma of marginalisation. On the other hand, educational institutions were described as sites of connection that allowed children an 'escape' from trauma experienced in home environments (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2018).

Teachers were often noted to be an integral network of support to children experiencing homelessness (Chow, Mistry and Melchor, 2015; Nabors et al., 2015; Oliver and Cheff, 2014), however this is likely to be dependent on the quality of relationship established and the interpersonal skills of the teacher (Sznajder-Murray and Slesnick, 2011). Whilst many homeless people, both parents and students, sought to hide their homelessness from education providers, those who chose to disclose their homeless status to teachers expressed the benefits that had followed. The benefits included access to knowledge about service providers (Bottrell, 2009), emotional support (Chow, Mistry and Melchor, 2015) and an increased sense of belonging and self-worth (Rautiainen, Raty and Kasanen, 2015). For many young people who had experienced trauma, including violence and homelessness, issues arose around building trusting relationships (Thielking et al., 2017), though supportive teachers could employ strategies to alleviate this and provide homeless children with a trusting relationship by listening and accommodating their unique needs (Oliver and Cheff, 2014). Whilst many homeless young people experienced the benefits of supportive networks within the school environment and a relief from isolation (Theilking et al., 2017), for others this was not the case. Multiple disruptions and high levels of mobility in education have been linked to weakened social bonds (Kirkman et al., 2010; Chamberlain and Johnson, 2018), which arguably contribute to a sense of being an 'outsider' in school (Broadhurst, Paton and May-Chahal, 2005). This was exacerbated if homeless students perceived their teacher to hold negative stereotypes of a homeless identity (Nabors et al., 2005), in which case this kind of teacher support was considered unavailable to them.

Schools are often ill equipped to deal with traumatic experiences that happen beyond the school gate (Ingram, 2011; West, Sweeting and Young, 2010) and homeless children often face outside pressures and fear of stigma that affect their educational engagement (Aviles de Bradley, 2011). When daily basic needs are not met, such as nourishment, personal hygiene and safety, concentration and social interactions can become strained and can contribute to poor attainment and 'disruptive behaviours' (Downey, 2008; Kirkman et al., 2010; Mckenzie, 2015; Bakkali, 2019). Studies have noted that in comparison to their housed peers, homeless children were more likely to experience anxiety, stress and to internalise problems from outside stressors (Bradley, McGowan and Michelson, 2018) as well as increased levels of sleep disturbance, aggression and hyperactivity that had adverse effects on both educational attainment and the experiences children had in school (Vostanis, 2002) in many cases educational practices come second to survival.

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed literature that relates to the field of study and has explored the underlying factors that have contributed to the rise in homelessness, specifically related to homeless women and women experiencing homelessness who have children in their care. This review of the literature has highlighted the myriad of ways in which governmental policies and strategies have impacted upon women who are already facing disadvantage and have contributed to an environment in which the individual is perceived as solely responsible for the ability to succeed in economically and socially difficult circumstances.

The tensions between home and homelessness have also been discussed through relevant literature which has demonstrated the ways ‘home’ can be found without a traditional house from which to create a feeling of home within. It has also been identified that the perceptions that exist around homelessness also add to the sense of shame around becoming homeless which prevents people from asking for support when they become, or at risk of becoming, homeless. Whilst there has been an increase in the feminist explorations of homelessness that give voice to the emotional experience of losing one’s home, this research will build upon this approach to also consider how that experience is felt whilst navigating decisions around schooling and education. Though there are arguments presented here to suggest that homelessness negatively impacts upon educational experiences, though the majority of in-depth studies in this area were conducted in the USA and Australia, rather than in UK urban contexts, a gap which this research will contribute to filling.

3. Methodological Approach

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I outline the methodological approach taken to the research, the methods used to gather data, my own involvement in the research process, the ethical considerations of the project and how the data has been analysed and presented. I begin by outlining the aims of the study, the epistemological positions that have informed the entire research process before presenting the research questions. I then move on to discuss who participated in the research, how I made contact with them, the methods that were utilised to gather the data, the methods of analysis and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the fieldwork.

The aim of this study, from its conception, has been to help fill a knowledge gap in current social sciences literature by exploring the under-researched connections between homelessness and education and, furthermore, aims to contribute to the growing field of homelessness literature that conceives of homelessness as an emotive and affective experience.

3.2 Feminist Approach

There is a wealth of research that approaches homelessness from a policy driven, quantitative position, though there is less work that engages with this matter through feminist methodologies. Whilst there is value in the objectivist position that allows for detached views of political economic processes that contribute to homelessness, it is imperative that we also understand the lived experiences of those affected by these broader structures of division and exclusion. There is no one research method that is distinctly feminist, but a set of considerations which provide a theoretical framework through which the research can be conducted. It is not an approach that can be 'applied' retrospectively but informs the research and practice from the outset. Some key concerns for feminist research are: taking a reflexive approach to the research (Dauder and Tejo, 2019), centring the lives and concerns of women (Landman, 2006), offering a rich account of their 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1988), understanding emotion and affect as valid knowledge (Mayock and Sheridan, 2020) and a focus on research as a tool for social change and liberation (Clarke and Braun, 2017a; Gringeri et al., 2010). These considerations, along with aligning with my own world view, are of particular importance to this research subject, as Watson and Austerberry suggest:

> "Patriarchal social relations, the sexual division of labour and the dominant family model in a capitalist society all serve to marginalise women in the housing sphere" (Watson and Austerberry, 1986, p.7).

Though it is recognised that women face particular challenges in relation to housing, parenting and homelessness, research on homelessness has tended to focus on the forms of homelessness typically experienced by men, such as ‘rough sleeping’. This work contributes to the growing scholarship that interrogates how women experience homelessness and housing precarity. It is hoped that this approach will contribute to a paradigmatic shift in our understandings of homelessness, rather than reproducing well engrained tropes and assumptions about homeless experiences. Lancione (2016a) argues that there is a need to ‘decolonize’ homelessness research and give voice back to marginalised subjects, a focus that this research adopted.

As discussed within the literature review, neoliberal thought values individual responsibility in choice making practices and holds each person to account for the choices that they make (particularly in relation to housing and educational fields). Largely ignored in these discussions are the ways in which choices are determined by affective dimensions and emotions that shape action and perceived possibilities for the self. Within the quantitative explorations of homelessness, viewed from a positivist perspective, emotions are routinely ignored, seen as a hypersensitivity to inevitable social phenomena (Dorling, 2010) and inefficient for thinking through responses to economic and political stimuli. Emotion is seen as detrimental to reason and pragmatic solutions to social ills (Ahmed, 2007), however, this project builds on feminist scholars who consider the everyday lived emotions of homeless experiences (Lancione, 2018; 2017; 2016a; 2016b; McCarthy, 2018; Robinson, 2011; Knight, 2015). Emotions here are not viewed as strengths or weaknesses but as individual expressions worthy of exploration. This work has drawn on the feminist tradition of researching social phenomena ‘with’ and ‘through’ emotions, considering affective dimensions. Affect is considered here as feelings that get “stuck to certain bodies” (Ahmed, 2010: 39), as autonomic bodily responses that transcend conscious control (Clough and Halley, 2007; Ahmed, 2010), that determine future action, desire and impulses (Berlant, 2011; Stewart, 2007) and provide practical, relational knowledge based on lived experience (Bakkali, 2019; Stewart, 2007). Affect and emotions live in our bodies and shape our interactions with the world and people around us. They shape choices that we make by limiting those seen as available for consideration and inform every decision that we make. In this way, our emotional landscape both determines, and is determined by, our experiences of the world and as such, if we are to understand how decisions are made and how circumstances are experienced, we must take seriously how they are felt. As Mayock and Sheridan determine: “The results of research usually show the results of an experience, but not the process of the experience, where emotions affect our understanding of reality.” (2019:41).

In research where objectivity is a key measure of validity and value, the concepts of scientific reason and human emotions are constructed as binary concepts and in which case emotional considerations are undervalued and viewed as irrelevant to knowledge production (Dauder and Tejo, 2019). In feminist research however, and throughout this thesis, emotions constitute as valid forms of knowledge. As Hubbard et al. state:

> “Knowledge is not something objective and removed from our own bodies, experiences and emotions but is created through our emotions and not simply our cognition or intellect.” (Hubbard et al, 2001:126)

A feminist approach was adopted to take seriously the textures of the everyday lives of homeless women; to situate the understandings in the context from which they were borne rather than from the outside eye of the researcher (Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1997). To do so, a narrative approach to presenting the data was selected as a means of centring the voices and lives of women. This presentation of the data allows participant responses and their perspectives on their own experience to be considered at length ensuring that the women that I spoke to are presented as the experts of their own experience. I have given space to allow the women's stories to be considered individually here in an effort to maintain as much of the initial responses and context as possible, within the confines of a university PhD thesis structure. This also allowed for allowed an interrogation into homelessness and motherhood to come from a holistic perspective, exploring at once the numerous exclusionary factors (including but not limited to: gender, race, class, disability, age), considered with the weighting with which participants assigned to them (Hunting, 2014).

Lancione (2016a) recognises that to produce more ethical, progressive research, participants who experience homelessness should be made a part of their own representation. In order to achieve a collaborative approach the researcher must be open to meaningful exchange and position themselves as inevitably influential on the process (Lancione, 2017; Katz, 1994; Pain, 2014; Anderson, 2016). This is also echoed by Harding (2008) who argues that feminist research should be conducted with compassion and empathy, drawing on the researcher's own biographies and life experiences to understand the field of research. Feminist research, she argues, should be:

> "Two people participating in a conversation, sharing understanding and attempting to minimise the power disparities between the two, and drawing on their own biographies and interests in doing so" (Harding, 2018: 140)

The initial proposal of this research outlined considerable efforts to achieve this aim, to conduct this study as participatory research, that is research where "great value is placed on the knowledge and full engagement of those who are conventionally the object of research" (Beritbart, 2016: 201) and where participants are valued as collaborators and help to shape the direction of the study (Denscombe, 2014). In the time between the conception of the research and drawing up the proposed plans, to the time the research was implemented, the world was, however, struck by the Covid-19 pandemic (which I shall discuss further later in this chapter). The effects of the pandemic dictated the ways in which this research could be conducted disrupted the original plans and I could no longer spend as much time as anticipated with those who had agreed to participate, this was an unforeseen but unavoidable necessity. Though, whilst the original design of the research had to change and be adjusted in accordance with Covid-19 social distancing policies, the ethos and the commitment to conducting equitable research practices were maintained in the revision of the work and I continued to centre and value the people who agreed to share their knowledge and lived experiences to inform this work.

In line with the feminist approach that posits a constitutive relationship to be valuable in ensuring comfort and trustworthiness in research exchanges (Rose, 1997) my own positionality, that is my personal interest in the research topic based on lived experience, was identified to participants. I made clear from the outset (when accessing the field, when asking people to participate and beyond) that I had approached this research as a woman who had experienced homelessness and housing precarity myself. This sharing of experience is recognised as a beneficial technique for working with vulnerable groups to encourage honest responses about a shared experience and was indeed useful to positioning the researcher as an empathetic listener rather than one exercising judgement (Brayda and Boyce, 2014); allowing participants the space to acknowledge their own emotions, as I did mine, through recounting their own stories. This approach encouraged an open dialogue and elicited a rich data set from which to draw my conclusions (Abrahams, 2017; Ashton, 2014).

Butz and Besio (2009) have recognised that autoethnographic work positions the researcher as an object to be studied in a way that foregrounds affect and emotion, and essential to collaborative research that values the participant's voice as the authority on their own experience. In this vein, I had initially intended to produce creative research diaries where the women that I spoke to could record details and thoughts about their day-to-day experiences and to utilise the contents of these diaries to direct the questions in the follow-up, open-ended interviews. This space between the first and second interviews was designed to allow for a reflection on my own thoughts, and for the participants to have the space to process the initial questions. I had hoped that the creative research diaries, in which participants could reflect on their daily lives and record moments of note, would provide insight into the moments of importance and guide the discussion in the second interviews, rather than me assuming what the women considered to be important. However, the impact of covid (a matter I explore further in 3.7.1) meant that this plan was disrupted and could not be enacted as designed. Alongside the research methods outlined below, I maintained a research diary in which I reflected on my own thoughts and feelings for the duration of the study. I was open with the women that I spoke to about my own experience of homelessness and gave all participants the option to read back the narratives I presented to ensure they were happy and in agreeance with how they were being characterised within the research.

3.3. Research Questions

The research questions were designed to interrogate broad structural issues that contribute to the nature of forms of personal and familial crisis engendered by them, whilst also interrogating the effect homelessness and economic precarity on children's educational experiences and mothers' educational choice making practices. The questions were as follows:

1) How is homelessness felt and experienced by homeless mothers with children in their care?
2) How do homeless mothers seek to engage with and navigate their children's educational pathways?
3) How do homeless mothers experience opportunities or constraints in relation to the educational

choices that they make during times of crisis?

The research focused on the everyday ways women make decisions, in this case, primarily concerned with housing and education, though inevitably other facets of the participants' lives were entangled in these areas. I turn now to how I endeavoured to answer these research questions and the ways in which this research was carried out.

3.4 Introduction to the Fieldwork

The fieldwork began in November 2019, in my second year of PhD study, and was anticipated to last until October 2020 – this was unfortunately disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, though I shall return to this discussion later. The research was situated in the city of Manchester where the number of those recognised as homeless by the council is rising sharply, with a 155% increase in declarations of homelessness and requests for housing support. Since 2014 (Manchester City Council, 2019a) the city has recorded the highest number of deaths of homeless people in the country (Booth, 2019). As a response to the soaring numbers of homelessness related deaths the Mayor, Andy Burnham, pledged a commitment to end the city's rough-sleeping by 2020 by donating 15% of his salary to open a 24-hour shelter (A Bed Every Night, 2017), though this since closed down, but the scheme still exists across different shelters - the service has seen a 15.6% increase in new users of this service in 2023 (A Bed Every Night, 2023).

Although there has been a renewed focus on the issue of homelessness, the emphasis and ensuing initiatives remain centred on 'rooflessness' and rough-sleeping and again neglects those who are living precariously in unsafe or unstable conditions, those termed 'hidden homeless' (MacIver, 2018). The Manchester initiative, 'A Bed Every Night', programme has been established as a key part of Greater Manchester's homelessness prevention strategy (GMCA, 2021) and endeavours to provide a bed and support for people on a nightly basis as an 'emergency response' to rough sleeping (Manchester City Council, 2023), though this is only accessible through local authority housing options teams and is focused on supporting people who are considered to be experiencing non-statutory homelessness, have no recourse to public funds, and who are "sleeping rough" (GMCA, 2023) and does not account for people who are living in unsafe dwellings, or in other forms of temporary accommodation. In 2018 there were 3,948 families living in temporary accommodation in Manchester (Shelter, 2018), and there were 13,466 families on the waiting list for social housing, despite this, only 28 new social homes were built in the city, accounting for just 1% of all new homes built (Shelter, 2018). It is not known how many people are living with friends and families without approaching the council for assistance.

On the indices of multiple deprivation Manchester is recognised as the 5th most deprived area in England it is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the number of children receiving FSMs is higher than the national average (Manchester City Council, 2019b). The attainment at GCSE level is also lower in Manchester in comparison to England’s average results (Ofqual, 2019). My connection to Manchester (I live in the city) also allowed for a useful prior contextual knowledge of the city when reaching out to, and talking with, participants. Conducting the study in my home city also saved time in accessing the field, as I was aware of hostels in the city having previously worked in some homeless hostels as a drama workshop facilitator and I was able to use my connections to the field to engage in discussions of access in a research capacity.

3.5 Accessing the Field

To respond to the research questions, I first had to access the field of study. I took a purposive sampling approach to explore the research questions with people who had direct, relevant experiences to draw from (Wellington, 2010; Bryman, 2012, Punch, 2008). This approach worked well to recruit participants who were residing in hostels/women and children’s centres as I knew that women who were living in these spaces had been deemed to be ‘unintentionally’ homeless, that is, that the local authority had a duty to provide relief from homelessness.

Having previously volunteered for homelessness services, food banks and schools, I had prior networks through which I could negotiate access. I made contact with the people that I already knew within these spaces, this included three separate hostels, a food bank and teachers from multiple different schools within the city. I initially outlined my research and my reasons for pursuing this research topic to each person who would be considered as a ‘gatekeeper’ for the institutions, before being given permission to speak to people within those organisations. Outside of this research I work as an actor and writer and made use of these skills to offer something to the hostels who were accommodating my research, and as such I volunteered again in some of these places (running a homework club, a drama club and as a general volunteer) to gain access, build trust and support the groups I was studying. I was given permission to attend and conduct recruitment efforts and research in these spaces and was able to access the three hostels: one was a large building with ten self-contained flats, it had a staff office, multiple community spaces and rooms designated for counselling, activities and training. The other two hostels were in converted houses, where the bedrooms had been converted into rooms for women and children that had sinks and fridges inside, and the living room, kitchen and bathrooms were all communal. The first women and children’s centre was quiet, each family largely using their self-contained flat to meet most of their needs and only occasionally using the other facilities the space had to offer. The other two hostels (the converted houses) were noisier spaces, where the communal rooms were in continual use, this, in a way, facilitated easier contact with the women who were residing there, as it was not necessary to approach people in their own private spaces, I could meet people when they were already engaged with others in active conversation. In the hostel where flats were self-contained, approaching women to ask whether they would like to participate involved knocking on the doors to their personal space.

During my time volunteering I was open from the outset that I was there to help run workshop sessions in homework and drama, and as a researcher conducting a piece of research into the experience of homelessness and educational practices. When I first mentioned that I was a researcher I noticed some sense of trepidation, a suspicion about my motives to be within the space and was asked questions regarding who the research was for, and what I was trying to 'find out'. There seemed to be a sense that I might be, in some way, trying to assess their claims of homelessness and for some, that I was there in a capacity to judge some people's claims to Universal Credit. When this was brought to my attention, I decided to address this immediately and alleviate these concerns. I confirmed that I was not there in an assessment or judgemental capacity and assured them that I only wanted to understand what their experiences were, and that this was driven by my own past experience of homelessness. This openness about my own homelessness seemed to provide a sense of relief, we were able to share conversational stories about our shared experiences and draw out points of difference that were interesting to discuss. I was also able to connect to people on a human level through interactions in the workshops, they were relaxed spaces and this aided in building a rapport with participants, and build the trust between us. I was open with the participants that I was observing the hostel space for my own notes, for my own contextual understandings, but that anything disclosed in the workshops would not directly be included in my research, that it may prompt a question that I would ask in the interview, but that I would not be making covert observations when I was leading the homework and drama sessions.

To recruit participants who were 'sofa-surfing', or in other forms of temporary accommodation snowball sampling methods were employed. The informality of snowball sampling strategies was used encourage further participation from 'hard to reach' groups who were more likely to enter the process should they know someone who has already built trust with the researcher and as such is able to gain prior information regarding the interview procedures (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). For homeless women the main form of support that they received tends to be social networks through which they can access shelter and emotional support in times of need (Phipps et al., 2018), this connection was drawn upon to recruit further participants who were not in local authority or charity based temporary accommodation. Concealing group identity is common among those who could be identified as 'hard to reach', such as homeless people, as fear of subjugation outweighs the desire to access support (Shaghaghi, Bhopal and Sheikh, 2011), therefore gaining access to people living with this experience was most successful through snowball sampling, by recommendations from people who are already aware of potential participants' living status and knew of their willingness to discuss their personal experiences with others. Mothers who were 'sofa-surfing' had largely not sought accommodation through formal routes, and, as such, there was no record of who they were nor where they were living, snowball sampling was the only option here to begin discussions. Once I had achieved contact with women who were living in the hostels, I was then able to ask whether they knew any mothers with school age children who were living in informal temporary accommodation spaces. It was both a relief, in terms of my research needs, and disheartening in a more general sense that I was able to reach so many women through this strategy. Most of the women in the hostels knew of someone who was ‘sofa-surfing’ that they could put me in touch with. Discussing my PhD with interested people who were not directly related to the research also led to some connections to women who were living in other people’s houses. This happened on multiple occasions, in one case I was at a hair appointment and a hairdresser had one of her friends living with her who she introduced me to, when I was working in my job outside of academia one of my co-workers mentioned that her sister and her children were staying on a friend’s sofa and made an introduction that resulted in participation. These connections highlighted to me how prevalent this issue truly is. Once I had made contact with the women I was introduced to, I outlined my research, my own positionality, gave them information sheets and left them with my contact details. I did not follow-up more than once as I did not want to push participation if they did not want to engage. For research purposes I bought a new phone that had a number separate from my usual one to ensure that I had some sense of separation and protection from the research project. On the information sheet I also included my university email and the university email for my primary supervisor to ensure that participants could, if they chose to, verify my affiliation with the university and my registration on the PhD programme.

Access to individual schools proved to be difficult, I could not ascertain from schools any data regarding the number of homeless children that were attending their schools. No institution provided a clear answer as to whether they were not providing this because of privacy and security measures, or whether they did not have this data to provide. As I was specifically interested in how homeless children managed education, and how homeless mothers engaged and navigated schooling, it was not useful to me to spend time at a school that did not or has not had any children experiencing homelessness enrolled. I decided it was more useful to use my informal connections to contact individual teachers and ask whether they had experienced this and if so, whether they would be willing to talk to me. I also utilised snowball sampling here, and asked whether these teachers could put me in touch with other teachers who had similar experiences. This recruitment effort worked well and I was able to engage with a significant number of teachers who were willing to take part in the research, though this was soon disrupted by COVID-19 and will be discussed further in the ‘Research Methods’ section of this chapter.

3.6 Participants

The participants that I recruited were all mothers who were experiencing homelessness, or practitioners who worked alongside homeless mothers and their children. It was important to the research to ensure that the mothers I interviewed had their children in their care. This was considered vital as mothers who had children in their care were responsible for all immediate decisions regarding their children’s education and for sourcing a space for them all to live in. And, though there are significant issues specific to homeless mothers who do not have their children in their care that are worthy of investigation (Bimpson, Reeve and Parr, 2020), my own research was primarily concerned with the immediate decision-making process, the strategies mothers employed to meet their needs and the emotive and affective experiences of these particular moments. To ask mothers who did not have children in their care may have been asking them to reflect on decisions made by other people about their children's lives and had the potential to cause distress and as such, was intentionally avoided within this research. Instead, this research focused on the complexities that exist for mothers who experience homelessness whilst their children are in their care. It was also an important consideration for this study that those children should be of school age, to pay particular attention to the intersections of homelessness and education. This included any school age children, I did not specify whether this should be primary or secondary school children for two reasons: one, because doing so would have limited the number of participants I had access to in an already 'hard to reach' group, and two, because it was the engagement with education and associated pressures whilst homeless that were of interest here; the year of school study was not a focus of the research, though considering parents of children at both primary and secondary school children did highlight some differing pressures at each stage of education. At the conception of the study I had initially intended to speak only to women who were living in hostel spaces, however, during the period of the data collection, I was able to speak to women who were experiencing other forms of homelessness, such as sofa-surfing, or occupying other forms of temporary accommodation, which allowed for consideration of multiple forms of homelessness and was ultimately useful in the breadth of the study (this is discussed in 'Accessing the Field').

Studies that focus on the sociology of education have been criticised for minimising the significance of teachers' perspectives, effectively ignoring those who put education strategies into practice on a daily basis (Curtis and Pettigrew, 2012). It is clear that those who are in a position to shed light on the subject being researched, and hold expert knowledge, were ideal candidates to participate in the research, as has been argued by many academics (Longhurst, 2010; Bryman, Becker and Sempik, 2008), and as such, I spoke with several teachers and practitioners who work with homeless families, to gain an insight into their perspectives surrounding familial homelessness and the impact that this had on the children's ability to engage in classroom activities.

In the tables below I outline the participants that I spoke to throughout this study; though the study aims to present a rounded picture of the women that I spoke to, for ease of reference, it is useful to outline here, the pseudonyms given to participants, how old their children are, where they are staying, and for the practitioners, their job role. The narratives of the participants I mention here are presented at length within the analysis chapters (chapters 4, 5 and 6), these include seven women who were 'sofa-surfing', four women who were residing in hostels and four practitioners who were working with homeless women and their children. During the data collection period, however, I spoke to multiple other women whose contributions, although incredibly helpful to my own understanding of the context, did not directly speak to the research aims, and as such, are not presented as in-depth narratives in this thesis; I have presented here only the most relevant contributions to allow me to answer the research questions.

Below are tables of participants who took part in this research. Table 1 introduces the women who took part who were ‘sofa-surfing’ at the time of interview. Table 1 introduces the women who were residing in hostels when the research took place and the third table, Table 1 introduces the practitioners who work with homeless women and children. They have been organised in this way in the tables as this is the basis on which I organised the analysis chapters that follow and all names presented within these tables and throughout the thesis are pseudonyms and their contributions remain anonymous. These tables provide an overview of who took part in the study for ease of reference and more can be learnt about the women through their anonymised contributions in the empirical chapters (chapters 4, 5 and 6).

Table 1: Participants presented in Chapter 4 - Life in Someone Else’s Space

Name	**Children**	**Current Accommodation**
Tess	One daughter (5)	Sofa-surfing with friends and family. They have moved between multiple peoples’ homes. They have been staying on this friend’s sofa for 6 weeks.
Narissa	Two children - one son (16), one daughter (12)	Sofa-surfing with friends and family. Her and her 2 children are currently sharing a small room in her sister’s house.
Tina	One son (9)	Sofa-surfing for a year. They have been moving approximately twice a week, only having short stays in each place.
Skye	One daughter (late teens)	Low-budget hotel. They have been sharing a room in a council funded hotel room in a hotel on the side of a motorway.
Julie	Three children – she	A small annexe in a friend’s garden. They have been

	only sees two of them: her son (15) and daughter (21).	staying in this converted garage for several months.
Kirsty	Four children – 3 daughters (2, 6 and 9) and one son (15)	Kirsty and her children are living in insecure housing, she had to leave her home due to domestic abuse and has had multiple periods of sofa-surfing.
Ava	One daughter	Once was in a hostel but now staying with family and friends, they are sofa-surfing and have had multiple short stays at different houses around the city.

Table *2*: Participants presented in Chapter 5: Life in Someone Else's Hands

Name	**Children**	**Accommodation**
Charlotte	Two daughters (14 and 6)	They have lived in a women and children's centre for over a year.
Rose	One son (11) and one daughter (14)	Rose and her children have lived in a women's hostel for many months and sees herself as helpful to newcomers in the hostel because of the length of her stay.
Malia	Three Children (15, 8 and 4)	Malia and her children have been staying at a women and children's hostel for 7 months after fleeing from domestic violence.

Nicole	Two sons (7 and 2)	Nicole and her sons are staying in a hostel, they have been there for a few months after a period of sofa-surfing.

Table 3: Participants presented in Chapter 6: Supporting other people's Lives

Name	**Job Role**	**Place of Work**
Muna	English Teacher	Muna works in a secondary school in Manchester, in an area with high levels of social deprivation.
George	Geography Teacher	George works in a secondary school on the outskirts of the city, he is also the head of department and acting head of year 7. He notes the high levels of social deprivation in his catchment area.
Laura	Drama Teacher	Laura works in a secondary school in the city, she has returned to work recently, 7 years after her qualification.
Jane	Homeless Lead Officer	Jane is a manager in a women and children's hostel in Manchester.

Having introduced the participants I illustrate the ways in which I collected the data, detailing the research methods used and the methods that were intended and outlined in the research proposal.

3.7 Research Methods

With each participant I conducted a semi-structured interview. The length of time the interviews lasted varied from around half an hour to three hours. Though I had an interview schedule, I allowed the length and depth of the interview be guided by the person that I was speaking to. I had spent time with each person prior to the actual interview, and as such had been able to establish some sense of rapport, or comfort with each person, meaning that our interactions often began with a friendly, informal conversation before we moved on to the interview questions. This rapport, however, meant that even during the interviews, once I had made clear that the Dictaphone would be recording, the tone remained conversational and open.

In depth semi-structured interviews, designed with open-ended questions allowed for an exploration of participants' views, beliefs and opinions that drive their everyday actions. These interview questions covered a series of topics including: decision making processes in school choice, (including agency and constraints over choice), strategies for engaging with education and addressing everyday practicalities (such as uniform and meal costs, homework, managing social networks with other mothers), how motherhood is experienced in precarious situations (including an exploration of what kind of stresses are felt), and how the field of housing is navigated from the standpoint of homelessness. The semi-structured approach helped in giving flexibility to pursue different aspects of experience and recognise the variability of homelessness, whilst allowing the key themes for answering the research questions to be covered in each interview (Longhurst, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews offer some distinctive limitations. First, the position of the researcher is often identified as having the potential to impact on the substantive content of data collected (Wellington, 2009; Bell, 2010). There is a concern within research methods literature regarding the influence and the bias that the researcher has upon the information offered by participants (Punch, 2008, Denscombe, 2017). However, feminist scholarship moves away from the notion of objectivity and detachment as necessary, or even possible, for the research process and instead sees the value in the researcher's voice being present and accounted for in the research; through which not only the academic knowledge of the researcher is considered as valuable, but also the lived experiences of the researcher and those who contribute to the research process, acknowledging that our approach to research is informed by our experiences of the world (Butz and Besio, 2009). In this vein, and as discussed above, I was open with the people that I spoke to that my desire to know more on this topic was borne from my own experience of homelessness and consequent sense of exclusion from educational spaces.

Whilst the interview schedule was carefully designed to prevent participant discomfort, it was structured in such a way as to facilitate conversation relating to the area of research interest, but also to allow the participant a freedom and agency to steer the conversation according to their own experience. In allowing participants to share their own voice and determine what was important to focus upon, the unequal power dynamics that can exist between the researcher and researched began to dissipate (Silverman, 2010). Though my position and experience was made clear to participants prior to interview no indication was given to participants as to how to respond to the questions asked, the interview schedule was agreed in consultation with research supervisors to ensure the questions were not leading or explicitly biased, which addressed issues relating to my own experience and the potential concerns regarding undue influence from myself as the researcher.

Once I had the interview outline confirmed, I arranged with each woman individually for the interview to happen. The location that these interviews took place depending on the circumstances of the people I was speaking to and where they felt most comfortable in engaging in these conversations. For women who lived in hostels, the interviews were conducted within either a private space in the hostel, such as an office or an activity room, or it was conducted in their living space there. For women who were living in other forms of temporary accommodation, the location varied. For some I was invited into their space, which was the case for Julie and Skye who had access to their own private space, for others who did not have a space that would be considered private, we met in public spaces, some preferred to meet in café's in which case I would propose a café or an arts space that I knew to be quiet with spaces away from other people. In some cases, I booked a booth in the library in which we could meet publicly but speak away from where others could hear. The change in spaces did also appear to change the tone of the interview, meeting in the library felt much more formal than speaking over a cup of tea on someone's sofa, but my main priority here was that the women that I was speaking to felt comfortable and had privacy to discuss emotional and sensitive situations from their lives. I recorded the interviews on a Dictaphone, with the participants permission, and transcribed these, immediately after the meetings, to ensure that I could still recollect any particular moments that I wanted to reflect on in my notes. The meetings that took place in café's or in public spaces were more difficult to transcribe with the muffled sounds of life carrying on around us, but none so much as to cause a problem with accurate transcription.

In the interview design, care was taken to ensure that participants were not assumed to have full access to memory, especially of traumatic events. It is understood that many may not have reflected on particular lived experiences and decision-making processes prior to being questioned about them and that the effect of this was significant to conceptualising their responses. In this way I understood the interview as an event in which meaning-making was attached to past events and personal histories (Hyden, 2014; Mitchell, 2011; Brayda and Boyce, 2014). Due to the spontaneous and unplanned nature of responses in initial semi-structured interviews, research diaries and follow-up interviews were planned to gather data with homeless women from a more reflective position, it would have allowed for a triangulation of the data, however, the necessity to quarantine and isolate during the COVID-19 breakout, meant that these follow-up tools were not able to be utilised. I now turn to further discuss the impact of the pandemic on this research.

3.7.1 The Impact of Covid-19 on the Research Methods

Prior to any knowledge of an impending pandemic, I had spoken to several other women who were staying in hostels who were interested in participating in this research, however, with COVID-19 becoming a more prominent concern in England, hostels, or women and children's centres were amongst the first spaces to close their doors to outsiders in a precautionary measure to reduce the risk of infection spreading amongst their inhabitants. This closure to visitors (both prior to and during the government mandated lockdown) meant that I had lost access to the spaces in which I could speak to these women. Though disruptive to my study, I appreciated the safety measures that were being taken to ensure the health and wellbeing of the residents. Once the lockdown became law in March 2020, I could no longer seek out participants in hostels, nor who were sofa-surfing. This effectively halted the research. As I had already established contact with some women, I considered at this time asking women to participate in virtual interviews, via Google Meets or over the telephone, however, given the sensitive and emotive nature of the questions that I was asking, I decided against this strategy. The potential to cause harm to participants during the unprecedented health crisis was too great. The pandemic was stressful and isolating for many and to add to this by asking women to reflect on their own personal stressors and crises seemed too risky to their wellbeing.

In face-to-face interactions, I could read better people’s body language, sense their emotional capacity to engage and know when to pull back on any sensitive lines of questioning. I was curious to know how, in particular, the women who were sofa-surfing were managing with the fact that they were confined to the space in other people’s houses during this time and how this experience felt, however, this was not the main focus of the research and would have marked a clear deviation from the research aims, but it would have also been difficult to ask women to answer these questions whilst in those spaces, with their hosts likely in close proximity. I must also add here that I struggled myself during the early weeks of the pandemic to cope with my own fragile mental and physical health, it was a frightening and uncertain time and I felt some sense of “survivor guilt” in that I was no longer living precariously and felt guilty for not being able to provide support for those still living in precarious situations – I noted that I had centred my own struggles in these moments and I did not want to take this sense of guilt, fear and self-centredness into interviews with me. So, for these reasons, I decided that I would not undertake any further interviews with other mothers, and that the contributions I had already been given from the mothers I had previously spoken to was valuable in itself and offered me sufficient insight to explore within the thesis. I did however, still have the practitioners interviews to schedule.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic I had organised face-to-face interviews with teachers who have taught children experiencing homelessness, to add another dimension to our understanding of those experiences. Although the decision was taken to avoid online interviews with the mothers partaking in this study, the one-step removed experience meant that the subject focus was not so personal to the teachers as it was to the mothers, the decision was therefore taken to undertake these interviews through online video-calling. This allowed for an insight into how families were coping with the pandemic from an educational perspective as well as into everyday practices.

As I had already established contact with these teachers and built a relationship prior to lockdown, I was able to email the teachers and ask whether they would be willing to interview online. Whilst making this request

I was cognisant that this was also an uncertain and difficult time for teachers who had little to no notice that they would no longer be able to work from schools with the announcement made on Wednesday 18th March 2020 that schools would not be allowed to open to the general school population from Monday 23rd March 2020 (Department for Education (DfE) 2020). This meant that teachers were working from home, trying to prepare work for their students and how to navigate an unprecedented teaching experience, and as such I did not approach teachers immediately, and only made contact to discuss the research after a few weeks of lockdown once we had all had a chance to breathe.

All of the teachers had been previously briefed about the research but in the initial email I also reiterated the aims and purpose of the research, attaching a research information sheet. The email also included a statement regarding the voluntariness of the interview and that they did not have to participate in the study, nor would they receive any pressure to do so. Some teachers declined to take part in the research online and this decision was not questioned.

The contact email outlined the ways in which the interview would take place online, utilising a university account on Google Meets to ensure encrypted calling for privacy and confidentiality purposes. Video-calling offered the closest alternative to face-to-face interviewing as facial expressions and body language could also be recognised throughout the interview as opposed to audio-only calling, though had the limitation of being time-limited and more formal than the face-to-face interviews that I had anticipated and were frequently interrupted by unstable wi-fi connections.

I asked participants to ensure that they were alone and in a private space when this interview took place to ensure confidentiality for the students' lives that they were discussing. Although this did not pose a problem for any of the participants who took part, I recognise that this assumed a level of privilege that they had enough space to be removed from others that they lived with.

These interviews were not free from emotion and encountering students who are struggling with the effects of homelessness and precarity was also an affective experience for the teachers who assumed responsibilities of care for the children that they teach, in many cases that included financial responsibilities for household items such as furniture and white goods, and school uniforms and school stationery supplies.

These methods of data collection, though not the exact methods that I had anticipated utilising throughout the study, allowed the research questions to be answered sufficiently and allowed me to provide a meaningful account of the experiences of homeless mothers whilst ensuring that no Covid protocols were broken and that no one was harmed through engaging in the research.

3.8 Analysis

The data analysed using a thematic approach. Taking an inductive approach to the process, the data was coded according to the dominant themes. Thematic analysis has been described as a 'translator' of data: a method through which broad themes can be extracted, summarised and explored through various responses

(Boyatzis, 1998; Nowell et al., 2017). Through this method of analysis comparisons across and between different research participants and research methods were identified, providing the multiple perspectives necessary to produce a credible qualitative study. Coding according to themes allowed points of departure or difference, and unexpected but valuable insights to be drawn out of the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

One criticism of thematic analysis is the consistency with which the search for themes is applied to the data set (Holloway and Todres, 2003), the flexibility of this method of analysis has been, for some, a negative. However, Nowell et al., (2017) suggest that this flexibility is the strength of this method which allows unexpected insights to become apparent. Thematic analysis allows for an inductive approach to the research, for points of interest to be drawn from across the data set and has proven to be a useful tool for analysis within this work. In line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) systematic approach to conducting thematic analysis, I set out first to immerse myself in the data set by transcribing and rereading all contributions, before establishing codes throughout the data set; that is, points of interest from all interviews conducted. Once I had these codes, I began the process of organizing the codes into emergent themes that answered the research questions, removing any coded data that did not fit into the themes I had identified. Through these steps I was able to interpret the themes and contributions in relation to wider literature and theories. These steps, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), have been useful in maintaining structure through the analysis but allowing enough space for unanticipated themes or contributions to come to the fore. I now turn to expand further on the processes that I undertook in the analysis of the data.

To immerse myself in the data I transcribed the interviews verbatim and continued listen to the interviews multiple times, note making at each listen to establish emergent themes within the data set. I undertook NVivo training to code themes within the data, and I would often undertake this process of coding manually, and used colour coding to identify similar responses noting points of interest in their utterances. Where participants spoke along the same lines I first noted these commonalities, then grouped these into broad themes, such as 'space', 'affect' and 'education' referencing across the data set to understand the points of similarity or difference. Once I had identified key concepts that appeared throughout different responses I then began a meaning-making process by concentrating on the nuances of the coded data, refining these broad themes and considering the contexts in which these utterances were offered. Retaining contextual information ensured that assumptions were not made about the contributions and that any quotations can be understood in the vein in which they were intended and not altered or manipulated to suit the needs of the researcher (Bryman, 2012).

To begin the process of refining the themes, I organised the data into the different groups of people that I had spoken to: those women living in hostels, 'sofa-surfing' or informally housed mothers, and the practitioners who work with homeless women. Organising the data in this way allowed for points of comparison and difference to be drawn out from similar contexts and experiences. I began by distilling the data within these groups alongside the research questions, eliminating data that did not respond to these central questions and looking for the relationships between the coded data across the various participants. Themes began to emerge within each ‘type’ of accommodation and across the data set as a whole and I explored the differing emotions and affects that underpinned similar experiences. I reviewed the themes to ensure that they were relevant to the research questions, reflecting on the established themes in this way meant that some data, despite providing interesting insight into other areas of women’s lives, had to be discarded from the thesis as it did not speak directly to the research questions. The final themes that emerged from the data have been included in the empirical chapters.

Once the themes had been established, the final consideration was how to present the data. Of course, all qualitative data analysis is open to interpretation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), but to be as transparent as possible I have presented these responses with as much contextual information as possible. I wanted to understand the complexities of my participant’s experiences, specifically in relation to homelessness and education, and so presented the contributions that participants made as fully as possible in their narrative form to allow for these complexities to be given space for consideration (Kim, 2016). As the collection of the data involved in-depth qualitative interviews and prior two-way conversations with the women that I spoke to, I have presented the data here in such a way as to capture as much of these interviews as possible within the confines of a PhD thesis structure. I have given space to the women’s individual stories to reflect this where the women spoke to the research matter at hand. Where participants did not have the capacity or inclination to engage in longer conversation or interviews and offered more limited but still insightful contributions, I have respected this and included their responses in the analysis, but have not presented a longer account as I have with those who shared more detailed accounts of their own experiences. Telling personal stories allows sense to be made of action and centralised the emotions and affective experiences (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002) that homelessness presented. Once I had presented all of the individual accounts from the participants, I then spoke to the emergent themes and my interpretations of the data in reference to broader social themes and relevant literature.

3.9 Ethics

Prior to interviews being conducted voluntary informed consent was sought from all participants. I provided each person with an information sheet that detailed all elements of the study (see Appendix One), this information sheet also included my contact details and the contact details of my supervisors so that participants could verify my position within the university, and so that they had a point of contact should they have had any concerns about my practice. I asked participants to sign two consent forms (see Appendix Two) that confirmed they had read the information sheet, were happy for their interviews to be recorded and included in the study, and that they were aware that these contributions would be anonymised but would be included in this thesis and potentially in future publications. I kept one of the signed consent forms and gave the participants the other. These conversations regarding consent were considered as iterative and at every point the people that I was working with had the opportunity to ask questions about the research, the expectations surrounding their involvement and have these questions answered with transparency. I also ensured that potential participants knew that there was no financial reward for taking part in the research and endeavoured to manage expectations around what this research could achieve. Though I hope that this research will provide some insight and future impact, I made statements to all involved that I could not guarantee any personal gain or change of circumstance from participating in this study. I could only offer the benefit of hopefully using this research to inform practitioners and policy makers involved in housing and education, to help people 'like them' in the future.

Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study. Should they have chosen to exercise that right, their contributions would have been removed from the data set and destroyed immediately without question or repercussion, however, no one chose to exercise this right and offered continued consent for their contributions to be included. I provided participants with my contact details but these were details specifically engaged for academic work; I will give them my university email address and a phone number that I obtained specifically for the purpose of this research so that boundaries between researcher and personal lives were clearly drawn. I made clear that the PhD was being conducted from the University of Sheffield and funded by the ESRC. I also made clear that whilst I approached them in other facilities/institutions, neither I, nor the research, had any affiliation to any other institutional body. As I am so heavily involved in the research and there is potential for memories/emotions attached to my own experiences of homelessness to have an impact on my own well-being throughout the process, I sought counselling services for myself to protect my own mental health. I also kept my own diary to reflect on my own feelings to ensure that I wrote these down at the end of each day rather than ignoring my emotions or mulling over them without addressing them, again, in an attempt to mark out boundaries between research work and personal life as far as possible.

An audio recording device was used to record the interviews, this provided a clear recording from which to transcribe the interviews verbatim post-interview. This was done personally by the researcher to ensure immersion in the data. If participants were not happy to be recorded, as was the case with one participant, then the interview was not recorded but copious notes were taken and written immediately after the interview. A fieldwork diary was also kept by the researcher, this was completed immediately (or as soon as possible) after each interview to reduce the risk of recall error. All data that was collected from the outset, including contact details and transcripts, was anonymised and stored confidentially, utilising the university storage encrypted systems. GDPR procedures were followed and I backed up all stored information on a regular basis.

Alongside the standard ethical concerns with any research project, this study warranted some specific measures to protect the participants from harm. The high-risk facility that women and children are staying in, and the reasons the majority of people became homeless was often as an escape from domestic violence, meaning that many of the women were/are under threat of physical violence regularly and therefore anonymity and confidentiality was, and remains, imperative. Pseudonyms were used vigilantly from the beginning of the process and I coded the transcripts and interview recordings with corresponding numbers that only I had access to. I did not disclose the locations of the hostels or the other temporary accommodation spaces to anyone and do not give any identifying information about these spaces or the participants at any point.

With in-depth qualitative research, particularly those studies focusing on sensitive topic such as this one, there was the potential to bring up unreconciled trauma, though Silverman (2010) acknowledges that interviews can empower through the value of their voice being listened to and valued and it also gives power to participants to narrate their own truths. I did however remain cognisant of the emotional fatigue that can occur through revisiting past experiences, especially those that have not been beneficial or positive. To recognise this, I took body language and verbal cues from participants to anticipate whether they were feeling uncomfortable and explicitly checked-in with participants at various points to check their well-being. Participants were made aware that they could leave at any time without having to explain, but that this remained part of the trust in a person's autonomy, and it was their choice to continue with telling their stories whether or not they become emotive during the retelling.

If a person became upset I offered breaks in the interview or the option to draw the interview to a close. I debriefed with every person after our interactions prior to leaving to make sure they were OK and in a safe position to resume their daily lived activities. I made clear that I am not a councillor that can help their trauma or anxieties, I was, however, an empathetic listener interested in their experience and hoping to address inequalities on a wider scale. To minimise risk of harm to participants, prior to undertaking any interviews I gathered resources from charities, support services and council services from areas local to participants, in order to signpost participants to service providers that may be able to help them. This included information/services regarding: housing providers/support services/charities, services that offer educational support for low-income families, free extracurricular activities for children that may support education, health services, foodbank providers, mental-health focused community groups, parental support networking groups. On the whole, the participants were not interested in accessing these services, or taking the information that these services offered. Some expressed that they did not believe these services would help, whilst others stated that they would be embarrassed or otherwise reluctant to engage with services for fear of judgement or wasting their own time.

The nature of my work and participants I met with was not or will not be discussed outside of the research context or supervision meetings. Beyond the data gathering process, in any publications resulting from the work, all details will remain anonymised. It was made explicitly clear that anonymity is a priority within this research. No names appear within the research at all and pseudonyms that are used are not similar to their own names, the same will be done for any other people or places that they mention within their accounts.

Anonymity will also be extended to the name of the service provider through which they were recruited and also to the name of the local area, which is not identifiable through the thesis or work beyond this. This was emphasised to participants at regular intervals to alleviate any anxieties that existed around being located or identified through the research. I reassured participants that they were in control of what they shared and were not under any pressure at all to share anything they were uncomfortable disclosing.

I gave thorough consideration to the ethics of this research from the outset and my primary focus was protecting the participants from harm and I am certain that this study has been undertaken without any participant coming to harm. I would, however, like to turn briefly to an ethical concern that I had not anticipated prior to undertaking the research. In my original proposal, I had set out to conduct this work, in part, with an autoethnographic approach, that is, utilising my own experiences as research data, drawing on my own recollections of the homeless experience and studying my own engagement with this research topic – a centring of the self within a research context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). I had planned to include personal vignettes in which I would show affective writings and emotive poetry that I wrote at the time and details of my own journey to and through homelessness while in education. Whilst autoethnography can work well to personally critique social, cultural and political affects and power dynamics lived and felt in social spaces (Denshire, 2014) and can evoke empathy from the reader and implore action (Ellis and Bochner, 2006; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), there are ethical concerns that arise from taking this approach, that ultimately undermined the benefits and stopped me from including autoethnographic aspects within the research. Including the details of my own experience risked exposing situations that others around me had also experienced, and whilst I had discussed this with those people and they agreed that this was an important topic and worthy of discussion, I was concerned that I could not anonymise them. My name is on the thesis and any future publications and associations could be made, so in an effort to protect them I decided against taking this approach, and instead discussed my experiences with the women that I was working with as a point of commonality and connection. This research project also took longer than anticipated to complete due to complications from my physical health condition. Ethical concerns remain centrally important to the research and any outputs that come from this work.

4: Life in Someone Else's Space

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter explores the stories of women, and their children, who are living with friends and family or in hotel spaces. Their narratives have been presented here to explore the many forms of homelessness that women and their children face and how they develop strategies to navigate precarious forms of temporary accommodation that are dependent on receiving support and assistance from their social networks and the affect that this form of homelessness has on their children's education. These women were not in receipt of council assistance or that of any other official agency and were occupying forms of temporary accommodation that were not monitored by the local authority, and as such are often referred to as women who were living through 'hidden homelessness' (Crisis, 2011; ONS, 2023). The term 'Hidden Homelessness' incorporates those homeless people who have not received government or council assistance in meeting their housing needs and instead, as Deleu, Schrooten and Hermans note: "rely on their own survival strategies" (2023: 283). As the Office of National Statistics (ONS) recognise, due to the nature of this form of homelessness, there is little accurate data that can reflect how many people are experiencing hidden homelessness, but that women are more likely to experience hidden homelessness and seek refuge with their own networks. For the women in this study, these were most often very short-term stays that often led to multiple further moves. I start by presenting a detailed biographical narrative of each woman's background, before moving on to draw out emergent themes across the data and the intersections with existing research in 'the force of feeling' section.

4.2 The Accounts of Women Residing with Friends, Family or Acquaintances

4.2.1 Tess

Tess walks into the room with her head held low, her eyes fixed on the floor in front of her though they occasionally dart to the space around her, wary of anyone in it. Since losing her job and being unable to afford her monthly rent payments, Tess and her 5-year-old daughter, Amelia, have been staying with friends, a situation that is at odds with her nervous disposition. Occupying someone else's space, the lack of control over her environment, and the anticipation of the unknown exacerbates Tess' anxiety, as she tells me her experiences of temporary accommodation have been somewhat hit and miss, "We've stayed in some vile places" she says:

> "You've got no choice. You just have to get yourselves a place to stay and then sometimes when you get there and realise how it is inside, it's too late to turn

> around and change your mind. You can’t be rude like that, they’ve given you a place to stay, they know you’ve got nowhere to go…you just gave to grin and bear it, beggars can’t be choosers, you know?”

As soon as these words escape her mouth Tess seems to panic a little, talks quickly to back track, careful not to offend, and assure me that she is “not trying to be rude” and that she was “lucky” to have a place to stay at all and friends to help her. Tess is conflicted, whilst demonstrating gratitude for her social networks, she worries for the sake of her daughter being exposed to conditions she does not consider to be desirable or beneficial to her daughter’s physical and social development. This conflict is bound up in the recognition that she has a lack of choice, her homelessness had left Tess and her daughter at relying on the actions of others; in Tess’ mind, being one ‘no’ away from street homelessness at every point evoked a sense of gratitude and good fortune when anyone said yes.

Although she largely stayed with friends and family, this was not always a wholly positive experience and Tess had previously experienced a confrontation with a friend, Leonie, whilst she was residing in Leonie’s home. She recounts a night out, fuelled by vodka shots, where things turned sour. A mutual friend had asked how she was finding staying at Leonie’s house, Tess had answered that it was ‘great’ but that she was somewhat uncomfortable with occupying someone else’s house, she recalls telling the friend “I just feel like I’m doing her head in all the time, I just feel like I’m in the way”. To Tess’ surprise Leonie had heard the conversation and assumed Tess had been “slagging her off”, which led to a heated exchange between the pair and resulted in Leonie asking Tess and Amelia to find somewhere else to stay. Tess asserts that her comments had been misconstrued but had ultimately resulted in the breakdown of Tess and Leonie’s friendship and Tess needing to find accommodation elsewhere. Tess found the whole situation immediately stressful due to being made homeless again, but also spoke of the regret she felt in the aftermath once she realised that the relationship she had once cherished had been irrevocably damaged. The experience has led Tess to keep her emotions and feelings to herself, not wanting history to repeat itself, however, this seems to cause her some anguish:

> “I wasn’t meaning it to be bad on her, but I just thought, ‘fuck, I can’t even have my own thoughts about it’. I haven’t got anywhere to live now I’m not even allowed to feel awkward about it…I just meant that you’re in someone else’s house, she’s got one bedroom and a living room and if I want a shower I have to go through her bedroom and that’s fucking weird! I’ve learnt now just to keep my fucking mouth shut, it’s not worth it. Just smile and say thanks.”

Tess spends a great amount of energy modifying her thoughts and behaviours to offer people what she thinks they want from her. She notes that she has been nervous since this encounter and works to ensure that she doesn’t experience this again and as such, is always on edge. This all-consuming anxiety and inability to rest meant that Tess often felt drained and exhausted, she slumps her body down imitating the heaviness. Tess is worn out and worries not only for the effects on both of their minds and bodies in the short term, but the impact of living without a home on Amelia's future.

Previously, Tess had made efforts to enhance Amelia's educational engagement and to encourage learning at home, but has found that these practices have been disrupted by her homelessness, not least by their current situation of having to share a corner sofa with her daughter, but also in terms of spatial availability, or lack thereof:

> "I used to have all posters on her walls, like counting and alphabet and stuff but I can't do that now, and bookshelves full of books but I've got nowhere to put them at the minute. I've still got them but they're in boxes sort of spread around different people's houses, in garages and stuff."

The space available for Tess to occupy negatively impacted her ability to provide educational support within the home in ways that had previously been seen as easy and accessible forms of educational input. The tiredness that Tess experienced through poor quality sleep, stress and anxiety also meant that, as well as trying to take up as little space as possible, Tess had little energy to engage in completing homework, or talking to teachers or organising activities the two of them used to do together. Whereas before they used to "visit the farm, go to different play groups, days out at the aquarium, things like that…", now a lack of money and energy has put a stop to these and is something that adds to Tess' guilt. She fears that Amelia is missing out on important years of her education through tiredness, stress and distraction but nevertheless says she receives good reports from Amelia's teachers, "she's a good egg" she says with a wide grin.

I ask Tess how she feels about the future and her response: 'nervous', the sense of uncertainty that she still feels around her housing, her temporary, part-time contract for employment, the guilt she has internalised about her daughter missing out on education, all contribute to an unclear path ahead of her but she finds light in knowing her and her daughter will be in it together, "as long as we've got each other, that's all that matters really". Tess and I head our separate ways, back into the uncertain world – "deep breath".

4.2.2 Narissa

Narissa is matter of fact and as soon as she arrives for our meeting she is ready to tell me what I need to know. When I ask Narissa how she would describe herself, without skipping a beat, she tells me she is: "no nonsense", "proudly Caribbean" and tells me "I don't suffer fools gladly". Narissa has 2 children, a son who is 16 about to undertake his GCSEs and a daughter, 12 who has just started at secondary school. The three of them are currently sharing one room in Narissa's sister and her partner's modest 2-bedroom house. As her sister is expecting a baby of her own this arrangement is also one that is time-limited and already far from ideal, with the environment being one that troubles Narissa and raises concerns for the health implications on her children:

> "They smoke in there, so I just sleep in a room filled with smoke and my kids are around it as well. I hate that, what's it doing to their lungs? But I don't really have

> anyone else to ask at the moment. It won't be for long, but it's quite suffocating sometimes!"

Despite struggling to cope with the lack of control over environmental factors that come with living in someone else's space, Narissa stays with family and makes a point not to apply for benefits or for assistance with housing. According to Narissa "we're too soft here" she says, comparing the welfare system in England to her experience of the Caribbean, as Narissa works to distance herself from the stereotypical, derogatory identity often associated with homeless people, or people who are in receipt of government financial aid:

> "You have to pay for everything [in the Caribbean], doctors, health, school, you name it, you pay for it. People know how to work back home, not sit on their arses like they do here…I'm not like that. I work hard for what I've got. I won't beg."

In Narissa's mind hard work is deserving of reward and any sense of security should be earned and a financial struggle does not entitle her to assistance. The racist and xenophobic attitudes that are prevalent in the UK, that creates competition between 'deserving' natives and 'undeserving' migrants in terms of accessing resources and welfare has, to some degree, been internalised by Narissa and she works to distance herself from this prejudiced narrative that surrounds immigrants and children of immigrants and stakes her claim to eligibility and credibility as a British citizen by stressing the fact that she was indeed "born here" and reiterating that since her parents arrived in England "They always worked, always. They worked for everything. And so that's been instilled in us, you don't beg for help, you work."

She credits her attitude towards education to this work ethic, "free education is a privilege" she says, and it is this belief that has driven her overall educational strategy, especially for her son who is approaching a significant milestone in the English education system: undertaking his GCSE exams. She tells me: "I chose his GCSEs. Me." Narissa stated that she doesn't "trust" her son to make those decisions at such a young age and wants to make sure he is well prepared to succeed in the job market after their education is over so he can "earn the big bucks". But it is not only academic attainment that she sees as vital for success, she also finds other ways to personally invest in her children's future capital. She tells me that her boyfriend works in IT, the field that her son eventually wants to enter, Narissa suggests that this could provide a useful "way in" to the industry for her son and would utilise the 'opportunity' she sees in her boyfriend in her son's favour. She states:

> "I have to stay with him now whatever happens so I know he can get [her son] a job and some experience for him! I'm not joking…I'm serious…it'll be impossible for him to get into that industry without any links!"

Narissa determined that her only option to guarantee her son's ambitions coming to fruition is to stay with the boyfriend at all costs, even though she doesn't like him very much. This sense of duty seems to stem from her homelessness and the guilt that she feels for her children not having a permanent place to call home:

"I've let him down making him live like this, the least I can do is look after his future and it's not as if I've got any money to do that with!" She acknowledges here that she has no economic capital to invest for him, so sacrifices her personal happiness in her relationship to develop social capital that her son can take advantage of later.

Narissa tells me that since losing their home and moving in with her sister, both of her children have found it difficult to focus on his education and have been stressed by their current situation. But, despite struggling to maintain a consistent level of educational engagement the family keep their homelessness hidden, they do not tell their friends or teachers at school or people that they work with, they see their homelessness as a source of shame. In hiding this from the schools, no extra support is given to accommodate their circumstances and her children have experienced punishment for not doing his work, without the school knowing the context. Punishment was seen as preferential to dealing with the 'shame' of homelessness:

> "I don't think the teachers know, no. I certainly haven't told them because it's quite embarrassing really and what are they going to do about it? I know that my son has had a couple of detentions for not doing his homework and for not bringing in the right books for the right lessons, because he is all over the place…he just rides it out, just takes what they say on the chin rather than explaining cause it's embarrassing for him."

Narissa assumes individual responsibility to 'solving' her problems and strategizing for future success, reluctant to seek help from anywhere or anyone. Narissa repeats how proud she is of her children, both in their hard work and the kindness they exhibit to others – "they know what it's like to struggle so are kind to others." She also tells me that she's proud that both children have "just got on with it", she believes this experience will enhance their resilience and will eventually become a source of strength - she takes this as one of the few positives to come from their homelessness.

4.2.3 Tina

"How long has it been?" I ask as Tina describes the house she is currently living in. Tina is vibrant, funny, has a lightening quick wit and an even quicker speech pattern, but this seems to slow Tina down. "I have no idea when that'll be but I just wanna get on with my life…I just can't wait for it to be over". For Tina, she sees her life as being on hold, as though she is experiencing a disruption to her 'real' life; this prolonged dislocation to her sense of self and stability is clearly taking its toll on her both mentally and physically: "it's been too long. I can't bear it". For the past year Tina and her 9-year-old son, Billy, have been staying with her family and friends, moving between various houses and routinely feeling as though she has outstayed her welcome. The sense of anticipation was overwhelming for Tina, to have to be ready to leave at a moment's notice and so she never unpacked her bag to make sure she was instantly ready to leave if they were asked to. One of her biggest fears, she tells me, and a thought that occupies her mind, is that she is being a nuisance to her hosts. She was using their homes and rooms for purposes they were not designed for and she was conscious of this, she says, at all times. In an effort to minimise disruption to individual hosts she would move regularly:

> "It's just better if I get moved quickly then you don't have to have awkward conversations with friends that neither of you want to have about you having got too comfortable and stayed too long and then before you know it you've lost a friend for an extra few nights in their house. So it's just, me and Billy get our shit together and off we trot!"

Due to the moves Tina stated that her son had missed quite a lot of school because they had to find a place to stay, or Tina was focused on shifting them and their belongings to another friend's house before they rescinded their offer and, in her panic, taking her son to school was not her immediate priority. Though she recognised that missing school frequently was likely to be detrimental to Billy's educational attainment, she was not concerned that this would have an effect on his future and that she would only start to consider his schooling important in secondary school: "when it actually counts, that's the only bit you need to get a good job really, the rest is just extended playtime". Tina's approach to preparing Billy for the future was not only dependent on schooling, but found that learning could happen outside of school too and found lessons to teach her son in almost every experience they had, whether that was about budgeting, navigating city streets or how to manage stressful situations, Tina made sure to highlight life lessons in all that they did; education was not just reserved for the classroom.

Tina was keen to tell me that she dreamed of her son having a happy and successful life, she wished for greatness for him, but she was not oblivious to the circumstances that surrounded their lives and the impact that poverty, precarity and insecurity may have on his future. She wanted her son to have realistic expectations for his future:

> "I want him to do so well in life, I want him to succeed, but …obviously he's not gonna be the next Prime Minister is he? He's probably not gonna be a brain surgeon realistically…not like I don't believe in him, but there's no point promising him the Earth if I probably can't deliver. Of course I want him to do what he wants and to be great at it, but you just have to be realistic…we haven't even got anywhere to live!"

Tina laughs heartily at the prospect of a politician addressing the nation from the sofa of the friend's house that her and her son are staying at, and her pragmatic approach to parenting and managing expectations was evident. She recognised that people who are assigned homeless identities, and who had limited economic and cultural resources, were rarely afforded the privilege of accessing jobs that are considered 'elite'.

Tina, though perpetually concerned about how her presence was affecting her hosts, did find positives to temporarily residing with friends and family, one benefit that Tina found was that she had regular babysitters on hand in most places that she went to that allowed her more freedom to socialise in the evenings than she had experienced when she was living as a single mother, though she was eager to tell me: "I don't take the piss!" Tina also relished the company in times when she found that she could relax in her host's homes, where she found the opportunity to cultivate "proper grown-up chat" a chance to express her own feelings and emotions beneficial to her mental wellbeing:

> "It's nice sometimes though, having someone to chat to and that. Normally it's just me and Billy…of course we talk, but it's not really a proper grown up chat is it? I can't offload all the bullshit on him like I can with friends. We bounce stuff back and forth, it can help you clear things up and solve problems, not even just about where to stay but just life problems, just natter. That's nice. Nice to have a friend around all the time."

Although she has found joy in some of her experiences of temporary accommodation, Tina states that she has come to live with an overwhelming and relentless sadness, but she says, not because of her every day experiences, "one day at a time, it's not too bad, individual days, yeah they're ok, they're not bad", but she cannot stop herself from thinking on a larger scale, and making comparisons to other people that she went to school with who she deems to be doing 'better' than her. She tells me that she looks forward to her future and hopes that her sadness doesn't stay with her for long.

4.2.4 Julie

Julie is a teacher and a mother of three in her late 40s. She is currently living in a friend's annexe that is situated at the bottom of her friend's garden. It is a shed that has been semi-converted into a living space. Her son, 15 lives with her full time and her daughter, 21 stays with her when she is visiting from university. Julie explains that when her daughter stays they have to share her double bed that occupies the living room space, leaving the bedroom upstairs to her son. The open plan layout of the annexe meant that this was still awkward and embarrassing for both mother and son, as the bedroom upstairs was connected to the only bathroom:

> "There's no doors on it…so for him it's a bit weird obviously, because he's kinda sharing the space as his mum. Which is strange…There's not even a door on the toilet, so when I go upstairs to have a shower, or doing what I've gotta do, I'm basically in the same room that my son's sleeping in, so yeah it's a bit awkward, a bit uncomfortable, obviously more for him that it is for me because of his age… I'd be mortified if I was him."

She asserts that though she finds some parts of living here 'embarrassing', she is also "incredibly grateful". Seven months ago, Julie left the house her family had lived in for many years to move into another, much more expensive, privately rented house in a new city with her new boyfriend, meaning that her son had recently started at a new school. However, as the relationship broke down and resulted in violence, Julie decided they had to leave. Initially mother and son were sofa-surfing at different friends' houses. Julie was resolute that she did not want to ask authorities for help for fear that they would assume that she was a bad parent and reprimand her, or that they would only help through placing her and her son in a hostel – it was a thought that terrified her. Julie's perception of homeless hostels was so bad that she could not conceive of a situation that would be worse than living in one, despite having never been inside one. The stigma attached to those places and the possible implications this could have for her son was enough for Julie to fear them:

> "I've never been in one, I don't know what it's like but I just imagine the shame that my boy would feel…it's just unimaginable like 'oh where do you live?' you know and then if other kids at his school realised that he lived in a hostel I think the shame would have tipped him over the edge to be quite honest!"

Julie's priority is, and always has been, the education of her children, she was aware that the decisions she made for and around her children had consequences for them in their day to day lives and their future success, and as such tried to make a conscious effort to factor in her children's well-being into where she sought refuge in terms of the temporary accommodation; Julie's only criteria for looking for a permanent place to live is that the place is safe and is within reach of her son's old school, that he left 7 months ago, in the hopes that this will get his education "back on track" after the disruption of multiple moves.

The annexe that she is currently occupying, however, is a long way from her son's school, each morning Julie has to make the hour's drive to a village to drop her son off at a bus stop, from there Julie heads back in the direction she came to go to work and her son has to wait for around an hour for the bus to drive him the 45 minute journey to school. Before their working days have even started (at work and at school), Julie and her son are exhausted. This was a stressful journey in and of itself and is exacerbated by the fact that her son has a health condition which can escalate suddenly into a hyper-critical, life or death situation, and many of his mornings spent waiting for the bus in that small village were in the cold winter months:

> "It frightens the life out of me because… he's gotta sit there in the bus stop and it's cold, but there's no other way that I can do it, other than to mess up his school again, I just feel guilty. Cause I'd made the decision to move him, he didn't ask to be moved."

The sacrifice, in terms of tiredness, time and effort expended and the stress of living in an over-crowded, unsuitable space was considered to be worth the pain just to be away from her abusive ex-boyfriend. However, Julie was left with a sense of guilt about her relationship ending in negative way and the multiple moves between temporary accommodations, that left her with perpetual internal anguish, despite her having done all she could to 'remedy' their situation. The feeling that something needed rectifying was one that Julie could not shift, I get the feeling that she will always carry this with her even when she is able to find them a house of their own. The experience of homelessness was felt as one that was so damaging that it would inevitably leave its scars on the family.

Julie is proactive in searching for a more permanent place to live and is now bidding on social housing and having to learn an entirely new system that she did not know existed prior to losing her home. Where she used to engage in leisure activities outside of work, she now finds that she spends her days bidding on properties and worrying that she's going to get things wrong and be left without anywhere to live. The system for finding social housing to rent was a much more anxiety inducing and difficult process than she ever thought it might be. She tells me that she had always assumed that when people would ask for help, especially when they had lost their home, that they would get it almost immediately. To become homeless presented Julie with a future and a present unknown. She had no point of reference to draw from in order to navigate this already stressful experience. Julie had always considered herself to be a 'good' and 'productive' person who had contributed well as a citizen, leading her to believe that if she found herself in need that the state and local authority would provide her with the safety net that she needed in a timely way: this is very much not the case she assures me:

> "I have had to bid for houses. Obviously where I wanted to be was where we were before but there was nothing there. So anyway I put a bid in and I got offered up 2 places that nobody else had bid on because they're rural locations, basically in the middle of nowhere… but I worry, cause they're no good and you can only decline, I think it's only 3 times, and I've already declined one that was in [place name], well, that was no good, for a start he couldn't get on the bus to school there, I'm not sending him to another school and there's no way I would have been able to commute, I wouldn't have been able to afford to commute all that way, so If I'd have taken that I would have lost my job."

To decline 3 properties would re-categorise Julie as 'intentionally homeless' and no longer entitled to council assistance. Julie felt that she had "no choice" and the options available to her were extremely limited. Julie's experience of homelessness was of course multi-faceted and varied but was filled with what seemed to be impossible 'choices', decisions she never wanted to make but now forever has to live with.

4.2.5 Ava

I met Ava in a café in the city, I'd asked if there was somewhere else she'd feel more comfortable discussing her story, but she declined: "where else would we go? I ain't got nowhere, and it's nice to get out the house innit?" I'd offered, beforehand, to book a quiet space in an arts centre nearby, or a side room in the library, but she made it clear that those places 'weren't for her'. It occurred to me that without the private space of a home, it is difficult to find any level of privacy in public when so many spaces feel exclusionary and demarcated for use by 'someone else'. It is difficult to find neutrality and privacy without a home of one's own. However, at the moment, privacy was not at the top of Ava's list of priorities, rather, finding a place for her daughter to sleep safely occupied her mind at any given moment, she spoke of the all-consuming nature of living without secure accommodation.

Ava was living in a perpetual state of stress, almost daily there was an urgent need to secure a new place to stay. Of all the women that I spoke to, Ava was moving between places most frequently, often only being able to stay with friends and family for a few nights at a time. This permanent impermanence led to Ava feeling lost, at once stuck to the life she was in, and completely untethered:

> "You end up feeling like you ain't a real person, you've got no base, you're just sort of floating around with all your shit, waiting until you have to move on and find somewhere else again. It's always just on edge, waiting until they get the balls to tell you that you can't be there no more. And like…negotiating with them, like 'ok, give me two more days so I can find somewhere for us to go' and they're like…'you can stay one more night then you need to go', so you're like, ok I've got today to find somewhere else."

Having to rely on other people for support was not a comfortable experience for Ava, "I hate having to rely on other people, it's just like, 'beggy'…It feels a bit desperate." Despite her embarrassment and internalised shame in asking for help, she recognised that she did not have the financial resources to resolve this issue herself. I asked whether she had considered approaching the council or women's hostels for help, but she was quick to respond with "nah, it ain't like that, I ain't that bad man, I'm not like, on the streets or whatever." Ava felt that her level of homelessness or precarity was not 'bad' enough to warrant assistance. Instead, Ava had surmised that she had to draw on her social resources to find accommodation, even when that felt uncomfortable and difficult. In order to secure housing for her and her daughter Ava spoke of feeling as though she were manipulating her networks, drawing on a sense of guilt and duty in her potential hosts, a guilt and duty that she knew she would not be able to evoke if she were a single woman without a child. Ava spoke of the 'awkwardness' this created, but felt it necessary nonetheless, to ensure she and her daughter had a place to stay:

> "It's awkward man, like 'please can me and my kid stay at yours for a bit cause we've got nowhere to go', like what kind of a wasteman is gonna say no? Do you know what I mean, like, it's awkward cause they can't really say no even if they don't want you there, so you're there like, knowing full well you ain't welcome and just trying to figure out a way of getting out of there like, rapid, but it is what it is innit?"

Even when she had managed to secure a place to stay, especially for longer periods of time, Ava laughed, "I try not to be there!" Though she was allowed to stay, she felt that she did not belong there, it certainly was not her home and she worried about what her presence in the house would say to her hosts about her identity, as though any indication of her presence would portray her as lazy:

> "We always just go for a walk, try and go to a park, just to get out cause it's horrible to be there, you don't want someone thinking you're just some like wasteman, like some slob just always in their face, all day on their sofa, when they get home from work, like 'surprise, it's me again', so I do try and keep out of their way."

I asked Ava about her daughter's schooling, it was clear that this weighed heavy on Ava's mind and that she felt the need to find ways to minimize this educational disruption and the emotional toll the multiple moves were taking on her daughter, but recognised that the constricted spatial elements of living in other people's homes made completing homework and educational practices beyond school difficult to achieve:

> "It's finding the time and place to do it that makes it hard, like, we've got the sofa, that's all the space we've got really, that's where we sleep and eat, but obviously, like, that's their sofa…they ain't gonna stop living their lives, so they're sitting there watching TV and we ain't got anywhere to do her homework. I hate seeing her little stressed face, so we go to like a café or something so she can get it done but obviously I ain't made of money, I can't afford to get us like a coffee and milkshake to sit and do that every day!"

The space was not theirs to commandeer and living within their hosts confines had Ava constantly second guessing herself: which space she could use, when she could use it, when would she be in the way. The incessant questioning and doubting was so stressful that a life without this stress was at the top of the list for Ava's future dreams: "I honestly don't care where we end up as long as we've got our own place, not one else interfering, not begging no one else for anything, just be free at home innit?" However much Ava desired this, she had no idea where to begin seeking help as she did not believe she was 'bad enough' to ask for it.

4.3. The Force of Feeling

Following the in-depth accounts presented here from the women I spoke to, I shall now turn to a critical discussion of the common themes that arose from the data collected. As well as drawing further on the narratives from the women I have outlined above, I also present here data from other women that I spoke to during the data collection process, but due to the confines of the PhD structure, did not have space to explore in depth (for further discussion of this reasoning, please see the methods chapter). The themes that emerged from the data and that will be discussed below are: Luck and Gratitude: exploring the ways in which people make sense of their housing-loss, Loss and Sacrifice that considers the emotive and affective experience of losing one's home and the associated sacrifices that mothers make in their quest for safe housing and good education, and finally, Affects of Space Negotiation highlights the ways in which homeless mothers and children had to grapple with the feelings of residing in a space that is not considered to be their own.

4.3.1 Luck and Gratitude

The interviews for this study were filled with recollections of negative events and stories imbued with pain and suffering that both led to their homelessness and continued throughout their current circumstance, however these interviews were also interwoven with the phrase “I’m so lucky”. Participants were simultaneously positioning themselves as ‘unlucky’ for having experienced acts of violence against them (both physical and symbolic in terms of oppression and exclusion), and ‘lucky’ for being able to survive it and to find ways through their lives while in crisis. They were the ‘lucky unlucky’.

For the majority of the participants who were sofa-surfing, this was their first experience of homelessness and was in most cases an experience that they had not foreseen and could not have predicted, they were not, after all, in their minds, the ‘type’ of person that they had expected to be homeless (Kawash, 1998, Hopper, 2002). The experience of homelessness itself was not considered pleasurable or ‘lucky’. However, when the women anticipated an insurmountable struggle, in some part due to a lack of understanding about how to navigate their circumstance, not knowing where to turn for help or support, and a belief that they were not eligible for welfare assistance in the first place; all participants spoke of feeling ‘lucky’ for still being able to secure a roof over the heads of themselves and their children. This belief that luck, an event that happens beyond the person’s control (Sauder, 2020), was responsible for their ability to find and secure a place to stay was also informed by a feeling of being undeserving of help. By adopting a rhetoric of being ‘lucky’, there was a sense that the women wanted me to know that they acknowledged that they had been a recipient of something that they felt they were not entitled to. Many of the women who were sofa-surfing stated that their situation was not ‘bad enough’ to seek local authority assistance in relation to their housing. This feeling of being underserving is not one limited to the women who took part in this study, in Garthwaite’s (2016) study with food bank users she found that there was a strong reluctance to access the available provision for receiving food supplies, in large part due to the stigma and embarrassment her participants experienced when approaching such spaces. Participants would only seek help when they were truly ‘desperate’. She attributes this to an internalised shame derived from the construction of foodbanks, through political discourse, media output and public perceptions, as both a moral and personal failing:

> “Explanations for rising foodbank use from Conservative MPs have… focused upon individualised behaviour, specifically poor financial management, addiction and, in some cases, selfish and neglectful behaviour.” (Garthwaite, 2016: 278)

Assigning individual responsibility for financial struggles and an ‘anti-welfare’ stance come to be seen as common sense thinking (Jensen and Tyler, 2015; Ahmed, 2014), and necessary according to government accounts of the economy that position austerity as necessary to solve the country’s economic ‘crisis’ and reduce national debt (Cameron, 2014; Cameron, 2011); that everyone should be financially independent of government funded support, remains as the apparent ultimate goal. According to Mackenzie and Louth (2020: 20) “the discourse of financial resilience aims to produce deserving neoliberal citizens who are moving toward self-reliance”. Therefore, those who are unable, for whatever reason, to live without aid are considered irresponsible and as an underserving ‘other’ who lives outside of society’s ideals. The concept of ‘othering’ based on perceptions of the deserving or undeserving poor has been explored extensively in academic literature (Jo, 2013; Pemberton et al, 2016; Jensen, 2014; Shildrick et al, 2012; Shildrick and McDonald, 2013; Skeggs, 2004; 2005; Tyler, 2008; 2013) with many academics noting that feelings of shame, embarrassment and anxiety were associated with seeking help. This concept was evident in the narratives of the women I spoke to who were working in their utterances to distance themselves from the homeless people they considered to be the ‘wrong kind’ of homeless. If we look back to Gowan’s categorisation of homeless identities there was a real effort to not be seen as ‘sick’, not to be seen as the person who was always destined to be homeless anyway. Luck and gratitude work as coping strategies that allow the women to conceptualise their experience and offer a sense of appreciation for what they are *not* rather than having to make sense of an identity that seemed inconceivable to them and at odds with the life they had expected to live; they were writing a sense of control into their narratives that had previously been missing from their lived reality. Only by constructing an imagined possible alternative, could the women express the gratitude that they perceived as necessary. The women that I spoke to had never previously considered themselves to be an ‘excludable type’ (Titchkosky, 2011) in terms of access to housing, that is, a person that is considered to be outside of the normalised state of being and, therefore, vulnerable to homelessness; the perceived characteristics associated with homeless people were at odds with how the women perceived themselves. Being home-less and unable to secure new permanent housing demonstrated to women how easily excludable they were, from: the housing market, society and, often, from friends and family’s homes, once their welcome had been outstayed.

Chase and Walker (2013) note that stigma was not only borne from self-perception, but the fear of how they would be viewed by others. We can see that fear at work here, where the concept of luck was invoked as a form of self-deprecation, the participants were showing me that they were judging themselves as unworthy of legitimate help, before someone else could make that claim of them. The concept of luck was operationalised to create distance between the women and the positive outcomes that had occurred. What was seen as success was attributed to a chance occurrence, happenstance, or the actions of another person that was beyond their control. The agency that the women had in asking for help was diminished in their narratives. Although they had effectively mobilised their capital through their social networks to secure temporary accommodation, these efforts were disregarded and downplayed.

Any positive results that have come from their own actions are attributed to luck, whereas anything that is seen as negative, such as losing housing, experiencing domestic abuse, having social services intervention, or disruptions to their children’s education, were considered an individual failing or a very personal mistake. Blame is internalised by those experiencing it, as an individual fault, as an inability to make ‘good’ and ‘responsible’ choices. This adoption of a ‘luck’ narrative speaks to the sense that women could only understand themselves as a recipient of someone else's kindness after having 'failed' themselves to secure or maintain safe housing.

The majority of women that I spoke to discussed their lives in terms of before and after the point of becoming homeless. Much like the women in Knight's (2015) work, the women's lives and identities had become divided by stressful and traumatic events, they had their 'real' lives prior to becoming homeless and now had to deal with a disrupted self and as such, had to assess what the new 'disrupted self' was worth and entitled to. Luck is a relative concept used to resolve this; living through a state of personal disaster and crisis such as familial homelessness, meant that luck was now attached to circumstances or events that had been seen as banal or unremarkable in their previous lives. Those taken for granted parts of their previous lives such as: access to accommodation – particularly now temporary accommodation, receiving support from friends and family, and being given basic resources to survive, were now considered to be a real 'lucky break'. Evoking a sense of 'luck' served to remind me that they recognise their seemingly accidental privilege and a fear of the 'type' of homelessness that potentially *could* have been experienced, should they not have managed to secure accommodation:

> "God I'm just so lucky to have such good friends, without them I don't know what would have happened… Cause obviously it's my friend and her husband, they've let me have it for a good rate with everything included in it." (Julie)

The image of homelessness that existed for the majority of women was a street-dwelling, 'roofless' form of homelessness and as soon as they lost their homes, this is the path that became the most feared. When this was avoided and temporary forms of 'roofed' accommodation were found, some fears were alleviated and the women considered themselves 'lucky' for not having to endure a life on the streets. But there was a sense that their claim to their accommodation was still in some way illegitimate, that they had some way 'cheated' their way into a space of accommodation that not everyone has access to. Although 'survivor guilt' – an intense guilt and feeling of unworthiness that occurs when one survives a traumatic event that others did not (Garwood, 1996) - and has been associated largely with events in which others had lost their lives such as the Holocaust, more recent studies (Murray, 2018; Fimiani et al., 2021) have argued that this sense of a somewhat unfair survival has been experienced in non-fatal traumatic events, which is evident within this study. For some participants, their ability to 'sofa-surf' and reside with friends and family was seen as a favourable position compared to those who they perceived as less fortunate than them, whose forced displacement from 'home' had resulted in rough sleeping and there was a guilt that they had 'survived' becoming homeless by securing a roof whilst many had not. For some, it was necessary to use the explanation of 'luck' as a defensive strategy against their own feelings of guilt, as indicated from Julie above and by Narissa who stated: "I know I'm lucky, I shouldn't moan, I could have ended up on the streets". The distinction between 'survivor/survival' and 'those left behind' was, however, not actually a binary one, and all feelings about their homelessness in relation to themselves and others were messy and complicated. There were processes of adjustment that each woman was going through and the majority of the women had struggled to come to terms with a new circumstance that had set upon them suddenly.

Although the women had complicated relationships to their spaces of impermanent residence, performative gratitude seemed to dominate strategies to acknowledge their tentative position in their temporary accommodation to their hosts. Frequently throughout the different narratives, the women discussed the difficulties of living in other people's spaces. However, any complaint that they had was negated by following it up with a discourse of 'luck' and 'gratitude'. It was as though there was a fear in speaking freely about their experiences and being perceived as ungrateful to their hosts, as captured here by Ava:

> "God I sound like I've done nothing but moan, I don't mean to slag them off, I'm more grateful than you'll ever know that they've let me stay, really. I know I don't sound it but I do count my blessings that people have helped me out. It's just somethings are hard man, I'm just ranting, but they're good people obviously. I do thank them all the time. Like, all the time."

This sense of a performative gratitude was something that had to live in their bodies, in the way they moved through the houses daily and how they interacted with their hosts. They thanked them frequently, both verbally and physically by respecting every 'house rule' laid out to them and by the rules unspoken. The sense of indebtedness affected their relationships with their friends and families, as though a line had been crossed that could not be undone, as through their friendship, as it once was, is now irretrievable due to the sense of owing, where feelings of gratitude were confused or conflated with feelings of indebtedness, a distinction which can often become blurred (White, Laudet and Becker, 2006). When homeless people are treated with kindness and care, rather than the assumption that they are homeless as a consequence of their 'sickness' or 'sins' (Gowan, 2010) they were more inclined to feel indebted to their hosts for the help they received (Budescu, Sisselman-Borgia and Torino, 2021).

This sense of indebtedness however, can result in women becoming more vulnerable to exploitation (Ellis, 2019), in some cases hosts make unreasonable demands of the women, change their agreement during the course of their stay or abuse their position as a trusted person and instead use the sense of indebtedness to make the women feel obliged to fulfil those expectations (Ellis and Leahy Laughlin, 2021). When women sense a lack of options to accommodate their housing needs, they are more likely to have to endure violent or abusive behaviour from their hosts in order to keep a roof over their heads. There was also a reluctance to challenge this behaviour for fear that doing so would mean they would have nowhere to sleep, or that elsewhere the environment might be worse. Kirsty described how she had refrained from reporting her hosts prolonged violent behaviour to the police out of a sense of duty and indebtedness to the family, she felt that this act would have been a betrayal of what she saw as a kindness in letting her stay when she needed somewhere to go, despite them showing no kindness once she and her children had arrived, Kirsty stated:

> "They smeared shit all over the walls and smashed all my stuff up and he used to

> knock his wife about as well, yeah, it wasn't nice… I was frightened. I didn't wanna be there… it was like living in a drugs den without the drugs cause it was just a shithole. And he would get more violent… It was awful, but it was a roof over my head and it's their house at the end of the day… and they'd let us stay."

The feeling of being lucky for having somewhere to stay and a sense of being beholden to her hosts for putting up Kirsty and her children, meant that she endured more ill treatment, disrespect and violence than she would have done in another circumstance. The sense of indebtedness, however, was not only demonstrated in concealing violence, but also in more mundane expressions of feeling the need to "make things up" to their hosts, a thought offered by Narissa:

> "Even if they offer small things, like I takeaway or whatever, I have to say no… I always feel like I've got making up to do anyway with her letting me stay, I know I said it's annoying but I really don't know how I'll ever be able to thank her properly!"
> (Narissa)

This was a sentiment also echoed by Ava when contemplating the trickiness of navigating the etiquette of food and drink acquisition within the host's home. Debating whether to ask for a cup of tea and some food, or just to 'help herself' like she had been told to do, Ava stumbles back into reiterating her gratitude and indebtedness to people who have allowed her to stay:

> "They get kind of annoyed with you always asking, they're like, 'yeah just do it', but it never feels like you can. You just always feel like you're doing their head in man, that messes with you, but what can you do? They'd be more annoyed if you just started off just going in all fresh and like just raiding all their shit, it'd be like 'are you mad?' so you can't win really, everyone's just always annoyed whatever (laughs) I'm messin'…kinda, you do get some people get absolutely sick of you and you can feel it, the tension and that, but you're there and it's a place to stay … you know they've always kind of got something over you, like you owe them cause no one *has* to let you stay innit?"

To live with uncertain and unspoken conditions imposed, or at least considered to be imposed by their hosts, left the women with a sense of unease that made it difficult to feel a connection or attachment to the place in which they were staying, and a clear reluctance to do so - this was only ever temporary, but the temporal limits to this experience were never clear. The women I spoke to had no idea when they would be able to access safe and permanent homes, and so their experiences of living in other people's spaces were understood and felt as both short-term and possibly ever-lasting, it was understood as an entirely different experience of time than they had ever felt before and as such living in temporary spaces was a transformative experience that shaped their personhood and connection to the world.

In wider society there is a belief, perhaps bolstered by the individualistic nature of the neoliberal ideology that permeates the social imaginary, that a positive mental attitude can shape your life experiences and encourage both personal and economic success and growth (Schweingruber, 2006). The individual is held accountable for their own success and is encouraged to strive for self-betterment to become autonomous, irrespective of inequality based on social or economic exclusions, there is an expectation that one should remain proactive in the quest for improvement (Scharff, 2016). This belief then, inhibits expressions of struggle, pain and negativity, without offsetting this with an exaggerated display of positivity through gratitude. This was not only a fear of appearing to be impolite, but the majority of participants expressed a sense of nervous anticipation or a "treading on eggshells all the time" (Ava) way of existing as they were constantly concerned about upsetting the people that they were staying with and having the offer of accommodation removed. In all of the narratives the gratitude for space also meant that they felt like they did not have the right to express any concerns or grievances that they had about the space or living conditions as they felt that this would breach the respect that had been shown to them in the offering of temporary accommodation. There is a sense that when people are helpful in meeting their housing needs, gratitude is expressed routinely and sincerely, because they had learned that neither care, nor housing, are guaranteed.

Despite their incredibly difficult circumstances and a need to prioritise housing, in most cases there was a clear dedication to their children's schooling (or if not schooling then learning in some form). Strategies for attaining or providing educational guidance were not only seen as beneficial to the child, but served as a way of allowing the mothers themselves to counter the guilt that they carried with them, a feeling derived from disrupting their children's education with house moves and factors related to becoming and being homeless. The efforts here, such as seeking out work environments such as cafés, or for Narissa, libraries, were not dissimilar in motivation to parents who practised more traditional forms of 'concerted cultivation' in regards to their children's education, the practise of investing in their children's perceived talents with additional subject tutors, and extra-curricular activities and hobbies, more attributed to middle-class parents who endeavour to further their children's chance of success with capital they have available to invest (Lareau, 1987; Perrier, 2012, Abrahams, 2018), the difference though lies in the resources (in terms of finances, time and energy) with which homeless mothers have to invest in these activities, and instead made adaptations that made engaging in educational practices possible, but the energies expended are not dissimilar. Where their children engaged positively with education, or where schooling was only minimally disrupted and the children could remain focused, the mothers I spoke to felt they had experienced some degree of luck that their children had some interest in learning. A desire to learn though, did not always mean that this was easy; the constant questions and anxiety that surrounded their home lives had a significant influence on their levels of concentration and engagement with education, but an interest in learning was at least seen as lucky in itself. A successful path through the education system, the system that (re)produces the ideal citizen through the standards it holds people to (Bathmaker et al., 2013), was also seen as an extension of themselves and did some work to 'prove' that they were not unworthy people who were homeless because of some genetic and unavoidable sickness (Gowan, 2010), and were instead merely ‘unlucky’ to have found themselves in a homeless position: to achieve at school debunked this concern that they might be the ‘type’ of person who could be socially and culturally perceived as homeless, and gave the women a sense of pride. Their children’s success was their success.

4.3.2 Loss and Sacrifice

Underlying in the narratives of living in someone else’s space, was a reflection on the sacrifice that was demanded of them to live in this way. This was never explicit in the women’s accounts of motherhood, however, sacrifice seemed to be understood as a mother’s duty, likely borne from cultural expectations of the ‘mother’ role, that of an unconditional caregiver, becoming the most dominant part of a woman’s identity (Bennett, 2018; Sevon, 2011). Here, these sacrifices were discussed specifically in relation to their children’s education and planned career trajectories; this was most perhaps most pronounced in Narissa’s long-term strategy, a plan that involved her making a considerable sacrifice of her own happiness to secure a route into employment for her son. Narissa recognised that a significant lack of capital, both economic and cultural, presented a barrier to participation in her son’s chosen vocation, though came up with a way to ensure he secured the social capital and work experience that would help him access paid employment in his field of choice; she noted that her boyfriend worked in the same field that her son aspired to be a part of and so felt it necessary to maintain her relationship with him to further the life chances of her son, despite being unhappy in the relationship:

> “It will be impossible for him to get into that industry without any links. I’ve let him down making him live like this, the least I can do is look after his future and it’s not as if I’ve got any money to do that with!... So I have to stay with him now, whatever happens so I know he can get him a job and some experience, even though I’ve never had a single flower the whole time. I’m pretty sure he’s just using me for sex…but you know, you do what you’ve gotta do.”

In this account, people were used as a commodity to meet their own needs, the social capital was drawn upon unapologetically for her son’s future economic advancement. Whilst this form of sacrifice was strategic, this was not the only account of relationships being sacrificed or lost. Intimacy was hard to achieve whilst sofa-surfing and as such women often expressed a longing for human embrace and connection. But because of a lack of space and privacy, this was not possible, as Tess indicates:

> “I’m so lonely, and I’m on Bumble and that but there’s no point is there? I can’t have a boyfriend now can I? What would we do, it’d be ridiculous, ‘wanna come over and shag on my mate’s sofa, don’t mind my daughter’, no, not gonna happen so yeah I do get lonely but I know there’s nothing I can do about it right now. I know that’s

> not high on the priority list right now and there are more pressing reasons to get a house, but it does make a difference to how I feel. As a woman, as a mum, I'm just doing it on my own so I would like someone, or even to have the possibility of it, have it as an option but….ummm…not right now."

The sense of womanhood in forming intimate relationships was seen to be missing due to the logistical incompatibility of living in someone else's space and the need for private connection. But the guilt for their children being homeless meant that in many cases women focus all of their attention on being 'mother' and forego any romantic relationships to compensate for this, though this could potentially be detrimental, after all sex, affection and connection are part of human survival (Meltzer et al., 2017). Intimate relationships have been proven to improve wellbeing, establish connections, improve self-image and reduces stress (Smith, 2019), the absence of this, without this being an individual's choice, can leave people lonely and discontented. If a mother's needs are not met, if she is not fulfilled as a person, it is unlikely that she will be able to adequately meet the needs of her children who are reliant on her for their care (Simperingham, 2020). And though Tess was not showing any signs of not meeting her children's needs, prolonged periods of homelessness and the ensuing loneliness has the potential to impact on future connections and make the navigation of housing and education systems more difficult.

Kirsty noted that in preparation for her children's future, she focused on withdrawing her protection that she believed shields children and prevents them from dealing with struggle and conflict that may follow them into adulthood. Kirsty was under no illusion that her lack of social and economic resources is likely to have an impact on her children's future and anticipates a life of precarity ahead of them. Having experienced homelessness in her teen years and with her mother as a child, Kirsty recognised the possible intergenerational effects of poverty and strategized in a pragmatic way to ensure her children had the resilience to cope with that possible future. In her mind, the best way to care for her children is to sacrifice their maternal bond after a period of time to ensure that they can look after themselves, of this she said:

> "When my kids get to a certain age and as fucking hard as it is, I start pushing them away, not cuddly, I'm not protective, like I would be with [youngest daughter] for example. I'll always be there when they fall! Might not catch 'em but I'm always gonna be there to pick up the pieces … How do they fly when mummy's holding on to them, mummy's going to protect them? No because mummy's not gonna be here all the time to do that, mummy's not. And that's harsh reality – mummy is not always gonna be here, they've gotta know how to stand on their own two feet, know how to spread their wings as far as they can and fly as high as they can…it sounds really sad don't it? You know, pushing your kids away or whatever, but they've gotta learn that when you fall down, there's not always someone to pick you up, and life's hard. And if I teach my kids that life is a bed of roses and wrap them in bubble wrap,

> how the hell are they gonna cope? Cause life ain't easy. Life's shit. Life's hard."

Kirsty's multiple experiences of homelessness has affected her engagement with the world; she has become jaded by the continual upheaval along with the continual lack of safety and support. Kirsty knows how easily a sense of security, and her home, can be lost and recognises that this is always a possibility for children. She does not take an easy life for granted. For Kirsty, what was important, was not the cultural and economic capital, but her strategies and capacity to cope and 'get through' situations that are difficult to manage or, what Reay (2000) and Gillies (2006) might term, 'emotional capital', that is the mother passes down her learnt experiential knowledge, the 'hot tips' that their children could take with them to avoid or cope with the same disadvantages that they have faced.

As Kirsty suggests, it is not only the mothers and adults that have to make sacrifices, but the children too. It was recognised by Narissa, Skye and Julie that the stigma and shame of homelessness prevented their children's friends from visiting and the lack of space made it difficult to 'have their friends over for tea' (Narissa) as they once would have. This had a negative impact on the children's wellbeing and sense of belonging in and out of school, the connections they had forged previously could not be maintained in the same way and as such, they felt their relationships and support systems had weakened over time. This was a source of stress for the parents who blamed themselves for this and lamented the loss of friendship on their children's behalf, acknowledging that they needed a social outlet for any pain they had suffered. Friends were seen to provide entertainment and freedom from the trauma, an escape, and without this, Narissa and Julie in particularly, worried that their children would 'bottle everything up' and generate irrevocable damage. The loss that they had experienced had been felt and could not be undone, the feelings linger and maintain their affect in the 'feeler'. Two of the women that I spoke to have now secured permanent housing (Julie and Kirsty) and have stayed in touch to provide me with updates on their experience of this transition. What remains, so strongly, in their narratives is a sense of guilt, of precarity, uncertainty and gratitude. They note that these affects are also apparent in their children's lives, in their demeanour and in their engagement with schooling. The disruption to their education lasted long after they had 'settled' in their new schools after relocating for housing. It guides their approach to education, to relationships, to life. The 'shame' of being homeless makes its way into the way women carry themselves, the feelings that are fostered here do not disappear once housing is secured, there is a sense that they needed to remain vigilant, that homelessness is around every corner and that everyone knows they are, or have been, homeless. Homelessness also provided a motivation for the mothers and children to do well and not experience this situation again.

Many of the women noted that one of the biggest losses that they experienced was that of space, in the quest for safety and escape from many forms of domestic violence, they had left their family homes which had become a space unliveable and no longer seen as a home. The resultant space that they occupied was, in all cases, much smaller and more densely populated than the house that they had once called 'home'. I shall now turn to explore further the negotiation of space whilst living temporarily in other people's homes.

4.3.3 The Affects of Space Negotiation

Here I explore the neglected micro-territories that exist when occupying space in other people's homes and how these semi-available spaces within other people's houses, impact on children's educational engagement and the wellbeing of mother and children. Much like in the recollections of moving into temporary accommodation in McCarthy's (2020: 1322) study, whose participants found the experience to be "fraught with apprehension and strangeness", it became evident in this study that homeless, specifically sofa-surfing, mothers were forced to choreograph the process of maintaining a homework routine under intensely pressured, changing and 'until notice' residential conditions. Daily routines of mothers and their children intersected with the everyday practices of their hosts and often required a negotiation of conflict or space management in relation to their hosts.

The space available to each woman and their agency to act within it varied greatly from person to person, some had a room of a house in which they stayed, some had a sofa and for Skye, she had a shared twin room in a hotel with her daughter. This shared space, she stated, was initially exciting to her, there was a sense of "oh my god, we're on an adventure", but the novelty of sharing a small hotel room quickly wore off, with the lack of space, privacy and any sense of ownership being recognised as key issues. The limited amount of space meant a significant amount of 'making do', utilising certain areas for means beyond their intended use which meant the boundaries between work and leisure, necessity and frivolity, public and private, became blurred. Workspaces had to be cleared to make way for food preparation and beds had to be given up to play. The amount of recalibrating they had to do to adjust the space and themselves in an instant, led to frustration, a feeling of being, as Skye put it, "suffocated by someone in your space constantly" and yet feeling entirely alone and isolated in the struggle. It was a practice, Skye assures me, that was absolutely exhausting and pushed her near to her limits. It made it very difficult for educational practices to be conducted in that place, the work had to be completed on the bed, though these were not big enough to relax in, let alone to create an environment conducive to learning.

It was not only misappropriating space beyond its intended function that cause disruption to homeless women's lives, Narissa and Tess felt that their children's personalities and energies were being supressed by the knowledge that they were in someone else's house, whether that was directly expressed to them or not, it was the mother's belief that they were duty bound to minimise the impact they had on their host's home life. This was achieved in multiple ways, by: trying to quieten their children, taking up as little space as possible, acting in accordance with the host's needs and a significant effort to be as undetectable in their living space as possible. In these narratives, there was an implicit consideration for what this suppression would do to their children's self-esteem, confidence and life beyond this period of homelessness. It was a consideration that added to the mothers' sense of guilt but also was seen as important, there seemed to be a collective belief that their stay in these people's homes was contingent on their ability to keep their children quiet and 'well-behaved'. In this way there was a sense that their parenting was being monitored and highly scrutinised in the presence of other adults that they were living with, which was framed as angering and demeaning and worked to further embed the belief that they were 'bad' or 'failing' parents. Whatever they believed or practiced in their parenting, there was always a question, a doubt about whether or not they were getting it 'right', but none of the women had a clear idea about what the 'right' thing ought to be, nor did they trust their host's opinions on parenting strategies or believe that their host had the right to comment on their parenting but they held in the stress that this brought to avoid conflict or confrontation.

As well as adapting to living life in a house that was not their own, the women and their children had to navigate the relationship and spatial dynamics of those that they were living with. For Tina, this constant consideration and having to be continually alert to other people's needs ahead of those of herself and her son was anxiety inducing:

> "You're just always being a pain in the arse, if you wanna get a cup of tea…what if they were about to go in the kitchen to get themselves a cup of tea and now I've just got in their way, it just makes me anxious."

Tina expended a significant amount of energy in anticipating her host's every need, every move and second guessing their thoughts, projecting her insecurities onto her host and convincing herself that she was "in their way" at all times. It was the soundtrack that scored Tina's thought processes and though she had not had any confirmation that her hosts had felt this way, in fact she tells me that they had stated the opposite, it did not feel any less true and totally controlled the way she accessed the space she was occupying. For Julie the shared space became problematic for her and her son when they realised that there were not many doors in the place that they were staying in, meaning that Julie had to shower metres away from her son, without a bathroom door to pull shut. This did not seem to distress Julie for herself, but for the sake of her son's mental wellbeing:

> "Well he's 15 nearly 16 and he's having to listen to his mum going for whatever she's doing, which is, you know, uncomfortable for me but as an older person you know, you experience life and it's not quite as embarrassing as it is for a teenager, because I'd be mortified if I was him."

She explained that whilst she was worried about the lasting effects that this experience might have on her son, she was also relieved to have moved him away from a man that was violent towards him:

> "I remember going up to my son's room and I couldn't open the door, he was right behind it and anyway I eventually got him to open it and he was absolutely sobbing his heart out 'cause he hated him [her ex-boyfriend], cause he…he wouldn't let him eat anything! He wouldn't let my son eat anything and he's diabetic!"

The sacrifice of space then, was compared to the sacrifice of her son's health and happiness that could potentially have occurred should they have stayed in their ‘home’, and so the ‘awkwardness’ of their situation didn’t seem like much of a sacrifice at all in comparison to what they had previously endured.

‘Awkwardness’ was, however, a major element in all of the women’s lives: from feeling uncomfortable sleeping on the sofa in a room that all who lived in the house had to pass through, to being present when the people that they were staying with were having arguments in front of them. All of these occurrences led the women to feel even less connected to the space that they were staying in, and moments of awkwardness brought to the fore the lack of control they had over life decisions at that time. Things that had previously been taken for granted, like a good night’s sleep or being able to move away from tension created by others, were now impossible to achieve and could not be done without a slew of internal questions and deliberations, as Narissa captures:

> “I just feel so uncomfortable even with the bedding and things when I have to sleep in the front room, I get so so anxious, what time can I get the bedding out? Do I ask them if I can go to sleep? Do I ask them to leave their own living room? Do I just hint that I’m tired? If I get the bedding out are they going to take that as me wanting to go to bed? Is that rude? When I wake up when do I put the bedding away? Can I leave it a minute so I can get ready first? Or do they want me to put it away immediately? Where do I put it all when I’m not using it? Is it ok there? There are just so many questions running through my head like boom boom boom boom, all at once and I get anxious I’m getting it all wrong.”

The feeling of ‘getting things wrong’ was apparent in all of the women’s accounts and was unrelenting, constantly making the women question themselves and every single action they made, introducing obsessions, stress and uncertainty relentlessly into their lives.

Private activities, such as giving their children affection or changing their clothes, were now happening in ‘public’ spaces, that is, space that was also occupied by their hosts, or in spaces where their hosts could possibly enter at any moment. This potential for an intrusion on their limited space meant that participants felt it necessary to be constantly vigilant and so moments of relaxation and peace were few and far between. This, I am assured, is exhausting. The choreography that was involved in these actions took up a lot of the mothers’ energy, they became watchful, with a heightened sense of anticipation in their efforts to try and pre-empt what was needed from them, or what might provoke a sense of annoyance from the people that they were staying with, or when they were best placed to steer clear of the house altogether.

In an effort to minimise the disruption they felt they were causing, the achievement of homework and other education practises becomes a balletic and highly changeable set of routines that were open to frequent disruption. The contemplation of the future was not only discussed in terms of housing and finding accommodation but the long-term plan for their children’s education, career and life into adulthood. For the majority of women that I spoke to, education was seen as the lynchpin of all success, a good education meant good prospects in the job market, but crucially, meant lessening the likelihood of a return to housing precarity and homelessness. Educational success has long been regarded as a vehicle for upward social mobility that provides a ticket to a ‘better’ life (The Equality Trust, 2023; DfE, 2017, Friedman, 2014). Despite many studies demonstrating that upward social mobility through education is not guaranteed, and is, in some cases detrimental to working-class students who struggle to emotionally and socially reconcile their past experiences and new expected behaviours and identities through upward social trajectory (Reay, 2021; Friedman, 2016; Loveday, 2014) , this belief, that a good education could outweigh the negative impacts of poverty and precarity, still prevailed within the minds of the women that I spoke to. Mothers felt that if their children secured a good education now, the mapping of their lives, with success as its destination, would be inevitable. The decisions regarding their education, however, were informed, and often marred, by their present struggle, negotiations had to be made regarding school locality and the distance their accommodation was from the school, where the children’s friends were at school, and how much education could be engaged with due to the need to survive and secure a place to stay above all else. The exhaustion that came with sourcing accommodation, moving their belongings from one place to another over multiple moves, dealing with anxiety around how to behave and engage around their hosts and coping with the trauma of past and present experiences occupied the mothers’ minds and made its way into every decision they made, leaving little room for educational engagement. In some cases it was seen as above and beyond their role as a mother when educational input could be fulfilled by the school, Kirsty was happy to let the teachers handle the educational side of things and focus her attention on keeping her children happy and safe at home, noting that:

> “If there was a problem at school…they’d tell me. I know they’re doing ok cause if not, they’d have me in there for a bloody meeting. Beyond that, from 9am til home time, they’re you’re problem, that’s your job. It’s not my job to do that teaching.”

For Tess and Tina, always having to be prepared to move out of their temporary accommodation at a moment’s notice, on another person’s whim, meant that they are living in an alert state which made it difficult to process the benefits and consequences of long-term decisions, when the immediate needs had to be tended to in order to live safely in the here and now. There was no lack of aspiration from any of the women, each of them wanted their children to “fly as high as they fucking can” (Kirsty), or, “to do better than I ever did, to get a great job, earn money, save it, have an easy life” (Tina), but the state of perpetual crisis that came with their experience of homelessness combined with the precarity and lack of capital that they had available meant that, despite having these aspirations, there was a pragmatic approach that acknowledged there would be significant barriers to this, mentally, corporeally and spatially.

Inhabiting other people’s houses had a direct impact on education in the lack of space available for them to utilise for educational purposes, this was highlighted as a concern for many, but Tess focused particularly on the wall space being clear but not ‘hers’ so therefore, was not considered useable: “I used to have all posters on her walls, like counting and alphabet and stuff but I can't do that now". For others, it was the lack of surface space, in terms of desk space, that meant they believed their children's homework outside of school suffered, Ava describes this as being damaging to her daughter's learning, but also to her daughter's self-esteem and identity as a school pupil as she is "a little goodie two shoes" and had been previously "told off" by her teacher for not completing her homework on time, she said:

> "Sometimes it's like, we've got the sofa, that's all the space we've got really, that's where we sleep and eat, but obviously, like, that's their sofa…they ain't gonna stop living their lives, so they're sitting there watching TV and we ain't got anywhere to do her homework. I hate seeing her little stressed face."

The financial implications in seeking out spaces to occupy were also made clear and indicated the unsustainability of this practice "we go to, like, a café or something so she can get it done but obviously, like, I ain't made of money, so I can't afford to get us like a coffee and a milkshake to sit and do that every day." These practices of self-management and choreographing the micro-territories of homework space (laps, tables) were not only physical but also affective. Although the women had secured access to accommodation, they did not access a feeling of home nor did they feel entitled to consider these spaces their own. The micro spaces of desks, tables and laps were necessary to educational success, but not always available for occupation and other spaces needed to be sought. Spaces became multi-functional, not through choice but necessity and there becomes a silent tussle over space, with the women and children having to fall on their sword because ultimately, they feel that they have no claim on the space.

4.4 Conclusion

Housing was understood as central to a life well lived, central to a life in which they and their families could be safe, happy and nurtured, the seeds from which their wellbeing should spring; the concept of homelessness, therefore, was misaligned with their fundamental expectations of guaranteed housing and safety. Having to map out their entire lives without a secure and permanent home felt "too big". Their circumstance felt overwhelming in such a way that time was somewhat distorted, they hoped that their homelessness would not last for long and that they could once again 'return' to their previous, or what they considered to be their normal, lives and at the same time could see no definite end date for their homelessness making the time and experience stretch on and feel unending and eternal. The sense of insurmountable struggle was also internalised and enduring, perhaps due to the confusion over what their situation actually was. The stereotypes that exist around homelessness meant that many of the women had not initially considered to themselves to be homeless and were grateful to have found temporary accommodation that did not involve staying in hostels or have service interventions. The women that I spoke to however, were so much more than a stereotype could ever encompass, their routes to and through homelessness had left them with new possibilities and obstacles that they had never before considered would be a part of their lives. Their identities were now bound by rules they had not thought were meant for them, such as wrestling with the decision to reveal or conceal a part of themselves for fear of judgement, or learning how to be the recipient of someone else's hospitality and help when, in the most part, they felt they could not offer anything in return. These feelings co-existed uncomfortably within all of the women that I spoke to and dislocated their sense of self, not only because there was a significant amount of emotional labour involved in making sense of their experience, but also because the routes now available to them to manage this identity work that was now required of them to acclimatise to their new circumstance was unfamiliar and unlike any other identity work they had had to do before. The women I spoke to now had to reconcile the grief they felt over losing a life that felt like theirs, whilst outwardly portraying an unwavering sense of gratitude for others who made this 'new' and strange life somewhat easier. But social relationships had become increasingly transactional, friends were 'used' to meet their needs and friendship bonds were strained by one party needing something, in this case, accommodation, from the other. In some cases the women resorted to gentle forms of manipulation to ensure that an offer of housing was made from their friends, they looked inwards to understand what would make themselves offer a space to someone in need, such as a child being desperate or in despair, then employed this as a strategy to gain entry to spaces people were reluctant to offer up. They were acting in ways that they had not had to before and felt some regret over this becoming necessary, but now they had lost their homes new rules for survival had to be enacted.

The losses that the women felt were not just for their physical home or the memories they associated with it, but for the stability that these spaces had once provided. The transient nature of their current living situations meant gathering up and moving their whole lives when given notice to move on which were always given informally and frequently given at very short notice. The majority of the mothers had spoken of their desire to minimise the disruption to their children's education throughout these multiple moves, but the physical and emotional exhaustion took their toll on the mothers and the children and made any ability to engage with education strenuous. It was evident that there were strategies at play to provide the best care possible to their children and continued to have high aspirations for them but felt constrained by the options available to them in their current circumstance. This was particularly true in relation to education. The mothers had described their efforts to continue a meaningful engagement with their children's learning and spoke of the continued invisible labour involved in seeking out space for home education (Hutchison, 2011), but as well as the prolonged tiredness they were all feeling, education was often also disrupted by the urgency of their housing crisis: survival through finding a place to stay had to be prioritised over all else. Where the women had successfully sought out accommodation that was suitable, or at least liveable, in the short-term, their agency to commandeer the space for educational purposes was limited. Living in someone else's space meant that access to space had to be constantly negotiated, for sleep, for eating, for leisure and for learning. Where so much of the English education system depends on homework and coursework done outside of the school gates, this provided a significant challenge for those who found it difficult to ask for, or assume, space in other people’s houses to complete this. In many cases, space was already being used for activities beyond their intended purpose and a designated space for work was not usually readily available. This meant that homework was being completed on laps on the sofa, in cafes outside of the hosts house, or in kitchens where it would need to be put away to give the space back to the home’s occupier who required the space for its original function. In many cases, the host was not overt in asking the women to put their children’s homework away, but the feeling of being ‘on edge’ and careful seeped into every area of their lives, they were cautious not to disrupt their host’s lives and to take up as little space as possible to avoid being asked to leave prematurely. Living homelessly and in other people’s space meant living cautiously and overthinking every micro-decision that was made.

This chapter helps us to understand that through ‘sofa-surfing’ forms of homelessness accommodation situations become transient but that the feelings and affects of living in this way can be long-lasting. The implications of being homeless can extend far beyond the immediate with detrimental effects on mental and emotional wellbeing and children’s education and yet, the women that I spoke to who were experiencing this form of homelessness, remained resolutely ‘grateful’ that their situation was not worse. For many of the women that were sofa-surfing, there was a reluctance to seek help through official channels due to the unknown and assumed dangers that this would result in; either the involvement of social services in the lives of them and their children, or being placed in a hostel until somewhere permanent could be found. Multiple moves between different spaces belonging to people that they had some connection to was seen as preferential to occupying a hostel space which existed in their imaginations as places of danger, depravity and for ‘real’ homeless people, which in many cases, they did not consider themselves to be. This did not seem to be based in first-hand experience, but was informed instead by the wider social discourse that positions homeless people, and therefore hostel residents, as ‘sick’ or ‘sinful’ (Gowan, 2010) and to be avoided. Through this study however, I spoke with women who were residing in hostels and I shall turn now, in chapter five, to an exploration of how it really felt to live within these spaces.

5. Life in Someone Else's Hands

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter explores the stories of women, and their children, who are living in hostel or supported forms of temporary accommodation and considers how children's education is affected by such an experience. These women were in receipt of council or welfare assistance in some form and had sought 'official' help in relieving their homelessness. Every woman included in this chapter was considered as 'statutory homeless', that is, legally homeless through no fault of their own and whose local authorities had a duty to help them find a safe, permanent place in which to reside (Housing Act 1996, Homelessness Act 2002, Homelessness Reduction Act 2017). Though the title of 'homeless' was not necessarily one that all of the women within this study would use to describe themselves, it is used throughout this work to encompass the broader understandings of homelessness and exclusion from housing systems that do not only include 'street homelessness' (Busch-Geertsema, 2010; Somerville, 2013; Fitzpatrick, 2005). Categorising people as 'homeless' helps us to understand, in policy terms, what assistance is available and where resources are lacking for different forms of homelessness. I start by presenting each woman's narrative in an ethnographic style, before moving on to draw out emergent themes across the data and the intersections with existing research in 'the need for normality' section.

5.2 The Accounts of Women Residing in Hostel Accommodation

5.2.1 Charlotte

In a small room along a long corridor I set up my Dictaphone, and hear the faintest tap on the door, on the other side, Charlotte. She stands, nervously peeking her head around the room before she enters. Charlotte is a small woman in her late 20s with a life history she says is "a bit madder than most people!". She has previously lived a life that she asserts is no longer hers, she was "a different person back then", caught up in "chaotic" incidents, largely, she believes, due to her use of drugs. Since becoming sober she has strived to create a life that somewhat resembles 'normality': "I try and make things as normal, well you know, what normal is supposed to be I guess".

Charlotte has lived in the hostel for over a year with her two daughters who are 14 and 6 and credits the prolonged hostel stay with bringing the family closer together as they came to it in a disparate state. The abuse that she and her children have suffered has had a significant impact on Charlotte's ability to situate her present decisions in a wider life plan, she notes that this has improved greatly with support and assistance for those who work at the hostel. When she first arrived at the hostel, she found self-motivation and focus difficult, she tells me: “I was still in a weird headspace where I just couldn’t focus on what I was supposed to be doing and I just couldn’t make myself do anything”. Those who worked at the hostel (whose accounts will be presented in the next chapter), were seen as a vital to Charlotte’s mental health recovery and her ability to reintroduce some structure and clarity into her life that allowed her to prioritise in a way that she was happy with and that benefited the future of her and her children. Though she has now reached a point where she feels the staff intervention could be removed, or at least, significantly reduced from the initially high input levels, the comradery and friendships her and her children had found at the hostel were viewed as highly beneficial. Interacting with other children who were experiencing the same thing and the hostel staff worked to throw the children birthday parties, gave educational input and advice and set up activities such as ‘film club’, it was a way children could connect to each other that allowed them a semblance of the familiar in unfamiliar circumstances:

> “So yeah even though it’s a bit shit that I have to be here, I think it’s nice and lets the kids have a bit of normality and grounding in a strange sort of way.”

When Charlotte recounted her experience of economic and social struggles throughout her life, especially growing up, she frequently followed this up by offering: “That’s not an excuse”, putting the responsibility for anything she saw as a ‘failure’ firmly back on her shoulders. Life experience that precluded precarity were diminished in her retelling, suggesting she felt that whilst negative events due to structural inequalities happened to, and around her, her circumstance felt like a very personal, negative reflection on her own decision-making practices. She feels at fault for factors outside of her control that informed her previous choices. The guilt that she carries for how she “made her children feel”, clearly weighs heavy on Charlotte. She recognises past events, behaviours and activities she had partaken in that ultimately led to their current homelessness, have affected her children’s relationship to her, to each other and how these are reflected in their own behaviours:

> “I do feel guilty for that. Like for my kids, for putting them through that. They’ve seen a lot of things that kids that age shouldn’t have seen, you know. And you can see it in them now, you know, they act out or whatever and throw things in my face… for example will be like: ‘You can’t tell me what to do, I looked after her when you were smoking crack!*’* and it’s true you know, I can’t argue with that, but I think it means she doesn’t think she’s a kid anymore, cause like, I put that responsibility on her. I feel like I took away her childhood, which is shit and I hate that, but it’s what it is.”

The affect of this trauma she anticipates, will be long lasting; a childhood seen as ‘lost’, and stained with memories of neglect, abuse and adult caring responsibilities, it was an experience that impacted upon every area of her children’s lives: “they get angry sometimes you know and then there are things like, they cry a lot, they wet the bed, find it hard to talk to me sometimes, get naughty quite a lot”. Although, she tells me, her eldest daughter “bloody loves school”, this behaviour does sometimes get in the way of her engagement with it and she is often called into the school to talk to the teachers about their ‘disruptive’ behaviour.

But the experience of struggle and homelessness was not seen as wholly negative, Charlotte saw this as somewhat luminating for her children: “it builds character I guess, you know, they’re empathetic to things which they maybe wouldn’t have been before…They’re brave kids. I’m so proud of them.” This seems to feed into the ‘resilience’ narrative, that one must shoulder the burden of stress and only the strong ‘cope’, positioning anyone who cannot or does not ‘cope’ as weak and ‘failing’, once again reducing social struggle to individual, internalised, success or failure.

All of this made her feel as though the ‘mum’ identity was one that she had not earned “I didn’t really know how to be a mum, it’s just not in some people…I fucked it up pretty bad didn’t I?” Though there was this expectation of what a mother should be, a pressure to meet a certain social demand in fulfilling this role, it remained unclear to Charlotte about what this should be and her only thought on this was that, whatever it was she was getting it ‘wrong’, when I asked her what the ‘right’ thing was she was not able to clarify this in concrete terms:

> “Ohh I dunno. Um. Taking care of them yourself, you know, not needing help – I’m getting there – but loving them unconditionally, giving them food, a place to live, keeping them safe… I didn’t really know how to be a mum, it’s just not in some people.”

Through Charlotte’s narrative, the notion of ‘getting it wrong’ continually resurfaced, but she was never able to clearly determine what ‘wrong’ actually was; the concept was elusive and foggy yet was felt absolutely. Much like the experiences of those ‘sofa-surfing’ or staying with friends and family, there was an ‘awkwardness’ that seemed ever present, arising from the uncertainty about what was being expected of her whilst living in conditions determined by others. I got the sense that Charlotte was always determined to ‘prove’ herself but remained unsure as to how to succeed in this endeavour. Seeking external help for personal issues was seen as ‘wrong’, despite the help she had received being credited with her recovery and ensuring her children had access to a life she considered to be better, suggesting that the sense of being in the wrong were, at times, determined by how other might perceive her, rather than always believing she had taken the wrong course of action. Reflecting on how far she feels she has come, she offers: “I’m getting better I think… we’re getting there”. She attributed her perceived personal growth and success to ‘help’ offered by the hostel and hostel workers:

> “I do like it here actually. They give you stuff to do. They’ll come and talk to you and like discuss how to meet your goals or whatever. You know, like, you make a plan when you get here about like, how to find somewhere to live, how to you know, deal with all the stuff you’ve got going on...give you all sorts of parenting tips and stuff to make you better, so you can do better for them.”

Her participation in these activities was a condition of her stay but “they really help” she says. Not only did she feel supported in terms of parenting and the challenges that come with that, she also felt that occupying the space in the hostel provided a financial safety net that was not available to her through private rental properties. The administrators of the hostel were seen as more understanding and capable of considering personal circumstances, that were seen as wholly absent in private landlords who were seen as callous and uncaring:

> “If you have financial stuff or you can’t pay the rent or whatever then you can talk to them, it’s not like they’re going to kick you out of here. You know, like before I was in a flat and the landlord was a bastard and I was like 2 or 3 months behind with the rent and they kicked me out, like with the kids?!”

Staying in the hostel had, in fact, provided Charlotte with a sense of safety that she had not been afforded previously: “which is, like, the most secure we’ve all been in a really long time, so I’m grateful”. Home was much more than the comfort of bricks and mortar and she arguably felt more ‘at home’ here with the sense safety that the shelter invoked than she had done in the insecure and unsafe circumstances that she had found herself in before. Despite this, she asserts: “it’s not home home” because, although the hostel allowed for a moment of relief, a period of time in which Charlotte could focus on her and her children’s physical and mental wellbeing, it was not permanent and seemed to foreshadow a future in which she must return a life of precarity and uncertainty when she would have to return to the mainstream housing economy, a thought that instilled a fear of leaving.

Charlotte has for a very long period of her life, been left feeling that she is unable to trust her own decisions, relying on other people to tell her when she is getting things, such as parenting, right or wrong. She considered her “chaotic” homelife not only to be detrimental to her children’s wellbeing, but a source of shame for them all, especially for her children at school: “At school people noticed, I think the kids and the parents just used to think we were the dirty family, a bit chaotic or not to be friends with or whatever”. In this way, Charlotte saw moving schools to one closer to the hostel, not only logistically convenient, but as a ‘fresh start’, an opportunity for her children to carve out new identities for themselves that were not overshadowed by her own drug use and lack of attention to hygiene:

> “They’re at a new school now, it’s funny ‘cause they’re not the dirty family anymore, you know…But I think a new place and a change of scenery and less chaos at home has given them more confident to go to school. Like, they can just be them, not the mess they’ve come from.”

In relocating, she considered that they had found a way to bury their past, though the affect of their experiences still dominates her narrative, they had been successful in finding a different way of presenting themselves to the world and hiding their living circumstances from those outside of the hostel, especially in their school lives. Charlotte saw education as vital now, but attributes her children’s success in this field based only on their own motivation to go, and do well, in school: “school was never my priority you know, I wasn’t bothered if they didn’t go in…”, but she tells me that for her eldest daughter, school was a safe space that allowed her to be a child, without having to care for her younger sister. It was a place in which adults, the teachers, were kind to her, which, she tells me, was not the case in their house, with Charlotte’s associates free to roam in and out of the house as they pleased, unmonitored. As she first entered the hostel, she tells me, though she was glad to have her children away from this environment, she still, at first, was not prepared to engage with schooling, and largely left this up to the hostel workers, who found her children a place at a school nearby:

> “I hadn’t even thought about it you know, I had quite a lot of other things going on, my head was just full of everything, I didn’t have any space left for thinking about thinking about school, you know what I mean? I just had to get us safe, that didn’t even come into it at the start.”

Since she has been staying at the hostel though, education has been moved higher up her priority list and she is proud to tell me that she takes her children to school every day.

5.2.2 Rose

As I approach the hostel I am greeted by a big wide grin and a friendly embrace, Rose a former dental nurse in her 30s, has been waiting for me outside. Every time I have met Rose her demeanour is the same: bright, welcoming and offering a friendly enthusiasm. A far cry, she assures me, from the Rose that first entered the hostel:

> “I must have been a right state cause I just used to cry to them all the time…Yeah, but I must have been a right state actually, you know, I never used to be that confident and I just thought bloody hell, I’m at rock bottom here, I don’t know how I’m gonna get out of this, this is it. This is like actual rock bottom, this is like a personal hell really. And I just, you know, you can’t see a way out.”

This was not the life that she had anticipated for herself and her children and the process of becoming homeless was seen by Rose as a very personal crisis, one that instilled in her a sense of dread and finality. Once she had taken up occupation in the hostel, initially she tells me, she could see no way out, the thought of a hostel was similar in Roses’ mind to a prison, a looming building that swallowed people whole and never let them out again, though she states has since come to terms with her stay here: “but I’m alright, I’m better now, I’m happy now. Happy Larry”, she follows this up with a laugh and a look that suggests she is still trying to convince herself of this.

Rose spoke of the speed at which her transition occurred. Although she had experienced problems of aggression from her husband previously, her house had always felt like home. This did not remain the case however and the aggression turned into extreme acts of violence perpetrated against Rose and as such she and her children, a son and a daughter ages 11 and 14, needed to vacate their house immediately: “he did end up actually getting very violent with me, really quite bad actually, um, so we did end up leaving quite quickly”. The suddenness of Rose’s homelessness left her little time to think about what she might find ahead of her, though on reflection she does consider that whatever she had expected, it was not what she had found. Her idea of a hostel had been informed by stereotypes or stigma, rather than experience:

> “I thought it’d be a lot worse to be honest, you know I thought if I were gonna have to go into a…hostel place that it’d all be a bit doom and gloom or whatever, but it’s actually quite nice, the staff are nice and that, uh, the place is kept clean which I didn’t… I honestly didn’t think it would be but I’m very grateful for that.”

And although she appreciates the cleanliness and welcoming environment, it was to Rose a necessity for the safety of her and her children, rather than a considered option: “I wouldn’t choose it, I definitely wouldn’t choose to live here, like it’s fine, but I’m grateful to them cause obviously, like, they keep us safe and stuff!” She expressed gratitude for the safety but not for the circumstance.

One of Rose’s first reflections on the experience of leaving her home and moving to reside in the hostel were of the things she had left behind, although, she laughs, “not the bloody husband that’s still there!” This was an aside, but Rose later briefly elaborated on the unfairness of their current living situation, that she had been made homeless whilst the perpetrator of the violence against her was allowed to remain in the home and life that they had built. She lamented many of the material objects she had left in her hurry but chastised herself for doing so: “it’s daft really… God, I used to put like, so much emphasis, you know, on the stuff that we had”. She frequently played off her sadness for her lost belongings as ‘stupid’, ‘daft’ and ‘silly’, but the belongings were not only longed for because of their functional use (though the garlic crusher was), but the sentiment attached to them, for her the potpourri she had on display in her old home was a dream and an ambition realised:

> “I had all my potpourri, which is something from when I was little, which is stupid actually, but I always wanted it. And it seems like old fashioned now you think about it but my mum always had it, and she would get it out when there were visitors and I would just think it was the poshest thing in the world (laughs). So like, you know, that was me, that was my little dream, when I was a kid, obviously like…dream big, but no, it was a thing that was like aspirational for me really, cause she would, she’d get it out when we had visitors or guests over or whatnot and it would be a thing about getting it out and…you’d, you’d put it in the posh bowl, you wouldn’t put it in like, it wouldn’t be in nothing, it would be in a nice bowl that she had for it to go in, and in my house, I had one that was just out.”

The memories tied up in the first potpourri bowl she owned that made her feel as though she had “made it” were irreplaceable. Although she did miss the items she discussed they also seemed to represent her shift in self-perception; before, she was a ‘homemaker’ that had the time, space and inclination to invest in making her accommodation somewhere comfortable and suited to her tastes, and now, saw herself and her space as not currently worth investing in, it was as though her life seemed to be on ‘pause’ because she did not have a home of her own: “so I’m hoping that like a decision gets made sooner rather than later really so that we can just crack on”. Her housing search, as she saw it, was considered to be in other people’s control and she was reliant on those people to resolve her homelessness but had little ability to influence the time in which it took them to find her and her children somewhere permanent to live; until that time, she just had to wait.

Though she was anxious about the length of time that she had been staying at the hostel and remains eager to secure safe and suitable permanent housing, Rose felt her experience of working through her distress was in some ways useful to others who were new to homelessness and the hostel itself:

> “When I see people coming in here like that now I just try and tell them, it’s not gonna be like this forever. I think that is a nice thing here actually, you know, we’ve all got that thing that we’ve been through and it might not be the same but it…it is sort of similar and we’ve got that and you can see how far I’ve come and I’ve got like the people who’ve been here longer than me and I can see how far they’ve come.”

Inspiration to support others and be inspired by those who had gone through this process before her was found despite the uncertainty that clearly underpinned her thoughts. When she returns once again to the waiting she faces, and her own unclear housing path, she drew on the knowledge that she had seen other women be successfully rehoused out of the hostel: “You can’t see a way out of it in the moment but it does get better and I’m *sure* it will get better you just don’t know how long”. The sense of constant waiting seemed to distort time and made decision making about their life and educational trajectories complicated and hard to navigate.

In this time of waiting and anticipation, Rose was reluctant to decide about her children’s schooling in the long term as she was not sure where she would be living and did not want to move her children multiple times. The hostel had recommended a school close to their building, offering to assist with the children’s school move, suggesting that this would be the most beneficial plan of action or the children’s education. This though, seemed irresponsible and detrimental to their education in Rose’s eyes, she was informed that other mothers regularly moved their children from their “old schools” in favour of a school in closer proximity, a practice that she found to be confusing and ill-informed when made by others. The *temporary* nature of temporary accommodation was quite clearly informing Rose’s perception of this whole experience. For Rose, her children’s education was seen as pivotal for their future success and any disruption to their education was seen as negative:

> "Cause it's important innit? Education? It's like the main thing in life, you know like, without an education you're not gonna go far are ya? So I wanted to make sure that area wasn't disrupted, I didn't wanna screw up their education, it's important."

She had previously worked, prior to her children starting school, to find out which school had 'good' results, which was a 'good school', and although she played this down "It wasn't like…I'm not saying I did the world's like, most thorough research on it or whatever" but she had invested her time and efforts into exploring the question: "What's the best one [school] I can get my kids into?" and did not want these efforts to be wasted and for her children to attend a school that she did not feel that would be as 'good' for her children. Her knowledge was based largely on information communally gathered and shared with other parents in her friendship group in her local area, the parents used each other as a trusted resource and now outside information, namely from the hostel, was not as trusted as her previous sources. Her friends knew her and her children personally, whereas Rose did not believe this was the case for those who worked at the hostel and as such, the information was not considered as valuable. Maintaining their place at the same school they had always attended was understood as a way of giving her children a sense of normality in a strange and seemingly unpredictable circumstance and ensuring there was as little disruption to their educational engagement as possible:

> "Yeah, they're still at the same school, yeah, you know, like everything was so up in the air that I wanted to keep things as normal as I could for them,…mainly so they still had the same teachers and friends and whatnot, like they can go to the same place, see the same faces and they're just like comfortable with it, rather than uprooting everything which had sort of been done in every other area of our lives really, like suddenly dad wasn't there no more and then mum's a bit sad *(laughs)* and then like, we've gotta move house but it's not to a proper house it's to this, to this place and there are gonna be staff there, do you know what I mean, like, it was really different for them to get used to."

Rose's priority is, and always has been, her children's happiness and is fundamental to every decision she makes: "that's the most important thing to me really is that me kids are happy". She recognises the amount of time that school takes of her children's lives and so endeavoured to safeguard their experiences in these spaces, protect their happiness in the school that they had come to know and love and keep some consistency in the friendship groups her children found support and joy in. Deciding to keep her children at the same school was Rose's way of accomplishing this, but this was not an easy practice to keep up as she found the gruelling journey each day fairly difficult, she stated:

> "It is difficult. The travel especially, honestly, it's like 3 buses we have to take and the cost of that, you know, me and the two kids to get 3 buses twice a day, it's a bit ridiculous to be honest, like it's become unaffordable, like, it's actually really

> expensive, actually bus travel these days, I used to think it was quite cheap but we haven't got a car anymore we had to sort of get rid of that and all but yeah, that is…to be honest, it's ended up to where I've been like cutting back on other things to make sure that I can afford to get them to school, which is like…no way to live really is it?"

Rose also spoke of the sacrifices she and her children had to make to ensure she could get her children to this school. She spoke of giving up their car, not being able to afford a 'treat' such as McDonald's in favour of a bus fare to get them to and from school, noting that their satisfaction in the immediate present was sacrificed for their future success:

> "You know like, you have to do like, a big dinner, and then like, try and…ration it a bit cause it's like, 'I can't afford to feed you a big dinner of what you want'… like I can't afford to go to Maccie's all the time like, I'm sure they'd rather have a treat than school but like I keep telling them, their education's important!"

Staying firm in her decisions to keep her children at the same school, despite the difficulties, could be understood as a way of taking back some sense of control over her and her children's lives; she had a choice and she is exercising it. There was very little in Rose's life that was certain or in her control and it was important to her own personhood to maintain some sense that she had agency over areas that she considered to be significant and valuable.

5.2.3 Malia

Malia, a South Asian woman in her 40s was, for all the time that we had spent together, very quiet, she avoided participating in the communal activities that others took part in and largely kept herself contained within her room with her children. She spoke briefly about the shame she felt in letting her parents down, drawing on cultural understandings of success and failure to describe why she could not turn to them for help:

> "They wanted me to be a doctor or a scientist, or even work in the business world. They really wanted me to do something worthwhile and thought that me living in England would have secured that, but…well that was a long time ago and was not to be, but I don't want to let them down. I tell them I'm doing well. My father is ill so they can't travel anyway, they still live in India, so I don't have to tell them I'm here, I don't have to break their hearts. I just tell them all is well."

Malia felt alone in her struggle, her homelessness was causing her a secret shame that she felt compelled to conceal for fear of disappointing her parents. She had internalised the expectations put upon her and could not bear to disclose to her parents that she had not lived up to these expectations. But it was not only the imagined reactions to her homelessness that Malia was apprehensive of, instead, she lived in a state of constant unease on a much wider scale:

> "I'm just scared you know, all the time, I just worry. I worry I've messed things up for my children you know, their house is gone, their school is gone, their friends are gone, we've got no money and we don't know where we'll end up. This is not what we imagined. It breaks my heart, because I know that this situation is not, you know, not a good one, it's a scary one. Real scary."

What Malia captured is the sense of enduring and always anticipated future pain through scarcity. When one lives through an emergency and a lack of resources there can be a leftover sense that they are going to be in that position again and so live with that fear beyond the immediate fear-inducing circumstance, a state that Malia captured throughout our time together:

> "When we leave, you just don't know what's going to happen, and there's no real way of ever stopping it from happening again, you know, I've not got anymore money or family here than I had last time, so who knows? I'd rather it didn't but…yeah, you never know do you?"

Her fear for her future self and future lives of her children was seeping into her present, there was a sense that she was preparing herself for inevitable crisis by worrying and ruminating on possible problems that were currently unsolvable because they didn't yet exist. This was a practice that she found exhausting and found that she expended energy in this way that would be more beneficially spent dealing with her current conditions: "it's very tiring, from morning until night, just worry and it doesn't get you anywhere, but it's there and I can't stop it, yes, it's very tiring indeed."

Malia not only had herself to worry about, but her 3 children also, she discussed how her 2 of her children had found it difficult to settle in the new surroundings and that she was worried about her children living in the hostel and being exposed to the 'wrong type' of people:

> "I just get scared they're going to be here and you know, here there are children who don't know how to behave and their parents don't tell them and you just don't want your children mixed up with dodgy people, but here you can't control who they're around, you just have to try your best to not let it happen and keep your children safe."

Malia separated herself from the other women who lived in the hostel and saw them as somewhat depraved for being there, despite being there herself. Malia's primary concern however, was the safety of her children and the exposure to other children in her place of residence was concerning for Malia. The subject of schooling, for Malia, was a highly emotive one, at moments through the discussion we paused when this became "too much" for her, and though I suggested that we move our interview on to other areas, she felt that it was an important discussion to have and stated:

> "People need to know, you know, that it's not just not having a home, that it's not just me, but it has a real impact on their lives and is something that is there in every decision I make, right or wrong, I don't know, but people need to know, please, I'm ok, let's carry on."

Following her experience of unrelenting, and extreme physical domestic violence, Malia's fear followed her in every step she took. This was especially the case for education. After she had left the marital 'home', she sought refuge in a hostel, she did, however, keep her children at the same school that they had always attended, "this was a huge mistake" she says, "my biggest regret. My biggest one of them all". Her ex-husband had waited for her to pick her children up outside of the school and stalked her, before attacking them on the street, "I was broken" she tells me, "I thought things were over, you know I thought they couldn't get any worse but then that, he just couldn't stand that we'd actually gone." Malia tells me again how much she wished she had moved their schools, but asserted that she wanted her children to have a sense of familiarity and normality in highly unusual circumstances. "They tell me it happens all the time" she says,

> "Here, they say that kind of thing happens all the time, that the perpetrator can't stand the lack of control and acts like that when rejected, they say that have seen it a lot, the Dad finding out, or waiting for you and the kids outside of school because they know you will be there, but you don't know any of that, you don't know. How should I know that?!"

At this point Malia is once again overcome with a sense of guilt for a circumstance that she sees as her own fault for not removing her children from the school sooner, and although she repeatedly says that she didn't know that, I get the sense that she did not believe herself.

Malia's children are now at a different school, but she tells me of that they have only been here for a few months and are setting in well, having made lots of new friends and good progress with their studies. Malia takes no claim on their success and commends her eldest son's determination and dedication to education as the driving factor in her children's attainment, as he helps her youngest child too. Though they now seem settled, this transition has been far from easy. The attack of her and her children, not far from their schools and the stalking that preceded it had left Malia with and overwhelming and unshakable fear of being separated from her children and the dangers that her ex-partner presented. Due to this, Malia kept her children off school for seven months:

> "I just had to keep them safe, it wasn't safe and I couldn't let them go knowing there was a chance that I was putting them in danger. I just needed them close to me. I had to keep my eye on them. I had to."

This length of time that they had been kept off school had caused her son a tremendous amount of stress, worrying that he will not be able to catch up with his peers. “he’s desperate to make up for the time he’s lost”. He works incredibly hard to ensure his own success, but Malia is still aware that this experience still haunts him:

> “It drives him crazy, he is just so stressed all the time, a bit obsessive actually, I try to make him stop but he won’t, but I get so worried when he’s so upset about it, he’s so sweet and I don’t know what to do to help him.”

Safety was prioritised over education, this protection from harm was seen as entirely necessary for her and her children’s wellbeing yet Malia was still left with a feeling of inadequacy and shame for not being able to prevent her son from distress. Malia had been offered, and had taken up, support from the hostel workers to help her and her children deal with the trauma of the past attacks but feared that support would be withdrawn once she left the residence “they’ll probably just forget about us, but we will see”.

5.2.4 Nicole

Nicole used to be a good student, she assures me, she was “on the right track for everything to go right”, she’d been to university and got a 2:1 in her degree, got a job following her studies and believed that she should have therefore, had a good life. But the path to ‘success’ was not the smooth one she thought it would be. She had children with her ex-boyfriend who had lost their savings and built up debt through gambling, and turned violent when confronted about this leading her to turn to her local authority for help.

> “I had to get out of there, we just had to go, it got too much and when it was just me you can make excuses, but when he started taking a tone with the kids, nope. No. Not gonna happen. We’re out of there. He doesn’t know where we are, he keeps asking people where we’re staying but I’ve told anyone that knows not to say anything, just easier isn’t it. So I went council and asked for help and by all accounts I was lucky to get a place here, cause there aren’t many, but it was a pain to try and sort it out.”

Nicole spoke of the “annoying” process of trying to find a space available for her family that included multiple phone calls, emails and face to face meetings with advisors which left her feeling “like I was going around in a bastard circle”. Nicole tells me that she had to spend several nights at her mother’s house, with whom she has a tumultuous relationship, before they could find a place for her to stay away from them, but tells me that she felt the need to exaggerate exactly how fractured her relationship was with her mother in order to secure a space, she told me:

> “We were arguing every day, it was awful and tense and I thought the kids don’t need to see no more of this, and our stuff was everywhere which was annoying for

> us, but she wouldn’t stop going on about it and what can I do about it? Like can she see the situation?! But as long as I was there I thought there’s no way they’re going to be rushing to get me a space nowhere, so I told them that Mum was gonna kick me out and that I had nowhere else to go! Got me in!”

Nicole felt the need to ‘play the game’ showing an awareness of how offers of temporary accommodation were made. She recognised that she needed to present as entirely without access to space to be considered homeless despite the space that she was occupying seeming unliveable with constant criticism and verbal aggression. She also noted the inaccessible process for finding her space, stating that she had had to go to meet someone from the council to fill out paperwork and get in touch with other hostels and agencies, she said that having to do so with her children in tow was almost impossible as she couldn’t focus on the process, especially with her toddler who wanted to run and shout, but that she had no one else to watch her children while she did that.

Once she had found her space, the communal way of living was difficult for Nicole, who valued her own space and independence that this way of living did not afford: “God it’s a nightmare, there are just people everywhere!” but she told me she felt grateful for the space. Knowing that people were around at all times was uncomfortable for Nicole and left her with a desperation to “get back to normal!”. The irritation she found from this came at different times and was exacerbated by outside stress. If her children had homework to do on a deadline, if she was being told information she knew not to be true, or if she was forced to live amongst other people’s mess, she found herself unable to cope with the experience:

> “I just can’t stand it! I just want to tell them all to go away or to clean their shit up but I have to remember it’s their space too and that it’s not my place to boss them about but it’s really bloody hard not to! If I had a bigger space I could just stay in there and get away from it, leave them to it but the room is so small and with all of us and all of our stuff it’s too busy, too stuffy in the room, it’s not healthy for us to just stay in there.”

Nicole spoke of a certain claustrophobia that she was experiencing caused by her hostel stay, though she found comfort in the support offered by the hostel workers, she found the experience extremely difficult to navigate and ‘cope’ with. The sights, sounds and smells of other people existing alongside her in close proximity served as a constant reminder that this place was not her “home” and that intrusions in her daily life were to be expected, at least for the immediate future.

Nicole offered valuable insights but told me she “didn’t have a lot to say” and found herself overwhelmed with emotion in recounting her story so we finished I drew her interaction to a close when it was comfortable, she has confirmed she is happy for her contribution to be included, further insights from Nicole’s offerings are included in ‘The Need for Normality’ section of this chapter. We now move to discuss the narratives offered by the women in relation to their overall desire to live a life more familiar to them.

5.3 The Need for Normality

In the majority of the narratives offered by the participants occupying hostel spaces, one recurrent notion highlighted, amongst their own individual concerns, was the need for a sense of 'normality', being and becoming homeless was seen as a displacement not only from their homes but from their normality; an unplanned break from their 'real' lives. As Nicole put it most explicitly: "I just need my life back, I just need some friggin' normality again! [she laughs]". This sentiment was echoed by Rose who declared: "I'm just desperate to crack on and get back to normal". But to suggest that one needed to 'get back' to normal was an interesting concept considering that the majority of women living in the hostels had already come from dangerous, precarious situations that would be considered as 'abnormal' to the outside world that were not experiencing abuse at home. It was perhaps the case instead that the women were craving a sense of normality that had so far not been afforded to them.

Domestic violence in all its varied forms remains one of the largest reasons for women losing their homes (Bimpson, Green and Reeve, 2021) and this was the case for most of the women I spoke to who were living in hostel accommodation. Much like in the work of Brueckner, Green and Saggers (2011), the reason for the loss of the women's home was most often bound with issues of conflict, insecurity and a lack of safety, where home was not necessarily a 'haven' and as such the normative romanticisation of home and feelings of belonging were complex. Discussing her perpetual embarrassment and feelings of 'failure' over her living situation, Rose compared her circumstances prior to leaving her home, that were fraught with violence and aggressions, and her time now occupying a hostel space, Rose stated:

> "I'd rather not be in it anyway - all that happened there, you feel like a failure either way: you stay in the house and you can keep your secret from everybody what's going on in there, pretend that you're not getting battered about everyday but you still get to go back every day and say you've got a house, or, you live here and everyone knows you're at bloody [colloquial name for the hostel], either way you lose."

Rose relished the ability to 'pretend' and privately conceal her abuse, which she believed allowed her to live a 'normal' life, but living in a hostel, when our society places so much value on 'the home', meant that their 'abnormal' status was visible, public, and seemingly undeniable. In a society where almost every element of our lives are compared, measured and standardised (Davis, 1995) living outside of the boundaries of what is considered to be 'acceptable' and 'usual' for people in social and cultural space leads to feelings of exclusion and alienation. In many cases, this alienation is felt alongside the process of becoming aware of how one is viewed by others, especially if that does not reflect one's own self-perception, sparks an internal conflict.

The 'homeless identity' was one that the women largely rejected but was nevertheless effectively assigned to them due to their need for emergency accommodation after being forced to leave the place they had previously called home. Many of the women understood themselves as without home: house-less but not homeless (Preece, Garratt and Flaherty, 2020; McCarthy, 2013), they acknowledged that they were physically homeless, but not culturally or socially homeless where this ‘homeless identity’ was bound up with stereotypes and understood through a pejorative discourse of begging, rough sleeping and a lack of hygiene and agency. This identity was considered to be all consuming and, from the outside, seemingly impenetrable to change; once perceived as culturally or socially homeless, the women feared that they would never be able to escape the ‘vagabond’ imagery associated with such an existence so worked to distance themselves from this identity. It was uncomfortable for the women to be assigned this identity that felt at odds with their perception of themselves, they largely did not question how this broader structural understanding of homelessness was problematic but feared the consequences of being seen in the same light. For several of the women I spoke to, to be thought of as homeless was a far cry from who they were internally. They felt in many ways that to be considered homeless meant to be considered as ‘other’ while nevertheless not considering themselves to be different. Rather, they considered themselves to be in a state I which they were temporarily disrupted by unfortunate circumstances beyond their control. Malia spoke at length about the issues that led to her homelessness, including an ex-husband that abused her and stalked her and her children even after she had left the home. She sought refuge at the hostel for a place to stay and for safety and protection. Though Malia was painfully aware of her lack of a house, of a home, a homeless identity was not one that she associated with herself, because to become homeless was not a decision she made for her own life:

> “I’m not a homeless person, I’m not one of the Piccadilly people who are on drugs, I don’t drink, I never have, I don’t live in a tent with my dog. No disrespect to those people, but they did those things to get them there, the drugs or…I never did those things. I didn’t choose this. I’ve got a roof over my head, it’s just what happened why I’m here. I’m just…just [Malia shrugs] bad things happen to good people so they say.”

Homelessness was one forced on her, in her account, by extreme levels of domestic physical violence, financial restriction and control from an abusive ex, and a housing system ill-equipped to manage a growing homeless population; she did not choose to be here and so rejected the identity and the connotations that came with that. Malia works here to distance herself from ‘the Piccadilly people’, that is, the street-dwelling homeless people who frequent the open spaces of Piccadilly Gardens in Manchester regularly, who have been associated with ‘risky’ behaviours such as drug use and theft and who have been villainised by mainstream society in the media (Moss and Moss, 2019; Pidd, 2020). Malia’s understanding of homelessness is akin to Gowan’s (2010) sin-talk categorisation of homelessness in that she understood homelessness to be the result of ill-fated negative life choices, that there was something inherently ‘wrong’ in the decision-making practices of those who found themselves homeless and rough-sleeping. In doing this, Malia positions herself as an unfortunate 'normal' person as opposed to what she saw as an 'abnormal sinner' who she considered to have a homeless identity.

For Charlotte, on the other hand, her arrival at the hostel saw the beginnings of a feeling of 'normality'; she considers her forced departure from a life that she characterised as 'chaotic' and an engagement with service interventions, provided by the hostel, as positive and beneficial to both her recovery from drug and alcohol dependency, her mental wellbeing and a feeling of safety. Where all of the other women I spoke to wanted a return to normality, Charlotte wanted to *build* a normality for her and her children that she did not feel she had given to them thus far: "I'm trying to and make things as normal, well, what normal is supposed to be I guess", the support from the hostel staff were seen as instrumental for this to happen and Charlotte was already feeling proud of herself for the strides she had made towards this goal:

> "So these days, we get up – on our own now, the staff here used to have to help us with that, so that's good!... like the everyday things. Like making them breakfast or getting them to school. I dunno. It's better now. Before it was like, I wanted them to be the priority, I actually did, I just couldn't make myself do the right things."

Much like Malia's perception of homeless people as faulty decision makers, Charlotte saw her past-self as one of those 'sinners' who prioritised her habitual drug use over her children. In building her new normal, she felt supported by hostel workers who provided her with help in getting her children to and from school and assisted her in organising school placements. This help was considered invaluable as she no longer trusted her own decision making and was fearful of "screwing up" their life chances by not engaging with their education, acknowledging that previously education had never been a priority for her. Now, however, she recognised the value of schooling and the joy that her children were able to derive from the social space of the school. The hostel space then, and her departure from spaces in which she fell back into old behaviours, offered an opportunity to change, however difficult that might be to reconcile in actuality: "it's fucking hard though!"

Though the loss of a home was felt through the [dis]connection to material possessions (which will be discussed further in the 'longing for home' section), the experience of homelessness was much more acutely felt in the abrupt disruption to their *normal* ways of thinking, being and feeling. The women who I spoke to were reluctantly learning to live with or build a 'new normal', and there was a struggle to manage both the internal and external changes that came with losing one's home. The overarching belief that seemed to be included in all of the women's narratives was a desperate need for normality and that this human need, was at odds with the experience of homelessness and the reliance on other people to make their housing future one that is secure and soon.

Children found this sense of normality and safety in their schooling, whether that was through staying at the same school they had been at previously, or, achieving this through a 'fresh start' that allowed them to build a new ‘normal’, set apart from ‘chaotic’ experiences that preceded their homelessness, all of the mothers that I spoke to, worked to facilitate this sense of normality and comfort in every area of their children’s lives – even though they did not feel this themselves and lacked control over large portions of their lives. Teachers were often viewed as caring providers who made their children feel comfortable whilst they were in school and schoolwork, in some cases, was viewed as a distraction, an activity that children could use to ‘escape’ from the feelings that living in the temporary accommodation stirred.

‘Normality’ seemed to elude the women who lived in the hostels in different ways. They affected, and were affected by, the hostel and their homeless situation in different ways, and the hostels existed as spaces where feelings of anger, derision and safety collided with women’s bodies, or as Thrift (2004:57) put it:

> “Particular affects such as anger, fear, happiness and joy are continually on the boil, rising here, subsiding there, and these affects continually manifest themselves in events which can take place either at a grand scale or simply as a part of continuing everyday life.”

Normality was disrupted in several ways but were tied to these manifestations of affect on the minds and bodies of the homeless women. There were endless ways in which this was happening daily, but some shared concerns included: having to parent publicly and feel judged, living with the affects of uncertainty, and also in a new feeling of ‘longing’ for a home that was no longer promised. I now turn to explore these notions further.

5.3.1 Living with Judgement

In conversation with the women who were inhabiting hostel spaces a major concern that they expressed was the feeling of being both watched and judged, primarily in terms of their parenting practices. Parental judgement is not exclusive for the women in this study, for many, being a mother is already imbued with social contracts they hadn’t realised they were signing when they gave birth: from being pressured and ‘bullied’ into breastfeeding (Taylor et al., 2019) to being judged either way for their working status (either returning to work or deciding against paid employment) once a ‘maternity’ period is over (Johnston and Swanson, 2006), and being criticised for how intensely they are deemed to love their children, too much or too little is bad, children must be loved just intensely enough (Pederson, 2016). It seems there is no area of parenting that is free from critique or judgement from others. Tensions seemingly lie in the social construction of a “good” mother for everybody, particularly those whose capital and economic resources are limited and who in turn rely on social welfare assistance to live (Vincent, Ball and Braun, 2010; Gillies, 2006; Braun, Vincent and Ball, 2008). Perhaps individual to the participants in this study and homeless mothers more broadly, however, is the experience of having to parent publicly at all times; where a home traditionally demarcates the boundaries of privacy, living without a home meant that privacy was a luxury not easily afforded to them and so parenting, and all else, became uncomfortably public in nature. To maintain their place in the hostel, mothers, in their first week of arriving at the various hostels, had to complete forms relating to their overall goals and aspirations, including how they would improve their parenting, how they would manage anger issues and employment related targets. There was, according to Jamila, a remarkable pressure to be a 'good' mother which translated into actual practical workshops, on which her ability to stay in the hostel is contingent:

> "They focus on me, on what I'm doing wrong, on what I could be doing better. How I can be a better mum, and if I don't do all of their little courses and workshops and [work]sheets I'm out, but really, I don't think anyone can be a perfect mum and I'm doing the best I can. But it's all this focus on me but then what are they doing to help the kids? It's not just me that's staying here. Some of it helps me, it does, much as I hate to admit it, but some of it does, but where is that for the kids? Just some people coming in from outside and that's hit and miss, never consistent anyway, so they can say all this about my parenting, and watch every move we make, but it feels like there should be something for the kids that are struggling even when they don't say they are."

The lack of emotional and pastoral support for her children was concerning for Jamila, the heavy interventions that she experienced were seen as inadequate for meeting the actual needs Jamila would have liked to have been addressed and instead focused on areas that she didn't think she needed help in such as her parenting skills. Having to undertake parenting classes, life skills courses and work-based activities was a concern for the majority of women that I spoke to, it could sometimes be 'patronising' according to Rose and made an assumption about their parenting solely on the basis that they had taken up occupation in the hostel. In many hostels, there are consequences for violation of the rules which are enforced through punishment (White and Wood, 2011). The rehabilitation-based model that is often in force at homeless hostels positions the recipients of such treatment as being in deficit to the ideal state of personhood that is expected for them to participate in 'normal' society, that is, a society in which people are trusted to inhabit their own private homes. This medicalisation of homeless mothers, as an object to be 'fixed', spoke to Gowan's (2010) understanding of the 'sick-talk' building and surrounding homeless identities, that is, supposing people who find themselves without a home are in some way 'faulty' and in need of professional intervention, and interaction with these services, if handled indelicately can lead to a victim-blaming experience (Robinson, 2005). This is a far cry from the Housing First model of re-housing homeless people that concentrates on providing a home for homeless people, without first making them 'prove' that they are capable of maintaining a home and family and has a high success rate of re-housing people with bespoke support packages (Bretherton and Pleace, 2015). In Manchester, the housing-first pilot ran for three years from 2019-2021 and housed over 80 homeless households with continuing support in place. The pilot has recently been extended until 2025 though has not yet received the funding to go beyond that (GMCA, 2021; GM Housing First, 2023). Though the 'housing first' model of rehoming people with person-led support has been heralded as a positive method to offer long-term housing to homeless people, the scheme in Manchester is only available for single people experiencing homeless and not open to women with children, therefore none of the participants in this study had had any interaction with the housing first services and could not choose to receive this type of support.

Whilst attempting to provide support for the mothers the practitioners working in the hostels had the potential to undermine parenting decisions and the confidence they have in their own abilities as their choices were being monitored, both formally with service interventions and informally, in the day-to-day of hostel life. When the practitioners offered advice, especially with acquiring housing beyond the hostel, to do with schooling and education, the mothers were expected to take it. For Charlotte, who had previously felt "a bit lost in life", this imparting of knowledge was beneficial and seen as a valuable resource to navigate housing and educational systems that she did not understand or feel part of, the hostel workers therefore, seemed to bridge the gap between her and these seemingly impossible to penetrate worlds.

For Rose however, the decision to disregard the practitioner's advice to move her children to a school nearer the hostel was an active choice that, in her mind, was the most rational and sensible choice to ensure her children's future success due to the temporary nature of the accommodation:

> "Bloody hell, some of these parents that come through here are putting their kids in a new school and then moving 'em on again, when they get their house and bloody god knows where that is gonna be, so it feels like sometimes you could be mobbing 'em on from their old school where they've been taken from, putting 'em in this new one then five minutes later putting them in a bloody new one again and where do they stand…that's gotta be damaging to their education hasn't it!?"

However, keeping her children in their previous school incurred a high cost in bus travel and, as she had been advised *not* to keep them there, she was reluctant to ask for support in paying for their bus passes, even though this was something that the hostel offered. Rose imposed her own sanctions for not following the guidance they had offered.

But also key to her decision making practices was a consultation with her children, especially when it came to which school they wanted to go to: "it's their lives innit? It's their time they've gotta spend there, it's not my eight hours out of the day, is it? It's theirs. So if they wanna stay, it's not really my choice to take 'em out." This was the only time that any of the narratives included a direct conversation with their children and gave them an equal stake in the choices about their own desires for their educational experiences.

Where the hostel workers were sometimes seen as helpful bureaucrats, who, according to Nicole: "…help loads", they were always seen as distinctly separate to the women who were living with the effects of financial and housing precarity, Nicole continued:

> "They're lovely, won't say a bad word against them, but…they don't get it, really, well…they haven't been through some of that stuff, so they can help with your paperwork and everything, but they don't know. You know?"

It was in fact other women in the hostel that were seen as the greatest emotional resource for newcomers, which was also the case with the homeless women who shared their experiences with Tischler, Rademeyer and Vostanis (2007), who acknowledged that social networks formed in the hostels with others who had similar lived experiences were vital for processing their own continuing traumas and identifying which services were deemed as actually useful. Becoming a more 'senior' resident of the hostel was for Rose a valuable part of her journey through her homeless experience and a position which gave her a sense of pride and responsibility:

> "I think that is a nice thing here actually, you know, we've all gone got that thing that we've been through and it might not be the same but it…it is sort of similar and we've got that and you can see how far I've come and I've got like the people who've been here longer than me and I can see how far they've come. So I think that's nice to be able to…yeah…. You can't see a way out of it in the moment but it does get better and I'm sure it will get better you just don't know how long it's gonna be, but I like that, I like being able to do that for people."

Other women living there were perceived to have a real understanding of what it meant to be going through the homelessness and housing systems. These social networks were also seen as vital in imparting knowledge about the choices that they would soon be presented with in their journey without fear of judgement. When speaking to the service providers there was a sense that their choices, or their strategies to come to making choices would be judged and monitored. And though when I spoke to service providers they assured me that they were not intending to judge the women that they were working with, this judgement was nonetheless felt by many.

5.3.2 The Affects of Uncertainty

During the interviews one theme that became apparent was a sense of fear that homeless women and children are living with, a feeling that was prominent throughout all accounts. This fear was discussed in terms of their homelessness and how they felt 'terrified' at the prospect of being/becoming homeless, or in some cases living on the streets, but for most participants, the fear also went further than this feeling. A sense of fear was discussed around the participant's futures, in many cases, the perceived security of the hostel for many women lives in stark contrast to the conditions in which they expect to find themselves once they leave that place. Horton acknowledges that anticipatory effects of painful situations, that is an anticipation of an event that has not occurred but it predicted by the person, can manifest in physical and emotional distress.

Despite not having yet left the hostel, the women anticipated a future struggle that existed in their body as immediate fear. Jane, the manager of the hostel who prides herself on her giving nature and helping people, said that this is not uncommon, adding: “we’ve had people who didn’t wanna leave here, um, and have said ‘I’m not ready to go, I don’t wanna go’, but not because they weren’t ready to go, it was because they doubted themselves”, this self-doubt was often surrounding the maintaining the safety of their children, the fear of returning to old habits or behaviours and not being able to afford to live outside of the hostel and having to seek help elsewhere., as Charlotte states: “I just get anxious about leaving…you know, it’s all cushty here, then after I dunno what will happen. I just hope I can keep doing good for them you know? I’m still a bit scatty.”

Jane credits the interventions that they provide in the hostel as a great way of preparing women for independent living (though this has been contested by some participants), she wonders whether this doubt was a result of the women staying there “a little too long” and perhaps becoming reliant on the staff and policies at this hostel. But, this fear of the future, as well as worrying about leaving their current accommodation, was also linked to a feeling of uncertainty and venturing into a future unknown. Most participants worried about not knowing where they were going to be living, where their children would be going to school and an anxiety around their future living situations being left in someone else’s busy and occupied hands. Life in the hostel seemed to be dependent on others fulfilling their job roles, in providing accommodation, securing future accommodation, space maintenance and due to this, a lot of decisions were taken out of the mother’s hands, left up to other people and made from the position of these people’s life experience, as Malia acknowledged:

> “I’m just scared you know, all the time, I just worry. I worry I’ve messed things up for my children you know, if they move us somewhere outside of the city, or like, the other side of the city, then what? We won’t be able to say no will we, it’s not up to us, it’s up to…god knows…whoever, but if they just plonk us somewhere, what? So then their house is gone, their school is gone, their friends are gone, we’ve got no money and we don’t know where we’ll end up. This is not what we imagined. It breaks my heart, because I know that this situation is not, you know, not a good one, it’s a scary one. Real scary.”

The fear that Malia speaks of is broad, when women are homeless the vulnerability that they experience is far reaching. In general terms homeless women are at a higher risk of violence than the general population (Calvo et al., 2021) due to employ ‘risky’ strategies to meet their needs, such as needing to cohabit with numerous people who are unknown to them to secure a roof over their head. But this particular fear goes beyond the immediate potential violence of shared and transient forms of accommodation, this fear is not a brief moment in time, but a sustained fear of the uncertainty they face that comes with realising the vulnerability of their position through their lack of agency over where their next home might be. As Robinson (2011:21) considers the impact of homelessness on those experiencing it, she sees the process as something more than the immediate violence, but a corporeal experience rooted in loss:

> “I rethink homelessness as displacement, as a series of dislocations through which… homeless people continue to lose housing but also, and more profoundly, their bodily integrity, their existential orientation, and their habitual resources. To be homeless, I argue, is to be displaced, to be beside one’s self in trauma, grief, fear, and anger.”

Homelessness is so much more than a loss of one’s house, but a state of perpetual displacement and induces a sense of enduring pain. In many cases, where one is residing in a hostel that provides support to its residents, the rehousing takes priority and the trauma of losing one’s house and the vulnerability that is associated with it is often neglected (Brush et al., 2013). It is clear from Malia’s and other’s accounts that such trauma affects the daily lives of the people that I spoke to. They appear vulnerable to the hardships generated by the housing market, and they know that there is a good chance of them being rehoused outside of the area in which they have lived and made their connections based if they are successful in finding a place. The rehousing process, as it currently functions in many cases, often involves a sense of being uprooted, a feeling of stripping one of their foundations and support networks, where a home cannot be sought in the local area, and with significant shortages of affordable housing, this is a practice that is increasing (Cooper and Weaver, 2022). The women that I spoke to were aware of this possibility and it served to increase their fear, the future of their housing was not in their control and nor was it set on a clear path, they did not yet know what they were heading towards and this only increased the deep feeling of uncertainty and disruption held in their bodies for prolonged periods whilst they faced an excruciating wait for hope, for certainty and for security.

There are, of course, processes by which the women felt that they had some sense of control over their future housing, but even then the participants discussed how they were limited in the choices available to them, and this included both housing and education, where the rules around housing offer meant that they could ‘bid’ on housing in an online system, but could only turn down three offers of accommodation (whether they were suitable or not) to still be considered eligible for help. Many women spoke of viewing inadequate housing, unsafe housing, housing with mould infestations that were not safe to occupy, and housing outside of their local area, that they felt pressured to accept for fear that if they didn’t they would be abandoned by council services in their need for accommodation. Even when it seemed they had a choice, these were extremely limited. It seemed rather than possessing the ability to make real choices, that these women were being offered an illusion of agency over making choices in their lives.

The mothers were fearful that making the ‘wrong’ decision in regard to their children’s education, whether to move schools to a school in closer proximity to the hostel, or to keep children at their old familiar schools, would disrupt and damage their education, this choice was a highly pressurised one. The perception of education in England largely centres around the belief that we live in a meritocratic society in which upward social mobility is a product of personal hard work (Gardner, Morrin and Payne, 2017; Swann, 2013; Friedman, 2014; Bennett, 2012). When this is not achieved the individual is held accountable and structural factors contributing to educational disadvantage are largely ignored (Lawler, 2017; Allen and Hollingworth, 2013). This is a significant concern regarding homeless children's educational experience and attainment as these children are disproportionately exposed to trauma, uncertainty and displacement (Teall, 2019) that impact negatively on children's ability to engage in, and fulfil their own potential, through the strict parameters that school allows for.

For Rose, it was an inability to concentrate through tiredness, that she associated with the distance of their commute to maintain the position at their school close, that caused the disruption for education. For Charlotte however, it was the emotional and behavioural factors that seemed to adversely affect her children's education: "they find it hard to talk sometimes, get naughty quite a lot", along with other behaviours she and Rose had both acknowledged with their children "lashing out", "getting really angry" and "kicking off out of nowhere". These behaviours were at odds with those expected in the school and classroom setting, they were considered to be outside of the norm, and as such, unacceptable and resulted in social and physical exclusion for some of the people that I spoke to. There was a fear then, that the embodied consequences of living through trauma and without a home would irrevocably influence their education and so damage their future employment opportunities and lives beyond the current moment. The number of permanent exclusions from school in Greater Manchester as a whole risen by 43.4% from 2016, most often for displaying 'disruptive' or 'violent' behaviours, with children accessing free school meals are three times more likely to be excluded from schools (Manchester City Council, 2018); there was no account of the reasons for these behaviours given in the report, but the effects of poverty and precarity on children has been made clear through the narratives of homeless mothers who feel unsupported in offering their children emotional support, especially in relation to their education. The concept of meritocracy appears to disregard the disparity between the kind of stocks of capital available to the rich and the poor and which allow for such mobility, especially in the field of education (Bathmaker et., al, 2016). It can also be argued that the determinants of school outcomes are established long before the final examination results that students receive. Perhaps more pastoral care may be beneficial for children demonstrating behaviours perceived as 'challenging' in schools, rather than punitive measures that further exacerbate the isolation and alienation felt by children experiencing homelessness and other forms of instability (Holt, Lea and Bowlby, 2012), especially as many of those children and parents experiencing homelessness causing much of this behaviour, do not disclose their circumstances due to the pain of reliving their accounts to numerous administrators, and the shame that is attached to such ways of living. Charlotte was aware of these misconceptions around hostel-living and was quick to address them:

> "Living in a hostel, it ain't gonna go down well. They would think it's dangerous cause you see hostels differently, you know, like you imagine them to be all dirty and dingy and like sharing a room with other people, but this one's not like that but

> that's what they'd think. It's just like living in a block of flats."

5.3.3 Longing for Home

A prominent theme that emerged was the sense of 'waiting' that participants felt, as though, through their homelessness, their life had been put on hold, that what they were currently living through was not 'real life'. This feeling was exacerbated by the way in which the length of their stay in this accommodation was felt to be indeterminate. Such waiting was often described as generating tense and anxiety-inducing feelings, especially when each step of the process of being re-housed seemed to entail lengthy waits. Another factor that influenced the feeling of insecurity and 'waiting' was the notion that their future was being determined by other people and they had to wait for decisions to be made around them before, as Rose states, they could have "a more concrete idea of what's gonna happen in the future". Charlotte also discussed the transitional period between leaving her violent husband and gaining a place at the hostel, she notes that this was a particularly difficult time for her children as they had to wait to start school and had nothing to focus their attention on: "they were antsy and struggling and a bit lost really you know? Like they had nothing going on, you know, just at a home that wasn't their home".

There was a fear of being 'stuck' in this kind of limbo position. Uncertainty of not knowing when they would once again have a home of their own created space for mental rumination that was generative of feelings of anger, resentment and stress. The effect of these feelings on their perceptions of time was considerable. Many of the women remarked on how passages of time began to feel distorted. Experiencing a sensation that time is slowing down during stressful periods is not uncommon (Holman and Grisham, 2020). With no indication of when they would be able to leave temporary accommodation, this sense of waiting seemed to leave them with feelings of constant apprehension and contemplation of when they would be able to restart their lives again.

The knowledge of the housing crises was apparent with all of the women that I spoke to, for Jamila, it was a source of communal anxiety for her and the other women residing in the same hostel:

> "We talk about it all the time, especially us lot who have been in there a while, all like 'still here? Yeah well, no houses are there?' rah rah rah. Sometimes I feel alright and then someone'll say that and I'm like shit, I'm gonna be stuck here for life!"

The discussion prompted a renewed sense of crisis, a panic that originated from a national lack of affordable housing (Shelter, 2022) but filtered through informal conversation that was often imbued with misinformation, which was something that Nicole remarked upon:

> "You're in the kitchen at night with the other ladies and they tell you things that their Nan's Uncle's best mate told them and it gets into your brain and you start to

> believe it and then it grows and you're overwhelmed by the fact that you're probably going to be here for years and no one cares. But then you speak to them here [the hostel workers] and, no, they are on your case, looking for something for you, it just takes time to get it right."

In both of these accounts, as well as the acknowledgment of a housing system in crisis, there was also a sense of being stuck in limbo. Having to rely on affordable housing stock becoming available and having to believe that those working as part of a housing system that was already excluding them were doing all they could to rehouse them, led to feelings of uncertainty and insecurity that left them feeling emotionally unsettled and practically unable to plan their futures. They could only wait. And their waiting had no end date. In a 2022 Manchester City Council report, it was found that Manchester had higher levels of temporary accommodation use than the national average; where comparative cities such as Nottingham and Birmingham had 3/1000 and 8/1000 people in temporary accommodation respectively, Manchester's temporary accommodation use was 11/1000 people. Manchester also had lower rates of homelessness prevention: a 30% success rate compared to a national average of 58% (ibid.) and an increased length of time families were having to spend in hostels, it found that the average length of time families were spending in supported temporary accommodation was 548 days. It is therefore unsurprising that the women that I spoke to felt an overwhelming sense of dread at the length of time they could potentially be spending in a space that was not a home, over which they had little control. That their lives felt as though they were on pause as they waited to be 'homed'. Living in hostels was not anyone's ideal situation though many of the women were pleasantly surprised with the hostel spaces, they were nicer than they had expected:

> "It's actually nice, cause I thought it'd be a lot worse to be honest, you know I thought if I were gonna have to go into a…hostel place that it'd all be a bit doom and gloom or whatever, but it's actually quite nice, the staff are nice and that, uh, the place is kept clean which I didn't… I honestly didn't think it would be but I'm very grateful for that. So like, the communal areas and that they are actually really nice so the kids can, the kids can go and play and stuff in there and you don't feel like, you know, that's that's, that's not where they should be. Um, no, it is actually nice."

This sense of surprise was also shared by Malia who stated:

> "We actually have a bit of our own space which I didn't imagine, I thought we'd be in rows and rows of bunk beds or something which I think I saw in a film once, but there is an ok amount of space. They keep it clean, so it's ok. Better than I thought."

But however much they were glad that the hostel was not the awful experience they were anticipating, they still maintained that they could not make their current spaces *feel* like home. Much like with the findings of Hoolachan's (2022) study, the women focused on "place-making" practices, that is, making the spaces that they did occupy comfortable and liveable, rather than “home-making” practices, where one makes the space one’s own. As Hoolachan noted, this is difficult to do considering the restrictions that came with living in the hostel spaces, such as: no pictures on the wall, no re-decorating, sharing spaces typically reserved for private activities in many cases kitchens, living rooms and bathrooms were now often communal spaces.

As with Robinson’s work (2005) the majority of women in the hostels that I spoke to appeared to be experiencing a form of grief in relation to their former homes, their lives before they were homeless, even though this was also a memory of a life that came with feelings of scarcity and violence. This grief was displayed in multiple ways, for some, including Malia and Nicole, this loss and grief was shown through tears when discussing how much they missed home and longed for it once more, Nicole stated:

> “I just miss it, the good bits, I really miss it, I don’t know how to explain to you what it feels like? [Nicole starts to cry] sorry, [I ask Nicole if she wants to stop as she wipes away her tears], no I’m good, sorry, I just feel like I’m never going to get that feeling again, of just chilling at home, now it’s gone, I just miss it.”

For others this grief was evident in the recounting and longing for the material home comforts that were currently unavailable to them in their accommodation. ‘Things’ and possessions are key to understanding how home is experienced and understood, they can influence the feel of a place and how it feels to be within that space (Lancione, 2013). In Rose’s account, the loss of her treasured potpourri took precedence, not because she necessarily missed looking at it, but because of the way it made her *feel.* Her potpourri allowed her to ‘perform’ an identity that she did not truly believe was who she was, but who she wanted to present herself as, they items were symbolic as much as they were decorative and being without this took away part of Rose’s ability to perform the identity she wished to show to the world. On the other hand, personal items that the women had brought with them were key to making their spaces feel something *like* home, much like the findings of McCarthy (2020: 1807) who showed how: “Homeless women used material culture to cope in unfamiliar spaces and through transitional experiences. In the midst of dislocation, participants utilised objects as 'personal anchorage points'”. This was certainly the case for Malia whose room was filled with her own personal belongings:

> “Of course, I have all my photos everywhere, I couldn’t leave those behind, my girls there, all the memories. And I have my candles that I love, I collect them, I can’t light them here but I couldn’t not have them, they’re everywhere, they relax me.”

These possessions and their arrangement around her room gave her a slight sense of agency and control in the space, as well as giving her emotional familiarity that she so desperately craved. But it was not only the women who craved the sense of home through their cherished items, children also experienced a sense of loss and longing for what was left behind. In most cases, especially where there had been instances of violence, they had been forced to leave their previous homes in a hurry, which necessitated packing their belongings quickly too and forgetting items they later longed for. Even when families had not left in a hurry the downsizing of space from a house or flat to a smaller space within the hostel meant that not all of their belongings could be brought with them. For younger children these items that they longed for were largely toys that they missed, for older children this was clothing, or games, reminders of their friends and good times gone by. Whatever it was that the child missed, the overarching desire was for a sense of familiarity and comfort, of belonging and security. The anger that some children felt about their homelessness and dislocation from a sense of home but could not articulate, was sometimes attached to the grief of missing their belongings; being angry about a missing toy made sense and was more easily expressed and understood than the confusing feelings of displacement. It is also important to note, especially for younger children, the toys and play that they engage in are often beneficial to their development and education outside the formal learning that takes place in school (Shelter, 2016; Hogget et al., 2015), and not having access to these items was also potentially detrimental to their present and future education.

Personal belongings, for the women and children, were signifiers of home, and the void caused by their lack of presence was a signifier of being home-less, as were the smells and physical feelings of the spaces that were not their own, as Jamila alluded to:

> “It sounds stupid but I miss coming home and it smells like you, you know what I mean? It just smells like, familiar, or…it’s just you innit? But here it don’t smell like you, it smells like everyone, it smells like here and whatever Sharon or whoever has been cooking, you get me? That sounds stupid don’t it, but yeah I don’t love that, or like getting into your own bed with your own pillow, you get me? Like, you don’t know how good that feels until you’re here with a ratty one 80 other women have probably slept on in the last 50 years [Jamila laughs].”

What Jamila captures here is the ‘multisensory process’ of home that Burrell (2014) talks to, home cannot be understood or experienced without considering the physical sensations that it invokes. The noises of the hostel were also considered to be distracting to children’s homework engagement, particularly when this was done in communal areas where Nicole’s child experienced sensory overload:

> “So our room is a bit small and everything is crammed in, so we get out of it as much as we can, but then when you go in the kitchen, or the ‘loungey’ type area then there’s other people in there and it’s loud and they’re all doing their own different things and it gets a bit much and I’m nagging him to try and keep doing his work but the tele’s on, someone’s shouting on the phone, kids are running around screaming and someone’s burnt their toast, it’s too much, he’s got no chance! Me neither to be fair, gets a bit mad, can you imagine? [Nicole laughs]”

‘Home’ allows people to feel settled and it was hoped that living in a home of their own would positively contribute to their children’s education according to Jamila, living in the hostel had left her children “out of sorts” and “disengaged” with their schooling, and they craved a space of their own to settle into ‘normal’ routines which would be conducive to engaging in the home practices of education that were expected of them. The participants of this study were longing for a home that they could call their own and for a sense of normality and control in their own lives but were unsure when this would be achieved.

5.4 Conclusion

It is clear that the feeling of homelessness is at odds with a sense of normality. Becoming homeless had positioned the women that I spoke to as an outsider to their normal lives but was not a part of their lives that they were happy to adopt as part of their identity. It was clear that the women acknowledged that they did not currently have a home but rejected the ‘homeless identity’ that was imbued with negative stereotypes and cultural understandings of what a ‘homeless person’ is. The ‘homeless identity’ was too far removed for their normal lives to incorporate this understanding of themselves beyond this temporary experience. There was a belief that once this homeless ‘situation’ had resolved itself through permanent housing, that they would return to ‘normal’ and no longer want to be associated in any way to the feeling and stigma of being considered ‘homeless’, with many of the women choosing not to disclose their residence or housing situation to the school for fear of being associated with the negative stereotype of homelessness for the rest of the time their children were in education. Though some of the women held on to hope that this process of rehousing themselves out of homelessness would come soon, the majority of women were in many ways both pragmatic and effective in managing their emotions with the knowledge that the affordable and social housing options are limited and in high demand. Knowing that affordable housing was difficult to attain meant that there was no definitive end in sight for their hostel stay and the lack of certainty engendered a sense that their lives had been put on hold by the situation, the hostel felt like a liminal space, a period and space of transition that could not fulfil the needs of a ‘home’. This temporality, uncertainty and the lack of ownership they had over the space left women feeling disoriented in the trajectories they had anticipated for their lives.

The move away from their homes and into hostel spaces felt disruptive to both to their sense of belonging and certainty, but also had a significant impact on how the women engaged with the educational decisions for their children. The mothers that I spoke to found navigating their children’s educational journeys through homelessness difficult as there was no certainty around where they would be living or what the ‘best’ thing would be for their children. In many cases they were advised to move their children to a school closer to the hostel than where they had been previously, but with no clear insight into where they would be housed beyond the temporary accommodation, for some people this felt risky and was seen as too many unnecessary upheavals to their schooling, they worried that this would lead to a lack of consistency with their schooling and have a long-term negative impact on their educational attainment and job prospects beyond school age. Keeping children at their old schools that was not in close proximity to the hostel also had a negative impact given the time and cost it took to ensure that they could stay in these schools. There was a sense of confusion and mistrust in their own decision-making practices in this area where they could not be certain they were doing the ‘right’ thing. It was however, one of the few areas that the women could garner a sense of control in a situation that was far beyond their control and so these decisions felt more important and pressurised than ever before.

Living in a hostel space, though they provided the shelter that the women had required in an emergency situation, did provide challenges for many women. Where a ‘home’ functions as a space where privacy can be found, where the world can be shut out, this was not the case for the women who were living in these hostels where much of the space was communal. Along with the sensory overload that came with residing in a space that housed multiple families, there was a lack of privacy felt by having staff around the hostel. There was a sense that their behaviours, particularly related to parenting, were under surveillance and were being judged negatively. This extended beyond the interactions that occurred in those communal spaces and into private meetings where women were encouraged to open up about areas where they felt they could ‘improve’, they were encouraged to set targets for development during their stay at the hostels; actively working towards and meeting these targets was also largely a condition of their continued stay. For some women this was helpful and helped to support them in areas where they had previously struggled such as with addiction, budgeting and career advice. However, for many women, this compulsory mentoring felt punitive, especially when women were expected to attend sessions on parenting, motherhood and managing their own behaviours. They felt as though they were being judged, that they were being ‘fixed’, though they didn’t necessarily feel ‘broken’. Having to attend these sessions created a feeling that they had somehow failed by losing their homes and were having to prove themselves and their parenting to strangers. Living under the same roof as staff that they felt were judging them and monitoring their ‘progress’ was tense and exhausting and made many women question their own parenting abilities where they had not necessarily done so before. This judgement also extended to the mothers’ decisions around parenting and in many cases, where women were determined to exercise their own judgement about what was best for their children’s education, the advice given by service providers (usually suggesting that they should move their child to a school closer to the hostel), was seen as an unwelcome interference in their long-term planning for their child’s future and disregarded as a short-sighted solution that would further dislocate their children from both their education and their social networks. However, where support was offered with extra-curricular activities such as helping children with their homework, organising gardening or music lessons, or providing support with the school’s administrative forms, this was seen as helpful and beneficial to the children’s education and was welcomed by many.

The mothers that I spoke to, in many cases, felt that they did not need or want the support that they were being offered, but did not have the agency to reject this as their stay at the hostel depended on attending these sessions. There was also a fear of upsetting the hostel workers as these were the people who were seemingly in control of their future housing options, and where the resources were already obviously stretched in these spaces, the women were concerned that upsetting these people would have negative consequences for securing safe and permanent housing.

For many of the practitioners who were leading sessions in the hostels, the intention was not to be punitive or judgemental, but was designed to provide support and was mandated by the authorities that were running the hostel spaces. I will now turn, in Chapter 6, to explore the more direct effects of homelessness on education by examining practitioners’ perspectives to understand how teachers and people who work in homeless hostels engage with homeless mothers and children.

6. Supporting other people's Lives

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the experiences that teachers and homelessness service professionals have had when engaging with homeless mothers and children, their perspectives on the housing and educational systems and their roles within them. I first present the narratives of four professionals that I spoke to: Muna, George, Laura and Jane before turning to an analysis of the data and current debates within the fields of housing, homelessness and education. All of these interviews were conducted through online video calls as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, for a full discussion the limits that the pandemic had on the study, and the implications of interviewing online, please see the methodology and methods chapter (Chapter 3). Following the narratives I provide an analysis of the data, including contributions from further participants that I spoke to under the headings of: Policy in Practice, Expectation versus Reality, and Parental Engagement.

6.2 The Accounts of Teachers and Practitioners who Work with Homeless Women and Children

6.2.1 Muna

I met Muna online during the early wave of the pandemic, though the circumstances were unprecedented and undeniably difficult for teachers, she was upbeat in herself and kept reiterating how happy she was to be a part of a study that she believed to be necessary. Muna has been teaching English for around eight years and during that time she tells me that she has "seen too many kids struggling with this kind of thing [homelessness], it's interesting and I can definitely say it has affected and impacted their education in some way." Muna expressed a genuine concern for the negative impact homelessness was having on the students in her school, not only in the immediate classroom situation but also for the ongoing impact that such trauma and disruption would have on their futures:

> "You just wonder, what is all this doing to that kid? How is this all going to affect how they are as adults, because it has to be doing something, doesn't it? You can't go through all this, moving all the time, living with all that stress, not being able to settle at a school, not learning at the same rate as everyone else and it not have any impact at all can you? Like, there was this one lad who had been to 4 schools in a year! A year!... He did not cope at all, he could not do the work, his reading was just…really low for his age. He needed a lot of support. A lot of support, handwriting was awful, really awful. Just, his ability to sit and concentrate was non-existent and there was no SEN there… I thought this kid is never, never gonna be settled if this is just one year of his life…four new schools? Then what's next?"

The transitory nature of occupying temporary housing was recognised as disruptive to homeless children's education, Muna also offered several other examples in which children who were experiencing homelessness were deprived of the opportunity to participate in classroom activities to the same level as their peers were, through extreme levels of tiredness caused by noisy and insecure accommodation, being preoccupied with the stress of living homelessly, in some cases through the effects of witnessing or directly experiencing domestic abuse that led to homelessness, and through having to move schools mid-way through the school year. For some students Muna had worked with, as well as the example drawn upon above, this had been a regular occurrence. Even though the moves of both housing and school were seen as necessary for securing accommodation that was liveable for the family in the immediate, Muna noted that these multiple transitions through homelessness affecting children's social networks and friendships, which she also saw as concerning for the child's ability to settle and develop well; friendships could not be maintained when children were dislocated from their friendship groups:

> "He never really made friends, I noticed that, he never really made friends and I wonder if that's because he knew nothing is ever really guaranteed and so, is there any point making friends?"

The importance of maintaining friendships through schooling was seen by Muna not only necessary for personal and social wellbeing but also supported a communal approach to education; where students felt isolated due to a lack of friendships, she notices that they find it harder to concentrate and participate in class activities due to already feeling like an outsider and therefore fare less well in terms of academic attainment through formal exams and regular in-class assessments. Whilst pondering on her concerns for homeless students and the lack of choice that children have in whether they leave a school or not, she began to feel guilty about her assessment of the situation, "man, I don't want to judge anyone" she says, aware that by stating children should stay at the same school they were at, she knew she was simplifying a complicated process, one fraught with difficult navigational quandaries related to the housing system and education. Muna mentioned the dilemma she saw in the mother's decision-making practices when they were required to move on to new accommodation. In many cases she had seen families have to move out of, or to the very outskirts of, Manchester to secure a house that was both suitable and available to them or risk not being helped by housing services at all: a 'decision', she tells me, that never seemed like it felt like a choice at all:

> "I think parents feel like they don't have a choice because it's the only option presented to them. But then I also think that children don't have a choice because if they raise their concerns or whatever they're thinking…I just don't think it's taken into account. At all. When parents are really really really desperate, they're not willing to listen to what their child has to say. It's more about 'well this is what we've got right now, so we just need to go with it."

Muna recognised that *need* was prioritised over *want* in trying to find a solution to personal housing crises, a circumstance that left homeless mothers feeling withdrawn, empty and “like a piece in a game, just being moved about wherever as if they’ve got no feelings about it”. There was little recognition in the housing system for human connection, the importance of keeping the children’s educational experience consistent and the emotional weight that parents were expending on housing and schooling related ‘decisions’. Where parents were able to maintain their positions at the school and find accommodation nearby this was seen as socially beneficial for the children’s education engagement and progression, but Muna noted that there weren’t enough social safety nets to support parents when they were experiencing such moments of crisis and instead there was a sense that Muna, alongside many other teachers that she worked with, had shouldered a responsibility for providing care that went beyond the scholastic needs of the classroom. They were, in Muna’s words, “the frontline for seeing what’s really going on”, and had, on many occasions, witnessed inaction or at least, delayed action, from services that were supposed to provide such support and as such felt an obligation to go beyond their job roles to provide immediate help their students, despite their already overwhelming schedules.

> “School has always felt like ‘well let’s…can we make it *our* job to raise some money and can we make it *our* job to help that child. If we all chip in some money together we can you know, get them some equipment or, you know, some uniform, but it’s difficult because we’ve got so many students and so much work that needs doing, so you end up stretched thin, but when someone really needs help, what can you do?”

Homelessness was seen by Muna as one of the issues that needed immediate action but one that was difficult to resolve, she told me, even when homelessness was apparently ‘solved’, the effects of precarity affected the ways in which families could recover from the experience. When one student, whose homelessness had been evident for months was found accommodation with his family, Muna tells me the conditions in the new house were still unliveable and “stunted him a lot when it came to exam days”, and that the responsibility for addressing these immediate needs fell to the school and his teachers to resolve:

> “I remember school had to, maybe in 2017, we had to…school had basically had to chip money in together because they’d been given this house but the house needed carpet. It needed carpet, it needed bedding and so the school, well, a lot of the staff…there’s over 100 staff members at my school and everyone had chipped in some money to, just to get some basic furniture because he was sleeping on a mattress on the floor and the mattress wasn’t clean.”

Despite being offered accommodation, the lack of attention given to assuring quality and post-placement housing support, meant that her student and his family were still suffering the effects of insecure and inadequate living conditions. The concerns for their continuing housing struggles had not been highlighted by another agency but had been investigated by a member of staff who was concerned for the ongoing disruption to the student’s education:

> “All of this had been revealed because the education welfare officer had done a visit when his attendance kept dropping. So it has been something that has affected him all over massively.”

Though Muna recognised that all of these factors were detrimental to a child’s education, she and her fellow colleagues felt a duty to support the families where they could, but she acknowledged that they were unable to support every student and family in need of assistance. Where other families were recognised as needing additional provisions and the school could not provide immediate support, especially around housing and homelessness, Muna found it incredibly difficult to know what to do with that information. Though she knew that she had to report any concerns to her school’s Safeguarding team, there was a reluctance from the school to flag any issues to social services or other agencies, that they felt could be better resolved by first having conversations with the child’s parents and managed ‘in-house’. There was an acknowledgement of the fear and mistrust of social services from the parents who feared that any report made to them would result in the removal of the child from their home, but also a recognition that without formal interventions from other agencies, finding safe and secure housing would be more difficult to access:

> “When I do speak to safeguarding team they always are, you know, they want to trust the parents, give the parents a bit more trust and, not to say that the services aren’t great, it’s just that they’ve never really seen action from the services at all. Even when social services or any entity is contacted there’s nothing that they can do…It is such a last resort because they just don’t want to break any of the sort of relationships and bonds that they have with parents.”

The importance of maintaining a strong and trusting relationship with parents in financial distress or housing crisis was also addressed by Muna, she knew that to involve services prematurely or without serious concern would likely fracture the relationships that she had worked to build and through which she could offer the school’s support to make sure the children had what they needed. To their trust would shut down a route through which support could be offered and a supervision of the circumstance could be maintained. It appears there was a battle in Muna’s mind, a constant weighing up of options for the most beneficial outcome of the child that was also bureaucratically correct, two factors, she said, that didn’t always align.

6.2.2 George

George works in a secondary school as a Geography teacher and also the head of year 7, acting head of Geography and Safeguarding lead. He tells me that his school is located in a significantly deprived area, and as such the student’s access to resources outside of school is limited and many students have issues that they are facing at home:

> “We’re from an area of quite low deprivation, no one’s got a lot of money…we’re in the bottom 10% of postcodes, so you can imagine the type of kids we’ve got. We’ve got way over the national average for Free School Meals and Pupil Premium kids and all that... Because of the area that we live in, lots of the parents are teenage mums, dads aren’t on the scene, there’s big drug issues… They’ve all got social workers attached to them.”

Living in this socio-economically deprived area also means that many of his students live in the same council estate and see each other regularly both in and out of school, George offered his opinion of the estate as: “When I’m talking about this estate, it’s like ‘Shameless’ and it looks ok from the outside but it’s like a rabbit warren, the deeper you go into it the worse it gets”, but did acknowledge that despite having a lack of money, there was a strong sense of community amongst the residents of the estate, “they haven’t got the money so they rely on family up the road, that sharing of resources is always there” and stated that when one person struggled, someone would come to offer a safety net, whether that be in the form of providing them with food, offering to babysit so they could work, or giving the family a room or sofa to sleep on should they lose their housing. The school that George works at is in close proximity to this estate and as such the majority of children who live in that estate attend his school. He states that the ‘choice’ to attend this school is not really a choice at all. The families were not able to, or not at all inclined to, move away from the estate in search of a different school and the only other school that would be within their catchment area had a restrictive admissions policy that prevented children from the estate from joining:

> “Where they are, we’re the school that they can go to, the next nearest school is in a bit of a leafy suburb and what that school’s been quite crafty with, with their attendance is that they’re getting the leafy suburb middle class kids in and taking a token couple from the estate and then closing the doors, so that’s where the issue is, so they have to come to us!”

The close proximity of the school to the estate and the multi-generational families who lived on the estate, meant that for many students, their parents or even grandparents had also attended the same school, but George believed that this was detrimental to building a strong parent-teacher relationship, which he considered vital for a successful educational experience:

> “The area I’m in, the people who live there have lived and grew up in that area and went to that particular school and back 15/20 years ago in as an extremely poor, extremely rough, extremely behaviour challenging school but they have very negative sort of vibes not only of that school but of the education system itself. Lots of them don’t have any qualifications, lots of them don’t work and they see school as very sort of negative, so the problem is when you’re trying to engage them, it’s almost like talking to students again. You’re not talking to the normal sort of adult.

> So you've got to get past their 'Well when we were at school we did nowt and we're alright' mentality to get to thinking well no actually they do need to engage."

He stated that he found it difficult to engage parents to support and enforce his school's policies, but that once he had found a way to build a bond with parents, and once he had earned their trust, then it was easier to maintain a productive relationship with them. Even when he encountered parents who were "very anti-school" and did not engage with the school, George saw it as the responsibility of the school to encourage them to change their perceptions around schooling, but noted this as a challenging job as he viewed the parents of the students as lacking aspiration, interest and confidence to engage with educational processes: a metaphorical hangover from the poor quality of education that they had received themselves at the school years earlier:

> "There's not many aspirations from the parents because they've been let down by education 15/20 years ago. The kids are getting there, the kids have got more aspirations, the kids do want better for their lives but lots of them do need that person over their shoulder to keep nudging them in the right direction...we try a lot with this community to change their mind on what our school stands for, but the problem is, is, I mean…being blunt, these parents aren't right intelligent, so it's difficult and that is the vast majority, that is 70% of the parents easy. 70% of the parents won't work, probably never have worked and it's difficult."

It seems to be George's ambition to be an influential figure on the student's lives and contribute to their upward social mobility through his educational practices but recognised that this was difficult to do when students and their families had other circumstances in their lives that affected their ability to engage with education, such as homelessness. Homelessness is, according to George, fairly "normal" for their student population, largely due to landlords evicting tenants for rent arrears, or having to flee the family house because of domestic violence.

> "They're homeless with their parents so lots of it is rent arrears or their landlords have caused issues. They're never like, sleeping under a bridge or anything like that. It generally, what happens is they put them in the [Hotel] on the motorway at junction […] and half of that [Hotel] is owned by the council and social services and that's emergency housing."

As Safeguarding lead George is privy to information about who in the student body is experiencing homelessness but is clear that none of this information is shared with other staff in the school, and therefore teachers do not know who, if any, of their students are going through the housing/homelessness system to find a home unless they are explicitly told by the student themselves:

> "I'm on the safeguarding team and it [homelessness] is never made public…some

> of the safeguarding issues are shared with staff, but the homelessness issues are never shared with staff because we wouldn't want the staff to treat the child different or them to have an opinion on that child because lots of the time…well, obviously it's not that kid's fault, but lots of the time it's not the parent's fault, they've just got themselves into a situation they can't get themselves out of, so…and generally the kids don't want to admit it, so they cover that up well."

When I asked why George thought children felt the need to 'cover up' their homelessness, George tells me that his concerns were primarily focused on what the staff at the school would think of the situation and the judgements they would make about the families who were living through that, associating homelessness with fecklessness, laziness and somehow 'faulty', and a source of 'gossip': "I do think it's protecting the kids from some of the teachers that wouldn't understand that and you wouldn't want it turning into staffroom gossip, that 'Oh, so and so's living on the motorway.'" He was less concerned with the response from other students and acknowledged that they did not work as hard to 'cover up' their homelessness with their peers, as he believed that they would be understanding of the situation:

> "They all live in the estate, and everybody knows everybody's business, so…and I think because a lot of the kids, they've been through that themselves, they don't sort of make a deal about it because in their world they see that as absolutely normal, and obviously we don't see that as normal because we've not had to live like that but they see that, being evicted as 'oh well, they've been evicted, that's normal!', yeah part of the everyday which it is you see, in the estate."

There was not so much fear of judgement from the children when opening-up to their peers about their homelessness because there was an assumed shared lived experience, they understood that their peers who live in the same environment would 'get it', whilst assuming that their teachers might not understand this experience, demonstrating an 'us and them' dynamic between the student population and the teachers.

6.2.3 Laura

Laura is a secondary school drama teacher who, at the time we spoke in May 2020, had been in her teaching position for two years. She had a break from teaching after qualifying 7 years previously, to have her own two children. She tells me that she has now returned to the profession with a renewed passion and a sense of desire to provide the best care for children in her class, both in terms of their academic success and of their personal wellbeing, after experiencing the education system as a parent and learning what she found to be important when considering the schooling of her own children. For the last two months of her career, however, Laura had been teaching in unprecedented circumstances and trying to navigate ways to teach remotely due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Laura tells me that during her two years of teaching she has taught several students who she knew to be homeless, but also tells me that prior to our interview, her own interest had been piqued around the prevalence of homelessness amongst their student population and that she had spoken to a senior member of staff who had been at the school for many years about the situation:

> "I spoke to head of English, she's been there forever and she said it's got loads worse recently, like, over the past few years, but then everything has hasn't it, all foodbanks and everything, but I know when I did my teacher training homelessness or homeless kids didn't even cross my mind, but now there are really quite a few students in school that are homeless, and that's only the ones I actually know about. It's bad. It's really sad isn't it?"

In her conversation with this senior member of staff, there was something that troubled Laura: "she said, 'you can tell who they are, just look at the naughty kids'". This characterisation of homeless children as just 'naughty' concerned Laura, and she spoke the danger of defining children as 'bad' or 'naughty' and ascribing them with that label for the rest of their educational career, if not their lives, which could result in a self-fulfilling prophecy without understanding the frustrations that were underlying those behaviours. Instead, Laura made an effort to consider what their disruptive or non-conforming behaviour could be indicative of, and, in the case of one of her current students, mentioned that his increasingly 'aggressive' behaviours that could suggest difficult circumstances at home:

> "…his behaviour after October half term got worse and worse and worse, but like really, gone from like a little disruptive to throwing chairs and like… he was trying to be funny and clever and it wasn't and everybody just thought he was a muppet and that obviously affected the way he reacted to things which is when he started to get violent… he would just always be acting out all the time, just running everywhere and we were like 'ok, something's gone on.'"

After becoming concerned that the student was going through something traumatic outside of school, Laura's teaching team made contact with his mum to ask if everything was ok, once they had done that they learnt that the family had been made homeless after fleeing an abusive home:

> "Mum had had to leave partner, we don't know where dad is, we're not sure, but she'd had to leave partner because of domestic abuse issues, so then this young lad has been living, they couldn't get him anywhere, sort of emergency accommodation, so he was living in a hostel in one room with his mum, his brother and his two-year-old sister."

As Laura recounts, this conversation with her student's mother was not an easy one; several teachers had attempted to raise their concerns with her previously, but found her aloof and difficult to engage with, but

Laura had had a different experience: “she engages but only to certain people, only to the people that she trusts, other than that she doesn’t.” Laura puts this down to a sense of ‘shame’ and says, “she’s really embarrassed.” However, Laura believed her position as a drama teacher allowed her a unique connection with students and their parents, as she noted that she seemed ‘less formal’ than her peers who taught subjects such as English, Maths or Science so was, in her opinion, more approachable and less intimidating to parents who may have been reluctant or nervous to engage with other teachers. Students were also encouraged in her class to create work using their own experiences as a stimulus. She notes that those students experiencing trauma sometimes included negative events that they had lived through into their work. This was the case for this particular student who had mentioned his housing circumstances fleetingly in an improvised scene in her drama class, which gave her a conversation starter to bring the topic up with the child’s mum and allowed her to open up about their living arrangements.

Laura was careful in her narrative to ensure I knew that she was not being judgemental of any family’s circumstances, that she did not attribute fault to this mother and the homelessness that they were facing, but that from her perspective as a teacher, she could see that the situation did have a negative effect on schooling. The life upheaval that they had experienced through becoming homeless and having to find shelter in a hostel was seen by Laura, as detrimental to her student’s education:

> “He’s got nowhere to do his homework because they don’t have a desk, so...um, he’s got no access to laptop or WiFi or anything. His mum literally had to leave everything, so he’s got no access to anything like that. So, in terms of home-learning he just can’t… and at school, like, he would look at a book, he’d be sitting there staring at a book and you can just see that there’s nothing there, his eyes were just completely glazed. So, he’s done no work at all.”

When Laura tried to discuss this with the child’s mother, his only present parent who was responsible for educational decision making and engagement, she found that the subject made his mother particularly emotional and caused her to cry. Her hopes and dreams for her child, that he would achieve good grades, excel in school and succeed in the job market beyond, were seemingly slipping away from her and her son, and, as Laura gathered, she blamed herself for their current circumstances but in that circumstance, her priority did not lie in ensuring his academic attainment, but rather on finding them a house, economic security and, as Laura puts it: “Just surviving is their priority”. In survival mode engaging in learning was not considered the most important aspect of this young person’s day; school, instead, became something other than a space exclusively designed for educational attainment, but made use, instead, of the social potential that the school offered:

> “He just comes to school for a complete release, and education is not at the front of his mind. He doesn’t…doesn’t care is not the right way of saying it but he, he comes to socialise and be normal and that’s his time to be normal… when he comes

> in he doesn't do any work, he just comes in to talk to other kids."

The process of becoming and being homeless had changed this young boy's relationship to education and to his peers, school became a safe arena where he was free to make use of the vast space that school offered, a complete contrast to the small confines of the temporary accommodation in which all members of the family shared one small room. This had not always been the case for him, and in a short space of time, after the stress of having to leave a violent situation and moving into small, overcrowded temporary accommodation, Laura witnessed the change in this child's ability to engage in learning:

> "Before, he was just so full of ideas, always the first one with his hand up, he'd get involved in everything…So, certainly, in terms of tiredness, it was his attention was a lot less after he'd moved into the hostel. You couldn't hold his attention at all then, whereas before you could hold it for short periods and you'd always have to check to see if he'd understood the learning, but after half term, after he'd moved into the hostel you'd have to say 'ok what's your task? And he'd be like 'I don't know…I dunno', you could explain it again and again and he'd be like 'so what am I doing?' and it was just like, he was looking at you and his attention was focused on you, but it just wasn't."

This was the case not only for this child, but for multiple others who were experiencing homelessness and still attending the school. Laura spoke of one student whose family had been evicted from their house and had since been residing with friends of his mother, having to move on average once a week to a new friend's house, many of which were uncomfortable and, in some cases, unsafe. His approach to education was almost the opposite of the student she had spoken about previously, and he had become more dedicated to his schooling, becoming more focused and attending all extra-curricular activities in school that he could: "he genuinely appreciates the time that he is with us and he doesn't want to go home. It's safe." Once again, the school had become a safe space where outside experiences could be somewhat escaped.

Laura spoke several times about the struggle she had herself watching parents 'trying to survive', she found the process difficult to manage emotionally, especially when imagining herself and her children in their situation, she became tearful when she reflected on the educational privilege her children were being given through her own ability to engage with their schooling. She wanted to do her best for the children she was teaching, but had little insight into how best to provide the most beneficial support. When I asked Laura; "How do you deal with that as a teacher?" her response was "That's a good question!!! I don't know the answer." Laura made it clear that in terms of support given to her as a teacher in how to help or approach working with students who were homeless or struggling academically due to the stress of homelessness: there wasn't any. The directive provided to her was to report any concerns to the school's Safeguarding team, but there did not seem to be any support or guidance regarding how to approach discussions of the student's homelessness with them on a day-to-day basis or how to support their emotional and physical wellbeing. The lack of advice given to teachers, according to Laura, left her feeling inadequately supported in doing her job to the best of her ability. Laura noted that as well as guidance for how to approach discussing homelessness with her students in her classroom, she would also appreciate some support in how to discuss such an emotive and sensitive topic with parents who are living in crisis.

6.2.4 Jane

Jane is a homeless lead officer in a women and children's hostel, she is the deputy manager responsible for running the unit on a day-to-day basis. Jane tells me that she works in this role because she has always had a desire to help people and has the ability to build rapport with people even when they are struggling. Jane says that it is her love of helping people that drives her work in this field. The hostel that Jane works at offers accommodation for women and children who have lost their home because they are "at high risk, medium to high risk of domestic violence", they have eight self-contained flats that, as Jane tells me, are always full. When I meet her in her office at the hostel and Jane tells me that her role is always busy and includes:

> "…looking at the support needs of people who come here to stay with us um, formulating action plans to achieve those actions and looking at support around anything they need in terms of trauma-based issues or education or maximising income or a whole array of whatever support needs they've got."

It is seen as the duty of the hostel to not only provide accommodation for the families but to try and "help resolve their issues", identified through initial assessments: risk assessment, needs assessment and a safety assessment to establish a support plan that includes a plan for the children's education. Jane tells me that they aim to conduct these assessments as soon as possible from when the women enter the facility but recognises that when women arrive at the unit they are often in a state of shock, in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event and in crisis and need a few days to "settle in". Jane tells me that the responses to arriving at the hostel varied between every woman and every family that arrived, but was a highly emotive experience, bound up with feelings of shock, guilt, sadness, desperation, hope, relief, and fear as well as a whole host of feelings unexpressed and individual to each woman. Jane tells me that women usually arrive without any belongings, having fled with their children in an emergency state – they were making their escape. In these situations, the first few days were not focused on the initial assessments as Jane says it would be "too much" to address the issues they were facing immediately, instead, the hostel workers focused on a plan of action to recover the family's belongings and to help them feel as 'at home' in the hostel space as possible. In many cases, the women were present with hostel staff and re-entering the house that they had escaped from to retrieve their belongings and was a difficult process. Jane recounts one such time when she accompanied a woman to the house and the perpetrator of violence against her and her children returned to the residence:

> "Two staff and a police officer's been there while they're doing it and it's been him

> constantly on her back going ‘please don’t leave me, please don’t leave me’ while she’s getting her stuff and you know it’s really hard and then they come back and we’ve got her stuff and everything and we drove off in two different directions so he didn’t know which way to follow us and um, anyway we got back here and we were bringing the stuff in into the flat and I was taking some stuff up, and she was stood, bless her [stands to demonstrate], she was stood the other side of the door, cause the children were in the flat and she didn’t want them to see how upset she was, so she was stood by the door in the corner and she was sobbing. Sobbing and sobbing and sobbing. And um, I just sort of hugged her and said, ‘you know what, you should be so proud of yourself. You’ve just done one of the hardest things you will ever, ever have to do in your whole life and you know, courage you’ve got tons of it, courage.’”

Even in traumatic events Jane suggests that most mothers are focused on hiding as much of their upset as possible from their children, trying to limit their children’s fear about this new space they’re residing in and the events that they have left behind, but in some cases, she tells me, this just wasn’t possible and the effect of trauma seeped into their everyday actions as a means of trying to protect their children which manifested itself in many different ways. Jane says that some mothers who were substance dependent struggled to ensure that their children were attending school regularly and were unable to prioritise their children’s schooling. Others who were also left with the mental scars of violence were fearful of the children being away from them and as such they kept their children out of school and by their side every day despite the threat of fines and prison time for truancy and children not attending school, safety and survival was prioritised over education. But, in Jane’s council outlined targets, education was one area that the hostel *had* to address in their needs assessment and in Jane’s opinion was one of the most important aspects of the children’s journey through the homelessness and trauma recovery journey, as it allowed children a safe space to just be a child and added a level of stability and routine to their days, which she tells me, in most cases, had been absent for some time – routine had lost out to the chaos of crisis. Jane asserts that enrolling children in school had the potential to be transformative to their experience, behaviour and self-esteem:

> “So, a family turns up, they’re in need of accommodation, that’s the primary response, in need of accommodation, once they’ve got a roof over their head we can look at all the other issues, um so years ago we didn’t push as much as now, as now, education is top for us now because we find that getting children into education when they’ve been through a traumatic experience and they’ve had to leave their home, and whatever else, gives that structure and that stability and maybe, another focus. We’ve had families come in here and you know, their families have been unruly, create…you know, running round going wild, got ‘em into school,

> changed like that [clicks fingers], fantastic!!"

In Jane's experience the majority of mothers relied on the input of those working in the hostel to decide the best course of action in regard to their children's education. Largely due to safety concerns borne from instances of domestic violence, the residents of the hostel had usually moved a significant distance from their previous address to be housed temporarily at the hostel. For that reason, Jane's advice was for their children to move into a school located in close proximity to the hostel to make the practicalities of getting children to and from school easier and to ensure that the perpetrator of the domestic violence did not have knowledge of where they were at school. Jane was also able to facilitate an easy registration and transition into new schools close to the hostel that she had built connections with over her years of working at the centre, a task that would have been difficult for parents trying to navigate alone due to placement waiting lists and administrative barriers to immediate placement in schools:

> "In terms of waiting lists and stuff, and placements, um but we seem to be getting better at that for some reason as well and I think that's because we're communicating better. I don't know how they magic these spaces up but they just do, we've never had a real problem getting anybody into school."

Having this connection to the schools was seen as useful, not only in the initial registration and administrative phase, but it also allowed an easier insight into how the children were getting on at the school and provided the school with an understanding of the child's situation outside of school and what they were dealing with every day. Jane recognised the importance of communication with the schools that the children in the hostel were attending:

> "We have really good connections round here with the schools, um, they, they know what we are…and they will liaise with us on a daily basis…is someone coming into school? Is there a reason why if they haven't turned up? Um, are there any ongoing issues?"

The background information about what students are currently experiencing or have experienced were seen as useful in tailoring the teachers approach to education, in informing pastoral care in school and in offering support to students and parents, and although this was Jane's advice and what she believed to be the best option when families arrived at the unit, it does not come without its downsides, especially given that the length of people's stays in temporary accommodation is not always secure or guaranteed to long periods of time:

> "It's still not fantastic because as people go through the homelessness system, one of the things that is probably an issue is that, in some cases they do change schools quite frequently and if they're in temporary accommodation, um, they could be registered at one school under one address and don't always notify the main office

> that they’re not actually at that address anymore, they’re in another address. do you see what I mean? The information doesn’t always tally.”

It was, in Jane’s opinion, this downfall that was the main consideration for parents who chose to keep their children in the same school as prior to their homelessness whilst they made their way through the housing system to ensure that there were not multiple social and educational upheavals alongside the housing upheaval that they could not control:

> “We’ve got a few residents here at the moment who have decided to remain in the schools where they are because they don’t wanna disrupt their education and over the years we’ve had people make that decision that they don’t want to change schools until they get permanently rehoused.”

Jane noted that in many cases, despite initially making the decision to remain in those schools associated with their previous address, many families struggled to adapt to the practicalities that this involved once they had undertaken this journey several times:

> “There will have been discussion about it, a lot of parents do feel that they have to change schools because travel is just too much for them, you know, if they’ve come from North Manchester, yeah and they’re now down in West…, that could be a 2/3 bus journey depending on where they’re going, which means that ,that parent and those children have to be up 2 hours before somebody who lives round the corner, so they have raised issues around it being an intensive journey and I think some of them have thought, you know, like, I don’t have a choice. If I’m gonna make my life easier I’ll put in for them to be in school round here or other people will just say they’re not that bothered.”

Whichever path parents took, Jane was clear that the decision about where their children went to school was always that of the mother. Some mothers choose to keep their children at the same school they were already at and make the daily commute to the school, for some this was important as they believed it would maintain a sense of continuity and stability for their children and their educational journeys. It was a priority for Jane, after considering immediate safety risks, that the parents had a sense of agency and control over how to educate their children, not only because it was seen as their responsibility and an important factor going forwards, but for many, Jane tells me, control had been stripped from them in multiple ways, both through domestic abuse, and through a disempowering housing system that significantly reduces ‘choice’ about past and future housing options. Making decisions, where possible, was therefore also seen as a way of offering power back to the women and building up their trust in their own decision-making instincts to live independently beyond life in the hostel and once they were rehoused permanently.

> “I think especially around domestic violence and children and things like that, when

> you've had that, when you've been controlled or you've gone through trauma, you need that control back, I think it's important for people to feel like they've got choices and control to some extent, even though we're limited, if we can provide what choices we can, it gives them a level of control because they feel like they're in a situation they have no control over…And that's why we say 'well, what do you want to do? Do you want to keep your children in the same school, do you want them to go round the corner? We'll go with you, show you the school, you can meet the teachers, they can go down for a couple of hours, see what you think', same thing with nurseries, you know, 'here are a list of nurseries, we'll go with you, do you want to do this? Do you want to do that?' it's all about choices. Not us saying 'you must put your children in that particular school.'"

In Jane's assessments that she had to complete as part of the centre's targets, she tried to offer all mothers a choice at every juncture possible, though she did recognise that living in the midst of crisis and in moments of desperation, people can find it difficult, if not impossible, to make rational decisions, whether due to the effects of illicit substances, ill health or the sheer overwhelming experience of trauma, homelessness and parenting. It is this recognition of human function that compels Jane to take a holistic approach to helping the mothers who passed through the hostel. She believes that the only way to help the children in the present and for the future, was to offer the mothers as much support as possible:

> "I've always said from day dot since I started working with people in need, if mum's not right, kids aren't right. So mum needs to be right as well so kids can be alright… if mum is preoccupied or isn't well enough to do what's necessary to make the right decisions or s unwell mentally or lacks um motivation cause they're depressed or anything like that, they can't possibly make healthy decisions because they're not healthy… If you're ill mentally and physically, you can't get that knowledge can you, you struggle to get it or you might struggle to take all that knowledge in so you might be making decisions but they might not be purely informed decisions because your attention span's only so long or you don't understand, or you're too ill to get out of bed, or you know, all that sort of thing…, it's looking at expectations you know, you'd go in and you'd say 'right, the expectation is for you to be doing this, within this period' and it's not really achievable is it? It's unrealistic and it's about identifying that you know, just because mum is the victim here, let's not persecute her, for something that somebody…for something that was done to them and that's…so all this around, you know 'if you don't do this, we're gonna take your kids off you' and all that sort of stuff, we're moving away from that cause that was something that was done years ago, we're getting away from that now."

Choice was seen as an important aspect of allowing mothers to feel a full and controlled life. Where there was no sense of control, women could not make considered, rational decisions regarding their present or their future. The absence of control was therefore understood, in Jane's eyes, as negative to personal growth and progression and so empowering a sense of choice and control was a vital part of her job.

I now turn to a wider analysis of the contributions offered by all of the practitioners that I spoke to.

6.3 Chaos in Crisis

This section pulls together the narratives presented here and from three further teachers, who offered some insights into working with homeless families, but who had limited experience of this (for further discussion see Methodology chapter 3). All of the professionals that I spoke to recognised that homelessness was a disruptive factor in children's education and existed as a crisis point in the families' lives. A crisis, that is: "sudden, uncontrollable and extremely negative events" (Brock, 2002), is understood to be profound, debilitating and disconcerting (Nickerson and Zhe, 2014), which the practitioners spoken to for this suggested, engendered a state of chaos within the individual pupil, their parents and the home environment they were living in. This section is organised into three themes: 'Policy in Practice' exploring how broader policies affect a person's everyday experience of homelessness and education, 'Expectation Vs. Reality' discussing how experiences of homelessness clash with normative assumptions of what education should be, and 'Parental Engagement' that focuses on how practitioners perceive the importance of parental engagement in navigating schooling and the housing system, all whilst dealing with the chaos that moments of crisis create.

6.3.1 Policy in Practice

For teachers working in schools and for the practitioners working in homeless hostels, they were tasked with enforcing both internal and broader policies, and their working practices were at the mercy of frequently changing policy agendas, with schools facing over 70 policy-related announcements from the government between 2010-2019 (Fautley, 2019), and prior to COVID-19 educational related strategies. Teachers are expected to work with an ever-adaptive approach to education, yet at the same time, are often the source of "growing concern" (Department for Education, 2013:4) for the government who continually demand better quality teaching (Gore, 2021; Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2009). Teachers are conceptualised in the wider discourse as both the problem and the solution to providing a "good" education (Archer, 2022; Osgood, 2012) that can meet the aims of schooling in preparing the English population to compete in a global labour market (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014; Department for Education, 2010). This approach to education, an all-encompassing provider of knowledge, was noted as becoming increasingly difficult to deliver. In both the accounts offered by some mothers and accounts offered by some teachers there seemed to be a firm understanding about what was the school's remit and what was the home's. For some, schools were only responsible for 'teaching' the students, sticking to the curriculum and preparing them for their exams, and monitoring their behaviour in the classroom to keep a quiet and controlled space in which to do this in, emotional support was, in some cases, seen as beyond the remit of the classroom, especially given the ever expanding class sizes, and the growing number of children experiencing homelessness/precarity based trauma, as Henry stated: "I just don't have the capacity." Although Henry was the only teacher to explicitly state that he did not have the capacity to provide emotional support to homeless students, it was the case for many teachers that I spoke to that they were experiencing some level of 'burn-out' after feeling overworked and under-appreciated themselves, a seemingly common feeling in the teaching workforce (Gemmink, et al., 2020; Al-Ghabban, 2018; Chatelier and Rudolph, 2018), this burn-out is evidenced in the teacher turnover numbers, with 33% of newly qualified teachers leaving the profession within the first five years after qualifying to teach (Burrow, Williams and Thomas, 2020).

Teachers, although the outward facing front of schools, in many ways a "street-level bureaucrat" that is, a key actor in delivering the government's education agenda (Hall and Hampden-Thompson, 2022; Lipsky, 2010), and often the receivers of criticism of the education system as a whole, they have very little control overall structure of the content they are able to provide and are also bound by individual school's policies. The national curriculum and educational policies that determine class sizes, school attainment targets, the prescriptive nature of the education system and pastoral responsibilities were decided upon by bureaucrats removed from the "street-level" delivery of those policies and who were not witnessing the everyday impact of those policies in practice (Hanley, Winter and Burrell, 2020). As Fernanda noted, funding cuts had played a significant role in the day to day running of the school and the number of teaching assistants that were available to support students in the classroom with any extra help them may have needed:

> "We're a big school, we got lots of students and lots of them need help, one-to-one in the classroom, they need it to help them focus, to explain more than I can to the whole class, I don't have time to do that for everyone, so…yeah, but when I first got here it was…there was… like there were more assistants in the classroom, but gradually you see their hours reduced and some say they can only be allowed here in the morning now but what about the afternoon? There isn't enough, like in the budgets I think there isn't enough for what we need but I think that's for everyone".

The reduced funding was also a concern for Jane who has seen the hostel's budget slashed in recent years, leading to a restructure of the daily running of the unit, staff reductions and added pressure to the remaining staff:

> "Before, here used to be staffed differently and then obviously we had to be more savvy with money so we restructured so we've got reduced staffing, to three staff and it used to be staffed at weekends, It's no longer staffed on a weekend, it's

> staffed by security overnight and over the weekend so it's things like that where you look and you make savings and you make changes and you make savings that way, but it's hard."

The delivery of the funding was also contingent on meeting targets set by the local authority, there was no area of the service that they provided that was not monitored and evaluated, the service providers had to evidence the 'progress' that they were making with their residents, which included areas such as education, parenting, money management and finding work. Jane termed this a 'holistic approach', trying to support the 'whole person' rather than just helping them to find safe and secure permanent housing; funding was only granted if they could meet the targets in these areas set out for them by local government:

> "I think a lot of services are doing this holistic approach now I think they're realising you know, you can't keep using old methods and get better results, 'cause everyone wants better results 'cause the lack of money now, for funding and services, you've gotta be attaining those targets and doing better and doing better."

This approach is a medical response to homelessness, an attempt to 'fix' the person who was presenting as homeless and whether or not the hostel workers believed that this was the most adequate way to support the women who resided at the hostel, it was the only way that they were able to secure funding to provide any support at all. All of the women who were at Jane's particular hostel were unquestionably 'unintentionally homeless', having become homeless through fleeing extreme cases of domestic violence, they were in this situation through "no fault of their own", and yet, the impetus on 'recovery' and moving on from their homelessness was placed firmly on their shoulders. It was the women who had to change, to progress, to be considered fixed and therefore dutifully supported. That is not to say that Jane or her colleagues did not value the women or found them individually lacking or deficient, instead, working in this field and providing these services came from a place of care. Jane herself was able to find a sense of purpose and self-worth in helping people, the feelings of gratitude and sense of personal reward were somewhat reciprocal when Jane witnessed positive outcomes for the woman and children she had worked with:

> "I love helping people… The amount of times I've said that to people in crisis who have come to me and said "Jane, I can't take anymore' and I've gone 'I promise you there will be light at the end of the tunnel' and there was and they've done great, and it's great when you get feedback that they've come back months later and they go 'how you doing? You ok?' cause they still come back. It's rewarding. Yeah it's great, they come in for a brew or whatever and they go and some form really good friendships with people so if somebody moves and they stay, they'd still come back and visit us anyway, it's nice."

There was a similar sense in Fernanda's account of her journey into teaching that her drive for a career in teaching was from a place of care, she wanted to "make a difference" to the children that she worked with;

this has been found to be the case for many teachers who are driven by a sense of civic responsibility to provide an opportunity to learn for children in their communities and provide a place of care whilst doing so (Johnston, Wildy and Shand, 2022; Chatelier and Rudolph, 2018, Archer, 2022; Lavermann, 2013). However, Fernanda she soon found that with the amount of students she was responsible for and the significant amount of content she needed to cover in each lesson, there was little space to offer her care to people who did not actively seek it out, as teacher's autonomy is often constrained by the boundaries set by the school and wider policy (Cooper, 2010; Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Bradbury and Holmes, 2017). This is perhaps a contributing factor in homelessness being frequently overlooked or 'missed' by teachers who have a heavy workload and too many students to offer individual attention, especially when the stigmatising effects of being considered homeless means that explicit disclosure of such an experiences is not common. The lack of adequate funding was also an observation also echoed by Lucy:

> "I don't think we necessarily have the funding for the support we need in classrooms, a lot falls on our shoulders and we can't do it all, we need help in the classrooms, in the schools, it can't only be teachers."

Many of the teachers had referred to a SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) within the school who were able to help facilitate access for disabled students, and also mentioned safeguarding teams who were responsible for reporting and managing referrals to outside agencies when students were deemed to be at risk, but the day to day pastoral care within these schools seemed somewhat lacking, perhaps due to limited funding, but support for students and teachers alike who were not yet at crisis point was sought after but unavailable. There was a sense that teachers felt backed into a corner with no intermediary option open to them, they either had to dismiss concerns in any official capacity, or report their concerns to outside, government agencies where perhaps they would rather have a trusted person for the families to talk to and give support rather than an immediate escalation. Henry noted that he was reluctant to turn to social services due to the fear doing so invoked in families:

> "That's their first assumption of all these parents that we're going to get social services involved and social services are going to come and take their children…especially when that homelessness is hanging over their heads and they're borrowing couches and putting false addresses down."

Henry had learned families would close down lines of communication if social services involvement were mentioned, he noted that they took this as a criticism of their parenting and believed that any contact with social services would result in their children being removed from their care, whether this was likely to be the case or not. There was, he suggested, nowhere else to turn for support for families who were experiencing homelessness, other than charities. With nowhere for them to turn there was a devolved responsibility and a reliance on charities to pick up the slack where national policy was not proving adequate for the scale of marginalised students, especially homeless students in their schools. The risk of relying of charity resources is that they are not guaranteed, could be limited and are area dependent, some areas had more charities in the vicinity to draw from than others and in some more deprived areas the charity resources were stretched more thinly than in others and teachers reported that the wait times for support were significantly longer and not always available when immediately required.

For many of the teachers, they had noticed that, when they needed to seek help, this was not readily available through institutional structures and they had to source other ways to secure help for homeless children in their classes and their families – often feeling that it was necessary for them, as individuals, to adopt responsibility for securing housing and resources for these families. Muna, in her above narrative, stated that she and her colleagues found themselves in a position where they felt emotionally and financially responsible for resolving a student's housing conditions to ensure that the student could have equal access to education without the effects of poverty and homelessness causing further disruption to their education, they were taking on more of a financial responsibility than they had anticipated through a sense of duty and care for their students, where policy fell short of providing an immediate resolution. Muna also found that the policy agenda did not extend into extra-curricular activities, but that exclusion from participation in these events because of financial precarity induced a feeling of isolation in students and also prohibited them from activities that may have been considered mundane for other students, and so she felt compelled to assist in these areas where she could to make the students feel included and "normal":

> "School has always felt like 'well let's…can we make it our job to raise some money and can we make it our job to help that child. If we all chip in some money together we can you know, get them some equipment or, you know, some uniform'…and I know from when we do non-uniform days a bulk of that money, the majority of that money does go to help vulnerable kids and it's like buying them a prom dress so that they can go to prom or buying them a suit for prom so they can go and just be normal."

Not only was the financial responsibility more than Muna had expected, but so too was the emotional toll that her student's turmoil was having on her, teaching as a "profoundly emotional activity" (Kinman, 2011:843) meant that she carried with her the guilt of not being able to provide the support to all students she knows need it, she tells me:

> "It's really difficult and it's really difficult to see, we have to be very careful…very careful, but you can't help feeling for some of them, you know, he's getting evicted at Christmas and you don't know? Yeah that's difficult and who do you talk to about it cause everyone's probably feeling the same."

As with Laura's account, there was a distinct lack of support for the teacher's themselves with a lack of preparation in relation to dealing with homelessness and trauma when it presented itself in their classrooms. The teacher training they had received did not include any focus on this or the emotional stakes that would be at play once they were working in schools daily (Long, 2022). Teachers had trained for delivering the national curriculum but are being left with other responsibilities that they are potentially unable to cope with when students do not respond to the prescriptive approach to education that the education policy demands (Lupton and Hempel-Jorgensen, 2012; Tranter, 2012) This will be explored further below in the Expectation versus Reality section.

6.3.2 Expectation versus Reality

As discussed above, education in the current climate is highly monitored and regulated by a national curriculum that determines what a child must learn, the ways in which that knowledge must be evidenced and the attainment targets that teachers and students must work towards (Department for Education, 2014a). The data-driven approach creates a competitive environment in which every 'local authority-maintained' school, that is schools that are funded by their local authority, must publish their assessment results (Department for Education, 2014b) and are publicly comparable to every other local authority-maintained school in the country, as well as any other privately funded schools that choose to publish. The schools who score most highly in these league tables draw in more funding, the strongest candidates for new teachers and are able to be more overtly selective in their admissions policies (Perryman et al., 2011). It has been argued that this approach is an unstable measurement of quality and disregards the context and environment that the school and its pupils live in (Perry, 2016). It has also been long argued that the national curriculum and its contents favours the knowledge and inherited capital usually associated with middle-class families (Reay, Crozier and James, 2011) and does not value typically working class knowledge and ways of knowing, leaving working class pupils at a disadvantage from the outset (Reay, 2017; Bathmaker et al., 2016; Hargreaves, Quick and Buchanan, 2023), or, as Reay in 2007 puts it: "working-class children deal with the punitive consequences of being positioned within middle-class imaginaries as the 'other' to a middle-class norm" (Reay, 2007:1192). The examinations students are expected to undertake assume a level of knowledge and experience that not all children have or can afford to have. This is certainly evident in the interviews that I undertook with teachers for this study, and the dissonance between what was expected to be part of the everyday experience and the actual experience of homeless children was vast. This was only one area were homelessness and education clashed, but was one highlighted by several teachers, including Muna who was cognisant of the difficulties that homeless parents would face in trying to provide these opportunities for their children:

> "If a child doesn't have an array of experiences they're never really going to be able to access these exams, especially for English like, one of the practice exam papers we had was to do with the theatre, and how do you then…if you have a child that has never been to the theatre before, answer questions about people's experience in a theatre. They can't relate! So we just make sure that they go…that they have a lot of theatre trips, museums, art galleries, and get to meet veterans, interview

> people. It’s things like that that we like to do for them and I like that. They’re the kind of trips that I fight for and help out with their costs, like if mum can’t pay rent how is she gonna pay for that, so I do try and help.”

That she had to fight for this suggests that accessing these activities depend on the energy the teacher they happen to have has to dedicate to fighting these causes, meaning that across the country there is inequitable access to the curriculum for students whose teachers are not inclined to fight (Manyukhina, 2022) or who do not have the provisions themselves to address the economic gap to provide students with these experiences and opportunities that are actually essential for pupils to have a chance to access the curriculum.

Aside from their direct engagement and ‘success’ in terms of attainment, the construction of what makes a ‘good’ student and a ‘good’ parent for some of the teachers, were tied to an adherence to the ‘norms’ established for school routines. There is a perception of what makes an ‘ideal student’, that is, a student who, according to Hempel-Jorgensen:

> “…has freedom to negotiate independently of authority [and] whose agency is constricted and defined by teacher-imposed structures in which their learning is oriented towards external goals, such as tests” (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009: 437).

The ‘ideal’ student is one who is unquestionably compliant, undisruptive (David, 2010), who is quiet, respectful and grateful for the education they are being offered (Johnston, Wildy and Shand, 2022). When students could not adhere to these ‘norms’, due to not having access to physical items such as pens and textbooks, or being too distracted with stress that they forgot to bring them, in some cases they were punished by their teachers for being unprepared, as George tells me:

> “If there’s something bad, or something negative has gone off at home you can spot that in the kids as they walk through the door, you can see that in the work that they do, you can see that in the attitude of the kids, the appearance of the kids…unwashed clothes, unwashed hair, dirty clothes, tired, really tried, properly tired kids. So they come into lessons like that and it’s a 3 strike and you’re out rule at our school, so if they come into lessons and they haven’t got a pen, that’s technically unprepared so that’s a strike, if they haven’t done their homework that’s a strike and you tell them and they answer back that’s a strike and then you get them being like ‘well fuck it I can’t be arsed with the 3 checks “see ya later’, so it’s sometimes, the kids find it easier to get in trouble early doors so they can go and sleep in isolation for the day and we do try to avoid that.”

It can be understood then, that much like the social construction of the ‘deserving poor’, who ‘work hard’, ‘pull their weight’ and express gratitude rather than dependency (Gerrard, 2019; Skeggs and Loveday, 2012), and the ‘good immigrant’ who is expected to: “behave well, and be loyal, be politically and religiously moderate, while contributing to the national economy through hard work" (Hackl, 2022: 990), the 'good homeless child' is one who excels in education, is continually prepared to participate and doesn't bring the effects of homelessness into the classroom. Any homeless child, or child experiencing social, emotional, financial and housing precarity who does not accomplish this, is branded as 'underserving', 'trouble' and punished for their circumstance.

Some students were using this behaviour monitoring agenda strategically and using the knowledge that they would be removed from lessons to their advantage to meet their own more immediate needs and were developing their own schedule in a highly controlled timetable, re-purposing the school space for their own necessities. When asked further about sanctioning homeless students, George constructs this punishment as a useful part of 'fixing' the homeless students, and socialising them out of behaviour that was seen as undesirable and problematic, with the punishment seen as a beneficial strategy to enforce order and 'stability' into their lives:

> "They don't have a stable homelife, whether it's an absent parent or substance abuse in the household or whatever, they don't…there's no routine in these kids lives or there's no sort of boundaries as such and they come to school and it's sort of safe and they know that they can get there and they know that they're gonna be looked after and know that they're gonna get food and they know that if they do something wrong, they know exactly what's going to happen. We're so consistent with our behaviour policy that they know if they go in and say this this and this, what the consequences are going to be, so it's those boundaries that are good and we always find that after the summer holidays or after any sort of break from school, the kids take a couple of weeks to sort of get back into that but then once they're back into that then they're alright….People in general need boundaries and need routine in their life to put things into place."

The punishment for 'failing' to prepare for school did not take into account the other hurdles and barriers that students had to overcome to attend school at all and located the 'failure' within the individual and did not question *why* the students did not exist in the way they expected and the structures that have disadvantaged these pupils in and out of schools, as Francis and Mills (2012) state, 'blaming' working-class students for their inability to engage with certain areas of schooling and the curriculum "points the finger of blame away from social policy and instead to a deficit in educational aspirations on the part of working class families" (Francis and Mills, 2012: 256). And, although George believed he was setting boundaries for the good of the student and that students were, or would be, grateful for the stability that these punishments were deemed to provide, removing students from the classroom for being unprepared only further removes students from their peers and from the knowledge that the school considered important to deliver in the classrooms which, in isolation, they were no longer able to access. Not only were students removed from their peers and academic delivery, but research has also found that punishing students and positioning them as ‘failures’ of the education system on a regular basis is highly demotivating (Reay, 2017; Ingram, 2009).

For many students, school attendance was seen as a burden, the consequence of being young rather than an opportunity to build a future and some teachers were accepting of the fact that many of their students had more immediate concerns and stressors to deal with than the impossible to imagine successful future that an education might provide. Laura recognised, although she believes in the power and importance of education, that when parents are in housing crisis, education, or more precisely *attainment*, can no longer remain as the priority for parents or their children, who struggle with the trauma of their ongoing experience of homelessness. As Laura puts it: “Just surviving is their priority”, educational attainment becomes secondary to ‘getting through’ the immediate struggle, academic achievements are of no consequence in the immediate; they only hold value in some imagined future where they can *potentially* provide access to jobs, opportunity and capital, but only ever potentially. It was recognised that this was not a lack of ambition or aspiration, but a lack of access to the stable foundations from which they could establish ideal conditions that were conducive to learning. The parents and the children both had hope for their future, but in the immediate, good grades and well-completed worksheets provide no solution to their current lack of safe and secure housing or the stress and feelings of panic that come with experiencing housing loss. The priorities of their homeless students were different, as Laura stated: “their minds are busy with other things”. Every teacher that I spoke to, without exception, spoke of how tired their homeless students were. This was for a variety of reasons: because of the inability to sleep in new environments – some students had had to move regularly between very short-term spaces (nightly in some cases) and could not ‘settle’ in these places that were a far cry from a ‘home’. For others overcrowding and excessive noise provided the backdrop of their bedtime routine and prevented them for getting a good night’s sleep. The tiredness, according to Fernanda, made the students “sluggish, unmotivated” and, she said, it affected their ability to work:

> “They can’t concentrate, they just want to close their eyes, get their heads down but what can you expect when every day is somewhere different isn’t it? It’s hard, no?”

For Fernanda, in some cases, it was more beneficial to both their education and their overall being, to allow them to do just that:

> “I just let them kip sometimes, you can see their eyes just getting heavier and they put their hoods up and head down or whatever, and I’ll just let them kip. If their house is noisy chaos, this is probably the only time they get quiet isn’t it? What’s keeping them awake and tired going to achieve?”

Fernanda understood that she needed to help facilitate her students meeting their basic needs first before she could begin to try and provide them with an education. This in itself could be seen as an act of resistance and solidarity, but it was an act that always remained subtle and unmentioned:

> “I always just pretend I don’t see it, ok? I don’t say come here to sleep or they’d all be doing it! I’m not the nursery room, just if people need it I don’t disturb it”.

Fernanda was all too aware that she would have been reprimanded by her superiors should they have discovered pupils sleeping in her class, but nonetheless, she allowed it to happen, a small act of pastoral intervention that prioritised the needs of the pupil in front of her, it would perhaps be beneficial for homeless students for schools to take steps towards a “compassion framework” for schooling where sanctions are not the first port of call, but a commitment to being sensitive to student’s physical and mental needs in a bid to encourage a better engagement with education (Al-Ghabban, 2018; Gilbert and Choden, 2013). However, the lack of investment in schools and teacher’s already exhaustive workload make any pastoral activities difficult (Archer, 2022) and would require an overhaul of the education system as it currently stands, focusing on wellbeing rather than competition.

As well as a change in attitude and increased levels of tiredness, changing friendship groups and a withdrawal from their established groups was seen by the teachers as an indicator of problems at home or outside of school. Students were largely expected to maintain consistent friendship groups that support each other with educational activities and provide positive peer-peer emotional support, however, as Lucy noted, when students experience extreme levels of deprivation, homelessness and trauma, they look for other forms of support and understanding:

> “You can tell when things are going wrong usually, because they start to associate with a bad crowd, they move away from their old friends and sort of get sucked into a bad crowd. I don’t know why? I don’t know why that is? But it happens a lot, you see it, as soon as they start having problems at home they want to go with the older kids who aren’t necessarily good for them but you see them ending up staying with them and you don’t know what to do because you don’t think it’s best for them but at least they’ve got somewhere to stay.”

Laura also spoke of a newly formed alliance that she had witnessed with a boy experiencing homelessness in her drama class, as he shifted his attention from long established friendships to a new group of older children:

> “He doesn’t hang around with anyone his own age anymore he hangs around with year 9 or above, which is quite funny is the wrong word but it is quite funny to look at because he’s young, he’s not 12 until the summer and he’s really short so he really stands out, but yeah he never hangs out with anyone younger than year 9 now and he hangs out with the naughty kids… yeah, because he always used to have his own little group of mates, year 7s that were in his class and don’t get me wrong they were cheeky chappies but they were really nice boys and the other ones still are and he’s just sort of abandoned them completely and hooked on to these other year 9s who have all got their own issues at home.”

There seemed to be a misrecognition of these new friendships as a move towards becoming ‘bad’, becoming one of the ‘naughty children’ headed for a life of criminality and addiction. The teachers were worried by these new associations, in some cases understandably where the new friendships also coincided with new and concerning, risky behaviours, however, some of these friendships actually seemed to be useful in terms of a sense of belonging, connection and understanding oneself, as noted most of those that gravitated together had “their own issues at home” and as such, there was an unspoken understanding of each other, the only group where everyone had some form of struggle at home and so they began their friendships on an equal footing, they ‘got’ each other and could move on to other points of conversation without having to deal with the awkwardness of discussing their problems with each other, or working out each other’s social positions in relation to themselves as so often happens in other groups. On the other hand, they could open up about their stresses without the fear of being judged by someone who did not understand their experience.

This recognition of the benefits of sharing spaces with others who have shared experiences was mentioned by Muna whose school had set up a ‘Comfort Corner’ wherein disadvantaged students could “hang out”, decompress, ‘escape’ from mainstream sessions, pop along when they felt overwhelmed and were welcomed to join in activities such as cooking, crafting, games and the like. This was a “safe space” for students who shared a common experience of disadvantage and Muna considered this place joyful and accessible, a place that she believed could level the playing field. She did note, however, that this space was more often accessed by girls (usually homeless, care experienced or otherwise ‘at risk’), and boys tended to avoid the space unless they were ‘desperate’ to get out of their lessons. In some ways this was a stigmatised space, a space that the vast majority of other students in the school viewed with pity or prejudice, it was a place where the ‘have-nots’ went and in her discussion of this other students seemed to view the ‘Comfort Corner’ with derision, so to for the people in it. There is a potential risk of isolation then, in designating a place specifically for disadvantaged students, as has been evidenced in the isolation and exclusion felt by disabled students who were educated in separate spaces to their non-disabled peers in mainstream schools (Holt, Lea and Bowlby, 2012). However, these schemes for supporting students struggling with mainstream education are disguised, their purpose is evident to the students inside and outside of these spaces and so, sometimes provoked feelings of jealousy from other students who feel a sense of injustice at the thought of some students being able to remove themselves from lessons for a calmer environment. Being seen entering a space designed only for disadvantaged students meant ‘outing’ themselves as such to the rest of their cohort, when so much work had been done by homeless students to avoid disclosing their circumstance and situation, even accessing the space seemed risky and ill-conceived in their efforts to protect their identities from criticism and judgement. It would be perhaps more fruitful to work towards a disassembling of the stigma associated with homelessness by discussing with the rest of the students the effects of homelessness and the structural forces at play to try and stop disadvantage seem like a personal failing.

In many cases, the dislocation between what students were expected to ‘be’, how they were expected to behave and how homeless children *actually* behave and engage with school was evident. For some, there was a need to 'fix' these students, to control their reactions to their experiences outside of school and try to force complicity with the behaviours expected from an 'ideal student'. The effects of crisis, as "profound and debilitating" (Nickerson and Zhe, 2014: 777) were diminished and somewhat disregarded, a deviation from the norm marked students or parents as 'lacking' or 'failing', regardless of whether the disruption to the routine was the result of insecure housing. Henry spoke of a current student, a young girl, who was experiencing homelessness and remarked on her ability to "show up everyday". It became clear from his account that for this particular family, a sense of structure and familiarity with routine provided a sense of normalcy despite the unsettled nature of their housing situation, it allowed the family a connection to their everyday and that he believed that the parents had made a concerted effort to maintain her educational engagement. However, she is compared, in his mind, with a previous student in the same situation whose attendance was low, and who "never did his homework ever, it would just never come back, it was really bad". Their experiences were pitted against each other – one family was doing it 'right' and the other, who struggled to regularly attend school were seen as 'wrong'. He seemed to have a romanticized notion of homelessness as a circumstance that people had the choice to ignore, that one could choose to not allow the loss of one's home to disrupt education and constructed it as the family's duty to their child to disregard the effects of precarity on the child's ability to show up and get the job done. This way of being viewed, as a deserving or undeserving homeless person, dependent on the ability to present an unaffected identity, often led to strategies to conceal one's identity from schools for both parents and students. The perceived importance of parental engagement and the difficulties that homelessness presents in mothers engaging with education will be discussed further in the section below.

6.3.3 Parental Engagement

As well as the 'ideal pupil', parents were also expected to maintain the role of the 'ideal parent', a parent who would ensure that their children remained compliant with school and social rules in an effort to help construct a productive and amenable citizen in the future (Best, 2017; Goodall, 2017). Within school grounds a parent who was considered 'ideal' is one who engages in conversations with teachers about their child's progress, ensures an adherence to school rules and one who engages with educational practices in the home space (Abrahams, 2018; Turney and Kao, 2009; Bakker, Denessen and Brus-Laeven, 2007). It has been argued, however, that the practices expected of parents were easier to access for parents who had disposable income and time available to engage: temporal and economic resources had a significant impact on being viewed positively within the school space. Where parents are viewed positively, it has also been argued that their children are then in turn treated more favourably (Abrahams, 2018).

For all of the teaches that I spoke to, in every different school it would be the case that parents had to sign a parent-school agreement, as a condition of their child's entry to the school, in which the parents had to agree to support the school’s efforts in delivering their own education policies and promise to maintain continual engagement with the school’s staff. Parents were held responsible for getting their children to school, managing their behaviour and emotional regulation in and out of school, and for their success within the school. Parents were also expected to work in collaboration with the schools to ensure that all rules enforced by the school were supported in the home environment, as George stated: “it’s very important and then if you’ve got the parent on board you’re alright, if you don’t bring them round you’ve got no chance.” However, teachers noted a tension with some parents and their comfort in engaging with the school. For those who felt that their own lives had not been improved by the education system, who had had a negative experience of academic learning, the teachers noted that education did not take a priority over other areas of their lives, often stating that this was to the detriment of their children’s schoolwork.

> “It’s difficult you know when parents aren’t on your side, we’ve got enough of a task with the kids, but then when you don’t get any support from their parents then it’s this monumental job, where you’re just battling everyone to try and do the best for this kid and you can see it in their work when you’ve got parents who aren’t interested, if their homework isn’t done, or their student diary isn’t signed, or, I don’t know, they just don’t seem to know about the world? But you can understand it sometimes, some parents struggle, they haven’t had that education themselves and they slipped through the net so how can we expect them to, really? But it’s so much easier when you really feel like the parents on your side, so much easier.”

Although the intention of the parent-teacher agreements was to strike up a partnership, and forge links, between home and school (Schecter and Sherri, 2009; Marshall, 2020) when parents were unresponsive to requests from schools to engage, the dynamic soon shifted into an ‘us and them’ relationship, the parent became a problematic opposition to the school’s agenda creating, as Fernanda mentioned above, a ‘battle’ for teachers to fight through. The parents were either on the school’s ‘side’, or they weren’t, education becomes yet another battlefield to navigate. This would likely be a difficult position for the homeless women that have to focus on frequently moving house and sometimes schools to maintain a roof over the family’s heads. Though Fernanda makes allowances for parents who were struggling and contends that they may not be able to prioritise giving teachers support, there did seem to be some judgement of unemployed parents with low qualifications from George, who worried that without parental engagement in schooling, that his students would also be “wasting their lives doing nothing all day”, though he did acknowledge that these parents had not had a positive school experience themselves:

> “The school that I’m at and this’ll be the same for lots of schools, but the area I’m in, the people who live there have lived and grew up in that area and went to that particular school and back 15/20 years ago in as an extremely poor, extremely rough, extremely behaviour challenging school but they have very negative sort of vibes

> not only of that school but of the education system itself. Lots of them don't have any qualifications, lots of them don't work and they see school as very sort of negative so the problem is when you're trying to engage them, it's almost like talking to students again. You're not talking to the normal sort of adult. So you've got to get past their 'Well when we were at school we did nowt and we're alright' mentality."

George's construction of a parent who did not engage in the typical educational practices that he would expect as abnormal, however, it has long been acknowledged that parental engagement comes in many forms, some of which go unnoticed and underappreciated by formal schooling (Reay, 2007; 2012; Francis and Mills, 2012), and as Bakker, Denessen and Brus-Laeven state:

> "The involvement of lower SES [socio-economic status] parents in the education of their children may be of a different nature than the involvement of middle or higher SES parents and is *often not in congruence with the expectations of the school*."
> (Bakker, Denessen and Brus-Laeven, 2007; emphasis added)

Many practices that homeless parents, as well as other economically marginalised parents, engage in with their children do not conform to the educational practices that teachers expect and are often misrecognised as a disengagement from schooling rather than alternative forms of learning (Reay, 2017; Abrahams, 2018). The construction of an 'ideal' parent is not explicit in parent-teacher interactions but is an ideal that is felt by many, an affective expectation that sparked emotion in both parties, according to Muna and Fernanda, some parents felt inhibited and prevented from full engagement with school procedures because of their lack of understanding of the education system and how to use these systems to their advantage, and instead saw school as nothing more than a legal requirement. Some parents, according to many of the participants of this study, saw the function of the teacher as sole provider of education and not the parent's place to engage with teaching practices, but as Agasisti and Maragkou (2022) suggest the lack of control over outcomes through not knowing about potential pathways through education reduced parents self-esteem in regard to educational decisions and limited their ability to engage meaningfully in their children's education as the teachers would expect. But this lack of engagement was not one that was always experienced passively, Laura noticed a sense of guilt within many of the parents that she engaged with, parents who wanted to fulfil the role of an 'ideal' parent, but whose circumstances prevented them from doing so:

> "So many parents are like, they feel awful, so many families feel so guilty because they're trying to sort a home and do their best and for their job, but in doing that, they feel guilty for not giving their child the attention that it needs and deserves when it comes to their work. Some people just don't know how."

Even when there was very little engagement from parents, most teachers stated that the vast majority of parents would still attend a parent's evening at some point during their child's school career. Parent's evenings in schools, for the teachers that I spoke to, acted as a way to measure which parents were truly engaged in their children's education, a large part of George's job role had been to increase the parental turn-out on these evenings, and was so far considering his efforts successful:

> "When I first started 8 years ago, on the parents open evening for year 6/7, you were getting sort of 20-30 families, last year we got 780 families attendance. Same with parents evening you were getting 30-40% of the year group's parents, now you're getting about 70%, so things are changing and shifting and that's a lot to do with members of staff and the leadership we've got now."

A higher level of parental engagement meant to George that the quality of the education they were providing was improving, but parent's evenings in school were also seen by many of the teachers as an opportunity to gain some insight into the home lives of their student and offer some support to the parents who they perceived to be struggling.

> "With the year 11 boy, the one who ended up on the street, this is the one that's got the younger siblings, cause even though the parents are always working, one thing they've never missed is information evenings, parents evenings…they are really hands on when it comes to his education. So, when I did meet them, there was…you can tell when people are struggling and you can tell…you can see tired. You can just see exhaustion on people's faces and then it's sometimes just the question of 'are you guys alright? How is everything?'

Laura, a secondary school drama teacher, recounted her experience of struggling to communicate with a "reluctant parent", though she recognized that the mother's life demanded her attention be focused on securing safe housing and that just keeping the family fed and sheltered was a struggle: "it's all about survival in times like this…just surviving is their priority", she stated that she had managed to find a bond with this mother who began to open up to Laura about her struggles when she attended a parent's evening for her child:

> "She said she was intimidated, as if we were going to judge her, because she didn't do well at school herself, she just assumed that she wasn't welcome there, or didn't feel comfortable there anyway…She's open to certain people, but she's really embarrassed, she hates it and she hates the stigma and you can tell…if you ask her about it in person, like if she comes into school for a parent/teacher meeting or anything like that, she'll always be checking over her shoulders and things like that to see who's listening and you can tell that she's worn proper nice, like the nicest clothes that she's got for it. Which is a bit sad. Because the rest of the time, the kids come into school and they're a bit mucky and they never have nice clothes or trainers."

The sense of inferiority read on homeless mothers was present in every account from teachers – school, it seemed, did not feel like a place for them and parents were seen to strategize about their school visits, making a significant effort to present in a way what they deem to be desirable through material goods. Dressing in their 'nicest clothes' and being well-kempt was seen as a way to gain access to capitals that they didn't always have (Bakkali, 2019; Mckenzie, 2015), but Laura had noticed that in these cases their seemed to be a fear of being discovered as unbelonging.

The reluctance to engage was not always because of some sense of intimidation or trepidation about what the school would make of them, it was also experienced on a practical level, parents sometimes did not engage because they *could not* engage, as Jane states, from her experience of working with mothers in the hostel, the effects of trauma extend far beyond the immediate moment of impact, but affected the ways in which mothers were able to engage in their children's education:

> "We'd come across, primarily families…and you know you'd talk about education and things like that with them and it was like 'I've got too much going on to be dealing with this, they don't need to be going to school, they need to be with me' some of that can be trauma because they want their children with them and they don't want them in school or some of it can be they just can't be bothered taking them to school …they were missing out on education and were usually hanging around with undesirable people, with parents. Usually those ones that didn't take 'em to school…I sound like I'm branding here but it wasn't, it's just that how it is in my mind, in recollection, but you'd find that like, those that were substance dependent would be less inclined to make that effort to take them to school."

The pressure of engaging with education was just one stressor too many for some homeless mothers and it was part of Jane's role within the hostel, to find solutions to ensure that the children did attend school and the mothers were not persecuted for unauthorised absences from school. Jane used the resources at her disposal to make this, sometimes difficult, transition back into schooling as easy as possible for both parent and child, but this did depend on the parent also agreeing to take control and responsibility for their children's education in the future, making this one of the targets that Jane and the mothers worked towards to demonstrate progress during their occupation within the temporary facility:

> "So then what we do is formulate a plan, a working agreement so, one of the working agreements must be 'you must get your children to school', we will support you, but we can't do it for you, or they'll say 'right, we'll get them a taxi to school…We'd have to start at 7 in the morning, going up, knocking on the door, 'it's time to get up, it's time to get up', so every half hour until they got up and that was literally to take them to school."

With some support and personal resolve, Jane acknowledged that most mothers were able to increase their level of engagement with schooling, but from the teachers there did not seem to be any level of support to help parents who were struggling to engage, beyond increasing pressure for them to do so.

6.4 Conclusion

In discussing issues of homelessness within their student population teachers acknowledged that the process of education, both in terms of experience and attainment, was negatively impacted by living without, or between, permanent safe places to live. Teachers, on the whole, felt a responsibility to support their student population who were struggling with economic and housing precarity but are under such great pressure from their superiors due to increasing assessments of students and teachers, that there was little time or space to offer bespoke teaching to each student who needed it. Where the majority of practitioners stated that they had entered their chosen profession to provide services and care for young people’s education and wellbeing, the lack of support available to teachers to be able to deliver this care and education hindered their ability to meet the needs of every student. There was inadequate help available to allow teachers to focus on their own wellbeing. It also became apparent that teacher training courses did not prepare teachers to deal with homelessness amongst their student population and as such, even when homelessness was identified in the lives of the families they were working with, they did not feel sufficiently equipped to engage in conversations around homelessness, or strategize about possible solutions they could put in place within the school to limit the negative impact homelessness was having on educational engagement or attainment. Both the teachers and other homelessness service practitioners found that, even when they did feel confident in their knowledge about how to approach housing or homelessness conversations and aid, they were bound by the bureaucratic processes that were in place that limited the support that they were able to offer, they recognised that due to funding cuts, increased numbers of children in classrooms and increased monitoring of teachers’ practice and results, alongside the growing number of children experiencing homelessness, meant that provisions were limited and did not adequately provide for the families who needed support in times of housing crisis. Although in some cases the support that was required was physical or material where families required bedding, clothes or food, in many circumstances there were other factors that made schooling and education inaccessible to children experiencing homelessness. When multiple frequent moves between spaces of accommodation were a part of the children’s lives, children often experienced tiredness, lethargy and an inability to concentrate. Moving between houses was exhausting and meant that the young people had little energy left to expend on retaining information or carrying out educational activities that were being asked of them. Enduring traumatic experiences, of which losing one’s home and living in insecure circumstance was one, and being exhausted, affected behaviour in some children so that behaviours exhibited in classrooms could be construed as unruly, disrupted and ‘naughty’. Being labelled as a badly behaved child was potentially damaging for the child’s perception of themselves in the present and in the future and was unhelpful in understanding the underlying reasons for this behaviour.

When families had to move into emergency accommodation there was a recommendation that they move to a new school located closer to the hostel's location, and in some cases, where emergency accommodation was not available, students had to move schools on a regular basis and the frequent moving of schools also meant that homeless children's education was disrupted when they had to be pulled out of schools and transferred into another. The driving force behind multiple moves was the necessity to meet their basic needs of having shelter and was required for survival. The practitioners recognised that despite suggesting that children maintaining their place at a familiar school would be beneficial for both their education and their wellbeing, given that that would enable them to maintain their strong social bonds with friends and teachers, that this was not always possible for families who were experiencing homelessness. When families became homeless, they were forced to take space that became available to them rather than having the freedom to choose where that space was. When parents were not able to factor in the proximity to the school when securing their next space for accommodation, some of the practitioners recognised this as a painful truth for parents to grapple with, it was a necessity that left parents with a sense of guilt, shame and stress for disrupting their children's education, but one which they had no control over.

Often, parents and children were reluctant to make the school aware of the circumstances once they had become homeless, it was a situation that practitioners believed was overshadowed by shame, embarrassment and a fear of judgement. It became evident that, for some teachers, a lower socioeconomic status and financial precarity was already an indicator of being somehow 'faulty', untrustworthy and as such many parents in this position were viewed as potentially disengaged and uninterested in educational conversations; an assumption that influenced how teachers treated parents and in turn, how parents engaged with the teachers. There was evidence of an 'us and them' dynamic between the teachers/institution and the children and the families who were recipients of the services the schools provided. Practitioners noted that there was a fear of judgement from parents that prevented them from 'opening up' to teachers about their experiences as they felt that the teachers would not understand the weight of the situation they were living through and would cast judgement upon them and 'blame' them for becoming homeless. It was easier for both mothers and parents to discuss their current situation with friends and peers who they believed would be able to relate more closely to their experiences. This unwillingness to disclose their homelessness though, made it difficult for teachers to put any strategies in place to help their families, or to contextualise any behaviours caused by stress and disruption. Where teachers and practitioners had insight into the daily lives of the children living in temporary forms of accommodation, they were more easily able to understand the deviation from the normative expectations that are imbued in the student/teacher/parent behaviours and relationships. When education is built around a "middle-class imaginary" (Reay, 2007: 1192), that values certain types of knowledge, the "norm" of what it means to be a successful learner is likely to be a mismatch to the ways in which homeless students are able to engage with schooling as they go through the crisis of homelessness and the stress of rehousing. The overcrowded nature of the forms of homelessness that their student populations were experiencing, such as sleeping on friend's sofas and sharing a hotel room with their family, meant that there was very little space to undertake homework tasks which teachers felt left these children ‘falling behind’. There was also an expectation that parents should form a ‘partnership’ with the teachers and the school to support the education of their children, however, navigating economic and housing precarity left many homeless mothers unable to engage with educational practices in overt and explicit ways that are valued by teachers and educational institutions, often written into their policies, and as such were seen as unhelpful and unmotivated in the education spaces.

Finally, it is also important to acknowledge that for some, school was seen as a place of safety where the stresses of their daily lives could be put to one side, and where they could focus on their futures, connect with their friends and peers and feel a sense of normality in the unusual circumstances they were living through with their loss of a permanent home. Schools were also thereby sites in which safety nets were in place for children and parents to have their needs met, even if these safety nets were unconventional and dependent on the kindness and care of the practitioners they encountered.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This thesis has explored the ways in which homeless mothers in Manchester navigate both their family's homelessness and their search for housing whilst also considering how they manage the education of their children through these moments of housing crisis. Whilst the topic of homelessness is growing as an academic consideration, and there has been an increase in work that focuses on female specific homelessness (Brush et al., 2018; Bretherton, 2017; Baupitt et al., 2011; Sikich, 2008), relatively little attention has been paid to the experience of parenting without a home, and significantly less attention still has been paid to the impact of that homelessness on educational engagement. The intention of this research has been to address these gaps in existing knowledge, whilst recognising that there is still more work to be done in this area.

Building on research that explores homelessness through feminist approaches (Lancione, 2018; 2017; 2016, McCarthy 2018, Robinson, 2011), this study sought to give voice to mothers living through moments of housing and economic precarity, with particular attention paid to the emotive and affective elements of this experience and the impact this has on education engagement. The thesis has been concerned with the kinds of feelings that exist in the intersections of housing precarity, female homelessness, parenthood and schooling in order to contribute to existing work concerned with the human experience of positions of homelessness. In this chapter I present a review of the key findings of the research, before coming to a series of concluding points drawn from the material that I have presented. I then move to outline the limitations of the study, before concluding by considering avenues for future research and a call for collective action.

7.2 Overview

I began this thesis by outlining the research questions which underpinned the study from the outset. Those questions were:

1) How is homelessness felt and experienced by homeless mothers with children in their care?
2) How do homeless mothers seek to engage with and navigate their children's educational pathways?
3) How do homeless mothers experience opportunities or constraints in relation to the educational choices that they make during times of crisis?

These questions and subsequent research prioritised the voices of the women that I spoke with in an effort to decentre the institutionalised subject of 'the homeless' that has tended to produce abstract categorisations of what are often seen as flawed individuals. Instead, I have sought to recentre the range of emotions and details of the lives of people who experience housing loss and who are then placed in positions of indefinite housing precarity. These issues have been deliberated on through the research from the outset and I now turn here to distil the key contributions of the research.

7.3 Key Contributions

This work has contributed to our understandings of how women experience homelessness, how education is affected by living without a home and how practitioners of both education and housing/homelessness services engage with homeless women and their children. The key findings, in response to the initial research questions and which will be revisited in more detail below, are:

1. Homelessness was experienced as a corporeal, emotional and affective phenomenon. It was felt as an identity-shifting, enduring process through which there was no clear or guaranteed route to security.

2. In most cases, educational attainment was understood by the women as an indicator of future success, but schooling was hugely disrupted and negatively impacted by the impermanence and transient nature of living without a home. Surviving was more important than engaging with educational practices or personal desires. It was difficult to enact educational practices outside of school where physical space was limited and emotional capacity had been reached. For others, education became the primary focus to survive and succeed.

3. Educational practitioners have limited resources to ensure that adequate support for children who have become homeless, or their parents, is available. In many cases teachers were not aware when children were experiencing homelessness and did not feel equipped to have conversations around homelessness when they were made aware.

4. Educational decisions were largely determined by circumstance: proximity of the temporary accommodation to the school, considering the number of previous moves or disruptions, safety considerations and advice from practitioners. However, where women were able to exercise agency over schooling and housing decisions, strategies were put into place to achieve some semblance of control in a circumstance that was deemed largely out of their hands.

I now turn to explore these key contributions in more depth. Though I presented the findings through different forms of accommodation and relation to homelessness, this concluding chapter considers all of these situations and actors together. The chapters were organised by association with place, job role or type of accommodation largely due to practical and logistical considerations: I was situated in hostels to conduct the research for specific periods of time and began analysis as an ongoing process whilst I was in these spaces and as such drew points of interest that formed chapters as I did so. Many of the emotional and affective experiences associated with homelessness existed across both hostels and other forms of temporary accommodation: tiredness, anxiety and a hope for a brighter future were feelings that were present irrespective of where temporary accommodation had been found and was more indicative of what it feels like to be homeless rather than where they were staying. It is not the intention of this work to compare differing forms of homelessness, but to gain a wider understanding of the feelings that occur when one is living without a place considered as a home. I have particularly sought, for example, to decentre the tendency to offer a kind of institutionalised subject of the 'homeless', by recentring the multiple emotions experienced in their lives. I now turn to outlining the key contributions made by this research in more detail.

Contribution 1 is discussed under the title Feeling Homelessness, Surviving versus Thriving provides more depth to conclusion 2, and the 3rd key contribution is summarised under the title: Teaching Homeless Children. The fourth contribution responds to the third research question: 'How do homeless mothers experience agency or constraints over educational choices' and is discussed throughout these three sections.

7.3.1 Feeling Homelessness

1. How is homelessness felt and experienced by homeless mothers with children in their care? Homelessness was experienced as a corporeal, emotional and affective phenomenon.

This research sought to contribute to the field of housing and homelessness by broadening its focus to understand the experience of homeless mothers and the emotional effects that homelessness had on their lives, whilst also considering the impact of these feelings and events on their educational decision-making strategies. It has been acknowledged that, thus far, homelessness literature, data on homelessness and media portrayals have tended to focus on a very narrow section of the male 'street dwelling' homeless population (Sikich, 2008). It is perhaps due to these portrayals that, in the public imagination, homeless identities still conjure stereotypes that signal a deviation from social 'norms' (Stevens, 2022; Radley, Hodgetts and Cullen, 2006) and homeless people are vilified as problematic and irresponsible (Penderson et al., 2015; Kennelly and Dillabough, 2008) with associations often being made between homelessness and 'deviant' behaviour such as drug use, violence and irresponsible spending (Gerrard and Farrugia, 2015; Oliver and Cheff, 2014). These representations of homeless people do little to capture the experiences of the vast majority of homeless people and the circumstances by which they have found themselves without a home.

Gowan's (2010) typology of homelessness suggests the causes of homelessness are broadly discussed in three categories: 'sin talk' where homelessness is associated with deviance or bad decision-making practices of the individual, ‘sick talk’ where homelessness is medicalised, pathologized and seen as an inherently individual problem to be fixed, and ‘system talk’ where the causes of homelessness are understood as systemic or structural failures. The academic literature in the field of homelessness and the contextual factors presented in this work all point towards systemic and structural factors contributing to the rise in homelessness in England, these factors include: the limited availability of social housing (Shelter, 2023; Pain, 2018; Cole et al., 2015), the lack of affordable housing in the private rental sector (Pridd, 2020; Ellis and Laughlin, 2021) and reduced public spending on welfare support (O’Leary and Simcock, 2022; Bogue, 2019), despite all of the women that I spoke being affected by these systemic and structural issues, they did not adopt a ‘system talk’ framing of their own experiences and had instead adopted a ‘sin talk’ or ‘sick talk’ narrative about their own identities and routes into homelessness, blaming themselves for their circumstance. The discussions around ‘home’ and their paths to and through ‘homelessness’ were much more complex and nuanced than mainstream depictions of such an experience would suggest. This study found that living without a home had a significant effect on the psychic and bodily capacity to function at some kind of ‘normal’ level or capacity. Homelessness was felt as an extreme disruption to normal daily lives and an experience that altered the ways in which the women were able to conduct themselves or maintain control over their lives. It was a feeling that penetrated identities and altered their sense of self in myriad ways: they had to become more dependent on other people to meet their needs, their parenting became a point of comment for others where this had not been the case when living in their own private homes and they had to reconcile the ‘type’ of person they thought they were previously with the ‘type’ of person that they were now being seen as after being given the label of ‘homeless’, a label that has wider social implications than just searching for a house, but on their sense of belonging, value and sense of self-worth (Averitt, 2003). All of the women in this study went through a process of identity renegotiation through which they had to shift their own perceptions of themselves and their lives. These identity renegotiations were based on processes of comparison (McCarthy, 2015); comparisons to their old ‘normal’ lives, to how other people were living their lives and to what they believed others now thought of them based on cultural and social perceptions of a homeless identity (McCarthy, 2013; Preece, Garratt and Flaherty, 2020). Many women rejected the concept of homelessness to distance themselves from this identity, they recognised themselves as ‘without a home’ but found it difficult to conceive of themselves as a homeless person. Perpetual identity work was mentally and emotionally draining and is a hidden effect of losing one’s home.

Alongside the mental and emotional effects of housing loss it became clear that physical effects were also evident. Moving themselves and their belongings between different spaces of temporary accommodation, especially for those who were ‘sofa-surfing’ and having to move regularly, was draining and required regular physical exertion. As with the participants in Sanders, Boobis and Albanese’s study on sofa-surfing (2019), sleeping on people’s sofas, or sharing a bed with their children, had detrimental physical effects on the body with many of the mothers noting pain from occupying small or unsuitable sleeping spaces. Sleep was hard to come by in such occurrences and was also interrupted by thoughts of guilt and fear over their situation and ruminating over plans to try and resolve their homelessness. The stress of homelessness caused more tiredness, and their tiredness and the impact of sleep deprivation had a further impact on their physical wellbeing.

In some cases, extreme tiredness was further exacerbated by the logistics of getting children to school, where the school was not in close proximity to their accommodation. Where women had made the choice to keep their children at the schools that they had become used to, moving to temporary accommodation usually involved making longer journeys between their residence and the school. In some cases, this journey involved multiple buses, long car journeys or having to drop their children off at a friend's house early in the morning before the long drive back to work. These long journeys, five days a week were exhausting for both the mothers and the children and caused a tiredness that affected both the mother's work, or ability to function through the day, and also the child's ability to focus and engage with their schooling. However, the perceived benefits of keeping their children at the same schools seemed to ultimately outweigh the negative effects of making the journey to keep them there given that consistency in school attendance is considered vital for educational success (Carter and Nutbrown, 2016) and that maintaining friendships and social networks with peers has been found to deepen learning and support wellbeing (Schmidt, 2020). For all of the women that I spoke to, there was a guilt associated with their current living situation, they expressed their disappointment that their children had to live in temporary forms of accommodation and did not have a safe, permanent house in which to reside and in some cases, keeping their children with their already established friendship groups by not changing schools was seen as a kindness, some recompense for the children having to experience disruption elsewhere.

The women that I spoke to had to become acclimatised to living in small spaces, consciously reducing the amount of space they occupied, both physically and symbolically. There was a constant emotional and affective struggle whilst residing in other people's spaces, or in spaces where other people were often present, as they tried to minimise their own presence or block out the disruption felt by the presence of others, a feeling that is common amongst those who are living in temporary accommodation (Sanders, Boobis and Albanese, 2019). But more than just physical manifestations of stress, the corporeal impact felt through moving one's belongings between places of temporary accommodation, and the tiredness endured through traversing long distances from temporary places of residence to their children's schools; the affect and emotional experience of homelessness was significant much like the feelings of guilt and disappointment discussed above. The affects that were discussed in relation to being and becoming homeless, that is, the feelings that get "stuck to certain bodies" (Ahmed, 2010: 39), were numerous, nuanced and individual.

Whether living in hostel accommodation or staying with friends or family, this study found that feelings of luck and gratitude were associated with managing to find a place to stay where this had previously been removed from them, this discourse worked to construct the women as lucky recipients of other people's charity and generosity, rather than successful and reliable individuals. Much like the participants in

Garthwaite's (2016) study, the women that I spoke to had internalised a sense of shame around their circumstance and downplayed their own agency and labour that had secured them a place to stay. Each woman had made a concerted effort in searching for accommodation and formulating ways to secure these spaces, but this was dismissed through their own narratives. Instead, most of the participants constructed themselves as the 'lucky unlucky', as they managed to find some brief reprieve in very difficult circumstances, despite feeling as though they were unworthy of support. The concept of luck also spoke to the consistent comparisons that the women would make in their own minds about their situation and the gratitude that they felt that their circumstance was not 'worse'. Interestingly, those who were residing in hostels expressed gratitude that they were 'lucky' enough to have gained a place in a secure location and were grateful not to have to sofa-surf in other people's spaces, conversely, many of the women who were sofa-surfing were thankful that they did not have to occupy hostel spaces which they imagined to be hostile and dangerous places. Imagining what a 'worse' alternative form of accommodation might be allowed women a sense of appreciation for where they were currently living.

Awkwardness also played a key role in residing in temporary accommodation, where the women were unsure of how long they would be allowed to stay, how to behave in other people's spaces and as such, became more conscious of themselves as outsiders than they had before. For those who were 'sofa surfing' or staying with friends and family, the notion that they were inhabiting someone else's home was inescapable. In most cases the women that I spoke to understood that there were implicit rules surrounding their stay and some behaviours expected of them as a contingency of their stay, though they were never entirely sure what these rules were, nor how to enact them. The consistent second guessing of their own actions and subsequent scrutiny of their children's behaviours in other people's homes was exhausting and stressful and constructed them as the object of judgement by others. In these spaces they could not be 'themselves', or retreat to privacy to shut the world away and instead had to live somewhat publicly whilst assessing every move they made and having no certainty that they were 'getting it right'. There was an acute awareness that they were occupying someone else's space and that the offer of accommodation could be, and was frequently, rescinded at a moment's notice. Many of the women lived in fear that they would have to rapidly find new accommodation and that their stay was entirely conditional and transient. For women who were residing in hostels or women and children's centres, there was a clearer sense of what the 'rules' were; they were expected to engage in 'self-betterment' practices through life skills and parenting courses, identify targets for themselves and their housing journeys that were then monitored, in some cases they were required to contribute to communal cleaning and maintenance tasks, and limit who was visiting them in the accommodation space. Within the hostels the conditions of their stay were, in most cases, made explicit but the implicit rules surrounding communal interactions, expected conduct, keeping children quiet and occupying someone else's space unobtrusively were still present here too. For some people, these rules were beneficial and supported their own desires for learning and development, but for others, these rules signified that they were being judged as a failure or as a person who required 'fixing'. It has been acknowledged that these 'self-betterment' programmes are borne from the neoliberal agenda towards individualisation and self-reliance but are not necessarily relevant to every person who will undertake them in these spaces (Cooper, 2016; Neale and Stevenson 2015).

Feelings of homelessness were shared by many of the women that I spoke to and homelessness was felt as a very individual crisis, but beyond this, many of the women were cognisant of the wider 'housing crisis' that is evident in the UK: the lack of social or affordable housing, the increase in average private rental costs and the limited number of supported temporary accommodations that were available to be placed in. The collision of both the personal and social housing crises were felt acutely and they remarked on wider discourse surrounding a housing 'crisis' as it was now impacting on their lives directly and limited opportunities to be safely and securely housed in a timely way. For many of the women that I spoke to there was a sense that the experience of homelessness was one that was enduring and an experience that women could only hope to be over. There was a sense of anticipating in and living only in some idea of the future; life in the present could not be fully enjoyed because this is not the life they were supposed to be living. For some this anticipation was filled with hope, the hope that soon their lives would return to 'normal' and that they would find safe and permanent a home, and that a resolution to the "issues" they were facing would be found through securing housing. Though, much like in Horton's (2016) work, anticipating future problems such as being unable to secure a permanent house, their children struggling with schooling and anticipating losing their home again in the future, caused anguish and despair that was felt and experienced as though it was happening in the present. Their hopes and dreams were pinned on the belief that they would only be in their current situation temporarily and so would soon find relief in being able to alleviate themselves from the pain and exhaustion felt through homelessness. Living in temporary accommodation, and a desire to return to 'normal' also meant that memories of their previous homes were romanticised, there was a longing for what was, despite many of the women having fled their homes through unsafe, overcrowded or otherwise unsafe conditions, the past existed in an idealised state; a feeling that they hoped to return to. Whether the 'waiting' was a feeling that allowed for a moment of hope, or, as it was for the vast majority, a painful feeling that they *had* to endure, the perpetual uncertainty was a feeling that they had no control over; housing options were limited by financial precarity, lack of affordable housing stock, a lack of knowledge regarding where to access formal support. Although there was some support through social networks and, especially for people living in women and children's centres, there was support available in finding future housing through the practitioners who worked in the centre, there was still a sense that they felt alone in their journey through homelessness and were expected to adopt individual responsibility for their housing trajectories, income and future success.

The notion of individual responsibility for success is bound by the idea that people act in reasonable and rational ways, that people are able to make sound and rational decisions about both their present and their future lives (Ilan, 2012). But, where the affective nature of being and becoming homeless was experienced as a very individual crisis and thought process and ensuing actions became marred by the stress and trauma of such an experience, it became increasingly more difficult for mothers to act in rational ways and make informed choices about themselves, their children, their housing and their children's schooling. Living without a home did not feel like their 'real life' and as such, it was difficult to imagine the consequences to present actions when future plans could not be guaranteed: there was an impossible internal struggle to marry up the risks and rewards of any action when the future was unknown.

For the majority of my participants, homelessness and the process of having to regularly seek out new temporary accommodation, meant that women and their children were constantly living in a 'survival mode': living in pursuit of the basic necessities for a liveable life. I shall explore this concept of survival, and its impact on education, in the next section.

7.3.2 Thriving Vs. Surviving

2. How do homeless mothers seek to engage with and navigate their children's educational pathways? Schooling was hugely disrupted and negatively impacted by the impermanence and transient nature of living without a home. In many cases surviving was more important than engaging with educational practices or personal desires, for others, education became the primary focus to survive and succeed.

This study suggests that homelessness became a task of prioritisation, where the overall concept of securing safe housing in an economically hostile housing market and simultaneously ensuring their children had access to a consistent quality education was too overwhelming to consider all at once, the compounding aspects they had to resolve were broken down into parts that could be reconciled separately. Prioritising what was needed in the immediate as a means of survival therefore took precedence over decisions where the results did not come to fruition instantaneously. There was not one 'right way' to prioritise, but individual assessments were made based on a sense of the risks associated with each decision that they were making and with consideration paid to the resources available to exercise these decisions.

Education in England is widely understood in government rhetoric as a meritocratic process through which hard work, individual commitment and high levels of academic attainment are determinants of economic success in the labour market beyond schooling (Department for Education, 2010; Friedman, 2014; Gardner, Morrin and Payne, 2017).This was a belief also held by many of the women that contributed to this study who considered educational decisions as a priority for them and for their children's future, and invested the time and energy into researching what they believed to be the most appropriate educational pathway for their children. However, some felt that the reward for investing in education was not immediate enough to prioritise engagement in it over the, sometimes daily, struggle to find a place to stay. In either case, the transient nature of homelessness had a negative impact on education. The de-prioritisation of education in these circumstances however, is often misrecognised as a lack of interest in education and a lack of commitment to their children's schooling; where 'parental engagement' is understood by schools as an indicator of academic engagement and a predictor of the student's achievement (Goodall, 2017), a 'failure' to engage in meaningful home/school relationships can cause tension between teachers and parents and can be misconstrued as a failure of parenting (Hutchison, 2011). This misrecognition undermines the emotional labour that homeless mothers are undertaking on a daily basis (Gillies, 2006). When the levels of expected parental engagement could not be achieved through the associated effects of homelessness, mothers felt alienated further from the educational sphere, developed a fear of judgement and shame when entering school spaces and were left doubting their ability to parent 'well'.

Where temporary accommodation was sought as an emergency, the women could not control where the location of this accommodation would be and were compelled to take any option available to them to ensure that they had a place to say. This, in most cases, was not close to where they had previously lived and resulted in either having to travel long distances to commute to the school or to try and find a new school for their children to attend close to their accommodation. When these accommodations were short-term, this could result in multiple school changes and extended periods of time in which the children were not consistently in school. Much like with Reay's (2017; 2001) work on working-class mothers' engagement with education, the women within this study expressed fear around making the 'wrong' choice about their children's education, but no solution adequately met both their accommodation and educational requirements, they were once again faced with impossible 'choices'.

Beyond the specific location of the residence, there was also a concern that they had no control over the environment inside those places. These spaces were not their own and so it was difficult to dedicate spaces to conduct homework from, they could not display educational materials or keep toys out in the open spaces, and for the majority of people the space available to them was limited and often resulted in space becoming multi-functional and never quite fit for purpose, which made both concentration and relaxation difficult endeavours. But they had no real choice, they had to 'make do', or risk trying to find somewhere else to stay.

The mothers had to make a significant additional effort to maintain homework schedules, find places to study, register their children at new schools or travel their children to their old schools. But it was felt by the women that participated in this study, that barriers to accessing housing and education and the monumental effort and emotional labour that women were putting into parenting, finding shelter and schooling decisions were diminished by people who were surrounding them. It was impossible to make firm plans and strategize around schooling when they did not know where they would be living. The women who contributed to this study were presented with a series of impossible 'choices'. Whatever choice they made someone seemed to have an opinion on it and they often found themselves criticized by practitioners, friends and family for even the most mundane of decisions. To return to the work of Gowan (2010) who explores the categorisation of homeless people as either inherently flawed, bad decision makers, or failed by systemic structures, and the

Disability Studies conception of the medicalised body, this study has found that homeless mothers, were in many cases, viewed as in some way individually ‘faulty’ and in need of professional or social intervention to ‘cure’ their bad decision-making practices and to direct their action.

It has been argued, however, that to parent well and make rational decisions people need to have their own basic needs met that extend beyond survival and include social engagements, romantic relationships and moments of reprieve where they do not have to field responsibility for big life decisions (Meltzer et al., 2017, Smith, 2019). But, from the accounts provided, it was clearly understood that a vast amount of the women’s time was consumed with securing new forms of accommodation, whether that involved asking different friends and family for a room for a short period of time or searching for, and bidding on, social housing properties. There was a guilt associated with engaging in activities that did not further their quest for housing and many people expressed that they did not have the mental and emotional capacity to be active outside of this, for many, this also included the issue of education. Non-action in relation to their children’s education was an action in itself, de-prioritising education was a method of self-preservation whilst they dealt with the issue of housing, which was considered as a more urgent endeavour to provide happiness and security.

Where education was moved down the list of priorities, personal relationships were squashed down further still. The process of prioritising essential actions meant that the women felt as though they were just surviving rather than thriving. There was a sense that by diminishing their personal desires and needs to successfully secure, or maintain, a place in temporary accommodation, that they were supressing parts of themselves and as such could not live what they would consider to be a whole life. They longed for a home so that they could begin rebuilding this idea of a ‘whole’ life. Home then, was conceived as not only the promise of security, but the promise of a considered future, ‘home’ was understood as a base camp from which to strategize and draw up ‘game plans’ for action. Home was considered as a place where there was less need to prioritise with such urgency and where the needs of both mother and child could be met. And yet, the home they had been excluded from had not necessarily provided these functions. It had not provided the security because it had been taken away leaving them without a safety net and they have been excluded, in multiple ways, both in terms of home ownership and in social housing and private rental markets. These processes of exclusion from seemingly legitimate, safe and secure forms of housing and schooling have been considered against the backdrop of a society where the needs of the ‘market’ are prioritised over the needs of the human and where surviving, let alone thriving, have become increasingly difficult and costly.

7.3.3 Teaching Homeless Children

Educational practitioners have limited resources to ensure that adequate support for children who have become homeless, or their parents, is available. In many cases teachers were not aware when children were experiencing homelessness and did not feel equipped to have conversations around homelessness when they were made aware.

For all of the practitioners I spoke to, the impetus for undertaking their chosen careers was a desire to provide care and compassion for those that they were working with, but in many cases the practicalities and bureaucratic processes involved in filling that role, made the delivery and display of care and compassion difficult to achieve to the extent that they had anticipated. For those working in hostels or women and children's centres, the advice they could give was determined by the existing homelessness policies that could not be deviated from irrespective of any emotional response from the person receiving that assistance. They were also limited in their capacity to support people based on the relatively low numbers of rooms or flats they had available for occupation and frequently had to turn away families in need of support and temporary accommodation; there was not enough accommodation to meet the demand. Where women and their children could not be provided accommodation in the hostels, many were offered other forms of temporary accommodation, some of which included placement in hotels or bed and breakfast lodgings.

Teachers were also limited by the policies and targets that set the boundaries that they could work within; in an effort from the government to ensure that English students are well prepared to compete in the global labour market, both teaching content and teacher performance are increasingly monitored (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014; Department for Education, 2010 through ever more stringent national curriculum targets (Manyukhina, 2022; Department for Education, 2014a), increased assessments (Hargreaves, Quick and Buchanan, 2023; Bradbury, 2014), routine Ofsted inspections (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017) and vast amounts of administrative work (Fitzgerald et al., 2019). The intensification of teaching processes through educational policy reforms have led to increased workloads and have had a negative impact on teacher wellbeing, with many teachers reporting that they feel overworked (Burrow, Williams and Thomas, 2020; Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2009). Even when teachers experience significant empathy towards a student's situation or have concerns for people in their classrooms, they could find little time to provide pastoral care or indeed, respond to their own emotional reactions to the trauma that their students were experiencing. Big class sizes also meant that teachers are now less able to devote significant time to individual students and risky behaviours or indicators of outside traumas were more difficult to identify.

For teachers who worked with children experiencing homelessness, whilst there was largely an empathy for the difficult circumstances the families found themselves in and a keen sentiment of wanting to 'help' for the students in their classes, there was a distinct knowledge gap in how to work with them. Teachers were used to managing tiredness in the classroom or the lack of ability to concentrate through other children that they worked with but did not know how to address this when the tiredness, lack of focus or 'disruptive' behaviours were borne from living in temporary or inadequate accommodation: there was no guidance about how to navigate the complex and nuanced experiences of those dealing with homelessness and insufficient resources to do so. That is not to say that teachers should be charged with the sole responsibility of providing specialised support to homeless children; the pressures that teachers already face with growing class sizes, increased pressure of standardised testing and quality assessments would make the care this needed difficult, if not impossible (Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2009). However, teachers should be offered some insight into how to begin these conversations, how to recognise the effects of homelessness so children experiencing it do not experience further exclusions and negative repercussions of their homelessness in the classroom setting. The impact of homelessness was not a topic in either teacher training prior to qualifying as teachers, nor as part of their ongoing training whilst they were in post. When they were made aware that a student was experiencing homelessness, largely through student declarations directly to the teacher, there was no certainty about the approach that they 'should' be taking, and were also hesitant to act, cautious that they were getting it 'wrong' but unsure what the 'right' thing was. Some teachers felt compelled to provide support for their students and their families experiencing homelessness, but with limited resources this was often done at a personal cost to the teachers themselves, this included providing food, home furnishings and extra educational equipment and resources. Although this supply of provisions was appreciated by those in receipt of it, this method of providing support for homeless students and their families is not a sustainable one and is dependent on the willingness and ability of teachers to personally provide it and there was no recourse for addressing and supporting teachers' wellbeing when they were emotionally affected by student declarations about the effects of homelessness.

It is important to acknowledge that teachers are not somehow outside or immune to the kinds of social stereotypes of homelessness that see people in this situation as failures, of the individual rather than as a failure of the society or the state (Reay, 2017). In some cases, stereotypes around homelessness and poverty were evident in some responses offered through this research, placing the 'blame' for homelessness and detrimental educational experiences on what they perceived as 'bad' choices from the students' mothers and their lack of engagement with teachers. Where these stereotypes were evident, there was less likelihood that that those teachers would extend additional financial and pastoral support to students and parents living without a home. It should not be the responsibility of teachers to resolve homelessness, but it should be considered important that teachers are offered clear guidelines and advice about how to work with children who are experiencing homelessness, especially as the numbers of children who find themselves in that situation are increasing (DLUHC, 2023a). If education is a key factor in accessing the labour market and is an indicator of future 'success', then homeless children too should have the chance to make the most of the opportunity that is schooling. This can only happen if teachers are given the support to do so.

This support is not only contingent on teachers knowing how to respond to homelessness but also in them knowing that homeless children are in their classrooms at all. It became evident that parents are so fearful of social services intervention and having their children removed from their care because of their homelessness, that this is often hidden from teachers where educators are seen as closely aligned with social workers in an effort to protect their family units. The work presented here also found that stigma has a large part to play in the concealment of their housing loss, with parents choosing not to declare their situation to school to avoid the teachers mistaking them for 'bad' parents. Children also worked to conceal their homeless identities to both avoid stereotypical assumptions from their peers, and to protect their parents from the stigma of losing one's home.

Where parents or practitioners had made the school aware of their living situation, this information was usually held by the senior leadership or welfare teams within the school and did not filter down to teachers in the classroom, who were not made aware of when their students became homeless unless the student or parents themselves made declarations to the teacher individually. This process was put into place to ensure that students remained safe from judgement and for their safety when they had left violent circumstances but did mean that accommodations to minimised of the effects of homelessness in the classroom could not be made in the learning environment when this was necessary.

7.4 Limitations

In the initial conception of this research I had anticipated undertaking a mixed method approach to the work, utilising both autoethnographic and participatory approaches to drive the research forwards and interrogate the ways in which women with children in their care experienced homelessness, I had planned to make multiple visits to the same women to hear a broader scope of their experience and offer them the benefit of reflection following the first interview. This, however, became impossible with the rise of the Covid-19 pandemic and had to be adjusted to accommodate everyone's safety. It would have been interesting to further explore these matters in a more participatory way than the circumstance allowed.

Another adjustment made from the research proposal was the inclusion of my own story in the research process. Whilst I still acknowledge that my experience of homelessness has informed this work and do not shy away from telling the world that I experienced homelessness, I made the decision to refrain from sharing more detailed accounts of this circumstance. During the PhD process I also found work as an actor and a writer and secured work on several TV programmes. I had not anticipated the effects of appearing in the public domain when I conceived of the research and was surprised by the attention online once I had made these appearances. I have mentioned that I have experienced homelessness in public forums and once these TV programmes were aired, I was inundated with questions concerning the minutiae of my experience from strangers across the world. And, whilst I believe there is value in me sharing the fact that I was homeless, I recognise that I was not alone in this experience. There were other people who affected and were affected by my routes to and through homelessness who have not consented for their stories to be shared so publicly and, as I cannot anonymise myself through this process I also cannot guarantee their anonymity, and so I refrained from including this information here. I did however, share my story with the people who shared theirs with me inasmuch as they were interested. I believe that it would have been an interesting endeavour to include some forms of autoethnography here, but to protect everyone's peace and safety, I ultimately decided not to.

This research was logistically difficult to undertake as a wheelchair user as many spaces of shared temporary accommodation that I had made contact with were located in old Victorian houses that I could not access. During the time I was conducting the research I also experienced the effects of housing precarity myself, after the lift broke in my block of flats, me and my wheelchair were trapped inside for weeks, in which time I could not get out to conduct further interviews or attend the places in which I'd been volunteering. I found myself momentarily relieved when the lift was fixed and I could once again rejoin the outside world, only for it to break again days later, and this time, trapping me outside of my flat for weeks. I had no option but to leave this accommodation and seek other places to live, but, once again, requiring wheelchair access made this difficult and I could not find suitable and affordable dwellings. I had to stay in the spare room of a family member, without my belongings, some 200 miles away from Manchester and commute to do the work. I was therefore, in some ways, living the research and my education and the work was disrupted as a result of my own loss of housing. Given more time, and without the interruptions to the study, this work may have benefited from speaking to a greater number of participants with differing experiences of homelessness and education. But I hope to have done justice to the people who gave up their time, shared their stories and shed some light on a matter that has been so far, relatively under explored and understood.

7.5 Moving Forwards

There have been many studies concerned with the quantitative data around numbers of people accessing homelessness support services. However, much of this work has often not considered the emotive implications and experiences of being homeless. In my own work I have sought to contribute to the emergent field of qualitative studies that explore the human experience of being without a home, the feeling of being homeless and unanchored from a stable life. The work also tried to speak to the experience of navigating the education system whilst trying to find a safe and permanent home. Following these important ambitions for the work I now turn to consider some modest recommendations, based on the findings of this research.

The first thing to say is that there is clearly a need for further study into the transitional processes by which people are able to escape forms of temporary accommodation. Many of the women I spoke to assumed that these feelings of guilt, insecurity and dislocation would last long into their future, some believed that their lives would return to 'normal' after they had found secure, permanent housing or, a 'home'. It is important to understand more about what this process was actually like and whether the kinds of emotions generated by living without a home stayed beyond these moment of crisis and whether there was adequate support given in the transitional process out of homelessness, especially when children had to move schools and establish new social connections. It would also be useful to conduct novel forms of longitudinal study with those children living in temporary forms of accommodation in order to better understand the long-term impact of education and also to consider those moments where targeted forms of support based on their circumstances could be identified. It would be interesting to understand the long-term impact of homelessness on children's educational attainment and transitions into the labour market, to consider how far reaching the impacts of being a child without a home on their future prospects are. More work in this area would help to further address the knowledge gap surrounding the intersections of housing and education.

Approaches to homelessness and how to work with homeless students and parents are something that the research here shows are needed. These should be offered on teacher training courses and through career development strategies once teachers are in work. A large group of the student population risk symbolic exclusion from educational spaces if their experiences are not understood. It may be useful to have dedicated pastoral support for students who have gone through housing loss (or indeed, other forms of social trauma such as migration), but more work needs to be done inside and outside of the realms of academia to remove the stigma from such an experience so people can be open about what their needs are in relation to housing and educational support as and when they need them.

More broadly, we ought to consider how to make housing options more readily and available, at the current moment given that even housing that is considered to be 'affordable' is beyond the affordability of most, especially in cities where private rental costs are soaring. It would also be useful to consider a more joined up approach between housing and educational services, not to increase monitoring of homeless people or to account for the numbers of people experiencing homelessness, but to ensure there is a supportive approach to decision making practices surrounding education whilst residing in multiple places of temporary accommodation and to ensure that transitions between schools is smooth for both parents and children.

It has become clear that the turn to individualisation has created a culture whereby care for those constructed as 'other' has diminished and the dispossessed are pushed further to the fringes of society without adequate social support structures in place to prevent this. The provision of housing has become ever more divisive and, increasingly, only those with high levels of social and economic capital can access the private housing market, leaving more and more people at risk of housing exclusion.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Research Information Sheet

Research Information Sheet

Title of Project: Navigating Motherhood and the Affect of Crisis: Homelessness, Education and Aspirational Goals

Researcher: **Stephanie Lacey**

Contact Details: svlacey1@sheffield.ac.uk

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide on whether or not you would like to participate in this research it is important you understand what the research will involve and why the research is being carried out. Please carefully consider the information below that gives details of the research, you are free to discuss this with others if desired before coming to a decision. If you would like to ask any more information, or if anything is not clear, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for reading.

What is the study about?

This research will explore your experiences of housing, motherhood and your child's education. The study will look at ways in which mothers navigate the housing system, the educational system and their role as mothers when dealing with personal crisis. The research aims to explore personal lived experience in order to inform policy and practice for those experiencing homelessness (in varied forms) and navigating the education system for their children. It aims to give voice to marginalised groups and address inequalities in housing and education.

Who is organising and paying for the study?

The study is being conducted within the Urban Studies and Planning department at the University of Sheffield. It is being funded by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council). The project is being led by Stephanie Lacey and being supervised by Dr Michele Lancione and Professor Rowland Atkinson.

Why have I been chosen and do I have to take part?

I am inviting you to take part in this study, as someone who I think would be able to provide some valuable opinions on your own experience of motherhood and navigating the education system and can offer interesting insights into housing precarity. There is no obligation to take part and it is entirely up to you whether you would like to take part or not. All responses will be kept anonymous and kept confidential.

What happens next if I agree to take part?

If you agree to participate you will be invited to an interview to discuss your opinions and experiences on the research topic. This will be a conversational interview. This will last for approximately 1 hour. The time and length of the research will be at your convenience. The interviews will be recorded but kept secure and anonymous. You may also be asked to complete a research diary based on your experiences and to participate in one further interview. This will be discussed with you at a later date. There is no obligation to take part in this. Your name will not appear anywhere alongside the responses given, a pseudonym will be used within all publications. The interviews will take place in private at a mutually agreed location.

How will the information collected be kept confidential?

Compliance with the Data Protection Act (2018) and GDPR (2018) ensures all information will be kept confidential. Once a contribution has been made, the details will be kept in a locked room and on a password protected system. The work will be saved on to a Remote Access Server through the university network under my details - ensuring only Stephanie has the username and password to access the information. All of the research data will be stored, analysed and published anonymously using pseudonyms.

What are the financial benefits of in taking part in this study?

There is no payment for taking part in this research.

After the study starts, can I change my mind?

Yes. You can change your mind and leave the study, without providing reason and without fear of prejudice or repercussion. If you should choose to exercise your right to withdraw, any prior contributions you have given will be removed from the research and destroyed. Should you choose to exercise this right, please contact Stephanie Lacey (svlacey1@sheffield.ac.uk) or on (phone number tbc).

What if I have a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should contact Stephanie Lacey on the email address above and I will answer any questions you may have. If you have any concerns about the research process or the researcher that cannot be brought up with Stephanie directly, please contact the project's supervisor Michele Lancione on: m.lancione@sheffield.ac.uk

What happens when the study finishes?

The results will be published and distributed within the university to better understand student experience. It may feature in articles and may also be presented at conferences or other creative endeavours (if this is the case, consent will be negotiated directly with you). Your name will **never** appear in any reports, articles or presentations. **If you would like to take part in this study please contact me on my email address (svlacey1@sheffield.ac.uk) and we can arrange the interview at your convenience. Thank you for taking the time to read this, and for considering the study.**

Appendix Two: Consent Form

The University Of Sheffield.

E·S·R·C
ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
COUNCIL

Consent Form

Title of Project:

Navigating Motherhood and the Affect of Crisis: Homelessness, Education and Aspirational Goals

Researcher: Stephanie Lacey

Contact Details: svlacey1@sheffield.ac.uk

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the study named above. ☐
- I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered to my satisfaction. ☐
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐
- I understand that my contributions will be anonymous, and my name will **not** appear in any reports, articles, presentations, or any other publication borne from this research. ☐
- I understand that information given by me for this project may be used in future reports, articles, presentations or creative endeavours by the researcher. ☐
- I understand that I will not receive any renumeration for taking part. ☐
- I understand that the interviews will be recorded.
- I understand that all information will be stored confidentially in accordance with The Data Protection Act (2018) and GDPR (2018) ☐

- I agree to take part in the above study ☐

____________________	____________________	____________________
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
____________________	____________________	____________________
Researcher	Date	Signature

If you have any concerns about this research which were not satisfactorily addressed you can contact my supervisor Dr Michele Lancione, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, University of Sheffield at:

m.lancione@sheffield.ac.uk