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(Re)conceptualising the boundaries between home and homelessness: the *unheimlich*

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ABSTRACT *A burgeoning cross-disciplinary literature signifies a move towards diversifying understandings of the meanings of 'home'. Homelessness is inextricably bound up in these definitions. While earlier work has considered meanings of homelessness, attempts to advance understandings of the relationship between home and homelessness have been sporadic. This article attempts to reinvigorate discussion around the home-homelessness relationship by problematising the binaries in current understandings and poses a different way of theorising the interplay between the two concepts. Drawing on interviews with women accessing homelessness services in the North of England, discussion interweaves women's meanings of home and homelessness with the Freudian notion of the 'unheimlich'. The 'unheimlich' captures the uncanny process of inversion whereby the familiar domestic sphere of the house turns into a frightening place; and a typical space of homelessness – the hostel – is considered home. The article seeks to contribute more adequate theoretical tools for future research to better understand and articulate the complexities of home and homelessness.*

KEY WORDS Home; un-homely; homeless women; homelessness; social theory.

1. Introduction: the 'home' in 'homelessness'

Homelessness is ideologically constructed as the absence of home and therefore derivative from the ideological construction of home (Somerville, 1992: 530).

It is imperative for understandings of homelessness to incorporate the complexity of the term around which it is structured: that of 'home'. In positivist models, the terms 'home' and 'homelessness' are pitted against each other, so that 'homelessness' means its literal translation; the lack of 'home' (Harman, 1989). A tendency towards definitions of homelessness as rooflessness lives on in the public imagination (Jacobs and Smith, 2008; Dean, 2015)¹. Following a flurry of academic interest in the meaning of home (Duncan, 1981; Watson and Austerberry, 1986; Saunders, 1989; Gurney, 1990), a number of scholars re-examined the meaning of homelessness in light of these contributions.

Watson and Austerberry (1986) found that homeless women commonly distinguish between their ideas of home and the realities of their living conditions. Some considered their present accommodation as home while describing themselves as homeless; and vice versa, others did not consider their accommodation as home but neither did they describe themselves as homeless. This ambiguity is explained in terms of an adoption of a 'minimal definition'; of homelessness in the first case, and home in the second. Subsequently, Watson and Austerberry (1986) developed a framework that stressed the relativity of homelessness. The 'home-to-homelessness continuum' (Watson and Austerberry, 1986: 21) was the first model to include home and homelessness on the same sliding scale. This continuum spans from extreme 'rooflessness' to unacceptable forms of housing where one can feel 'homeless'. In between home ownership and rough sleeping is a range of 'concealed' temporary and inadequate living situations (staying on a friend's sofa or in bed and breakfast accommodation, for instance). Similarly, 'home' can be seen on a continuum of permanent housing with personal warmth, comfort and stability to a public space where 'at home' activities take place.

Watson and Austerberry's (1986) research encouraged a broadening of 'homelessness', rooting it in social and cultural constructions of appropriate housing and 'home' (Phillips, 1987) rather than just an 'administrative category' (Neale, 1997: 48). In other senses, the 'home-to-homelessness continuum' still proves inadequate as a means of conceptualising complexity. A linear continuum does not suffice when women hold a multitude of shifting meanings of both home and homelessness. It reinforces a hierarchy of housing situations, placing permanent housing at the top

¹ While a tendency towards a narrower definition of homelessness may be true in the case of the public imagination, the legal definition of homelessness in England and Wales is broad in international standards. Everybody without permanent housing is considered homeless, including those who are 'roofless' as well as those who cannot be 'reasonably expected' to live in their current accommodation.

and rough sleeping at the bottom, and does not account for how in some situations – for those living in a situation of domestic violence, for instance – this hierarchy could quite easily be overturned.

Somerville (1992) provided a further conceptual framework in the form of the 'six signifiers of home' identified as shelter, hearth, heart, privacy, roots, abode (and sometimes additionally, 'paradise'). Homelessness is positioned as the semantic opposite of each. This typology dismisses the possibility of one-sided explanations and recognises the multiplicity of home and homelessness, allowing for individuals to feel 'at home' in one sense (having a shelter) but 'homeless' in another. However, where Somerville's 'six signifiers' fall down is their continuation of the position that home and homelessness are necessarily opposites. Somerville (1992) acknowledged his analysis as 'preliminary' and called for further work to explore this typology empirically (Fitzpatrick and Kennedy, 2001; Jones *et al.*, 2002).

While much international literature has considered theories of (the 'causes' of) homelessness (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994; Neale, 1997; Jacobs *et al.*, 1999; Fitzpatrick, 2000, 2005; Anderson and Christian, 2003; Clapham, 2003), attempts to advance frameworks that help to conceptualise the relationship between home and homelessness have been sporadic. One attempt is the concept of 'homelessness at home' which – in different guises – has been applied to a variety of housing situations to explain the 'porosity' of homelessness and home (Kellett and Moore, 2003; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Bennett, 2011). There is a wealth of empirical evidence illustrating that homelessness can be felt in the domestic sphere, and that 'home environments' can be established on the street, which invalidates the equation that homelessness entails a lack of house, while a house equates to the presence of 'home' (Gurney, 1997; Hodgetts *et al.*, 2010; Choi, 2012). These premises are often explored separately (the 'homeless at home' studies are firmly grounded in the 'meanings of home' literature); or – while presenting rich empirical material – do not explicitly advance debate theoretically (Neale, 1997). This has led to a somewhat theoretical impasse, a situation in which the conceptual tools through which we understand the relationship between home and homelessness have become rusty (Neale, 1997).

For women in the present study, home was shifting and complex and this affected feelings of homelessness. Hostel life at once contained elements of home and un-home. For instance, Gretel referred to the hostel as 'ace' but at the same time referred to her room as a 'kennel'. It became clear that no work in this field so far had proposed a conceptual framework to comprehend the complexity of women's home and homelessness experiences. In response, this article aims to develop a conceptual framework with which to better think these through, in a way which more critically considers the relationship between homelessness and 'home'. Since understandings of 'homelessness' are dependent on understandings of 'home', this article considers the concepts in relation to each other rather than as two distinct

variables. Drawing on qualitative interviews and visual methods to explore the lived experiences of women accessing homelessness services in the North of England, this article discusses how the *unheimlich* can be utilised as a new and relevant concept with which to think through the relationship between home and homelessness. It therefore contributes to understandings of homelessness and questions the term's positioning in opposition to the notion of 'home', and challenges the common assumption that those residing in temporary homeless accommodation lack home while those permanently housed possess it.

This article is divided into seven sections. The first provides an explanation of the *unheimlich*. The concept is taken out of its original context and adapted to fit the conceptualisation of home and homelessness. Far from 'forcing' the concept onto the data, the *unheimlich* emerged as an appropriate 'lens' to shed light on participants' experience (Maxwell, 1996). Secondly, the article situates itself within a literature on the meaning of 'home' which is developing the concept beyond its 'traditional' place in the domestic sphere. Next, a reflexive account of the research methods is given. The following sections present empirical analysis, centring on the ever-shifting sense of home and un-home. The article argues that this complex picture can be understood through the concept of the *unheimlich*, and that this contributes to a richer understanding of the hitherto under-theorised relationship between home and homelessness. The article concludes that the future body of work on homelessness would benefit from being informed further by theory; by building on existing conceptualisations ('homelessness at home') and developing new concepts.

2. The *unheimlich*

The *unheimlich* originates in 'The Uncanny', an essay by Freud published in 1919. Freud's text responds to an earlier academic text by Ernst Jentsch, 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny' (Jentsch, 1995 [1906]). The exact disciplinary canon of the text is ambiguous, straddling literary criticism, autobiography, etymology, aesthetics, psychology, and fiction. Though for this reason, difficult to summarise, a number of scholars offer succinct interpretations of the *unheimlich*. Freud describes the *unheimlich* as a disturbing combination of dread and horror in which 'the homelike' and 'the unhomely' merge. Royle defines the uncanny as 'a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home' (2003: 1). Haughton (in Freud 2003 [1919]) writes, 'The Uncanny' is about a particularly intense experience of strangeness. Masschelein (2003: 1) sees the uncanny as a 'specific - mild - form of anxiety, related to certain phenomena in real life and to certain motives in art'. Freud lists such phenomena as 'the double', 'strange repetitions', 'the omnipotence of thought', the 'confusion between the animate and inanimate', and other experiences related to 'madness, superstition or death'. Yet this list is by no means deemed as conclusive.

It is the first section of Freud's essay that was introduced to architectural theory by Anthony Vidler (1996), which is of particular significance to this article. In this section, Freud explores the etymology of the 'uncanny' and discovers that *heimlich* ('homelike') has two meanings. In the first, most literal, one it means the domestic, familiar and intimate. The second is almost its reverse, meaning hidden, secretive, clandestine: 'what interests us most [...] is to find that among its different shades of meaning the word *heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*' (Freud, 1985 [1919]: 3). Freud (1985 [1919]) concludes that although *unheimlich* seems the opposite of *heimlich*, in fact '*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*' (p. 347). Uncanny experiences that arouse 'dread and horror' (p. 339) because of their extraordinary nature are in fact, Freud argues, precisely the experiences that are habitual and known: 'the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (p. 340). Freud's interpretation ran counter to then current-day intuition by complicating the straightforward argument in Jentsch's earlier essay of familiar versus strange. What Freud proposed was that something is frightening 'not because it is unfamiliar or new but because what used to be familiar has somehow become strange' (Masschelein, 2003: 5).

While it is difficult to adopt a Freudian concept without straying into that branch of psychology, it is the 'significations and affiliations' of the word, '*unheimlich*', which hold promise for this article. It was Vidler (1996) who first underlined the relation of the concept to the spatial. Vidler was interested in Freud's approach to the definition of *unheimlich* and its relation to its apparent opposite, *heimlich*, and how he exposed the 'disturbing affiliations between the two' (Vidler, 1996: 23). The *unheimlich* is used by Vidler as a metaphor for an 'unhomely' modern condition: he explores unsettling aspects of contemporary architecture - 'fragmented neo-constructivist forms reminiscent of dismembered bodies; its 'seeing walls replicating the passive gaze of domestic cyborgs' - in relation to questions of social and individual estrangement, alienation, exile, and homelessness.

The modern house relies on processes of exclusion to become a home – a private, isolated and familiar space (Kaika, 2004; Atkinson and Blandy, 2016). The structure of the house itself is a physical and metaphorical barrier – an autonomous entity – that keeps the 'undesirable' outside from coming in; the public from entering the realm of the private (and vice versa). The exclusion of the outside from the domestic space creates a relationship of dependence on/autonomy from the processes it tries to exclude (Kaika, 2004). Thus, 'the inside (the familiar) needs the outside (the unfamiliar) to construct and define itself as a distinct space' (Kaika, 2004: 273). Home relies on homelessness to construct and define itself, and 'there can be no homelessness without an economic, political and social process that produces "the home" as a commodity' (Kaika, 2004: 273). In scenarios when the arbitrary nature of the inside/outside, public/private dichotomy is exposed, the dweller is confronted with

the falsity of the construction of the 'private sphere as the utopia of the autonomous and the protected' (Kaika, 2004: 270). The instability of this division reveals itself in various manifestations: the most striking example being when the violence meant to be kept outside the home is reproduced within (in domestic violence).

The *unheimlich* can be used as a frame of reference for considering the struggle for domestic security on the one hand and homelessness on the other, 'at the same time, revealing the fundamental complicity between the two' (Vidler, 1996: 12). There is constant vacillation between the familiar and unfamiliar, the homely and un-homely (Steiner, 2010: 134). The *unheimlich* is located within the walls of the house itself and in the residue of family life; in what appears to be familiar, domestic, friendly settings lurks feelings of homelessness and dislocation. The *unheimlich* allows for fluidity and multiplicity: how one space can be felt as 'home' and 'un-home' at different times, and how these feelings can shift. Kaika (2004) suggests that the complex relationship between inside and outside (and by extension, home and homelessness) can be better captured by the term, 'porous membrane'. When alienation is experienced within the most familiar environment it produces an uncanny situation: 'it is when the predictable nature of the familiar acts in unpredictable ways that the uncanny effect is produced' (Kaika, 2004: 277). While much has been written on the *unheimlich* seeping into the familiar space of the domestic house (Vidler, 1996; Kaika, 2004; Stivers, 2005), less attention has been paid to travel in the opposite direction: when the familiar moves beyond its usual habitus of the domestic house (i.e. when the tropes of 'home' are performed outside of the private sphere). The following section explores how academic understandings of 'home' are increasingly acknowledging this complexity, but largely without a concept to adequately explain it. The *unheimlich* has been introduced in the present section as one such conceptual tool, before it is applied to women's experiences of home and homelessness in section five.

3. Other histories of 'home'

Despite the relevance of the concept to questions of the domestic and the modern house, the *unheimlich* has so far not been applied in sociological studies of homelessness and home (Vidler's (1996) application of the uncanny to architectural theory and Lancione's (2017) use of the uncanny in relation to eviction and resistance being the most prominent exceptions). This section traces the history of the concept of 'home' (the *heimlich*) and how it has developed alongside the 'bricks and mortar' of the house, notions of domesticity, and the familiar. It then goes on to explore how past sociological research has questioned the association between 'domesticity' and 'bliss', and through highlighting the gaps, demonstrates the novelty of using the *unheimlich* as a conceptual framework in this field.

Subsequent to the rise of the bourgeoisie in 17th century Britain, the meaning of home became appropriated by the ruling classes to promote a form of nationalism

that protected land, wealth, and power². The term was used to maintain a 'domestic morality' aimed at 'safeguarding' familial 'property', including estates, women and children. The design and organisation of the Victorian house cemented the construct of home in notions of security, order, privacy, and respectability. Spaces within the house, and the space of the house itself, became demarcated along gendered lines. Following industrialisation, boundaries established separate realms between 'home' and 'work'; and the term 'home' became imbued with the 'domestic'³ – the house (Tosh, 1996). The house was fast becoming more intimate, more ordered and spatially segregated by functions (Rybczynski, 1988).

From the mid-20th century, the domestic became associated with the feminine (Morley, 2000). Gender is reflected in cultural narratives of home and travel, with the male figure of the 'flâneur' depicted as the stranger with the freedom to wander and uproot from his home voluntarily. This is in stark contrast to women, as epitomised by the figure of the 'housewife':

The woman in the family is not only the 'still point' in a changing world, [but] the protector of the "true community", the place to which the (male) labourer/traveller returns (Morley, 2000: 65).

Although there have been changes in gendered household roles to an extent, women are still primarily responsible for unpaid care work within the family (Boje and Leira, 2000; Carers UK, 2014). In response, feminist theorists have expressed how home can be experienced as a place of fear and entrapment (Oakley, 1976; Wilson, 1977; Segal, 1983). The concept of the 'ideal' home, a private space where one can 'be oneself' away from the gaze of others, has been contested from a feminist perspective; ideals of family and privacy sometimes work in conflict, emphasising a form of 'togetherness, intimacy, and interest in each other's business' (McDowell, 1983; Somerville, 1992; Johnston and Valentine, 1995). What for some might be an ideal home is a prison, a place of violence, or a site of intrusion and violation for others (Johnston and Valentine, 1995; Tomas and Dittmar, 1995; Wardhaugh, 1999). These studies present the darker underbelly of home (the *unheimlich*)⁴. More recent strands of feminism have emphasised a specificity of experience; that despite the oppression and privileges surrounding the concept of home, it also carries 'liberating potential'; or acts as a site of resistance or refuge from dominating social structures (hooks, 1990; Elwood, 2000; Young, 2002).

A body of literature is beginning to explore notions of home for 'marginalised others': young, working-class, homeless, non-White, non-heterosexual people whose voices

² Reflected in the idiom, "An Englishman's home is his [sic] castle".

³ Derived from the Latin 'domesticus', meaning 'belonging to the house' (Mallett, 2004).

⁴ Feminist research on the domestic has its own silences; historically, it is dominated by middle-class white women's experiences (Wilson, 1977). For women who take pride, satisfaction, and sanctuary in the home, the contention that it can only be experienced as an oppressive space is equally exclusionary.

have largely been absent from the debate so far. For young people, who usually have less control over household decisions, the home can be experienced as a place of conflict and family disunity (Madigan *et al.*, 1990; Kurtz *et al.*, 2000). A study focusing on the meaning of home for 'runaway girls' found that the house was experienced as a dangerous place rather than a 'homely' refuge (Peled and Muzicant, 2008). Work also explores the meaning of home for 'other' (Said, 1978) identities and domestic experiences, including young care leavers (Natalier and Johnson, 2015); 'houseless' young people (Robinson, 2002; Kidd and Evans, 2011); lower-income households in the private rental market and those in non-permanent accommodation (Harman, 1989; Easthope, 2004; Bevan, 2011); rough sleepers (Sheehan, 2010; Parsell, 2011); homeless women (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995; Wardhaugh, 1999); persons with dementia (Zingmark, 2000; Frank, 2005); LGBTQ people (Gorman-Murray, 2012; Pilkey, 2014; Pilkey *et al.*, 2015); single people (Wilkinson, 2014); women who have experienced domestic violence (Meth, 2003); mobile home residents (Olwig, 1999); and refugees and migrants (Svašek, 2002; Walsh, 2011). Sheehan (2010), in a study of long-term homeless persons' constructions of 'home place', found that a public square became 'home' for participants since 'at home' activities took place there – sharing meals, recovering from hospital stays, and hair braiding. Johnsen *et al.* (2008) found that living in public spaces allowed some homeless people to feel safer, more socially connected, and more autonomous. These studies give voice to hitherto unheard subjectivities, and further destabilise the boundaries between home and homeless.

Bennett (2011) focuses on the experiences of young, working-class women living on a deprived housing estate in East Durham. This research employs the concept of 'homelessness at home' to explain how the house is not always felt as a 'homely' space; the women were denied 'normative values of home' because they lived in substandard accommodation, far from friends and family, in an area they deemed 'undesirable'. Many felt under surveillance by their local authority or private landlords in ways that undermined their sense of privacy and left them feeling 'homeless' and 'haunted' by where they lived. Bennett's work marked a major contribution to research on homelessness and home by developing a further dimension of 'hidden homelessness' beyond a focus on people who are off the radar of the authorities to people who feel 'homeless at home'. Bennett is influenced by feminist accounts that show how households 'comprise more than those who live together to include others that affect its economy and coping strategies' (2011: 962). Bennett draws attention to the material, affective and imaginative experience of home which can extend to the sinister. The women in her study felt home-less, Bennett concludes, because they were denied the 'normative value of home' (safety; a base for performing the routine activities of life; privacy or a sense of ownership of one's home; and preservation). This study provides rich, empirical insight into the *unheimlich* of home, but perhaps does not go far enough into how the findings have implications for the relationship between homelessness and home. The research does, however, provide an impetus for subsequent work to explore this conceptual gap.

As this section shows, despite an unravelling of 'home' these studies have lacked an adequate concept to better comprehend the 'slow unfolding of the homely into the unhomely' (Vidler, 1996: 25). The present article argues that work in this field would benefit from further conceptualisation and that Freud's (1985 [1919]) decipherment of the *heimlich* and *unheimlich* is a useful place to begin:

The word *heimlich* is thereby linked to domesticity, to being at home or being neighbourly. And yet, lurking behind such images of happiness [...] there is the burden of what is definitely not *heimlich* (Vidler, 1996: 24).

A recent study by Lancione (2017) on the struggle for housing in the contemporary urban has initiated this process of (re)conceptualisation. Focusing on the eviction of 100 Roma from their home in the centre of Bucharest and resulting practices of resistance, this article contributes an innovative reading of Freud and a critical (re)imagining of urban political praxis and theory – and of home, homelessness (or 'home *unmaking*' and 'remaking' (Lancione, 2017: 6) and displacement more broadly. Lancione (2017) expands the concept of the uncanny significantly by shifting it beyond the cognitive – as something more than an 'emotion' – and towards the affective – 'affecting different constituencies in different ways' (Lancione, 2017: 8). The uncanny does not have to elicit a negative response. The resisting and occupying Roma body – although uncanny and strangely familiar 'because the 'familiar' Roma body in Romania does not protest in that way' (p. 8) – found positivity and strength in their uncanniness. Unfortunately this gradually faded as people spent longer on the street and became 'tired, distressed and intolerant' (p. 12). Uncanniness is a shifting, porous thing. The present article continues the endeavour of building and developing a theory which allows us to re-think the relationship between home and homelessness based on the everyday experiences of those who are 'home-less'.

4. Methods

Participants

The present study involved twelve women accessing voluntary and community sector services across three local authority areas (two post-industrial cities and one large market town) in the North of England. This location was chosen because it was important to be geographically and ethnographically close to the participants. The researcher met with each participant *at least* three times and this level of engagement would not have been possible elsewhere. Participants were recruited from a total of five organisations, encompassing: two hostels, one women's centre, one church-based drop-in centre, and one supported housing project for young people. These services provided a trusted contact, able to signpost potential participants capable of giving informed consent; to provide support following

interviews; and offering a safe space for interviewing. Services were found through online searches, academic colleagues, and snowballing from other services⁵. Through practical and ethical necessity, the participants recruited were limited to those in contact with homelessness agencies. In each organisation staff were key to approaching people who might be willing to participate. This involved sharing information sheets with residents, putting up posters, talking to people, and arranging an initial meeting which those interested could attend to meet the researcher and ask questions about the research.

Although based in three local authorities in the North of England, the research is not a case study of homeless women in this region and findings will likely have relevance to other international contexts. This is because despite the specificities of homelessness, the broader ontological condition of 'home', and finding 'home', is something in which we are all engaged (King, 2004). As King (2008a: 26) says, 'dwelling [...] is simply something that we all do and which we need to do'.

The sample was deliberately small so that rapport was viable within the given timeframe⁶. Although this study cannot claim the scope and representativeness of interviewing more participants, the depth of relationships established between researcher and respondent made up for the lack of variety: it allowed me to spend *time* with the participants. Fieldwork entails an involvement in people's lives that places the researcher in a relationship with the participant (Warr, 2004). These relationships were complex and inevitably differed between person to person⁷.

Table 1 below provides a brief introduction to the participants' biographies. It is presented with the caveat that neatly summarising a person's life can only ever offer partial, over-simplified accounts, but is intended here to give context to subsequent discussion. Participants ranged from 18 to 49 years old. The women were often competing with or recovering from multiple disadvantages in addition to their homelessness: physical and mental health issues, alcohol and drug dependency, past and present domestic abuse, limited employment opportunities, disrupted education, family problems, and lack of family support. In nearly all cases family and relationship breakdown had been a significant factor in their becoming homeless.

⁵ The first point of contact was an email setting out who I was, what my research was about and what it would involve. I approached services in the nearest city first, sending out thirteen emails to thirteen organisations. Seven organisations responded, five arranging a further meeting, and two declining due to not fitting the remit of the study (not having many women accessing their services). After the meetings, one more organisation was deemed unsuitable due to its main user group being street drinkers, who might have struggled to give informed consent, and whose lives, it was thought, might have been too chaotic to dedicate time and effort to a participatory photography task. This contact was carried out in two waves – one at the beginning of the fieldwork year, and another half-way through, when it was felt more participants were needed.

⁶ Although a greater number of participants may have yielded a greater diversity of experiences to explore whether findings held true across different forms of homelessness.

⁷ Frankie was the research participant I spent the most time with and welcomed me into her flat to conduct interviews, cooked meals for me, and asked me questions about my life.

Some women had experienced rough sleeping at one point in their pathway, but none were sleeping rough at the time. Seven women were staying in a hostel (Katie, Jo, Danni, Jenny, Gretel, Tori and Becky); four in supported accommodation attached to housing projects (Bella, Lucy, Leah and Frankie); and one was temporarily sleeping on a relative's couch and accessing support through a women's centre (Jules).

Table 1: Participant profiles

Participant	Short Biography
Frankie	Aged 49 at the time of interviewing. Frankie resided in temporary supported accommodation for homeless and vulnerable adults. She received daily visits from a key worker. Frankie had undergone several traumatic life experiences including divorce, and the death of her mother, alongside struggling with (and attempting to recover from) alcohol dependency and agoraphobia. Frankie had served a short term in a women's prison, for arson (after a cigarette set fire to a relative's property when Frankie was under the influence of alcohol). She previously lived in a large, detached house with her then husband and son in an affluent area.
Bella	Aged 22 years old at the time of interviewing. Bella emphasised her difficult childhood and adolescence. After her mother and father separated, and her mother found a new partner, she described how her family began to split apart: her mother would not allow Bella or her siblings to see her father, so her sisters moved out, and Bella started to 'act out' at school. Bella moved into care at the age of 13. She previously resided in a hostel, but had recently moved into a council flat, still receiving continued support from a housing project.
Gretel	Aged 23 years old at the time of interviewing. Gretel had been living in the hostel for two years, having moved in when her family moved to Australia. Gretel had had a fairly unsettled housing history, moving house was common, and she reports living in inadequate conditions.
Tori	Aged 20 at the time of interviewing. She described her life so far as 'hectic', having a drug addiction at an early age and moving out of her family 'home' at the age of 14 due to family disputes. She lived in a women's refuge for a period of time, fleeing her ex-partner. At the time of interviewing, she lived in a hostel. Tori had a three-year-old son, who was taken away from her during her period of drug addiction. At the time of interviewing, her son lived with her ex-partner/his father.
Danni	Danni was aged 20 at the time of interviewing. She was brought up by her mother and grandmother, and later, also by her step-father. After moving in with her then boyfriend, Danni became addicted to drugs and alcohol and started 'getting into trouble all the time'. At the time of interviewing, it was Danni's second stay at the hostel; she has been living there on and off for about three years.
Jenny	Jenny was 20 years old at the time of interviewing. She then resided at a hostel (she had moved in two months prior to the first interview), since her family made plans to move to Plymouth, and Jenny wished to stay where she was in order to finish her college course (Health and Social Care). Jenny was a young carer for her mother and younger siblings. Jenny described her upbringing as relatively stable until her step-father moved in; he was an alcoholic and abusive to her mother. Jenny had a part-time job in a bar and worked voluntarily at a school; her ambition was to work with young people.
Jo	Jo was aged 32 years at the time of interviewing. She was residing at a hostel for single homeless people, or those at risk of becoming homeless. Jo had lived in the same village for the most part of her life, moving out when she was 23 years old to live with her then partner. Jo admitted that her 'life spiralled out of control' when she moved in with him. He was a drug dealer, and soon, Jo became addicted to drugs herself and became more and more isolated from her family and friends. Jo eventually left him but still felt that her life was 'out of control'. Jo had eventually realised that she needed support and had stopped taking drugs a year ago (from the date of the interview). Jo was on sick leave from her job as a Customer Service and Sales Team Leader while she recovered. Jo was very close to her family, and frequently looked forward to seeing her niece and nephew.
Katie	Katie was aged 31 at the time of interviewing. She was also residing at a hostel for single homeless people. Katie described her upbringing as 'normal', though later mentioned that she was abused as a child, and frequently moved in and out of refuges as a result. Katie was diagnosed with psychosis

	after taking an overdose, and had previously been sectioned under the Mental Health Act. Katie has two sons, but both had been taken away from her by Social Services; one lived with his father and the other lived with adoptive parents.
Jules	Jules was aged 30 at the time of interviewing. Though Jules was brought up in foster care she described her upbringing as stable. Jules was then residing with her grandparents, but did not see the situation as ideal, as she did not get on well with them and felt that the space did not feel like her own. Previously, Jules had lived in hostels, and had also spent three months in prison (for reasons not disclosed but she said it was something minor).
Leah	Leah was aged 18 at the time of interviewing. She lived with her mother on and off due to frequent disputes. Her mother had a dependency on alcohol, which was often the cause of conflict in their relationship. Leah lived with her uncle for five months after one argument, and later, with her ex-boyfriend's parents before moving into a hostel and then her new flat (where she was currently residing). Leah's father left when she was five years old.
Lucy	Lucy was aged 28 at the time of interviewing. She was brought up by her grandma from the age of 12 years; Lucy no longer had contact with her mother. She has a seven-year-old son. At the time of fieldwork, Lucy lived with her grandparents but would shortly be moving in with Bella. In the past she had lived in a hostel (and did not enjoy staying there) and in several different houses with her mother.
Becky	Becky was aged 18 when interviewed. Though I did not find out much about Becky's situation (having conducted only one short interview with her which she found challenging) she did tell me how she grew up in a small, post-industrial town, where she had lived for most of her life before moving in and out of hostels. She mentioned how she had been 'kicked out of' her previous hostel due to her 'behaviour'. Becky had past issues with drug addiction but was now in recovery. By the time of my second visit to collect Becky's camera, staff reported how she had been missing from the hostel for several days and were unaware of her whereabouts (I found out from one of her friends that Becky was sleeping on a friend's couch after an 'incident' at the hostel).

Method(ology)

Both verbal and visual methods were employed in a multi-method approach. In-depth, semi-structured interviews explored personal histories and 'homeless biographies' (Johnsen *et al.*, 2008). These interviews were loosely structured around a topic guide. Following initial interviewing, participants were invited to take part in a photography exercise. Photography was chosen as an accessible and 'fun' method, facilitative of rapport and agency (Langa, 2008; Lombard, 2012). Visual approaches are recognised as important in yielding an understanding of everyday life (Martin, 1999; Kaomea, 2003; Bijoux and Myers, 2006; Mannay, 2010). Visual methods have roots in psychological explorations of self-identity (Ziller and Rorer, 1985) but have more recently been taken up by sociology, social science, geography, and anthropology. Studies from geography have included Johnsen *et al.*'s (2008) research with the street homeless which concluded that auto-photography helped in highlighting hidden spaces, otherwise inaccessible to the researcher; and David Dodman's (2003) auto-photographic exploration of the urban environment in Kingston, Jamaica. Sociology has also witnessed increasing use of visual methods. Steven Gold's (2004) work demonstrated the importance of photography in developing the understanding of migrant communities. Scholars across these disciplines cite several advantages of auto-photography, including its participatory nature and its potential to construct knowledge with the participant as 'expert' (Meth and McClymont, 2009), as well as its potential to emphasise the multiple meanings that places can hold (Lombard, 2012). Participatory visual methods thus appeared to

be compatible with commitments central to ethical, responsible, and feminist social research: the destabilisation of power relations between the researcher and researched; the promotion of engagement (Robinson, 2011); and the exploration of the complexity of lived experience. This is particularly crucial for research with homeless women, who have historically been more absent from homelessness research (Klodawsky, 2006). All but one participant agreed to take part in the photography exercise. They were given a camera pack, containing a disposable camera and a guidance sheet. Guidance was left loose, allowing women enough freedom over subject matter, but support was provided where needed⁸.

Follow-up 'photo-elicitation' interviews then explored developed images together with the participant in a one-to-one discussion. The topic guide ensured that several basics were ascertained, including: what the photograph depicted; why the participant had chosen to take that photograph; and what they felt about the subject/place/object depicted. But the rest was left open as a way of allowing participants to explain the photograph in their own terms. Some interviews were shorter than anticipated and participants often had to be prompted to divulge more about a photograph before moving on to the next. This challenge is rarely acknowledged by studies using photo-elicitation which cite the ability of photographs to foster discussion by giving participants something tangible to focus on (Clark-Ibanez, 2004)⁹. While the length of discussion did not extend, the depth did. The photographs provided routes into other areas of participants' lives and identities that would otherwise have remained hidden. Jules and Jo took several photographs around their walking routes; and Frankie took photographs of 'meaningful objects' around her flat – none of which would have been picked up by standard interviewing alone.

Visual methods provided 'new windows' into the worlds of homeless women; offering insight into previously unknown experiences (Johnsen *et al.*, 2008: 205). All participants gave positive feedback, noting the photography exercise as their favourite element of the process. This 'novelty factor' is a useful way of recruiting participants, maintaining their interest throughout the process, and 'giving something back'. Participants looked forward to getting their prints and displaying them in their rooms. This work contributes methodologically to the ever-growing international body of work in the homelessness field using visual methods (Aitken and Wingate, 1993; Wang *et al.*, 2000; Young and Barrett, 2001; Radley *et al.*, 2005; Radley *et al.*, 2006; Hodgetts *et al.*, 2008; Johnsen *et al.*, 2008; Clover, 2011; Padgett *et al.*, 2013), and indeed, to any research with 'hard-to-reach' groups.

⁸ Confidence at handling the camera varied so the level of guidance differed on a person-to-person basis.

⁹ With the exception of Packard who noted how 'these interviews proceeded very rapidly, with the participant providing as short an answer as possible' (2008: 73).

If researchers are to conduct ethical research, they must pay particular attention to their own and their participants' positionality (Sultana, 2007). Participants had a range of complex needs in addition to their homelessness, and while this denoted difference and distance from the researcher in some respects, common ground and affinity was found in others. Reflections on positionality, although ethically necessary, in no way guarantee a destabilisation of power relations between researched and researcher. The following extract is taken from the researcher's field diary:

Given that I am not and never have been classed as 'homeless' nor have I experienced homelessness, as a researcher, I am mostly an 'outsider' or 'non-member' to the group of participants in this study. While I consider myself as having come from a working-class background, my entry into academia has afforded me certain privileges. My education has put me in a different location, often in one of hierarchy to most of my participants whose educations had frequently been disrupted. Although there are gaps between myself and participants, in terms of housing status, educational privilege, current financial stability, I have felt some frustrations due to being from a low-income family enough to empathise with the women in this study. My political ideologies, commitment to social justice campaigns and view of homelessness as an injustice also positions me as sympathetic to the plight of homeless people.

Analysis followed revised versions of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), which involved continually returning to the roots of empirical work. This entailed neither feigning a 'blank canvas' approach as espoused by earlier versions of grounded theory, nor forcing data into a preconceived theoretical framework. Rather, theories acted as 'skeletons' to which the 'flesh' of the empirical data was added (Kelle, 2005). Analysis started before transcription as responses in interviews were processed to shape further questioning, reflected on again after interviewing and during transcription. Once interviews had been transcribed, they were read through several times as a whole. First, a detailed commentary was recorded in the margins of transcripts and repeated until key themes developed. The long list of themes in the framework was repeatedly re-organised by merging codes and grouping similar codes together under a broader theme; other codes 'die[d] a natural death through lack of use' (Cope, 2005). Once these themes were defined, the data was returned to in order to gather further empirical evidence. Analysis was continued in the act of writing the subsequent discussion sections.

5. Homeless women's negotiations of home and homelessness

The un-homely house

In understanding what home meant to participants in the present, it was important to disentangle their home-life prior to their current homeless situations. Home, for some, was a space firmly located in a selectively recalled past. It was a nostalgic

yearning, a concept always distant and beyond reach. Participants for whom home was a thing of the past can be compared to the figure of the exile, one who is translocated voluntarily or by coercion (Friedrich, 2002).

Frankie, in particular, was characteristic of the exile, presenting a predominantly idealised and nostalgic version of home as the past house that she shared with her (now separated) family, a home and home-life she could not return to for reasons pertaining to her divorce and need to live in supported accommodation. Frankie gave eloquent and vivid descriptions of her 'other house', and decorated her present flat in ways that purposely mimicked and evoked memories of this past home:

'Cause I like lights, 'cause in my other house, my second house, in Broadfield... a massive garden, both front and back, and I used to have an arched tree [...] So it had like a window there, and then a bedroom window there, a bay window here, and then a long window up there for a bedroom. And it sort of went in, a recess, and then you'd got a sort of arch, with a porch, and then an old – not an old, but it looked very old – door with leaded glass panels. And beyond that, on the arch trees at Christmas, I used to have those fairy lights; that's why I used to call it the Alice tree. We lived on Alice Tree Lane, but I called it the Alice Tree because there were two big conifers and I trimmed them into an arch. And I had a wishing well at the bottom. And I called it the Alice Tree and I used to put fairy lights on there.



Figure 1: Photograph by Frankie

Frankie's accounts of home paralleled images of the 'ideal home' (Kellett and Moore, 2003) with its privacy, bay windows, and fairy lights, and this exerted a powerful influence on her recollections. The physical space Frankie inhabited while homeless was not the one she wished it to be. This is what King (2008b: 71) describes as being the problem of the exile: 'of being displaced and yet capable of remembering

place... We have a great yearning, but we cannot fulfil it with anything but memory'. While Frankie's marital home was held in a nostalgic place, it also became the source of unsettlement when situations arose in later homes that were less than this 'ideal'. Frankie, throughout her homelessness, had been trapped in what she saw as less-than-ideal accommodation, which affected how she felt in herself. Frankie was fearful at the prospect of having to '*move on again*' and being allocated something '*horrid*' that would '*set [her] back*':

I think, well, it's frightening being here. I get scared of change. I get really scared of change and adapting again to... but I know I've just got to keep telling myself it's just a stepping stone. It's just a stepping stone and I don't want to be put somewhere... 'cause I've been in some dives, and I mean dives.

Frankie, then, was haunted by her lost home, which stirred up feelings of grief because of the impossibility of return and when measured against current homes, which fell short. Freud (2003 [1919]: 148) observes that 'in some modern languages the German phrase *ein unheimliches Haus* ['an uncanny house'] can be rendered only by the periphrasis 'a haunted house'. The association of the *unheimlich* with a haunted house suggests a spectral presence. The shadow of Frankie's former family home-life asserted its presence in her current accommodation so that home, or *heim*, gradually turned into the *unheimlich*.

In many accounts participants had left 'homes' where the normative values of safety, comfort, and security associated with the construct of home and the domestic sphere were not present. Abuse and violence featured as part of women's childhood relationships, as they navigated a world in which relationship violence was part of the everyday. Katie, for instance, had suffered abuse as a child, but still described her family life as 'normal': '*I just grew up in a normal family life, stuff like that. Yeah, I was abused as a child at some point*'. Tensions often led to participants leaving the family home, either running away or being thrown out. The Freudian idea of the familiar turning into the unfamiliar is useful here, when thinking about participants' past homes. The *heimlich* which supposedly contains familiar spaces and expectations of behavioural norms suddenly turned out to be uncanny when the relationship between kin turned sour.

Bella also experienced a turbulent upbringing, characterised by movements from one place to another; different people leaving and entering her life; and family disputes. At the age of 13, Bella's mother could no longer look after her, and she was placed under local authority care for two years. Bella's sense of homelessness began long before she was officially defined as 'homeless'. At her family 'home', Bella felt an inexorable sense of abandonment, to the point that she felt '*adopted*'. This transformed the family home from the usual 'place we can escape to' (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995: 496) to a place Bella wanted to escape from. Although Bella longed for a sense of home, she concurrently felt this as the source of her alienation and

exclusion, her *unheimlich*, when it was not met. The mother figure may indeed have come to represent Bella's *unheimlich*, an estranged figure transformed into a symbol of neglect.

Bella was eventually allocated a council flat. But even there, with potentially more control over her living quarters, she did not view her flat as home. She spoke of a sense of surveillance and paranoia which undermined any sense of privacy and comfort: *'I was really paranoid when I moved in 'cause people who live in them flats, keep telling me that I'm living in the murderer's flat'*. Bella was referring to a recent murder case that appeared in the news at the time.

I had written words all over my walls, all over my fire place, all over my balcony... and every time I used to go to, when I tried to go to sleep, it felt like I could hear people or hear someone drag something across floor.

This experience relates to the 'most popular topos of the nineteenth-century uncanny' (Vidler, 1996: 17), the haunted house. The terror of the ghostly presences was perhaps sharpened by the contrast of the home's supposed domesticity, 'its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort' (Vidler, 1996: 17). Bella later discovered the falsity of the rumours but at the time, they were chillingly real, materialising in imagined ghostly presences and hauntings meaning that the flat was never quite right: the superstition was enough to make it terrible. Bella mentioned having to tolerate reporters trying to elicit information about the case. The intrusion by real and imaginary others into Bella's flat signalled a loss of control over her own space, rendering homeliness impossible. Bella's situation reflects what Bennett describes as when the porous boundaries of 'home' allow the policies, practices and attitudes of powerful others to seep into home life, affecting how home is felt by residents and 'affecting homelessness' (2011: 981). But, deeper than this, it shows that the home is a prime site for uncanny disturbances, the experience of the unfamiliar in something that should otherwise be quite familiar.

Recreating home and family in the hostel

New meanings of home and family were forged in spaces away from the domestic house. For many participants, especially those residing in hostels, home still revolved around family, but not family in the traditional biological sense of the word. Present relationships were drawn from other people who were homeless in the same hostel. Women recreated home and family within the space of the hostel, or in 'other spaces' (May, 2000), subverting the idea (and ideal) of home as the domestic, familial house and complicating the very notion of 'homelessness' itself. This section adds weight to the argument that definitions of 'homelessness' are inhabited by normative definitions of 'home' (Veness, 1993). Just as one can feel homeless in the family home, one can also feel 'home-ful' in officially defined 'homeless' (typically unfamiliar) spaces, such as the hostel.

Home was defined as the people who care and take care of one another, with friends and staff described as family. The relationship between Jo and Katie was almost sisterly: Jo sought solace and support from Katie, her best friend in the hostel, when *'things [got] too much'*. There was a reciprocal sense of solidarity in their relationship, reminiscent of that between siblings and other family members: *'we're really close me and Katie. We help each other through a lot of things'*. This close relationship provided them with a sense of home through a feeling of belonging and shared experiences. Because the hostel provided a shared dwelling space, in many ways it replicated the family home and fostered relationships that were somehow more than those between friends and akin to those of siblings. Katie's room was a hiding place, a refuge, or a place of retreat possessing similar characteristics to 'home', where Jo could 'disappear' for 'a few days' and no-one could find her. The company of the other residents still went some way to providing Jo with a sense of belonging, something that she had lacked in the past, before becoming 'homeless', when living in a house with her ex-partner and battling a drug dependency. The uncanny home, then, perhaps works both ways, in that it can also mean the experience of the familiar in something that should otherwise be quite unfamiliar. This proceeds beyond the equation of unhomely equals unfamiliar.

Assuming that Jo derived a complete sense of home from the hostel, and her friendship network there, would be overly simplistic. Later in the interview, and when directly asked 'where is home?' Jo drew distinctions between her sense of home and her 'real home', by replying that although the hostel felt like a home, she did not go so far as calling it 'home' (rather, her 'room'). While Jo tried her best to construct a familial, homely space from the hostel, she did not hold any romantic illusions about hostel life. Relationships provided Jo with a sense of home, but not to the extent that she could ever consider the hostel as a 'true' home, which she still saw as a (future) fixed, physical dwelling: *'I think 'home' is a house. It sounds daft but I can't imagine home being a flat. Like, I want it to be a house'*. While this interjection suggests that Jo clung to a notion of home that she (and/or society) thought she should have, it also said something about relationships: that they simultaneously uphold and uproot notions of home.

Jo's descriptions of life in the hostel all at once contained hints of a sense of home as well as un-home. The sense of belonging that Jo felt with Katie was often undermined by feelings of insecurity and unease: *'like here you can be constantly on edge, expecting summat to happen. So you never relax and my home is somewhere I imagine relaxing and chilling out'*. Nevertheless, although Jo's sense of home was rooted in the conventional notion of the house, relationships provided Jo with a sense of belonging for a while at least, suggesting that some associations of home can be found in alternative accommodation. Jo's sense of home at the hostel was fragile; constantly in jeopardy of being disrupted by the chaos of other residents'

activities. So, while relationships can (re)create home in homeless accommodation they can just as easily shatter it. These findings can be framed by Freud's interpretations of *heimlich* and *unheimlich*; and add weight to the observation of 'the disturbing affiliation between the two [...] constituting the one as a direct outgrowth of the other' (Vidler, 1996: 23). It follows that there is an all-too-easy slippage between 'home' and 'homelessness'.

Homes away from (not) home

In negotiating their displacement from home as well as the shifting nature of it, a number of participants frequented 'alternative spaces' in which they found a sense of belonging and connection. These were spaces where they could 'feel happy' and relax. While some participants did not have a place to call 'home'— like Tori who said home was 'nowhere' — they still found places in which they felt 'at home'. These were retreats or 'homeplaces' (hooks, 1990), a 'home away from home', or a 'home away from *not-home*'.



Figure 2: Photograph by Gretel

Gretel's 'therapeutic place' (Robinson, 2002: 144) was the park pictured above in *Figure 2*. This space was one in which Gretel could be around people she connected with, surrounded by people with like-minds, a contrast to how she saw the people in the hostel: '*Erm... oh, just... worst bit... only bad thing... like living 'ere is all idiots that live 'ere*'. It was also a place where she could 'let go', away from the rules and constraints in the hostel, where drinking in rooms was forbidden.

A number of participants found that going for walks, and being surrounded by fields, trees and 'nature' was their form of coping with stress, finding inspiration, relaxing and thinking about things:



Figure 3: Photograph by Jules

If I'm really stressed, or I need to think about something [...] there's a place in Lansell which isn't too far, and I go for a walk and I... it sounds really silly but I like to feed the horses [...] that's a place that I like to go when I need to relax. Most people say I like to go to the pub. [laughs]. But I say no, I like to go for walks (Jules).



Figure 4: Photograph by Jules

[Referring to *Figure 4*] This was actually, not far from where I live. Well, it's not my house, obviously I'm homeless, but I stay with my grandma. This was... it's

just down the road. There's an old people's home but there's a wood and a little river. And I normally, like if I'm stressed, I go for a run on there, or go for a walk on there (Jules).

Jules had nowhere she could call home, at least not materially. 'Home' for Jules was a state of mind, a place where she 'felt happy' in herself, 'not stressed' and where she was able to exercise creativity. Likewise, for Jo, who did not feel the hostel to be home at all times, her means of finding escape, solitude and relaxation was to *'go off on my own, don't listen to anybody and go for a walk'*.

Home was somewhere participants could 'be themselves' and this did not necessarily have to be a house, or a fixed space; but revolved around the particular atmosphere of a place which could foster certain emotional states, space for creativity, relaxation and escapism. Such places resound with bell hooks' (1990: 384) notion of 'homeplace', 'the construction of a safe place'. When physical dwellings did not suffice as home, participants sought the associations of home (relaxation, escape, belonging, and safety) outside the boundaries of bricks and mortar. This section further deconstructs traditional notions of home as domestic dwelling and reaffirms the idea that home can be broadened to include not only 'homeless' or institutional places like the hostel, but outside spaces in which comfort, belonging and safety can be found. It shows how the oppressive oscillation between *heimlich* and *unheimlich* in the domestic sphere can be resisted: home did not have to be rooted in the domestic at all but in alternative 'homeplaces' of women's own creations and constructions.

6. Discussion

This article has shown that as participants' narratives of home diverged in meaning, mirroring the dimensionality of home as a construct, it followed that homelessness was a heterogeneous experience. Participants subverted normative definitions of 'home' by finding 'home' in unfixed dwellings and familiarity in unfamiliar environments. 'Homelessness', in its sense as a label, does not necessarily entail loss and absence of home. At-home-ness was felt within alternative spaces. For many of the women, grief over 'home experiences' continued to shape their lived experiences of homelessness and home, '[which] were lived in terms of the continuing negative relationships with the new homes they established' (Robinson, 2005: 52). An absence of family, and consequently 'home', affected Bella in her most recent council accommodation, her time spent at the homeless hostel, and in the 'family' home itself. Similar to observations made by Wardhaugh (1999: 93), that "being at home' is an unselfconscious and taken-for-granted state: to be homeless brings with it an awareness of absence', Bella resolutely felt homelessness as a lack, but this stemmed from within the family home itself. Frankie's bittersweet and nostalgic descriptions of her past home life suggest she was tied to a notion of home located in the past; distant and unapproachable; 'an impossible object, always

disappearing with the horizon' (Biernat-Webster, 2010). The notion of the domestic as a space of refuge crumbles apart here. This article has further destabilised the apparent division between home and homelessness, by suggesting that these states and spaces are convergent: home and homelessness can, at times, be one and the same. As Moore states, 'it is as possible to feel out-of-home whilst living in permanent and stable accommodation as it is to find small pockets of home whilst on the street' (2007: 152).

This research has employed the concept of the *unheimlich* for the purpose of understanding the relationship between home and homelessness. It points to the utility of the *unheimlich* as a concept which can capture the idea of fluctuation between the homely and the unhomely, and between home and homelessness – a concept largely neglected by the homelessness literature so far. As this article has shown, the complexity of women's experience cannot be framed simply by the terms 'home' or 'homeless' in their conventional senses as opposites. The *unheimlich* reveals the proximity between 'home' and 'homeless' and reframes it not just as a continuum (Watson and Austerberry, 1986) but as a relationship of flux and inversion, so that one can exist *within* the other, or even, so that one *is* the other. The slippage between these two terms can be captured in the application of the *unheimlich* to the space of the home – this task becomes less of a mean feat when one considers the home as both an actual and experienced space. The physical walls of the house – there for safety and warmth – may become likened to the bars of a prison cell if what is contained and experienced within is troubled. Re-figuring home and homelessness, in such a sense, blends and dissolves the binary oppositions well established in society and culture, which are typified by the opposition between 'home' as the interior, safe space and 'homeless' as the terrifying outside world. In this study, homelessness lurked behind closed doors – in shattered familial relations, grievous memories, and unwanted impositions.

For the women here, feelings of home and homelessness were interchangeable. The significance of showing these boundaries as permeable is vital: firstly, to de-myth the dichotomous association of 'home' with a house and 'homeless' as its lack is an attempt to show up the inadequacies of the stigmatising 'homelessness' label. Secondly, seeing homelessness as something that happens only outside of the home masks a plethora of domestic experiences and hides 'homelessness at home' (Bennett, 2011), just as locating 'home' within the bricks and mortar of the house disregards and devalues the home-making practices which occur beyond this space. The lack of theorising around the home/homelessness relationship has restricted the way work in this field has been able to discuss homelessness. The *unheimlich*, like any concept, contains some weaknesses: it overly focuses on movement in one direction (from homely to un-homely) whereas this study shows how feelings of home and homelessness can travel back and forth in both directions. However, this article hopes to have modestly developed the concept by applying it to a different field, and in turn, opened up new ways of conceptualising homelessness and how it

is experienced and lived.

7. Conclusion

Drawing on qualitative interviews and visual methods with women accessing homelessness services in the North of England, this article has provided evidence that confirms the findings from key international research and extends this knowledge base in other ways. First, these findings add weight to the growing body of literature deconstructing the dominant ideology of domestic space to suggest that alienation and homelessness can be felt within the home, and that the 'über-homeliness of the [...] interior conceals a deeply rooted sentiment of alienation' (Steiner, 2010: 142).

Moreover, this article extends findings from existing conceptualisations of the relationship between home and homelessness, finding that, in the same way as a sense of homelessness can operate within the home itself, so too can alternative homes be created in unconventional domestic spaces, such as the 'homeless hostel'. When living with non-related kin in a new 'domestic' environment, 'homelessness' became a framework through which conventional understandings of home were reworked and opened up. These findings emphasise the need for policies and services to go beyond the provision of stable material housing to also consider the psycho-social factors which render accommodation 'home' or 'un-home' - this may involve tailoring housing assistance and support services to individual needs.

Although much work now acknowledges the home-space as porous (Easthope, 2004; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Bennett, 2011), and with notable exceptions (Harman, 1989; Meth, 2003; Kidd and Evans, 2011; Tunåker, 2015), there is still a dearth in understanding what happens to the sense of home at the extremes, i.e. when one becomes 'homeless' – and in turn, what happens to the boundaries between home and homelessness. (Re)conceptualisations of the home/homelessness relationship have remained undeveloped since the 'home-to-homelessness continuum' (Watson and Austerberry, 1986) and Somerville's (1992) 'six signifiers of home'. As stated earlier, a linear continuum does not suffice when women hold a multitude of shifting meanings of both home and homelessness; and Somerville's 'six signifiers' still maintains the home vs. homelessness dualism. Much work on homelessness explores how it unfolds outside of the home, in terms of street homelessness and rough sleeping in the urban centres of a handful of global cities (see Golden, 1992; Glasser and Bridgman, 1999; Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009; Cloke *et al.*, 2010; Parsell, 2012). These largely ethnographic studies of urban homelessness are vital for a number of reasons: they hold to account the revanchist policies of the neoliberalist welfare state which attempts to sweep homeless people from the streets, and legitimise the inhabitation of public space by marginalised

'others'. They are also important in highlighting how 'at-home' activities can be played out in visible urban space (Cloke *et al.*, 2010) and thus further break down public/private and home/homelessness dichotomies. However, while such research provides empirical illustration of the instability of this boundary, it does not explicitly conceptualise the relationship between home and homelessness beyond the usual binary terms. This article departs from such a paradigm, and is thus novel in the homelessness field, by employing Freud's (1985[1919]) *heimlich* and *unheimlich* to highlight how each is implicated in the other.

It is clear that more empirical work is needed in this area which critically engages with and develops conceptualisations of the home/homelessness relationship. Further exploration and deconstruction of the binary between home and homelessness is necessary to de-myth the association of home with the domestic house. This might be done by highlighting other examples of the uncanny processes of inversion at work between home and homelessness: where home occurs in traditionally 'homeless' spaces and where the *unheimlich* occurs in supposedly 'homely' spaces. Like with any concept, there are gaps and areas for development around the *unheimlich* and its application to experiences of home and homelessness. The majority of Freud's (1985 [1919]) theorising on the term focuses on the slippage from 'homely' to 'un-homely', and the unfamiliar in an otherwise familiar setting; he does not discuss how it might occur in the other direction. Still more work is needed which looks at the lived experiences of homeless women and how gender plays out in home and homeless situations. For women in this study, lived experiences and feelings of home and homelessness were complex and unable to be encapsulated by the usual home/homelessness polarity. This article hopes to set in motion further thinking around the applicability of the *unheimlich* as a tool for research in housing studies seeking to highlight the precarious boundaries between home and homelessness and destabilise dominant ideologies of home.

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