“People Need to Understand Why We are Who We are”: An Ethnographic Study of Homeless Women in Brisbane

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Abstract

Recent statistical information suggests that the numbers of homeless women in Australia are growing. Due to the increase of female homelessness, the Department of Housing, Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2008) published a White Paper where they emphasise two main aims: first, to halve homelessness by 2020, and second to offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it. For this to be achieved, the issues homeless women experience need to be explored and addressed. Little is known about the experiences of, and the meanings attached to, homelessness for women. While there has been an increase in the research undertaken in the field of homelessness in recent years, these examinations not only lack a qualitative dimension, they also tend to be ‘gender-blind’.

This thesis, through the analysis of ethnographic data, explores the role of gender and space in the lives of homeless women in Brisbane, Australia. The research employed a grounded theory approach and was guided by the theoretical considerations of gender relations, gender identity and gendered spatiality. This thesis gives voice to the many homeless women of Brisbane. The research upon which the thesis is based involved over ten months of intensive fieldwork on the streets of Brisbane. Data were generated through life history interviews and observation and participation in the field. The findings suggest that, for homeless women (whose biographies include stories of previously abusive home lives and disadvantage) the notion of ‘being’ homeless encompasses much more than the risky reality of life on the street.

The findings point to the importance of understanding the multifaceted nature of female homelessness. The stories in this research illustrate the influence of the women’s identity and their relationships on being a woman during their homelessness. In this instance, homeless women demonstrated agency through aligning themselves with non-homeless women. By not being passive and finding a sense of self, these women managed their bodies and identities with a range of adopted strategies to cope with life on the street.
Some of the mechanisms homeless women in this research utilised are directly related to the everyday aspects relevant to a potentially risky public space. By actively re-negotiating and re-defining their positions in public space, women attempted to manage their physical bodies and their identities. In addition, for homeless women in this research, their experiences of the private sphere (before homelessness) and the public sphere (during homelessness) point to the notion of a social reality, which is opposite to their current reality.

The stories presented in this thesis establish that the lives of homeless women tend to be complex, individualistic and need to be understood in a holistic way. In addition, based on the women’s accounts, this thesis suggests the importance of understanding the gender and space relationship in the development of effective interventions and policies. Overall, this thesis provides an important theoretical contribution to the limited understanding of women’s experiences of homelessness.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

____________________________
Helena Menih
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Chapter 1: Introduction

On the 7th February 2012, I met a woman I shall call Mary\(^1\). During the early stages of fieldwork, I had seen her around, however, before this time, I had not yet talked to her. Mary’s case-worker mentioned my research to her and she was willing to sit down with me and tell her story. Mary’s story is one of the oral histories that make up this thesis.

The words in the title of this thesis, “People need to understand why we are who we are”, are Mary’s. She spoke these words in our first interview. For Mary, it was important that people understand her story. Moreover, when she identified herself with the homeless population, she expressed the need for an understanding of all the women’s stories out there on the streets. She talked about others needing to acknowledge “our” past, what is it that brought “us” to our current situation in life, to be able to understand our present.

With Mary, I carried out two interviews, each lasted a little more than two hours, and additional numerous informal conversations. During these interactions, I learned the importance of looking at the whole story. Mary is now in her sixties; she explained that about twenty years ago, she had an accident which significantly changed her life. She experienced physical injuries with lifelong consequences that limit her walking. She also experienced severe brain damage with some memory loss. At that time, Mary needed to re-learn how to speak, read and perform other basic actions. In Mary’s words, she spoke of this time:

Um, see, most of my life, from the beginning, I used to live with my family down in Sydney. And I was either taken off them, or my mother got sick and put me into a home, I can’t... I don’t know, ‘cause I don’t remember. But I remember being with my parents for... at the age of six. After that, I don’t remember anything because of an accident I had. But also there... in my memory there is, like, pictures of me getting hit physically, of getting abused mentally, and getting abused sexually. So I’d say that most of my life was like that.

\(^1\) Mary is a pseudonym; her actual name has been decoded as will be explained in Chapter Three (Methodology).
Growing up in a home where abuse was an everyday occurrence understandably and substantially impacted on Mary’s life. Due to reasons unknown to her, she lived in a youth home as a teenager. She remembers going to her parents’ home for holidays and even some weekends, but she cannot remember why her parents sent her to the institution. Mary’s sister told her that as a child she was wild. Mary believes that because she was looking for a way out of the physical, psychological and sexual violence, she ran away from home as a teenage girl. This was her first contact with homelessness. She does not remember exactly what happened, all she knows is that she wanted to get away from the abuse. Mary explains:

At the age of sixteen I left the [institutional] home, went home to my parents. The same thing happened that happened all those years. The physical abuse, if not anything else, and the yelling, and the screaming. My mum and dad used to yell and scream and rant and rave every... all the time. I remember that. I came home to that at Christmas. And my dad got angry with me and smacked me. By the back of his hand. But that was enough. That was the straw that broke the camel’s back. I ran away from home at the age of sixteen, believing, because my parents had always said it to my face, that there was an uncle up here in Queensland. So I got up onto the Milperra highway and here I was [hitch]hiking. Not the safest thing to do back then. Still not safe now. But an off-duty copper2 apparently picked me up, asked me where I was going, told him where I was going, took me down to the Riverview Police Station down in Sydney. And then a normal police officer said that they would take me back to my dad. Take me home. And I sat in the corner like that [she stood up from the chair walked towards the corner of the room, sat down and crossed her arms across her face], and I said, ‘you take me home’, in a very small voice, ‘and I will kill my father, and I will kill my mother’.

Mary remembers that for some reason she felt threatened and could not control herself. She thinks the abuse was the reason for not wanting to go back home. Because of this, she was institutionalised in a psychological ward for a few years. In her words: “I’d had a mental breakdown from all... probably all the physical abuse and everything else that was happening to me. I spent four years in a place like that [referring to an institution for the mentally ill].”

When Mary turned 20, she decided to leave Sydney and start over somewhere in Queensland. She says: “And I never looked back.” Soon after coming to Brisbane, she met a man that became the father of her first child. As Mary puts it: “Uh, he wasn’t the

2 Copper is Australian slang for a police officer.
nicest man, but he didn’t abuse me. Which is probably what I was looking for.” Still, while there was no physical abuse, there was mental abuse:

But he still was able to mentally degrade me, because that’s what I expected. You know, when he called me useless, that’s what I thought I was. When he called me stupid, that’s what I thought I was. Because to me, that’s all I was. You know, stupid, incompetent, not... having no self-esteem. Not really... mm... looking for somebody that could really give me love because I didn’t know what real love was.

Mary continued: “I had a couple of good years with him, and then one day he just left, and left me destitute....” During the next few years Mary had two more children by two different men and then eventually met a man she married. She explains: “To me, he was six feet tall, bright orange hair, [a] knight in shining armour, who could help me, you know.” When Mary got pregnant, they got married. However, soon, things changed:

After the marriage, he changed. I don’t remember what my life was with him after that. But according to my daughter, because of the accident in 1990, he used to use me as a punching bag. If he... everything went wrong, he’d take it out on me. If he couldn’t get on with something, he’d take it out on me. Uh, if he didn’t have a good night’s sleep, he’d take it out on me. I was his excuse. He had an issue with anger management, but it was my fault. And to me, that was acceptable because I’d grown up with it.

Mary said that after a while, the marriage fell apart:

Um, but we were separated, going for divorce, because of the fact that he moved in with a woman, got married to her while married to me, don’t ask me how he did that. Got tried for bigamy, came home one day to ask me if he could have sex with me, ‘cause I was still separated. I told him no, my daughter came home from school, and he was choking me. He had his hands around my throat, trying to choke me to death. And she... I don’t remember this... I... I know she wouldn’t lie to me. She picked him up, we had a big plate glass window like that. Flew through the plate glass window, jumped out through the balcony, and here she was, on the ground, pummelling the hell out of him, and she was gonna kill him, and my neighbour called the cops, and charged him with attempted murder and assault. And he got out of that because of a good lawyer. He had money. Believe you me. And after I divorced him, that was it. You know.

A few times during our conversations, Mary spoke of her distant mother; she never understood what motherly love should be like. Instead, she felt rejected by her mother: “...you know, she never even hugged me.” Mary explained that in her childhood she never learned what it means to love someone. Even later, when she was an adult and had relationships, she never understood the meaning of love. The
relationships that were supposed to be intimate and meaningful quickly turned into a life filled with violence. As Mary was used to violence from her childhood, she took such relationships as normal.

Mary continued her story by explaining her accident. One day, Mary went to pick up her kids in school. She took her son’s bike and the next thing she remembers is waking up in the hospital:

But what I’ve been told is my spleen was shattered beyond repair. My ribs... all my ribs were broken. My nerves were damaged. My... everything inside was damaged. According to the ambulance man that eventually came up to see me, he said they had to cut away all my dress. My... or whatever I was wearing. Wrap me up. Rush me up to the hospital in a coma. Um, and I spent six of those months in a coma, and the rest, I… I think, was probably rehabilitation although I don’t remember. But when I woke up, he came to me and he said, he said ‘you were like a living doll that somebody tried to pull all the insides out’. He said, ‘this… but this has been repaired’, there’s supposed to be a plate in there. My… half of my brain was hanging out of my head. And they’ve told me that everything inside was just damaged. There’s a lot they haven’t told me. How bad, like, my brain damage... I know they can’t assess that, but I was told that... acute brain damage, to the point that I should have been a vegetable, or died. That’s how they looked at it. I should have been a vegetable, dead. Why I didn’t die, they can’t tell me. They had me... I was half machine half woman. I had about eight machines keeping me alive, according to what I’ve been told.

Eventually, Mary was allowed to go home. Getting used to daily activities such as showering, paying bills, etc. caused her a lot of problems. With the help from her neighbours, she recovered to the point that she was somewhat capable of taking care of herself again. Due to the accident and violence at home, her children had been put in a foster home. As the time passed, Mary was able to get her youngest daughter out of care. By that time, living on her own, dealing with consequences from her accident and her violent past, life for Mary had become tougher and tougher.

The years passed and Mary’s children grew up. Being on her own, she moved around and even though she was on disability allowance, she still tried to find a job.

Finally, Mary moved in with her daughter and her son-in-law:

I’ve been living with my daughter now for over eleven years. Uh, before that I was living by myself in a… in a unit over at Kedron, and before that, well, let’s just say I used to move around a lot. And that’s because of my upbringing, mainly, and probably because of my ex-husband.
While living at her daughter’s place, Mary’s past seemed to catch up with her yet again. She attributed this to her problems with expressing love due to the abuse in her childhood, and feeling mentally and physically weak because of the accident caused her problems in communication. A particular situation that Mary did not want to ‘get into’ (because it was a private issue) led to an argument with her daughter. Subsequently, she left:

Got into the city, I knew I didn’t have anywhere to stay. Didn’t know that there were any people that you could get onto. On Saturday night, I slept... I tried... I found an old doona blanket that was discarded by somebody that [sic] didn’t want it. Got that and I was gonna sleep... I was asleep up at the Roma Street, near the railway station. On late Saturday night. And a policeman said that it wasn’t safe to sleep there, and he said ‘you’ve never done this before’ and I said ‘no’. I said ‘I didn’t know that’. He said ‘I’ve not seen you around’. I said ‘this is my first time’. And he was the one that gave me advice that the police beat was probably the safest. So I moved from there to the place, and that’s where I’ve slept. Just up in a little, um, doorway where it was far for leaks. Apparently belonged to somebody else, because they were... had got into trouble and gone to jail, or something. I didn’t know that, right? They’re probably back there now, but I tried sleeping on the bus shelters until it rained, and then I went there. And that’s where I slept.

In one of our conversations, Mary explained the importance of knowing her whole life-story. She expressed the need for a change and in Mary’s mind the only way she can achieve this is by understanding her life from the beginning. She said: “Why I get so angry. Why I get so frustrated. How can I help myself become a better person. Because I don’t feel complete. I don’t feel complete. And that is the problem.”

This story is only the beginning. This story shows Mary’s struggle before homelessness, the decisions and life consequences that led to her homelessness. Mary’s story also demonstrates that homeless women need to tell their stories for us to understand their homelessness, to understand why and how these women become homeless. Mary is only one of the women who shared their stories with me over the ten-month period of fieldwork. Each story is different, yet, in some way, similar. Each story leads to homelessness. Each of the women’s stories considers experiences from

3 During my fieldwork, I spoke with approximately 70-100 women through informal conversations and ten recorded interviews. A biographical sketch of women who participated in the interviews can be found in Appendix C.
the past and present, experiences before and during homelessness. This thesis aims to give these unheard and invisible women a voice. Voices that can help us understand why and how. The stories portray a picture of women’s experiences of homelessness and demonstrate that when looking at female homelessness, we need to look at both individual and collective stories.

This thesis is an ethnographic study of homeless women in Brisbane. The main focus of this research was to bring the voices of women sleeping on the streets to light. Sleeping on the streets basically refers to sleeping in a place without a shelter; according to the literature, this is referred to as ‘primary homelessness’ (MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2008).

By employing a grounded theory and ethnographic approach, this research aims to explore:
1) women’s reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness;
2) women’s experiences of homelessness that are grounded in their identities; and
3) how homeless women experience ‘risky’ social spaces (public spaces) and how they negotiate and manage their spatialised selves.

This research examines women’s reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness and their experiences of homelessness. In doing so, it recognises the importance of understanding homelessness from the point of view of the women living outside of the ‘traditional home’. Home is considered to be domestic, women’s private space, while public space is considered to be more male dominated sphere and consequently considered ‘risky’. The research is grounded in the experiences of homeless women themselves.

This thesis consists of nine Chapters, including the introductory Chapter. Chapter Two provides an overview of the current definitions of homelessness in Australia, the extent and nature of homelessness in Australia, a review of the international and national research on homeless women and considers key theoretical concepts that guided this research from the outset. The aim of this Chapter is to
demonstrate gaps in knowledge on female homelessness. Chapter Two also points to the overall lack of qualitative research within the field of homelessness, the limited research focus on homeless women and a lack of theoretical and conceptual clarity on female homelessness.

Chapter Three focuses on the methodology used for this research. This Chapter offers a more detailed overview of the key aims, how this research was carried out and what were some of the challenges I faced as a researcher. Here, a more detailed description of the grounded theory and ethnographic approach demonstrates the importance of qualitative methodology when researching vulnerable populations, such as homeless people. Within the description of the analysis, this Chapter provides a brief overview of the next four findings Chapters.

Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven offer an understanding gained from the interviews, informal conversations and observations. These Chapters portray the stories of homeless women by looking at ‘becoming’ homeless, ‘experiencing’, ‘managing’ and ‘exiting’ homelessness. To understand how women ‘become’ homeless, Chapter Four considers reasons for, and pathways into homelessness. These two themes are accompanied by the women’s explanations of meanings of ‘home’ and ‘homelessness’. Here it is suggested that for the women who participated in this research, ‘becoming’ homeless is often complicated by various factors in their past and present lives.

Chapter Five is the most extensive as it locates the homeless women in the context of ‘experiencing’ homelessness. By understanding the women’s daily routines, relationships and the roles women play, their contact with crime and police, and how they view and interact with service workers and shelters, this Chapter points to the challenges homeless women face on a daily basis. Across the women’s stories, this Chapter points to the struggles women face in terms of their gender roles and identity within various social contexts in public space.

Chapter Six continues from the previous Chapter by exploring how homeless women ‘manage’ their homelessness. This Chapter is predominantly based on the
observational component of the fieldwork. Looking at the coping mechanisms the women use to deal with, and manage, homelessness, this Chapter suggests homeless women experience chaos in their lives. Based on these stories and observations, I have identified that the women’s coping strategies range from substance use, mental health problems (such as depression and anxiety), attending free art classes, to ‘passing’ as non-homeless. I found that these factors can impact on women’s homelessness both positively and negatively. The strategies that have a positive impact can consequently contribute to women’s exit out of homelessness.

Chapter Seven discusses ‘exiting’ homelessness by looking at the stories from women who have successfully left their lives on the streets behind them. Due to the main focus on women who are experiencing primary homelessness, this Chapter was not initially planned. Yet during the fieldwork, it became clear that most of the women are trying hard to exit, or have recently exited homelessness. Here, the narratives demonstrate that the road to exiting homelessness tends to, not surprisingly, be a challenging one.

Chapter Eight is the discussion Chapter. Here, I provide critical reflections of the research aims and I consider these in the context of findings and theoretical considerations. This Chapter points to implications of this research for further research, social policy and intervention. Overall, the importance of an understanding of space and gender is highlighted. However, as recognised in Chapter Three, this research does not apply in a nation-wide or international way, yet, the theoretical concepts that emerged from this study are certainly insightful and relevant. Finally, Chapter Nine concludes Mary’s story and provides an overall conclusion of this thesis.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this Chapter is to outline a basis for this study. The majority of the research literature presented here originates from Australia. However, given that international literature has played a vital role in constructing the Australian perspective on homelessness, where relevant, this international position is also offered throughout. This Chapter demonstrates the way homelessness is constructed in the Australian context and some of the issues pertaining to these constructions. This will validate the need to learn about the way homeless people, more specifically homeless women, define concepts such as home and homelessness. The extent of homelessness and responses (government and non-government) reveal there is a lack of literature addressing homeless women. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2011), almost half of the homeless population in Australia are women. Since 2011, the numbers of homeless people are increasing annually.

A review of the national and international studies undertaken on homelessness indicate a tendency towards a gender-blind approach. In Australia, the majority of the research on homelessness is in the form of reports commissioned by government (e.g., Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2009) or non-government agencies (e.g., Chamberlain, Johnson & Theobald, 2007). This stands in contrast to the international research on homelessness, including British and North American studies, where research is both quantitative and qualitative in nature (Parker & Fopp, 2004). Parker and Fopp (2004) point out that Australian research is predominantly quantitative and that qualitative analyses of homelessness are relatively undeveloped. Previous studies also suggest that women who are homeless are battling with their prescribed social role as women, which is consequently impacting on their affiliation and connectedness with their own self (Brown & Ziefert, 1990). While little is known about homeless women’s experiences, the few studies that do exist suggest that women may be doubly disadvantaged on the street: first, for being homeless and second, for stepping outside the traditional gender role (e.g., Casey, 2002). As a result, a more in-depth understanding of why women become homeless and how they experience homelessness is essential.
This Chapter consists of four sections. First, I present an overview of the development of current definitions of homelessness in Australia. The second section depicts an overall snapshot of homelessness in Australia. Here, I overview responses, policies and the current extent of homelessness. Third, I review the existing national and international literature on homelessness with an emphasis on the female experience; this shows a lack of qualitative research on women in the Australian context. The final section offers the main theoretical considerations that guide my research. An examination of the research illustrates that while women’s homelessness is increasing, there continues to be a lack of empirical insight into this phenomenon.

**Definition of Homelessness in Australia**

According to Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992), much of the literature on homelessness around the world has been based on three loose time brackets and associated definitions. This directly impacted on the Australian definitions. First, in the 1960s and the late 1970s, the characterisation of homelessness in Australia was focused on people living on ‘skid row’ (vagrants, alcoholics, and addicts). Secondly, by the late 1970s and the early 1980s, the definition was more radical, giving priority to perceptions of those defined as homeless, and the adequacy of their accommodation situation, as they perceived it. Thirdly, by the early 1980s there was a conservative reaction to the radical definition of homelessness that focused on people who are without conventional shelter, or who are in emergency shelter. Neil and Fopp (1994) emphasised that while the last two definitions have been adopted by many researchers, others still use more radical definitions. Basing the definition of homelessness on subjective perceptions may create a number of problems for research or policy purposes (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1992).

Chamberlain and Johnson (2001) point to three influential definitions of homelessness relevant to the Australia context: the literal, the subjectivist and the

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4 It has also been suggested that in practical terms, subjective and objective criteria are likely to blend (Neil & Fopp, 1994).
The literal definition associates homelessness with ‘rooflessness’, suggesting that people are literally without a roof over their head (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2001). This is also the image that most of the mass media use to represent the homeless population (Parsell, 2010). Chamberlain and Johnson (2001) explain two central typifications that mass media use to portray homeless people. The first dominant characterisation of the homeless population, from the 1970s and the early 1980s, is the image of an older man living rough, possibly with an alcohol or mental health problem. From the 1990s onwards, the second major typification prevails: the homeless teenager; the image of ‘street kids’ sleeping in public places or squatting in demolished buildings.

In contrast to the literal definition, the subjectivist definition originates from a long tradition of social and political thought “which argues that sociological concepts should be grounded in the perceptions of actors” (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2001, p. 37). This definition contends that homelessness depends on how the person involved evaluates their housing or homeless situation. Chamberlain and Johnson (2001) argue that this definition can be considered as the ‘official’ definition, given many advocates prefer it. In Australia, this characterisation has its foundation in the work of National Youth Coalition for Housing (1985), and its underlining principle was encoded in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2001). The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) defined homeless persons as those with inadequate access to safe and secure housing (ABS, 2012).

The third position, the cultural definition (advanced by Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1992), argues that “homelessness and inadequate housing are socially constructed, cultural concepts that only make sense in a particular community at a given historical period” (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2001, p. 38). Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1992) explain that before it is possible to define homelessness, it is first important to identify the standards of a shared community’s understanding of minimum housing, so that people can live according to those expectations; and second the groups that fall below the minimum community standard need to be identified. Watson and Austerberry (1986) discuss an example of a society where the vast majority of the community was living in mud huts, thus the standard or cultural norm was that mud huts represented
adequate accommodation. Similarly, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia, the western concept of ‘home’ may be antithetical to their own (Parsell, 2010b). These examples indicate that western concepts and ideas of homelessness might not represent the construction of homelessness amongst all peoples.

As a result, a definition based on cultural perspective is objectivist and it pays little attention to a person’s perceptions (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2001). This means that homelessness is relative to a particular community’s minimum housing standards, a structural view, rather than individual perceptions. On Census night, the ABS (2008) used the cultural definition of homelessness to count the homeless population (cited in Chamberlain & Johnson, 2001; Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2009). Yet as this definition was not developed by the ABS for the purpose of enumerating homelessness, the numbers did not represent a genuine picture of homelessness in Australia. In 2008, the ABS developed their own construction of homelessness for statistical purposes only. In the following Census, their published position showed their definition was founded on three main elements: “adequacy of the dwelling; security of tenure in the dwelling; and control of, and access to space for social relations” (ABS, 2012, p. 11).

Chamberlain and Johnson (2001) point out there will always be individual homeless people who are hard to classify. However, in broad terms, a cultural definition of homelessness points to the identification of three sections of the homeless population: primary, secondary, and tertiary homelessness. Primary homelessness encompasses those without conventional accommodation: people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in deserted buildings, under bridges, living in improvised dwellings (such as sheds, garages or cabins), and using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1992; Chamberlain & Johnson, 2001; ABS, 2008; Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2009).

Secondary homelessness includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2009). This includes those residing temporarily within others’ households (such as friends, relatives and emergency accommodation) because they have no accommodation of their own, and
people staying in boarding houses on a short-term basis, operationally defined as 12 weeks or less (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1992; Chamberlain & Johnson, 2001; ABS, 2008; Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2009).

Tertiary homelessness encompasses people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis, operationally defined as 13 weeks or longer (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2009). People living in such situations are defined as homeless because their accommodation situation is below the minimum community standard of a small self-contained flat; they do not have a separate bedroom and living room and they do not have kitchen and bathroom facilities of their own (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1992; Chamberlain & Johnson, 2001; ABS, 2008; Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2009).

As Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992) demonstrate, the definitions and kinds of homelessness are quite complex. Therefore, not only is it important to conceptually and operationally define homelessness, it is also imperative to distinguish different experiences within homeless populations, for example, among gender specific populations. Due to the multicultural nature of Australia (Parsell, 2010b), the way definitions are used when trying to better understand homelessness needs to also be taken into consideration. This means that the cultural definition should be expanded to include both personal perception and additional demographic conditions. For example, not only do factors such as ethnicity or age tend to be overlooked, gender is not taken into consideration. As Tucker (1994) recognises, the way men and women consider the idea of home and homelessness tends to differ. Further, Saunders and Evans (1992) note that in order to dismiss the still conventional illusion that maleness and whiteness, uncritically envisioned, describe the social world in Australia, women and men need to be studied in all their transitory and structural specificity. Thus, to understand how women experience homelessness, it is necessary to first explore how women define home and homelessness based on their experiences.
A Snapshot of Homelessness in Australia

The nature of homelessness in Australia

Memmott, Long and Chambers (2003) point out that homelessness in Australia has been present since the arrival of the British First Fleet in 1788. At that time, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people either dispersed or were dispossessed from their land and were therefore forced into a form of homelessness (Coleman, 2000). Considering that land (rather than built structures) was considered home and ‘sleeping rough’ was a way to feel connected to land (Parsell, 2010), such displacement created an absence of all that was familiar or identifiable as “home”.

The ideologies and values of eighteenth century Britain (Coleman, 2000) continued on into early nineteenth century Australia. There was a perception that people who were poor, unemployed, and more specifically did not have a residence were seen as a problem (Schindeler, 2010). Such populations became labelled as homeless and defined as problematic. Consequently, within the British colonist context, these characterisations led to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples being labelled as homeless and problematic. Memmott and colleagues (2003) indicate that poverty in the nineteenth century rapidly became localised in the inner urban areas of Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane and the need for solutions amplified. Like the values and ideologies of that time, responses to homelessness were also imported from Britain (Dickey, 1980) and were essentially in the hands of charitable and caring societies (Coleman, 2000). These responses were harsh and often judgemental and in time, spread around Australia; they developed into Australia’s own mixture of welfare and social control (Dickey, 1980). For instance, in Sydney by the early 1820s, homeless boys were removed from the streets and accommodated on the ships anchored in the harbour (Dickey, 1980). Further, in the 1800s, networks of night refuges and shelters emerged throughout Australia’s major cities (O’Brien, 1988). Basically the poor, the sick, and the homeless were moved into institutions, where they were “hidden away and subjected to a well-directed regime” (Dickey, 1980, p. 37).
Dickey (1980) explains that in the 1800s, at times, control was based on bodily fear. Apprehension of physical injury seemed quite a harsh method of dealing with such a population (O’Brien, 1988). Yet this was the consequence of the convict era, where solutions were designed to remove people considered deviants from the model of the decent economic man out of the mainstream of society (O’Brien, 1988). These shelters or institutions tended to be overcrowded; often people’s stay there was temporary. Such inconsiderate responses, often judgemental in nature, and at the same time keeping pace with the expanding frontier, became widespread across Australia (Dickey, 1980). Over time, these early responses developed into a distinctive mixture of welfare and social control (Dickey, 1980; O’Brien, 1988).

British colonists transplanted the English common law system to Australia; this included vagrancy components dating back to the 1300s (Memmott et al., 2003). Based on British legislative traditions (the characterisation, regulation and policies), the Vagrancy Legislations in Australia were developed: 1835 (New South Wales), 1836 (Victoria), 1845 (Tasmania), 1851 (Queensland). The behaviours such as prostitution, begging\(^5\), public drunkenness, and being without lawful means, were classified as criminal offences. In this instance, the homeless were considered as a criminal population that needs to be regulated and reformed. In addition, these legislations punitively regulated the use of public places (Memmott et al., 2003). A vagrant was considered to be a person without a settled home or regular work, someone who was ‘straying’ from one place to another and ‘wandering’ by night; these terms were emphasised as negative (Crane, 1999). Crane (1999) believes that vagrancy existed (and still exists to some extent) within all highly developed civilisations; nonetheless, it only arises and becomes visible during a period of rapid economic and social disorganisation (for example, economic depression).

In Australia, this was seen after the depression due to the economic down-turn at the end of the 1800s and again through the 1930s (Coleman, 2000). As the result of this economic crisis, poverty struck all the major cities in Australia, producing large

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\(^5\) In addition to 1836 Vagrancy Legislation in Victoria, the Vagrancy act 1996 in Victoria also deemed begging as a criminal offence (Lynch, 2002). This again demonstrates the heavy influence of British colonial tradition on Australian legal tradition.
numbers of homeless people, not only young white men, but also families (Memmott et al., 2003). People sleeping out on the streets were tolerated at some times, and moved on at others (Coleman, 2000). Eventually homelessness became a familiar part of the Australian landscape. Coleman (2000) indicates that through the 1930s many of the responses to homelessness in Australia were based on the principles of the old Poor Law system in England\(^6\), which distinguished between the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’ poor. According to Rosenthal (2000), the deserving poor were those whose homelessness was the result of structural causes\(^7\). On the contrary, the undeserving poor refer to those homeless people whose homelessness is perceived to be the result of personal fault. Regardless of this distinction, responses focused on consistently moving homeless people on. Thus, the state was able to successfully avoid acceptance of responsibility.

World War II and the immediate post-war economic boom witnessed high levels of employment and prosperity (Coleman, 2000). After World War II, the government started promoting home-ownership as a way of creating a stable population, and as an integral part of their work-based welfare strategies (Coleman, 2000; Memmott et al., 2003). In Jordan’s (1994) study on homeless men, he noted that in 1952, a sharp economic recession overloaded the welfare agencies with homeless people. Coleman (2000) explains that this homeless population consisted of a core group, the most visible and researched of which were older, single men. Both Coleman (2000) and Memmott and colleagues (2003) note that during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the problems of poverty and homelessness in Australia were ‘rediscovered’ and thus re-emerged as an issue for public concern and debate. Simultaneously, youth homelessness and homelessness affecting women were identified (Coleman, 2000; Memmott et al. 2003).

Moreover, government funded services rapidly expanded in response to these social issues. In 1973, the *Homeless Persons’ Assistance Act 1973* was passed, which was operationalised as the Homeless Persons’ Assistance Program the following year.

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\(^6\) In addition to the Poor and Vagrancy legislations grounded in British tradition, the legacy of control over the poor and homeless in Australia continued though the establishment of legislations such as New South Wales, Western Australia and Victorian legislation for children of the poor (Schindeler, 2010).

\(^7\) Rosenthal (2000) further divides them into three subgroups: slackers, lackers and unwilling victims.
(Memmott et al., 2003). Parsell (2010a, p. 22) elaborates that this program provided assistance for advancement and improvement of non-institutional programs to “support people who were homeless to participate in all aspects of ‘mainstream’ society.” Furthermore, there was the recognition of homelessness as a nation-wide problem and the need to approach this issue nationally resulted in the development of the SAAP in 1985 which replaced the previous legislation with Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 (Parsell, 2010a).

The SAAP (1993) explains that a person is believed to have unsafe and unsecure adequate housing if the only housing to which they have access includes the following conditions:

- damages, or is likely to damage their health;
- threatens their safety;
- marginalises them through failing to provide access to adequate personal amenities or the economic and social support that a home normally affords;
- places them in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security, affordability of that housing; and
- has no security of tenure (cited in ABS, 2008, p. 10).

If a person is living in accommodation provided by a SAAP agency, or some other form of emergency accommodation, he or she is also considered homeless (ABS, 2008). The SAAP is both federally funded and by each of the state and territory governments; since its establishment, it has been Australia’s front line response to homelessness (Parsell, 2010a).

However, given the SAAP, together with current housing systems, was not able to reduce homelessness, a new, ‘whole-of-government’ approach was needed (Parsell, 2010a). In 2008, the then Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) issued a White Paper that set out a national approach to reducing homelessness (FaHCSIA, 2008, p. v). This paper suggests two very ambitious goals to achieve by 2020: to halve overall homelessness and to offer supported

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8 Due to the administrative changes in 2013, this Department’s two superseding agencies are now Department of Social Services (assumed most of the responsibilities) and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (assumed indigenous affairs functions).
accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it (FaHCSIA, 2008, p. 17). Furthermore, according to FaHCSIA (2008, pp ix-xii), these responses to homelessness will be implemented through three strategies. The first strategy involves ‘turning the tap’ where services will intervene early to prevent homelessness. Secondly, services will be improved and expanded to achieve sustainable housing, improve economic and social participation and end homelessness; services will be more connected and responsive. The third strategy aims to break the cycle. Using appropriate support people, those who become homeless will move quickly through the crisis system to stable housing, so that they avoid homelessness.

The FaHCSIA White Paper appeared to play a vital role in the government responses to homelessness and resulted in the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). These Agreements outline the framework for governments to work together to reduce and prevent homelessness and improve housing affordability (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2011). Both of these Agreements commenced in January 2009. The NAHA was initiated by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and its main aim was to tackle the problem of housing affordability (Department of Social Services [DSS], 2013). According to the Agreement, in the first five years from the day of commencement, the COAG will provide $6.2 billion towards housing assistance to low and middle income Australians (DSS, 2013). The NPAH contributes to the NAHA to prevent, intervene and reduce homelessness and improve service responses to homelessness (DSS, 2013). This Agreement committed to contribute $1.1 billion towards achieving their goal. In June 2013 and after operating for four years, the NPAH expired and while a new long-term agreement is being negotiated, the COAG works on a one-year transitional agreement.

Based on the White Paper, the NAHA and the NPAH financial arrangements, the SAAP was terminated, which led the Federal Government to express interest in introducing new up-to-date homelessness legislation to ensure adequate support and quality of services (Parliament of Australia, 2013). The goal was to replace the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994, more specifically to replace the
funding mechanism within this Act; as a result, the *Homelessness Bill 2012* was introduced (DSS, 2013). This Bill aimed to preserve the best features of the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994*, such as recognising homeless people as the most powerless and marginalised group in society (DSS, 2013). The main principle of the *Homelessness Bill 2012* is to increase awareness and recognition of persons who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of experiencing homelessness. In August 2012, the Government released the Exposure Draft of the Bill with the main aim of increasing recognition and awareness of persons who are, or are at risk of, experiencing homelessness (ABS, 2012).

**The extent of homelessness in Australia**

Homelessness does not select people; it can become a reality for anyone (FaHCSIA, 2008; AIHW, 2012). Homeless people come from all age groups, and include men, women and children from all cultural backgrounds (FaHCSIA, 2008). There are two major sources of information about the level of homelessness in Australia, the ABS and the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) Collection. While these sources collect their data differently, both were influenced by the publishing of the White Paper in 2008.

Until 2008, the ABS did not provide an official estimate of homelessness. Instead, they based their data of homelessness on Chamberlain and MacKenzie’s (2003; 2009) estimate of homelessness which used the 1996, 2001 and 2006 Censuses of Population and Housing (ABS, 2012). After the release of the above-mentioned White Paper, the ABS developed its own robust and evidence-based definition of homelessness for statistical purposes. As a result, the ABS data collection focuses on people who are actually homeless and not people at risk of becoming homeless.

Second, in 2011, the SHS Collection replaced the SAAP National Data Collection and was designed to provide appropriate information to agreements such as NAHA and NPAH (AIHW, 2011). While the SAAP collected data annually, the SHS Collection gathers data monthly (AIHW, 2011). Further, SAAP collected data only
from the agencies that reported to and were funded by SAAP, however the SHS Collection includes not only these agencies, but also agencies that were not required to report to SAAP and even some agencies that were newly funded under the NAHA and NPAH. The data are collected at the end of every month and due to the scope, it aims to improve the relevance and quality of data (AIHW, 2011). It is also estimated that the SHS data might report higher figures of homelessness than the ABS data, considering most people are homeless for only a short period of time (ABS, 2008; AIHW, 2013). As a result, while SHS data provide a more exact picture of the number of people who access homelessness services, it does not present an actual picture of homelessness as a high percentage of people included in data collection are at risk of becoming homeless, but are not yet classified as homeless (AIHW, 2013).

Across Australia, the 2011 Census reported 105,237 people classified as being homeless (ABS, 2011). This figure is an 8% increase from the 2006 Census (89,728 homeless people) (ABS, 2011). The rates for male homelessness fell slightly from 57% in 2006 to 56% in 2011, while female homelessness rose slightly from 43% in 2006 to 44% in 2011 (ABS, 2011). This small increase in the female percentage is quite ample when examining the numbers; in 2006, there were 38,569 homeless women and in 2011, 45,813 homeless women (ABS, 2011). The ABS data further suggest female homelessness in Queensland rose from 7,851 women in 2006 to 8,504 women in 2011. This is a higher percentage rise compared to men; in 2006 there were 11,008 homeless men and in 2011, 11,333 homeless men. From the 8,504 homeless women in Queensland in 2011, 592 are considered to be primary homeless (the data is based on persons who are in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out).

While the ABS data portrays a more accurate picture of actual female homelessness, the SHS data represents the number of women who are at risk of becoming homeless. The annual SHS report for 2011-2012 states that 229,247 Australians accessed specialist homelessness services in that period, with females representing 59% of the overall number (AIHW, 2012). From all those who accessed homelessness agencies, 34% of people reported they had experienced domestic or family violence, with women comprising 78% of the clients. Further data show that
almost equal numbers of males and females were homeless when they began receiving support, however the females at risk represented 68% of all the people at risk of becoming homeless (AIHW, 2012).

**Conclusion**

This section summarised the history of homelessness in Australia and the initial responses. Throughout Australia’s short, colonised history, there has been a continual increase in the recognition, and awareness, of the homeless population. With the recent government responses, there has been more focus and interest in the homeless population than ever before. This is probably also due to increasing numbers of homeless people across Australia. The ABS and the SHS data also indicate that not only is female homelessness on the rise, similarly, women tend to be at a greater risk of becoming homeless. Women also report family or domestic violence as either the main factor for homelessness or as a contributing factor for seeking help to prevent homelessness. The increase in numbers and the sensitivity of the contributing factors (such as family violence) for women indicate that women are more vulnerable than men. Consequently, this means that the ‘general’ focus on homelessness and social policies need to become more gender-specific in an endeavour to decrease the numbers of homeless women. This demonstrates major gaps between government responses and social policies and increasing numbers.

**Researching Homeless Women**

A review of available international and national research on homelessness demonstrates gender bias. The United States of America has long been considered a leading research country in the field of homelessness. As a result, Parsell (2010a) explains that various international and national studies have been influenced by the language, and mirrored concepts used, from the United States during the 1960s and the 1970s. To understand more clearly what this means, I firstly present an overview of the relevant research literature up to 1970s. This era represents the recognition of female
homelessness. Secondly, this Chapter provides an overview of the research that focused on both homeless men and women, or only homeless women.

According to Rossi (1989), the three foremost and influential researchers of the early twentieth century are Anderson (1923), Schubert (1935) and Sutherland and Locke (1936). Anderson’s (1923) research indicates that ‘hobos’ and ‘tramps’ fulfilled a role in the economy by supplying occasional and needed labour. Anderson (1923) also distinguishes hobos and tramps from ‘bums’, who got by as much as possible without work. By the 1940s, when the need for casual workers had drastically reduced, hobos and tramps were influenced to either settle down in conventional homes or become bums (Rossi, 1989). Essentially, Anderson’s (1923) research seems to have focused on explaining homelessness through the then current homeless population (hobos, tramps, and bums) in the context of their employment. Shubert’s (1935) later findings presents the homeless population as mainly white and unattached (unmarried or single) males. Sutherland and Locke (1936) similarly establish that the homeless population consisted of older, unemployed and single men.

Whilst Anderson’s (1923) research recognises that the notion of ‘tramps’ included the experiences of both genders, the research that followed focused on homeless men only. For instance, in Australia, Linsell (1962) and Jordan (1965) identify homelessness as a solely male occurrence. A few years later, de Hoog (1972) and Towers (1974) use the term ‘homeless people’, yet their findings indicate a gender-gap as no specific findings for women were discussed. Similarly, in the United States, Bahr’s (1973) research examines the homeless population in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s in a stereotypical way, that is, as older men, who often abused alcohol and had disabilities. However, Wright (2009) acknowledges that Jones’s (1975) and Clements’ (1985) research into eighteenth and nineteenth century homeless populations report a sizable fraction of women homelessness. This indicates that it was not until the late 1970s that researchers considered other forms of homelessness, such as women or family homelessness (Parsell, 2010a).
In the United States in the late 1970s, Garrett and Bahr (1976) note many reports consider factors that led to homelessness among males, however there were only occasional references to those that led to homelessness among women. They suggest the gap be filled with research about women who are homeless and alcoholic. Garrett and Bahr (1976) present two hypotheses: first, the general null hypothesis that the family backgrounds and experiences of skid row\(^9\) women do not differ significantly from those of men; second, women from broken homes are not overrepresented among homeless (skid row) women (see p. 372). Garrett and Bahr (1976) undertook life-history interviews with 52 women at the Women’s Emergency Shelter in New York. They compare a sample of 118 low-income middle-aged and elderly women and a sample of 199 men from Camp LaGuardia, an institution operated by Social Services to which aged and ailing men are voluntary committed. They focus on demographic characteristics and marital histories.

Garret and Bahr’s (1976) findings present no support for the first hypothesis and reject the second hypothesis. The shelter women were slightly younger (their mean age was 44 years) compared to the institutionalised men (their mean age was 47 years). When comparing the demographic characteristics, black women\(^{10}\) (44\%) were overrepresented among homeless women compared to men (one in four). Also, the shelter women were more likely to be native born (rather than foreign born) and better educated than the men. This research did not present detailed quantitative data on childhood and family experience. Through the interviews, two general types of parent-child relationships were evident: one involved the child neglect-parental irresponsibility syndrome (see also Minuchin, 1974); and the other involved a domineering parent who was a strict disciplinarian (Garret & Bahr, 1976). Lastly, according to the marital histories, three noteworthy factors were revealed. First, none of the respondents were living with a spouse at the time of the interview. Second, most of those who had been married at least once, reported that the marriage had ended in separation or divorce. Third, although the homeless men and women were at that time maritally unattached,

\(^9\) Skid row is an American term, which refers to a part of town that is frequented by vagrants and alcoholics.

\(^{10}\) This is the language used in the original study.
over three-quarters of the shelter women had been married compared to less than half of the men. Although these findings reject the second hypothesis, Garret and Bahr (1976) still recognise that women from broken homes were overrepresented amongst homeless women and also suggested that failure in marriage may be a key variable in explaining homelessness for women. This research not only assumed homeless women in the context of heteronormativity, but also failed to qualitatively explore the reasons behind marriage breakdown (for example, domestic violence), which was considered the main reason for homelessness.

At roughly the same time, Edwards, Zammit, Hakendorf and Gayton (1977) undertook a study of homeless women in Melbourne, Australia. They found that homelessness for women occurred away from the public and that women’s homelessness had to be understood in terms of the lack of alternative accommodation, safety fears and social expectations. They also acknowledge that there is a need to re-think definitions of homelessness to develop effective policy and service provision. Finally, they encourage further research in the area of service provision. Since this research, homelessness services have increased their focus on homeless women, however the theoretical contribution in terms of gender and space is still quite limited. Further, as Edwards and colleagues (1977) indicate, definitions of homelessness limit the development of social policy, which is still relevant today as definitions tend to focus on the use of space instead of identifying what is distinct about homelessness, especially for women.

Despite establishing that women also experience homelessness, the research into adult homeless populations in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia had, with the exceptions of those few studies discussed above, predominantly focused on men (Tomas & Dittmar, 1995). Yet, in the mid-1980s, research started to shift. In the United States, quantitative research carried out by Bassuk, Rubin and Lauriat (1984; 1986) and Bassuk and Rosenberg (1988) focuses on family homelessness with an emphasis on females. Their samples included 80 homeless mothers and 151 children, and 49 homeless female-headed families and 81 housed female-headed families, respectively. Throughout the interviews, women reported higher rates of major mental
illness (Bassuk et al., 1984), more difficulty in current life circumstances (Bassuk et al., 1986), and that they were more likely (than men) to have histories of sexual or physical abuse (Bassuk & Rosenberg, 1988). Nevertheless, the major shortcomings (such as using quantitative approach) of these studies demonstrate the lack of an in-depth examination of the experiences of homeless women (Tomas & Dittmar, 1995). These studies also focus mainly on females with families and ignored homeless women that are ‘single’.

By recognising methodological gaps, researchers began to employ mixed methods approaches. In the United States, Calsyn and Morse (1990) undertook interviews with a random sample of 248 homeless people staying in shelters in St. Louis (122 female and 126 male). By comparing the responses of homeless men and women, the authors established differences; two major examples were highlighted. In general, homeless women experienced a higher quality of life than homeless men. Secondly, women were more satisfied than men in their current place of residence (shelter), their shelter neighbourhood, their food, the people they lived with, their daily activities, use of their spare time, and available services and facilities. While Calsyn and Morse (1990) utilise some qualitative methods, a description of background characteristics was limited and lacked the actual stories of experiences of homelessness. This impacted negatively considering one of the aims of this study was to compare the characteristics and experiences of homeless men and women, instead of considering them separately. Similarly, studies conducted by Crystal (1984), Hagen (1987), Breakey, Fischer, Kramer, Nestadt, Romanoski, Ross, Royall and Stine (1989), Burt and Cohen (1989), Maurin, Russell and Memmott (1989) and North and Smith (1993) directly compare homeless men and women. While most of these studies aim to understand the gender gap, their findings were limited by the lack of detailed description and rich understandings of homeless people’s experiences.

From the mid-1990s onwards, international research finally assumed the approach of studying homeless women separately from men. Tomas and Dittmar (1995), Wardhaugh (1999), Edgar and Doherty (2001), Mina-Coull and Tartinville

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11 Most of the homeless women tend to be in some relationship (ex-wife, girlfriend, sister, etc.), but the majority of women on the streets are homeless by themselves.
(2001), Reeve, Casey and Goudie (2006), May, Cloke and Johnsen (2007) and Moss and Singh (2012) all demonstrate a link between domestic violence and homelessness for women (see also Browne & Bassuk, 1997; Metraux & Culhane, 1999; Toro, Bellavia, Daeschler, Owens, et al., 1995). Further, these studies found that women tried to seek help from their social networks (such as family and friends) before seeking help from homelessness services or sleeping rough. Unlike previous research, these studies also explore the background characteristics and experiences of women’s lives in a detailed way before homelessness occurred. These authors found that before homelessness, most of the women lived in poverty and were also more likely to have had a troubled childhood (for instance, living in foster care). To provide an example, Tyler, Hoyt and Whitbeck (2000) discuss childhood sexual abuse and adolescent runaways in relation to victimisation on the streets. They found there was a strong link between sexually abused young women and the time spent on the streets or in unsupervised living arrangements. Browne (1993) also draws parallels between sexual abuse or intimate partner violence and homelessness for women, connecting the effects of childhood abuse and characteristics identified in homeless women. Davis-Netzley, Hurlburt and Hough (1996) argue there are strong links between childhood abuse (physical and sexual) and homeless women with mental illness. Still, the majority of women in their study became homeless as children or adolescents thus neglecting adult women. While these studies focus on women only and explored links between background characteristics and homelessness in more detail, they lack a detailed description of what it is like to experience being homeless as a woman. Moreover, these studies lack theoretical insight into homeless women’s identities.

In Australia, the link between homelessness and domestic abuse has also been explored (Chung, Kennedy, O’Brien & Wendt, 2000; Johnson et al., 2008; MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2003; Tually, Faulkner, Cutler & Slatter, 2008). Healy (2002) explains that 45% of women in Australia named domestic violence, including sexual, physical or emotional abuse, as the main contributing factor for their homelessness. Moreover, 55% of women with children and 36.9% of unaccompanied women name domestic and family violence as the main reason to seek assistance (AIHW, 2008). Still, most of the research discusses domestic or family violence instead of focusing on a specific
behaviour within domestic violence, such as physical abuse. Thus, it can be hard to
determine how many women in Australia actually experience which particular type of
abusive behaviour and the extent to which it is linked to homelessness. Statistical
material is also likely to misrepresent the actual picture of domestic or family violence
in Australia, as much abuse is not reported (Tually et al., 2008). In Australia,
consideration of violence as a reason for female homelessness has been empirically
examined, yet the way women experience this, and consequently the pathway that leads
them to homelessness, has not yet been explored. Moreover, similar to international
research, these studies lack a detailed theoretical exploration of what it is like to
experience homelessness as a woman.

While the international and national research discussed above has contributed
immensely to the field of homelessness, I consider two major limitations relevant across
these studies: lack of qualitative methodology (for example, an ethnographic approach)
and lack of a theoretical contribution to understanding homeless women’s experiences.
Here, I examine three influential studies into female homelessness: Watson and
States and Casey (2002) in Australia. Each contributes strongly to a theoretical
understanding of the field and is pertinent to understanding women’s experiences of
homelessness through a gendered lens. Watson and Austerberry (1986) undertook
interviews with homeless women to explore the experiences and needs of women
without secure accommodation. Their focus was on single women (those who are not,
and have never been, married, and women who are not living with a spouse or
children)\textsuperscript{12}. The sample consisted of 160 single homeless women in London. Watson
and Austerberry (1986) suggest that in the case of single homeless women there is a
need to shift the focus from the individual to an analysis of wider social and economic
structures. The framework of their study was based on two strategies: first, to analyse
the marginality of single-person households; and second, to explain how patriarchal
social relations, the sexual division of labour and the dominant family model in a

\textsuperscript{12} The reason for this sample was a general decrease in marriage rates, marriage at a later age, increased
longevity among women and increase in divorce rates. This was accompanied by the fact that the
ideology of nuclear family and women’s independence was changing (Watson & Austerberry, 1986).
capitalist society all serve to marginalise women in the housing sphere\textsuperscript{13}. Their findings show that many women expressed feelings of inadequacy and failure; they also tended to internalise social blame and blamed themselves for their homelessness. Only a small proportion expressed anger at the inequity of the system and the label that is attached to being homeless.

One crucial point that Watson and Austerberry (1986) establish is that 42\% of interviewed women did not self-identify or feel homeless, according to their own definitions of homelessness. Most women considered the label of homelessness as relevant to the image of “little old men with bags on their shoes” (p. 106). Thus, Watson and Austerberry (1986) conclude that when homeless women do not recognise their own housing needs or homelessness, they are less likely to act to change their situation. Single women tended to be concerned with the ideological acceptance of the traditional family norm (where women marry and become housewives) and by the lack of non-family and single household as a group, and the consequent lack of visibility of this section of society (Watson & Austrberry, 1986). This can further be intensified by the women’s demotion to the domestic sphere and their lack of economic and political power in the public sphere. Here, Watson and Austerberry (1986) point to the hidden nature of women’s homelessness, which is reinforced by sexual division of labour.

Moreover, Watson and Austerberry’s (1986) study indicates that concern about homeless women in society was limited mainly due to the narrow definition of homelessness. Policy makers, politicians and people responsible for housing allocation, have mainly used this narrow definition of homelessness (Watson & Austerberry, 1986). Consequently, this contributed to the invisibility of female homelessness. While Watson and Austerberry’s (1986) study primarily focuses on housing issues for single women and the way homeless women identify themselves in relation to a definition of homelessness, the authors did not explore the way these women experienced homelessness.

\textsuperscript{13} Watson and Austerberry (1986) use Marxist-feminist analysis as a useful framework for understanding women’s homelessness.
Brown and Ziefert (1990) undertook a fieldwork study by applying a developmental model\textsuperscript{14} with groups of homeless women in two shelters in the United States. First, they undertook a meta-analysis and considered previous research on women and homelessness. Through this process, Brown and Ziefert (1990) identify three categories of homeless women: the chronically, the episodically, and the situationally, homeless. The application of these categories was then explored through their developmental model. First, chronically homeless women were “those without a permanent domicile for at least a year, [who] have developed a routinised existence that barely meets their basic needs” (Brown & Ziefert, 1990, p. 8). Furthermore, certain characteristics, for instance, substance abuse, mental illness, and volatility, of these individuals inhibit their ability to search for scarce and low-income housing. Brown and Ziefert (1990) assert that these women became socially alienated by their experiences, which in turn, resulted in their daily routine being about daily survival. The chronically homeless women were characterised as mistrustful of all relationships and engaged with others in a shallow, self-protective manner. Their lives were complicated with substance abuse, mental illness, and sexual and physical abuse. They were not focused on long-term goals.

Second, episodically homeless women were typified by an “alternate life on the street, in shelters, and with friends or family members with brief periods of independent living” (Brown & Ziefert, 1990, p. 9). Furthermore, as Brown and Ziefert (1990) suggest, they are users of service networks and quite motivated to find permanent housing, even though they are usually substance abusers and often experience mental health issues. Yet despite their motivation, they demonstrated a lack of preparation for independent living, thus it was difficult for them to find, and sustain, independent housing.

Third, situationally homeless women lacked “shelter because of an acute crisis and are usually homeless for the first time” (Brown & Ziefert, 1990, p. 10). The authors

\textsuperscript{14} The authors used P. Brown’s (1981) discussion of women and competence to develop their model in the context of the tasks of social work practice, which they consider necessary to reconnect homeless women to others. In 1988, Brown and Ziefert (1990, p. 6) developed a “feminist service model for work with women who have experienced violence and loss through sexual assault, which disrupted their connection to the community and produced feelings of helplessness and powerlessness.”
explain that situational homelessness occurs in response to a particular crisis and usually involves temporary residence in a motel, with a friend or a relative, and then later in a shelter. These women were usually homeless for a short period of time, until they were able to find affordable housing. Brown and Ziefert’s (1990) study suggests that to address women’s homelessness, their ‘alienation’ needs to be addressed. They identify feminist social work practice as activities that can effectively help these women connect to others and the community. In this context, social networks are considered of a great importance.

Brown and Ziefert’s (1990) three categories of homelessness were influential for Casey’s (2002) study. She set out to research women’s pathways into, and out of, homelessness and further developed categories of homelessness. Through in-depth interviews with 11 women\textsuperscript{15} aged between 25 to 45 years, she illustrates how the length of the women’s homelessness impacted on their overall experiences of homelessness. The use of qualitative thematic analyses of the interviews identified three distinctive groups of experiences of homelessness. These were based on a variation of Brown and Ziefert’s (1990) groupings: chronic, long-term and situational homelessness.

Casey (2002) argues that chronic homelessness is used for women who have been homeless since their childhood and had very little experience of a ‘home’ as adults. Three from 11 women experienced chronic homelessness. They became homeless when they were children or teenagers and therefore their ‘homelessness careers’\textsuperscript{16} were more consistent with youth homelessness careers than adult ones (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2000). While Chamberlain and Johnson’s (2000) research was based on youth homelessness in Australia, they sustain that the term chronic homelessness is also used to describe long-term homelessness.

In contrast to Brown and Ziefert (1990), Casey (2002) identifies long-term homelessness as a separate category, rather than as episodic. Throughout the interviews

\textsuperscript{15} Casey (2002) recognises the small number of interviews undertaken, yet the findings still indicate further research into this area is necessary. These women were considered to be single and with no dependent children during their time of homelessness.

\textsuperscript{16} ‘Homelessness career’ according to Chamberlain and Johnson’s (2000) definition.
she found that more than half the women in her sample (six) had at some stage, if not for an extended period of time, lived independently in the private rental market. They had also experienced primary homelessness for extended periods of time or had a series of psychiatric hospital admissions, and their housing was considered questionable. For safety, these women slept in places that were hard to find. Consequently, this contributed to the invisible nature of female homelessness.

The third category of homelessness Casey (2002) observed was situational. She found that two women did not consider themselves to be homeless. These women were unable to access appropriate low-cost housing through the private rental market, thus they sought to find short-term housing. They tended to access housing and support services to avoid primary homelessness. Yet, to maintain short-term housing, they often required access to other support services.

Casey’s (2002) study also explores pathways out of homelessness. Here, she points to an interplay of various factors such as:

…inner strength to begin to seek out support; access to affordable accommodation/housing in the short and long term; adequate income in relation to housing costs; personal counselling, particularly regarding past trauma, including sexual assault counselling and services such as domestic violence outreach; support in pursuing leisure activities, such as athletics and art, etc. (Casey, 2002, p. 88).

Women also indicated their own personal strengths and resiliency as crucial when exiting homelessness.

While Casey’s (2002) study explores many pertinent issues concerning women’s homelessness, the small sample focused on women aged between 25-45 years and these women did not experience primary homelessness at the time of the interview. The study explores experiences of pathways into and out of homelessness in the context of homelessness categories (based on Brown & Ziefert’s model) and service providers. While this provides us with important insight into the way homeless women tend to be categorised on a temporal and pathway basis, it does not provide us with enough information on how these women experience public space through a gendered lens.
All three studies (Watson & Austerberry, 1986; Brown & Ziefert, 1990; Casey, 2002) explore homeless women’s experiences in great detail, yet each focuses on different issues. Watson and Austerberry (1986) examine single homeless women and their experiences of the housing system in the United Kingdom. They also explore the way homeless women identified themselves based on the established definitions of homelessness; yet, the study ignores homeless women’s experiences in public space. Brown and Ziefert (1990) explore how established categories of homelessness applied to homeless women, yet similar to Watson and Austerberry (1986), they did not focus on homeless women’s experiences in public space. Lastly, Casey’s (2002) study is considered to be the most relevant, as it was undertaken more recently, in Australia, and explored experiences of pathways into, and out of, homelessness. However, it failed to explore the experience of homelessness for women. To fully understand the needs of ‘exiting’ homelessness, it is pertinent to explore the experiences of homelessness.

While these three studies narrowed their focus in a gendered way and provided an important contribution to the field of homelessness, the research methods employed limited their contribution. For example, Casey’s Australian (2002) study only used in-depth interviews instead of marrying this with a more in-depth approach such as ethnography. Coleman (2000) on the other hand, undertook an ethnographic study of homeless people in an inner city area of Brisbane, Australia, with an aim to explore their experiences of public space. This research provides an in-depth overview of people sleeping rough on the streets. Coleman (2000) undertook in-depth interviews with three homeless women and seven homeless men. In her sample, the interviewees all experienced different types of homelessness. The purpose of the research was to uncover the meaning that long-term homeless people give to the public spaces they use and share with other community members, and how changes in public space might affect them. The findings illustrate that for people who are experiencing long-term homelessness, public spaces are places of intense significance to them. Life histories, events, and community rituals are situated and maintained in these spaces. The long-term homeless people in Coleman’s (2000) research identify that space as their ‘comfort
zone”. Furthermore, homelessness for these people was more relevant with their recognition and acceptance at the local community level, than with the lack of accommodation. Being accepted by the people who reside in that community was of great importance to them. Thus, changes in that community had a significant affect. While Coleman’s (2000) research plays a significant role in understanding homelessness and public places, and also employed ethnography, this research ignored to explore these issues through the gendered lens. There were only three interviewed women in the sample, which did not provide a detailed understanding of the homeless women’s experiences of public space.

More recently, Parsell (2010a) carried out a qualitative study on homelessness in Brisbane. He used an ethnographic approach and approximately 100 people participated in the research. Through observation, these people were then engaged in informal conversations and formal interviews. Parsell’s (2010a) research aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of how the homeless people in certain areas in Brisbane perceive themselves. There was a distinction between their lifestyle and the type of people they identified themselves as. For example, not all homeless people identified themselves as homeless. Their experiences of homelessness and their explanations of their identity were separate issues. Also, their notion of home was a mere physical structure or a solution to their homelessness. Public places played a significant role in their lives, especially regarding social relations and daily activities, such public spaces were never considered as ‘home’. It is clear Parsell’s (2010a) study contributes considerably to the field of homelessness, yet the role of gender in understanding the experiences of public space was absent.

The review of international and national research on homelessness demonstrates that the majority of studies only provide socio-demographic information of homeless men and women. There were a limited number of qualitative studies exploring the experience of being homeless (Coleman, 2000; Parsell, 2010a). The studies that

17 Comfort zones are considered as specific places where homeless people felt feelings of comfort, consequently these places tended to be identified as their ‘current home’.

18 Due to the nature of an ethnographic approach, the number of overall participants (which included informal conversations and observations) is approximate.
employed a more in-depth approach of understanding tended to be gender-blind. The review of studies indicates homeless men and women report different reasons for their homelessness and furthermore, it can be seen that their needs are diverse as well. These suggest that the understanding of different ‘gendered’ reasons for and pathways into homelessness can contribute to a better understanding for an early intervention. As Healy (2006) notes, the links between gender and homelessness demonstrate there seem to be many different reasons for, and characteristics associated with, homelessness across sexes, ethnicities and ages. Further, the links between domestic and/or family violence and homelessness seem clear and have been explored through the empirical literature to some extent. Yet, to what degree such abuse contributes to women’s homelessness and the way women experience such abuse lacks qualitative input. Furthermore, an understanding of the ‘gendered’ needs of homeless people is imperative to the improvement of their lives and their pathways out of homelessness. Overall, the previous research on homelessness, both national and international demonstrates a gap in qualitative methodologies and lack of a gendered lens.

**Theoretical Considerations**

Official statistics suggest that women’s homelessness in Australia is on the rise. Literature also suggests that women experience homelessness differently to men, yet the way women experience homelessness has not been explored in an in-depth way. Homeless women are considered more vulnerable (Mallett, 2010) and in conflict with socially prescribed gender roles. Brown and Ziefert (1990) indicate homeless women need to be studied separately from men and with particular attention to a gendered understanding and concerns of public space.

It is imperative to understand gender and space in investigating and understanding the lives of homeless women. One major reason for this is that the majority of women previously spent their lives in a private sphere, but then, upon becoming homeless, spend their days in public spaces (Smith, 2005b). For the purpose of this research, I first explored Panelli, Kraack and Little’s (2005) model of four
elements influencing women’s agency, and I then developed a new model. Panelli and colleagues (2005) studied rural women’s experiences of fear and suggest that the women used spatial and social strategies when they were faced with certain situations they deemed fearful (see also Little, Panelli & Kraack, 2005). Panelli and colleagues (2005) suggest gender relations and culturally specific discursive contexts shape women’s lives and the way they react to threatening situations at certain times and in specific locations. In this context, the individual biography of each woman was considered, particularly regarding their association with certain types of space. The four elements are social context (e.g., gender relations and positions within social control), cultural discourse (e.g., discourse of femininity), spatial relations (e.g., experiences of various forms of public spaces) and the individual biography or the women’s personal experiences.

Panelli and colleagues’ (2005) model offered me a starting point to develop my own model. I explored three major elements. First, concepts of gender relations provided me with insight into power relations between men and women, the roles women play and the statuses women have within various social contexts. Second, gender identity assisted me to consider and then explore sense of self, identity, agency and body. Third, the concept of spatiality allowed me to explore the idea of gendered space, and the way gender identity and gender relations within such places, manifests.
Gender relations

The way women construct their experience in various social settings depends on the way ‘gender’ as a category is constructed and positioned in such circumstances (Panelli et al., 2005). For the purpose of this research, literature on gender relations was explored from three chief perspectives: power, role and status. This section also includes the concepts of the ways in which hegemonic constructions are perpetuated and legitimated in everyday social interactions.

Gender is not a natural category, but a complex social, historical, and, cultural product, related to, but not simply derived from, biological sex differences and reproductive capacities (Pollock, 1999). It refers to behaviours, values and norms within a particular culture. ‘Sex’ and ‘gender’ are often used interchangeably as ways of categorising the apparent basic biological distinctions between females and males (Smith & Wincup, 2009). Yet, when it comes to understanding the distinction between sex and gender, most differences are the result of complex social processes rather than
the result of biological determination (Holmes, Hughes & Julian, 2007). Sex differences are based on biological criteria for classifying people as male or female (genital and hormonal differences), while gender differences are ascribed by society and relate to expectations about appropriate social roles (Smith & Wincup, 2009).

Smith and Wincup (2009) argue that gender differences, such as social roles, expectations and identities, are assumed ‘natural’; rather, they are learnt during the processes of socialisation. Through these processes, people gain knowledge of the cultural definitions of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’, and thus what it means to be either a ‘woman’ or a ‘man’ (Smith & Wincup, 2009). Gender and gender relations arrange social life and social institutions in fundamental ways (Pollock, 1999).

Women are not a homogenous group; they are influenced by an intersection of race, class, age, and sexuality, among other demographics and experiences, yet, even within varied societies, women are likely to have a common experience of gendered relations (Connell, 2009). Ortner (1972) describes the factors by which the position of women in society can be measured. First, statements of cultural ideology explicitly devalued women, their products, and their roles. Second, symbolic devices, such as the concept of defilement associated with women, devalued women’s femininity. Third, the exclusion of women from specific places limited women’s participation in society. In most known societies¹⁹, women’s subordination to men can be founded on any, or all of, these above-mentioned characteristics. Women’s status in society has tended to be universal, from culture to culture, from various times in the past and present, women have been considered subordinate (Ortner, 1996).

The dichotomy of social roles for men and women is, in part, based on the sexual division of labour and consequently impacts on the differences in the attitudes of/to men and women (Wood & Eagly, 1999). Wood and Eagly (1999) explain this division and the associated hierarchy of sexes as based on differences in reproduction, physical size and strength of men and women. When looking at the roles women play

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¹⁹ There are some societies that have matriarchal communities, for example, Mosuo in China (Göttner-Abendroth, 1999).
and the tasks they do, these tend to be devaluated by men’s roles and tasks (Eagly, Wood & Diekman, 2000). According to Oakley (1974, p. 60), two themes underline the continuing social differentiation of women (and their resulting circumstances) from men. Oakley (1974) states that first, domesticity defined a women’s situation and secondly, ambivalent cultural values were applied to women’s roles. Social stereotypes portray women as domesticated. Thus, a view of women is always mixed with a perception of their social difference from men, and as Oakley (1974) indicates, they are perceived as housewives.

Similarly, Rosaldo (1974) explains that while women’s and men’s role vary cross-culturally, one fact remain constant: male activities tend to continuously be considered more important than those females are engaged in and are socially organised in a way that accord more authority to men. As a result, certain societies might consider activities performed by women as less important (see Mead, 1949). Rosaldo (1974) also points to the inequality and hierarchy within gender relationships in the domestic sphere; these are particularly created and bolstered through marriage. Thus, gender dichotomy is perpetuated through intimate relationships (marriage or de facto) in the domestic sphere. For instance and more recently, Moran (1990) explains that women tend to occupy a lower status position in society. Accordingly, the only way a woman can achieve more prestige in society is through the assistance of her husband, resulting in an elusive and dependent status.

Although key works at the time, I note that Oakley’s (1974) and Rosaldo’s (1974) arguments are dated and more recent literature (e.g., Grace, 2006; Connell, 2009; Kane & Mertz, 2011) suggests their work has less merit regarding current gender roles. Yet, I believe this historical component is quite important to consider alongside social context; it demonstrates the changes within society and how these have affected gender relations and positions, especially since gender relations are created and re-created in everyday life (Connell, 2009). As Eagly and colleagues (2000) note, the domestic role

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20 I note that Oakley’s (1974) work is outdated; this will be addressed in following paragraphs.

21 I also note that the work of Rosaldo (1974) is outdated; this will similarly be addressed in following paragraphs.
tends to be more frequently occupied by women than men. This means the stereotypical ‘homemaker’ characteristics inclined to be ascribed to women and in opposition, typical characteristics of a financial provider are then ascribed to men (Eagly et al., 2000). According to Grace (2006), Oakley’s (1974) and Rosaldo’s (1974) work focused on sex role theory, and consequently emphasised sex role stereotypes. Instead, Grace (2006) believes that their attention ought to have shifted towards gender theory, which includes the broader aspect of social institutions and culture and how these enforce a gender system, such as education and workforce. For instance, in Australia and since the mid-1990s, women aged 25-64 have been more successful in tertiary study completion (Adema, 2013). While this means the overall number of women entering the education system is increasing and the gender gap is narrowing, the gender gap within specific fields of study remains wide. As an example, in 2009, women were awarded about 75% of the national degrees in health and welfare studies as opposed to about 20% of those in computer science (Adema, 2013). To understand this, it is important to explore the influences of traditional perceptions of gender roles and the acceptance of specific cultural values (Kane & Mertz, 2011).

In Australia, a large majority of households consist of men as the main financial earners. In 2012, 72% of the adult male population participated in the workforce compared to 58.9% of the adult female population (ABS, 2013). Connell (2002) notes that women still do most of the housework and usually do not have high-positioned jobs outside the home. When women do get a job, they tend to earn less money than men on average (ABS, 2012). For example in November 2013, women employed full-time earned on average $1287.20 weekly compared to men employed full-time, who earned $1620 weekly (ABS, 2014). In terms of heteronormativity, such economic inequality can lead to women’s dependency on men and can consequently affect the hierarchy of power and control at home (Connell, 2002). Further, such hierarchy can be perpetuated amongst low-income households (Bennett, De Henau & Sung, 2010). Bennett and colleagues (2010) indicate that amongst poorer households, men are considered to be the main ‘breadwinners’ and consequently women tend to experience ‘hidden’ poverty within the household due to lack of financial independence.
Some research shows that it is women who tend to work in low-income households, often in multiple part-time low paid jobs (Cerise, O’Connell, Rosenman & Sarat Chandran, 2009; Martin, 2010). In these circumstances, men are more likely to be unemployed (Roll, Toro & Ortola, 1999). This has implications for the ‘performance’ of masculinity and femininity when men are unable to fulfil the financial provider role. This can also lead to domestic violence (Martin, 2010). Pehlan and Rudman (2010) point out that gender equality in terms of numbers of employed women in the workforce is increasing; yet the traditional gender stereotypes (such as woman in a caretaker role) are still very much intact (see also Fiske & Stevens, 1993; Prentice & Miller, 2006). Consequently, this means that even though women nowadays might be more ambitious than in the past, there is a perception that the characteristics of women seeking or holding more powerful positions should differ from men and thus, this still acts as a barrier to gender equity (Pehlan & Rudman, 2010). Basically, changes in the division of labour can be referred to as ‘old wine in new bottles’, a demonstration of new structures of gendered disadvantage (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007). Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007) explain that the idea of ‘female masculinity’ is relevant to situations where women are employed in positions assumed ‘traditionally’ masculine, such as working in high-level business positions. This means women are considered to be involved in actions that are assumed opposite of their natural, or normalised, femininity (Halberstam, 1998). While femininity as a cultural discourse will be discussed in more detail in the following section, it maintains relevance in social context as it demonstrates the gender hierarchy within workforce positions.

O’Brien (2004) points to the use of the household as a patriarchal structure to marginalise and control women. Traditional households indicate that men maintain power and control at home (Dema-Moreno & Diaz-Martinez, 2010). As a result, these are sites of oppression (Gurney, 1997). As Dema-Moreno and Diaz-Martinez (2010) emphasise, for women, financial independence is considered of fundamental importance; even if they became part of the workforce, they found it did not modify gender relations within the household. Connell (2009) considers that this is due to the workload at home, tasks that are still predominately considered to be done by women.
Such gender inequalities at home often create tension and can also result in violence (Tually et al., 2008). Such gendered violence can directly or indirectly lead to homelessness (see Browne & Bassuk, 1997; Metraux & Culhane, 1999; Toro et al., 1995; Healy, 2002; AIHW, 2008; Moss & Singh, 2012). Consequently, relationships outside the home, both personal and those within an employed context, can affect the way women experience family problems, and accordingly, homelessness. According to Shinn, Knickman and Weitzman (1991), women who have fewer people available for assistance and support in circumstance of family problems are more likely to become homeless.

Social relations amongst women whose primary role is domestic one is something Oakley (1974) failed to explore (see also critique by Bell & Ribbens, 1994; Head, 2005). Accordingly, re-thinking Oakley’s approach could contribute to a more holistic understanding of women’s desires and ambitions both inside and outside the home (Grace, 2006). Dema-Moreno and Diaz-Martinez (2010) explain that despite the social changes in society, women’s roles at home are inclined to stay the same, whilst their positions outside the home shifted; for instance, the increase of women in professional roles.

Connell (2002) states that a masculine culture outside the home that emphasises toughness makes it hard for women to achieve the same status as men in either the workplace or other public social events. Consequently, this indicates that women at home, or outside the home, still experience gender inequality that is enforcing the idea of women in the context of domesticity. Women’s positions in the home, and subsequently their relations at home, are constructed to have a propensity to be subordinate to men. While outside the home, there has been progress with higher rates of women in the workforce, women continue to experience gender hierarchy, that is, they still cannot achieve the same positions and status as men. This raises questions in terms of women’s statuses and roles within the home before homelessness and their strategies of coping when these statuses and roles change due to their lack of ‘traditional’ home.
Traditionally, feminine behaviour is identified by domesticity, passivity and dependency, unlike masculine behaviour, which is considered in the context of physical strength, in control of one’s emotions and ambition (Connell, 2002). Gender relations and constructs of femininity and masculinity are not balanced, but are based on the organising principle of men’s superiority, and social and political-economic dominance over women (Pollock, 1999). Nearly every society is inclined to differentiate men and women and to view them as having a distinctive set of normalised and gendered characteristics (Holmes et al., 2007). With this in mind, Holmes and colleagues (2007) argue that most cultures, at different points in history, have had their own definition of masculinity and femininity, and differentiate characteristics attributed to males and females within their particular societies. Yet, Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007) point out that global changes in modernity have influenced gender blurring and shifted gender roles, which in turn have led to surges of individuality. This raises questions regarding how these changes contribute to the construction of femininity for women, who do not have a home in a traditional sense.

**Gender identity**

It is believed that people act as they think they are supposed to (Goffman, 1990). People do what they think is appropriate in places that are also considered appropriate. For the purpose of my research, I explored the literature on gender identity from two major perspectives: identity and body.

Cresswell (1997) explains the importance of powerful groups, in any given context, defining ‘common sense’ and that which goes undisputed. In a situation where individuals or groups disregard socially produced common sense, they have a propensity to be defined as ‘out-of-place’ (Cresswell, 1997). This notion is especially relevant to my research, as there is a belief that homeless women are considered to be ‘out-of-place’ (Cresswell, 1997). As Watson (2008) notes by using a qualitative approach, such as ethnography, it is possible to closely examine the details of human lives in a specific setting. In turn, this can provide understanding of the ways in which

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22 There are some societies that do not have men and women as binary categories (Douglas, 1966).
individuals strive to accept changes in the world. In the context of my research, such an approach provides an opportunity to explore the lives of homeless women in terms of their gender identity.

Taylor (1989) explains that for humans, the concept of identity refers to certain evaluations that are necessary because they provide an essential platform out of which we reflect and assess context. To lose such a foundation, or not to have yet discovered it, can be a distressing experience of disaggregation and loss (Taylor, 1989). Or as Bosworth (1999) explains, the notion of identity refers to the intersection between socio-economic and cultural contexts in which people are located and the more diverse and ambiguous ways in which people perceive themselves. Who we are results from our practical experiences, “such as wealth and education, which interact with complex and dispersed ideas and ‘stories’”, which we tell to both ourselves and others, about femininity, sexuality, and other important facets of identity (Bosworth, 1999, p. 101). Moreover, these narratives often rely on division of space (private and public) and are heavily rooted in white, western, ideas of heterosexual monogamy and the nuclear family (Bosworth, 1999).

Braidotti (1994, p. 99) explains that within identity, the subject is not fixed (a priori ‘being’); instead it is “a process of material (institutional) and discursive (symbolic) practices.” Butler (1990) explains this for gendered or sexualised identities, where men and women are seen as having distinct and fixed selves. Due to the limitation of fixed identities, Butler (1990) points to recognition and a destabilising of the possibilities of such identities, which can be constraining and disabling. Accordingly, there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender (Butler, 1990). It is the expression, or the performative nature of identities, that brings identity into effect (Lawler, 2008). Identity is subject to language of control and it is established internally and externally (Bosworth, 1999). There is an analytical distinction between an ‘internal’ self-identity aspect and an ‘external’ (or discursive) social-identity aspect (Watson, 2008). Exploring people’s identities in certain social settings can help with an understanding of bonds between self-identities and wider discourses (Watson, 2008). Social identity is concerned with whom we see ourselves as; yet, the main focus
remains on the self as part of a larger group. This means social identity is the collective self and can also lead to ‘depersonalisation’ \(^{23}\) of the self (Hogg & Mcgarty, 1990). This raises questions about the collective ‘homeless’ identity for women, that is, how women experience homelessness and the ways in which they manage their identity in an effort to not ‘depersonalise’ themselves.

Watson (2008) points to the importance of recognising the way in which people make connections ‘outwards’ to social others as well as ‘inwards’ towards the self. As Goffman (1963a, p. 42) states, “To display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where.” Later, Goffman (1990) discusses the way in which people manage themselves in everyday life by relating these actions to theatre. For instance, when people spend time in a private sphere, they act the same way as back-stage, that is, as themselves: they are inclined to express their true emotions and feel free without any restrictions (Goffman, 1990). In opposition, when people are performing in front of a theatrical audience, they become aware of their actions and ‘impression management’ becomes important (Goffman, 1990). Goffman (1990) explains that people try to represent themselves as they think is the desired way of the public with the help of impression management. This means that when people spend time in a public space, they manage their actions, beliefs and attitudes. For instance, Grant and Mayer (2009) use Goffman’s idea of impression management to explore the ways in which soldiers accept and associate themselves with citizenship behaviours; they identified impression management as a tool that helped soldiers to accept their role and identity, but not to challenge it. This raises questions whether homeless women accept their ‘homeless’ identity without challenging it. According to Goffman (1963b), whilst we form social relations, the meanings of who is an ‘outsider’ and ‘other’ are epitomised. These then help us define and label specific groups as undesirable, unproductive, dysfunctional and potentially dangerous, which tend to lead to differential acceptance of groups labelled in such a manner. Such ‘stigmatising’ yields devaluation of individuals and groups in society (Goffman, 1963b; Katz, 1981).

\(^{23}\) In this instance the distinction between sociological (as used here) and psychological definition of ‘depersonalisation’ needs to be made. Depersonalisation in a psychological context is a psychiatric condition characterised by an alteration in the perception and experience of the self (Mellor, 1988).
Creswell (1999) explains that although the concept of ‘bag lady’, which became notionally attached to homeless women, was outdated, according to Goffman (1963b), this connotation still tends to signify an ‘undesirable’ woman. Goffman (1963b) clarifies that a stigmatised person uses impression management skills to pass as normal rather than deviant. In the context of my research, this raises questions as to the ways homeless women manage their identity when stigmatised. In Goffman’s (1963b) words, due to the obvious differences or socially disqualifying traits, a stigmatised person often develops ‘spoiled’ or tainted identity. Stigma should be seen as ‘a language of relationships’ (Goffman, 1963b). Across time and space, stigmatisation emerges (e.g., shame) as situated in the day-to-day activities of agents, with the visible nature of the attribute eventually becoming less important than the essence of the difference from socially constructed norms (Gilman, 1988). According to Goffman (1961; 1969), the dramaturgical metaphor of the self is a ‘performance’, where the depiction of the series of ‘mortifications’ through which the self must pass to become a subject within a total institution.

When exploring the concept of social establishment based on Goffman’s (1990) impression management, four perspectives are suggested: technical (e.g., efficiency and inefficiency), political (e.g., social control), structural (e.g., social relations between various groups) and cultural (e.g., norms and values). Further, when studying social establishment with the use of impression management, three different areas of inquiry are required: individual personality, social interaction and society (Goffman, 1990). Here, Watson (2008) notes that broader structural and discursive circumstances of gender inequality tend to be connected to the gender-related social identity. I considered Goffman’s and Watson’s ideas and applied them to my research of homeless women; they served as guidelines in exploring the impression management of homeless women. Individual personality, social interaction and society are all related to the broader structural and discursive circumstances of gender inequality. Furthermore, Butler (1990) explains that identity can be reassumed or repeated in different ways. Here, the performative aspect that institutes within identity occurs in a highly controlled context;
the performative nature of identity is compelled by norms external to the individual (Butler, 1990).

Butler (2004) argues that whilst individuals express agency, this agency often occurs within a structured frame of norms and expectations. These not only limit the individual’s performance, but also influence how others will interpret the performance (Butler, 2004). The meaning of the performance is established not solely by the actor, but by and within the context the performance is received (Butler, 2004). Butler (2004) notes that the subject is then reconfigured to accommodate both structure and agency. She believes the subject is an active, but not autonomous, agent. Central to identity is human agency. The subject is an active agent with the capacity to transcend imposed identities; identity is located within social structures, namely cultural norms, which both contain and enable human agency (Butler, 1990).

Agency is the condition of activity rather than passivity; this includes the experience of acting, doing things, making things happen, exerting power, being a subject of events or controlling things (Hewson, 2010). The other aspect of human experience is to be acted upon, to be the object of events, to have things happen to oneself or in oneself, to be constrained or controlled, that is, to lack agency (Hewson, 2010). As a result, human beings make their social contexts and are made by them. We are all actors, but are also acted upon, that is, people are subjects and objects; in part we possess agency, and in part we lack it (Hewson, 2010). Mackenzie (2000) considers the three interrelated levels at which socialisation can impede autonomy:

- the processes of formation of our beliefs, desires, patterns or emotional interaction, and self-conceptions;
- the development of the skills and abilities that constitute autonomy competence; and
- by frustrating a person’s ability or freedom to act upon or realise her autonomous desires or autonomously conceived life plan.

These levels tend to influence on our activity or passivity within a social situation.
The capacity for autonomy seems instrumentally valuable as a means for resisting oppression and intrinsically important as part of the fullest humanly possible development of moral personality (Friedman, 2000). When women have access to means for their own material support, the level of risk to their well-being is lessened. According to Friedman (2000), women can then gain as much from a generalised cultural idealisation of autonomy, as they are at risk from it. The possibility of social disruptiveness is one risk that must be faced by both people who, and cultures that, would idealise personal autonomy (Friedman, 2000). None of us is self-made, for we are all inescapably, “a product of our environment” (Barclay, 2000, p. 54). The identity of the self is comprised of various social attachments. The idea that the self is constitutively social incorporates the claim that the self is socially determined; this certainly suggests that the self’s aims and aspirations are determined by the communities of which one is a part (Barclay, 2000). Certain feminists argue that recognition of women’s identities as socially determined is particularly crucial, given that those identities are often indisputably oppressed (Barclay, 2000). Women are quite compatibly both autonomous agents and deeply social selves (Barclay, 2000).

In addition to looking at performative nature of identity, Butler (1990) also suggests that the body and gender roles should be in a performative relationship. Bodies are often shaped according to gendered norms and ideals of masculinity and femininity (Lorber & Moore, 2007). Further, women’s bodies are controlled by institutions that are predominantly dominated by men (such as medicine and religion), but knowledge gives women increased autonomy (Lorber & Moore, 2007). Lorber and Moore (2007) argue that women’s bodies seem to need to be constantly controlled by men in the family and the community. Women and men, for the most part, go along with gendered norms, which in turn govern appropriate masculine and feminine behaviour, because their identities and self-esteem are built on meeting social expectations. In western societies, most people are persuaded to accept gender inequalities by the belief that they emerge from the body, that is, ‘natural differences’. Women and men have different roles and positions in organisations of employment, politics, education systems, and the other main areas of society, and men predominate in positions of power and authority. As such, these ‘natural’ explanations are reinforced by culture, the mass media, religions,
and predominant knowledge systems; these erase the ways in which social processes produce gendered bodies and behaviour (Lorber & Moore, 2007).

Halberstam (1998) explains that at a certain moment in history a female body is able to take on and live out certain masculinities in the same way as a male body can take on certain femininities. Lock and Kaufert (1998) relate the meanings that surround the notion of femininity and masculinity and the ways in which these intersect with cultural, economic, political and other aspects of social life. For instance, femininity at home is often directly connected to motherhood and reproduction, however it can be perceived differently depending on the cultural norms present (Lock & Kaufert, 1998; see also Scheper-Hugher, 1992). As Connell (2009) indicates the female body is constructed and inscribed by the social and cultural environments one is exposed to. This raises questions about the ways in which homeless women view and manage their femininity and their bodies in an environment that is considered socially and culturally masculine.

Moore (2010) explains that currently, the notion of ‘the body’ is closely linked to an ideology of one’s inability to control their body and vulnerability; this consequently points to a lack of social power. Power and its processes dictate the margins that symbolically govern masculinity and femininity (Connell, 2005). The choices that one makes in terms of eating, dressing and other daily rituals through which one attends to the body, mirror the values and beliefs of one’s culture (Bordo, 1993). The body is a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are ascribed and this is reinforced through the concrete language of the body (Douglas, 1982). Our bodies are shaped, trained and impressed with the stamp of the prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity and femininity (Foucault, 1979). The body is a practical and direct locus of social control (Foucault, 1979). According to Bourdieu (1977), seemingly trivial routines, rules and practices, such as table manners and toilet habits contribute to culture as a ‘made body’, and thus convert into automatic, habitual activity. On the other hand, our bodies are regulated by the norms of cultural life (Foucault, 1979). Such a ‘docile body’ can limit or dictate our social life (Foucault, 1979). Changes in society
require women to constantly attend to elusive ideals of femininity: female bodies become docile, bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation and ‘improvement’ (Bordo, 1993).

Our bodies are invested with social meaning when we are part of a community; then we become people with biographies, stories of our personal, yet social, bodies. Community norms and expectations determine the meanings of bodies and their relative value. Whether the body is in an owner’s control, or if it succumbs to another’s control, Lorber and Moore (2007) argue that the way body is handled is determined by the intertwining of communities, families, and individuals. The social body is the entity formed of a community of individual bodies; our physical bodies become social bodies through recognition by a community and application of the community’s body norms and practices (Lorber & Moore, 2007). To provide an example: when a homeless person sleeps in someone’s doorway, and people walk by as if that body were invisible, the person had been excluded from the community. The concept of community inclusion makes us social bodies, which is why excommunication and exile are such harsh punishments (Lorber & Moore, 2007). The body has its invariably public dimension that is, constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere (Lloyd, 2007).

Spatiality

In recent years and in relation to gender, there has been an increased sociological interest in the issues of space. Panelli and colleagues (2005) argue that women’s experiences and understanding of various spaces provide these women with knowledge and skills to tackle dangerous situations. They further explain that in many instances it is not the actual space that is perceived as being dangerous, instead the social relations within the space can result in a certain space becoming dangerous. To explore the way homeless women experience public space, it is imperative to understand the ways in which space is divided and consequently the spatial relation and processes within certain space. For the purpose of my research, I explored the literature on spatiality from three perspectives: gender identity, gender role and risk.
Tuan (1977) explains that space is humanly constructed: the individual organises space so that it conforms with and caters to his or her biological needs (based on the posture and structure of the human body) and social relations (close or distant relations between human beings). Ardener (1992, p. 2) further considers that “behaviour and space are mutually dependent”, in the sense that environment can dictate our actions and in turn our perceptions of a space tend to be shaped by those actions. Consequently, this indicates that space tends to define people in it and, in turn, people tend to define space (Ardener, 1992).

Tuan (1977) also indicates there are spatial differences that exist; these are often socially constructed and impact on the division of space. Ardener (1992) explains that the divisions of space, social formations and structural relationships are intimately associated. Ardener (1992) points out an example of the division of space in a western home with a living room/kitchen and the relationship between a man and a woman. Montoya, Fraizer and Hurtig (2002) explain there are particular spatial effects of the specific social processes and the scale at which they operate, for instance, a domestic space and cooking. Moreover, from Ardener’s example, the social processes of gender inequality are constituted in particular places and in particular context (Montoya et al., 2002).

Historically, environmental changes led to social changes. Ehrenberg (1993) explains that in the past, the act of looking for food led people to move around and find places that were safe from dangers, offered people a location for a proper sleep and had access to various survival necessities (such as water). Once a suitable location was determined, people tended to stay in that place for as long as possible, consequently introducing the idea of a ‘home-base’. In these contexts, women played a pivotal role in social development; this included caring for both the space and their infants (Ehrenberg, 1993). Research into human evolution indicates that the division of gender roles in society started as soon as women started caring for their offspring; similarly, with the development of the notion of a home, a conventional division of ‘home’ activities and roles then became entrenched in people’s minds (Ehrenberg, 1993).

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24 This is specifically relevant to Western societies (Ehrenberg, 1993).
Stereotypically, men’s activities are seen to be outside the home and home is “a haven for a tired man when he returns from work; here he expects to find a meal prepared, a room clean and tidy, a seat comfortable and warm, and a wife ready to give him what he wants” (Oakley, 1974, p. 62). As such, the “wife’s”, or a woman’s, place is in the home and her role is to keep the household in good order; during the time her husband is at work, she ought to complete her day’s work, including domestic activities such as washing, ironing, cleaning, etc. (Oakley, 1974) Connell (2009) argues that historically, this premise has been used to legitimate gendered social policy and discrimination against women in the workforce. Gender division is omnipresent in a particular field of employment; for instance, mechanical and technical professions are mostly occupied by men, and positions in human services and arts-based jobs are mostly occupied by women (Connell, 2002; 2009). Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007) explain that in recent times, new contexts of gendering are emerging where older forms of inequality (such as household or workforce gender division) are becoming intensified: “traditional gendered social roles are being reinforced and strengthened” (p. 248).

Consequently this patriarchal ideology of domesticity led to the notion of separate spheres of the public and the private (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007). The home, for example, was stereotypically considered a private place and a safe place for women; rather, considering employment and ‘breadwinning’ is outside the home and are men’s activities, public place is thus believed to be their domain (Oakley, 1974). Mallett (2004) confirmed the stereotypical notion of the home, explaining the notion of home for women tends to relate to safety and housework roles. Byrne (1999) explains that gender segregation in residence (at home) is essentially a function of the spatial segregation of the household.

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25 Walby (1990) indicates that with the social change throughout the years, the concept of household started changing as well, eventually leading to significant changes in the relationships between women and men, yet roles within a household tended to stay the same.

26 Oakley’s ideas assume heteronormativity.
According to Ardener (1992), the concept of physical interiors and exteriors can be explained in terms of the social division of geographical spaces in male and female areas. The interior is a conceptual space for a woman, as opposed to the exterior which is regarded as a conceptual space for a man (Ardener, 1992). As a result, the internal is considered feminine and private, or a woman’s domain; the external is considered masculine and public, a man’s domain (Ardener, 1992). Taylor (2012) explains that the occupation of space re-invokes normative notions of femininity, where the home and community structures are often associated with forms of gender and sexual regulation. Basically, the physical separation of men and women contributes to the perpetuation of gender stratification (Spain, 1993) and consequently gender inequality produced by space is rising in prominence (Fortujin, Horn & Ostendorf, 2004).

In public space, gender relations and hierarchy are considered to operate in similar ways as they do within social institutions: the dominant male and the passive female (Connell, 2002). This manifests in a number of ways. First, it is evident that women do not directly control physical or social spaces (Ardener, 1992). Secondly, women’s public lives are thought to be controlled by men and are thus believed to be ‘out of place’ in what had become a ‘masculinised’ public space (Skeggs, 1999). Spatialised feminist analyses consider these spatial dimensions (such as differential use, control, power and domination of space) of power relations between the sexes and try to identify and explain these differences (Aitchison, 1999). For example, Jun and Kyle (2012) explained that in the context of leisure participation (which is still considered to be predominately masculine area), women who participate in such activities tend to be indirectly influenced by masculine identity.

“The public realm includes any non-domestic gathering place in which deliberations about social values occur”, a park, square, etc., basically where strangers interact (Spain, 2008, p. 12). As a result, public and private realms are described in terms of “experience and value, spatially and temporally, separated and epitomised by different sorts of people and roles” (Slater, 1998, p. 144). Reiter (1975) explains that the use of public spaces often vary according to gender and time. For instance, traditionally during the day when men work, women take over the public space, while in the
mornings and evenings the public space tends to be predominately occupied by men (Reiter, 1975). Even though Reiter’s work was based on a small village in France and is dated, the way public space is divided today is somewhat similar. Taylor (2012) emphasises that with global economic changes (such as recessions and cut-backs, etc.) the workforce has undoubtedly undergone some transformations, and as such gendered professions have become less stereotypical and ‘fixed’ working hours have become more flexible. Consequently, public space is occupied differently by gender depending on the time of the day (Taylor, 2012).

Schwanen, Kwan and Ren (2008) indicate that in the context of gendered space, it is not only the workforce that dictates the way space is occupied. They identify that in everyday life, the way gender influences space depends not only on the activity, but also on when, where, for how long and with whom. For example, Holloway, Valentine and Jayne (2009) explain that gender matters in the context of the debate on the public and private consumption of alcohol. Through the discussion of masculinities, femininities and geographies of alcohol consumption, Holloway and colleagues (2009) emphasise the importance of gendered moralities in shaping gender differences when it comes to drinking habits, locations and motivations.

Similarly, Brooks (2011) suggests that activities such as gendered alcohol consumption in bars, pubs and clubs is not only considered a more masculine behaviour, but it is also considered ‘risky’ for women to engage in. Further, Brooks (2011) posits that women’s drinking behaviour should not be considered risky; rather, it should be the social relations (between men and women and the problem of aggressive men) and the location that should be considered risky. Koskela (1999, p. 121) argues that certain spaces that are produced by power relations in everyday life tend to be places that women usually “do not-or dare not-have a choice over their own spatial behaviour.” For example, the threat of violence, sexual harassment and other situations that increase women’s sense of vulnerability only reinforces a sense of masculinity of the space (Koskela, 1999; see also Pain, 1991; Lamas, 2002). In this context, fear is a consequence of gender inequality and perpetuates the social exclusion of certain genders (Koskela & Pain, 2000; Pain, 2001).
Boys (1985) indicates that given the belief that women can be assaulted in both the private and public sphere, there are no ‘inappropriate’ places for women’s safety and women often feel unsafe anywhere. Indeed, being in public space indicates that some risk might be involved when occupying such place. Risk is socially situated and contextualised with regards to public discourses and the socioeconomic structures that shape our lives; as a result of these discourses, women face fear in public spaces rather than in private sphere (Green, 1997; Scott, Jackson & Backet-Milburn, 1998). The literature describes the private sphere of the home in terms of safety and security while the public sphere is described in terms of fear and vulnerability (Mallet, 2004). However, in recent times, the rate of violence in households has increased which indicates women are faced with risky situations in public as well as private spheres (Tually et al., 2008). Nevertheless, Harden (2000) suggests women’s vulnerability in public space tends to be emphasised.

A bigger picture perspective of everyday risk can be explored through Beck’s (1992) idea of a ‘risk society’, whereby human-made hazards in an industrial society are understood by managing calculability. People are affected by this risk even though they are not directly involved in their causes (Beck, 1992). Beck’s (1992) ideas imply there is a constant revision in society, which in turn continually impacts on a society at both the institutional and the individual level. The relationships between an individual and social institutions change and a structural process of individualisation emerges, as such, risks become embedded in society, they become part of a cultural discourse (Beck, 1992). For instance, Beck (1992) argues that woman’s liberation from stereotypical housework led to woman’s individuality, which consequently puts women in risky situations (in the context of family, economic welfare, etc.). Green and Singleton (2006) indicate that Beck’s ideas impacted on sociological theories of ‘risk’ such as the discussion of ‘risky youth’, consequently contributing to ‘risk theorising’.

The way risk is formulated is embedded in gender, race and class politics, which in turn indicates that the politics of gender dictate the experience of risk (Chan & Rigakos, 2002). Gustafson (1998) emphasises that when looking at the gender
perception of risk, one needs to explore gender ideology and gender practice. While gender ideology refers to people’s norms, values, expectations and world views, gender practice refers to the idea that men and women perform various activities in their everyday lives, at different places and times; this can also be identified as gender division of labour (Connell, 1987). Consequently, there is variability in the ways in which men and women use and access certain spaces (Massey, 1994). Similarly, research identifies the difference in risk perception between men and women (see Krimsky & Golding, 1992; Pidgeon, Hood, Jones, Turner & Gibson, 1992; Slovic, 1987). The relationship between gender ideology and practice that then reflect onto gender structures dictate gender differences in experiencing risk: risk exposure, risk perception and risk handling (Gustafson, 1998). Gustafson (1998) also explains that a gendered perception of risk states that women and men perceive the same risks in different ways. Spain (2008) points out the concept of a changing environment, from safe to risky, which in turn indicates that some public spaces are considered safe during the day and dangerous at night. Consequently, the way women use time and space depends on the way in which certain spaces and times of the days are perceived as risky (Green & Singleton, 2006).

Kilgour (2007) describes the nature of fear in the context of spatiality discourse and temporality discourse; these emphasise that women are inclined to re-negotiate and re-define their positions in space in an effort to avoid risk. For example, Pain (2001) explains that women try to counteract fear at night by going into public spaces with men or by staying around places they feel safe. Sanders (2004) provides an example of sex workers at night, who do not passively accept risks they face; instead they manage these by manipulating, controlling and resisting certain spaces. Green and Singleton (2006) discuss an example whereby women organise their leisure activities throughout the day within safe spaces to avoid risks.

When exploring a gendered view of risk, it is important to examine the concept of risk taking (Chan & Rigakos, 2002). Chan and Rigakos (2002) suggest that taking risks tends to be gendered (like risk perception) and it relates to type of activity or risky behaviour women choose to engage in (see also earlier discussion on alcohol
consumption by Brooks). Pain and Smith (2008) explain that in the context of women’s risk taking, the concept of ‘responsibility’ impacts on the way they experience such risks in everyday life. Campbell (2005) points to the discourse of responsibility and negotiation, noting that women can morally regulate the feminine subject to be safe and responsible. According to such gendered rules, a woman facing risk should avoid risk instead of partaking, given her responsibilities to others, especially children (Campbell, 2005; Olstead, 2011).

Consequently, women’s vulnerability, that is, either being at risk or taking risk, is related to the perceptions and experiences of their own bodies in a particular given space (Harden, 2000). Green and Singleton (2006) suggest that in trying to avoid everyday aspects of risk, women manage their embodied and spatialised selves. Further, the notion of risk for women is also rooted in social and cultural discourses of female ‘respectability’ (Green & Singleton, 2006).

**Theoretical conclusions**

This section has demonstrated the ways in which a discourse of femininity constructs and perpetuates gender inequality within social interactions both inside and outside the home. Accordingly, this indicates that traditional gendered social roles are still very much entrenched in our minds and are actually continuously being reinforced. Further, women are constantly being judged on premises of femininity when engaging in actions that are assumed traditionally masculine. This consequently facilitates and reinforces the idea of females becoming masculine when they step outside gendered roles.

This section has also explored the concept and importance of private and public space. I have demonstrated that space tends to be gendered, which in turn dictates relations between people within the particular given space. In recent times, women tend to be experiencing dangers when accessing the public realm, which is perceived to be a man’s domain. However, women can also experience dangers in the private sphere. Consequently, this means that certain spaces and relations within are perceived as risky
for women. The way women manage such risks depends on their perception of space and the relations within.

**Summarising Gaps**

This Chapter has provided an overview of current definitions of homelessness, and explained the characteristics of homelessness in Australian society. In saying this, it is clear that these definitions are not based on homeless people’s experiences. The research that explored homeless women’s identities in relation to a homelessness definition indicates that women do not identify themselves accordingly (see Edwards et al., 1977; Watson & Austerberry, 1986). This raises questions as to whether current definitions used by policy makers actually represent homelessness from women’s perspectives and whether there is a reflection of their experience of homelessness in public space.

In recent years, homelessness in Australia has been given more attention than ever, yet the numbers of homeless people are increasing. Moreover, the homeless population today is almost equally divided between men and women. This indicates the increase of women’s homelessness needs to be better understood before it can be addressed. Previous research demonstrates links between violence in the home and homelessness for women; yet, empirical knowledge regarding their pathways to homelessness and their experiences is limited.

The review of literature also suggests that the methodologies employed by previous research tend to be quantitative. Moreover, the research that employed qualitative methodologies used methods that did not provide enough of an in-depth understanding. However, more recently, in Australia, two ethnographic studies provide great insight into experiences of homelessness. Yet these studies focus on homeless people in general, consequently providing a limited understanding of female homelessness.
While previous research has contributed to the field of homelessness, my review of the empirical material points to three main gaps. First, there is a lack of an in-depth understanding of the experiences of women experiencing homelessness in public space. Secondly, there is little understanding of how these experiences impact on women’s identity, especially with respect to the currently used definition of homelessness. Thirdly, there is limited use of qualitative methodology for research on female homelessness. Consequently, the gender gap led to an exploration of the theoretical concepts of gender and space, which in turn demonstrates a further gap in a conceptual and theoretical understanding of female homelessness.
Chapter 3: Methodological Approach

This research explored the lives of homeless women in Brisbane, their experiences of being homeless, and their reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness. The research provides a description of female homelessness that is grounded in the experiences of women themselves. As such, a qualitative approach was seen as the best methodology. Using a qualitative approach, more specifically ethnography and grounded theory approach,²⁷ allowed for this research to aim for an insight into the lives of homeless women in Brisbane.

This Chapter firstly outlines the main aims of this research. Secondly, I discuss how this research was designed and carried out. Thirdly, I outline the challenges of ‘doing’ ethnography and provide an insight into the ethical challenges and researcher reflexivity. Finally, the last part of this Chapter addresses the issue of generalisability.

Aims

Although it is common that in most studies the research question directs the course of the study, when employing a grounded theory approach, the researcher instead enters the field with proposed aims (Birks & Mills, 2011). Since this research used grounded theory, I followed the main idea of the approach, which indicates that the researcher enters the field of study without narrow research questions common to other research designs (Birks & Mills, 2011). Instead, based on the previous literature, this research proposed the following broad aims:

1) to explore women’s reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness;
2) to explore women’s experiences of homelessness that are grounded in their identities; and

²⁷ Birks and Mills (2011) note that there is a distinction between methodology and methods. Methodology originates from a corresponding philosophy, which means it is seen as a set of principles and concepts that suggest the way a study is designed. Methods, on the other hand, are practical techniques used to generate and analyse data (Birks & Mills, 2011).
3) to explore how homeless women experience ‘risky’ social spaces (public spaces) and how they negotiate and manage their spatialised selves.

The first aim proposed to explore the main reasons that lead to women’s homelessness in more detail. While the existing literature on reasons for homelessness points to difference between reasons for men and women, the literature does not explore how individuals experience these casual factors. This aim focused on addressing this gap. Moreover, the literature on pathways into homelessness mainly explores a few ‘key’ pathways based on general reasons for homelessness (e.g., a domestic violence pathway or mental health pathway) instead of exploring pathways individually, to establish whether pathways can actually be generalised. Consequently, the first aim proposed to explore women’s reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness.

The second aim proposed to look at how women experience homelessness. The literature review demonstrated that both the national and international literature on homeless experiences is limited and gender-blind. As the literature suggests, homelessness has stereotypically been considered a male phenomenon, however according to recent information, the number of homeless women is on the rise. Recent national attempts at reducing homelessness suggest that women’s homelessness needs to be first better understood before appropriate intervention and prevention mechanisms can be applied. Consequently, this aim proposed to explore women’s experiences of homelessness.

The third aim proposed to explore in more detail the mechanisms that homeless women use when ‘stepping out’ of the traditional gender role. The literature suggests that women tend to be regarded on the basis of their femininity, not only in a space that is considered to be masculine, but also for actions that are considered to be traditionally masculine. Consequently, this aim proposed to examine in more detail the processes women employ to manage their female identities in a space that is considered to be masculine and ‘risky’.
Methodology

Qualitative research is identified as primarily relevant and useful in research with marginalised populations (Smith, 2009b) or more specifically, with a vulnerable population such as homeless people (Martin & Kunnen, 2008). First, it can properly explore the processes and meanings attached to the social and spatial world of homeless people. Second, homelessness research has been described as falling into the category of sensitive research because it engages with participants who are more likely to be vulnerable or disadvantaged (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005, p. 7) describe it as ‘especially appropriate’ for sensitive research involving vulnerable participants because it’s ‘flexible, fluid and facilitative’ and thus has the capacity to obtain more in-depth information and enable the participant’s voices to be heard through the research process.

Qualitative research has separate and distinguished histories in different disciplines, fields and subject matters (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; 2000; 2005; 2008). Consequently, these diverse paradigms constitute contrasting philosophical and sociological perspectives that qualitative researchers adopt. Traditional qualitative approaches often assume a social perspective and then seek to understand the meaning of this world for participants (Philips & Hardy, 2002). Through a set of interpretative material practices, the researcher makes the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; 2008). Words turn the world into a series of representations (Bryman, 2004). Through these descriptions, the researcher depicts the studied field in the way the studied population see their world, and thus their experiences are made visible.

Qualitative research involves an interpretative and naturalistic approach in a setting that is not created for the purpose of the research (Hammersley, 1989). With that, the world can be represented as it is. For example, by adoption of a grounded theory approach28, people’s point of views are documented through a series of descriptive accounts and then interpreted into a reasonable conclusion (Corbin &

28 Grounded theory approach was adopted for this research and will be explained in more detail in the next few paragraphs.
Strauss, 2008). In this sense, a qualitative approach plays an essential role in understanding various aspects of social life (Lamont & White, 2009).

Both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches are used to study vulnerable and hidden populations. Both have strengths, however a qualitative methodological approach has the ability to explore the meanings attached to actions and interaction within a group (Watters & Biernacki, 1989). A qualitative approach enabled me to explore and provide an understanding of the interactions and experiences of the research participants. Such an approach was adopted to seek comprehension of the meanings that homeless women ascribe to their lives, to understand how they see the world and their place within it. This was achieved with ethnography and a grounded theory approach.

Ethnography is a methodology with a long history of roots in anthropology (Gobo, 2008). While it lacks a single and accepted definition, Gobo (2008) points out that traditionally, ethnographic research focused on knowledge about distant cultures, in particular, non-Western cultures. Ethnography seeks to understand certain cultures and groups, specifically groups on the margins of society (Brewer, 2000). Caulfield and Wonders (1994) emphasise the necessity of ethnographic methods, as they help us to discover parts of a social world that tends to be unknown through more traditional methodological techniques.

Berreman (1986, p. 337) points out that “ethnography provides a description of the way of life, or culture, of a society that identifies the behaviours and the beliefs, understanding, attitudes, and values they imply in that social world.” Or as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) emphasise, ethnographic research aims to understand how people see themselves. To gain this understanding, the researcher must get close to those people he or she is interested in, so it can be easier to observe their responses to certain situations in life (Goffman, 2001).

Ethnography is not only a methodological approach; it is also an analytical perspective on social research (Van Maanen, 2011). As an interpretative skill,
ethnography focuses on the ‘how’ and ‘why’. Herbert (2000) argues that ethnography is a particularly valuable method when we are learning about the processes and meanings that occur in socio-spatial life. This consequently means when studying people living in a public place, it is important to understand how they create their social and spatial world.

As the review of the existing literature demonstrates, there is limited knowledge on homeless women, thus a grounded theory approach was selected to facilitate homeless women’s voices. This approach is appropriate when there is little known about the area of study; when the generation of theory with exploratory power is a desired outcome; and when an intrinsic process is entrenched in the research situation (Birks & Mills, 2011). Cutcliffe (2000) explains that grounded theory is induced from the data rather than preceding it. Birks and Mills (2011) continue that theory is most often developed from qualitative data sources. Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss (1987) explain the data obtained by qualitative approaches are rich in description, which can then develop theory. Grounded theory has roots in symbolic interactionism and aims to discover patterns and processes, and seeks to understand how a group of people define their reality through their social interactions (Cutcliffe, 2000).

Birk and Mills (2011) explain that the researcher’s personal theoretical standpoint is an important factor which influences the ways in which the researcher works when in the field. The researcher’s personal theoretical beliefs need to be recognised before the fieldwork is undertaken (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This directly impacts on the methodological approach and methods the researcher chooses, and later employs, in the field. In this research, I first recognised my theoretical standpoint, which is grounded in critical criminological and anthropological feminism, by outlining theoretical considerations. This influenced the choice to undertake ethnography by employing participant observation and life-history interviewing.

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29 In a grounded theory approach, the main theory emerges from the collected data, yet Corbin and Strauss (2008) indicate that recognising one’s theoretical standpoint tends to be most valuable before going into the field and during the process of interpreting data.
Once the researcher clarifies their own personal philosophical stance and selects a methodological approach, the next step is to clarify the research aims (Birks & Mills, 2011). (The aims of this research were outlined at the start of this Chapter.) This then leads the researcher to develop a research design, identify ethical and legal issues, determine required resources and develop a timeline of the study (Birks & Mills, 2011). The next few sections will outline how this research was carried out and consider some of the challenges I faced as a researcher.

**Gaining Access to the Field**

This section describes the initial steps of this project in detail. First, I undertook an audit of available services for homeless women in Brisbane. Second, I carried out a sensitising interview with a cultural consultant and an informative interview with one of the specialist in the field. Third, once the key services were examined and with the help from the cultural consultant and specialist in the field of homelessness, the key gatekeepers were contacted. Fourth, based on all the steps taken, a selection for the main fieldwork places was made.

**Audit of available services**

An audit of available homeless services in Brisbane revealed that there are many diverse services available for homeless women. Tables 1 and 2 below offer an overview of the services available for homeless women. Table 1 summarises the key services in Brisbane that deal with accommodation, food and providing advice in terms of other services. Table 2 summarises other available services\(^{30}\) for women.

\(^{30}\) These services offer help mainly for homelessness factors of individualistic nature.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Support Service</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Operating Hours</th>
<th>Available for whom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drop-in and support services</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>139 Club Incorporated Homeless Drop-In Centre</td>
<td>Fortitude Valley</td>
<td>Monday – Friday, various hours</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Level Drop-In Centre</td>
<td>Fortitude Valley</td>
<td>Monday – Friday, various hours</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Vincent de Paul</td>
<td>Various Brisbane locations</td>
<td>Monday – Friday, various hours</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment and referral services</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane Homelessness Service Centre (BHSC), Micah Projects</td>
<td>South Brisbane</td>
<td>Monday – Friday, various hours</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane Youth Services (BYS)</td>
<td>Fortitude Valley</td>
<td>Monday – Friday, various hours</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hart 4000</td>
<td>Fortitude Valley</td>
<td>Monday – Friday, various hours</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifeline</td>
<td>Over the telephone counselling</td>
<td>24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neighbourhood and community centres</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footprints</td>
<td>Newstead</td>
<td>Monday – Friday, various hours</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Farm Neighbourhood Centre</td>
<td>New Farm</td>
<td>Monday – Friday, various hours</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepping Stone Clubhouse</td>
<td>Coorparoo</td>
<td>Monday – Friday, various hours</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West End Community House (WECH)</td>
<td>South Brisbane</td>
<td>Monday – Friday, various hours</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accommodation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency and short-term housing for adults and families</td>
<td>Various locations around Brisbane</td>
<td>Around 30 overall; most of these charge per night or week or require a referral from a homelessness service; gender specified for only 6 (only 3 considered emergency shelters)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency and short-term housing for individuals aged under 25 years (including those with a family, pregnant)</td>
<td>Various locations around Brisbane</td>
<td>Around 25 overall - most of these charge per night or week or require a referral from a homelessness service; gender specified for only 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported accommodation (Level 3) – mostly boarding houses</td>
<td>Various locations around Brisbane</td>
<td>Around 21 overall - most of these charge per week; gender not specified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Food vans and kitchens</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A network of volunteer-run, autonomous community-based organisations</td>
<td>Fortitude Valley, Spring Hill, West End, City Botanic Gardens, City, Redcliffe, New Farm, Ipswich, Kangaroo Point</td>
<td>Most are active all week (including weekends) – morning and evening hours</td>
<td>Everyone welcome</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Other Available Services for Homeless Women in Brisbane

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Support Service</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Available for whom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help with health problems (public hospitals, community health centres, mobile healthcare services, dental services)</td>
<td>Various locations around Brisbane</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug and alcohol problems</td>
<td>Various locations around Brisbane</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with legal problems</td>
<td>Various locations around Brisbane</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence support (domestic violence – DV connect Womensline and Immigrant Women’s Support Service (domestic violence program))</td>
<td>City (24 hours), various locations around Brisbane</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with finding work</td>
<td>Various locations around Brisbane</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with finding child care</td>
<td>Various locations around Brisbane</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior’s information and support services</td>
<td>Various locations around Brisbane</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant women’s services</td>
<td>Various locations around Brisbane</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrelink(^{31})</td>
<td>Various locations around Brisbane</td>
<td>Men and women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 1 and 2 reveal a few important points. First, most of the available key services have limited operating hours or are not open over the weekend. For example, 139 Club offers emergency accommodation for women only, however this is only available on Wednesday evenings. Second, there are only a handful of emergency accommodations for women; in Brisbane there are only three key emergency shelters that cater for women only. Third, depending on where homeless women are sleeping, some of the locations of these services require access to transport.

**Sensitising interview**

Before designing my research in more detail, I decided to seek help from a ‘cultural consultant’ (a person with insider knowledge, in this case an ex-homeless woman). Smith (2010) points out that cultural consultants can offer invaluable contributions and knowledge of the studied field, especially in locating participants. In

\(^{31}\) Centrelink is an Australian Government agency responsible for delivering a wide range of services and unemployment benefits to Australians who find themselves on a low income or without an income (http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/dhs/centrelink).
addition to conducting an interview with a cultural consultant, I met with a specialist in the field of homelessness. This section overviews the key findings from the interview with a cultural consultant and those from my meeting with a specialist in the field of homelessness.

My first meeting, with a girl who I shall name Rose, occurred on the 18th August 2010, at about 9 a.m. I first came in contact with Rose through the homeless forum online (http://www.homelessforums.org), where I asked for assistance with my research. She was one of the respondents, and soon after she gave me her e-mail address so that I could contact her in a more formal way. Although she is no longer homeless, she lived on the streets and shelters of Brisbane for about three years. Eventually, we set up a meeting at Griffith University (Mount Gravatt campus).

The interview was not recorded and in a conversational format; it lasted for an hour. During the interview we discussed various topics and mainly considered Rose’s reasons for homelessness, her pathway into homelessness, experiences as a homeless woman and her exit out of homelessness. Rose spoke of physical abuse as being the main reason that led to her homelessness. Her sister was continuously physically abusing her and her mother was “keeping her eyes shut”. Rose then said that despite her sister being her identical twin, she has never felt any special attachment with her and that she was always the exact opposite to her. Rose then explained her pathway into homelessness. After leaving home, she spent some time with friends and then went to a dormitory room. Her tuition fees for school and the dormitory rent for the first few months had been already paid by her mother, so she was trying to hide there for a while. However, the abuse at home and then leaving home left her feeling extremely depressed. She said she was feeling suffocated and trapped at school. So, one day she said she “grabbed her stuff and left her room and never went back.” This is how she ended up living on the street. She said that in the beginning she was completely by herself. She was sleeping on fire stairs of buildings, entrances of buildings, basically anywhere that a person might also get a feeling of security. However, she had to continuously move between these places.
When Rose talked about her experiences on the streets, she discussed a few important themes: relationships that she formed on the streets (how she is maintaining some of these now), crime (being a victim and having problems with substances), the police (mainly negative experiences), contact with homelessness services (to access necessities, such as hygienic products, financial support and accommodation) and some of the issues that arose (such as mental health problems). Finally, Rose discussed her exit out of homelessness. She indicated that the only reason why she exited was due one of the youth shelters that helped her enter a drug rehabilitation program.

All these themes were discussed through the narrative of Rose’s daily routine and demonstrated two key points. First, the aims set for this research were reinforced as appropriate. Second, some of these themes are of a descriptive and sensitive nature, thus a more delicate and qualitative approach would be needed. This was further emphasised through the informative meeting with Dr Cameron Parsell, a specialist in the field of homelessness. Dr Parsell provided me with important information about fieldwork locations, homeless services and potential participants. In 2010, Dr Parsell completed his doctorate through an ethnographic study of the daily lives of homeless people in Brisbane. This helped me to narrow down the fieldwork locations, how to approach participants in public places or at services, which questions to ask, and provided me with even better insight into the available homelessness services. (The information I gained helped me to develop the further steps of this research.) Next, I made contact with one of the key homelessness service providers; they agreed to work with me as my gatekeepers.

**Networking with key gatekeepers**

Gatekeepers are used to gain access to the field. The ethnographic literature recognises such importance of gatekeepers (Gobo, 2008). In this research project, the

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32 This study is explored in more detail in the second Chapter.
33 This will be discussed in more detail in the ‘Fieldwork selection’ section of this Chapter.
34 This directly led to my decision about which homeless service to approach first and will be discussed in the next section.
gatekeepers were the workers at the three services that were visited on a daily basis. These were Micah Projects, 139 Club and Roma House. Contact with these was made at different stages of my fieldwork.

Once I reviewed the key homeless services and received first-hand information from my cultural consultant and a specialist in the field of homelessness, I decided to approach Micah Projects, which is the lead agency at the BHSC. This agency is located on Peel Street in West End. First contact was made with one of the Referral and Assessment team leaders. We had an informative meeting on the 21st October 2011 at the Micah Projects’ office, which lasted for an hour. During this time, we discussed my research aims and the ethnographic approach I had selected.

I provided the team leader a document outlining the project description in a detailed way, which was then forwarded to management. After a staff meeting, the agency agreed to work with me. I visited the agency one more time before starting my fieldwork. During this visit I met the majority of the team members to explain my role as a researcher and their role in my research (and also to establish a solid working relationship). At this time, Micah Project employees were my only gatekeepers. I spent most of my time at this location and after a while, I also accompanied teams such as From Street to Home. The Micah Projects agency introduced me to further services that also acted as my gatekeepers.

The second service worker who acted in the role of gatekeeper was employed at 139 Club in Fortitude Valley. This service turned out to be very beneficial for my research. This was mainly because of their art classes on Monday and ‘crash nights’ for women only on Wednesday nights. Initial contact was made with the management of this organisation; they immediately agreed to work with me. I then made contact with key workers who were involved in the art classes and Wednesday’s crash nights. Most of these were volunteers. I spent at least two days on a weekly basis at this location (Monday and Wednesday).

35 Street to Home is a public space and homelessness outreach service. This service provides a proactive approach for people sleeping ‘rough’ and responds to people who are intoxicated and vulnerable in public spaces.
The third service was Roma House, located in Spring Hill, and is a service that provides accommodation to homeless people who are currently, or have been, experiencing long-term homelessness. They offer regular meals, adventure and activity programs, access to other services and programs tailored to each individual and their particular needs. Once Micah Projects introduced me to Roma House, I had a meeting with the manager and after presenting my project; Roma House also agreed to work with me. I spent at least one day a week there.

Employees at these services already had an effective and positive rapport with the majority of homeless women and their relationships turned out to be very helpful for me to develop a rapport with potential participants\textsuperscript{36}. Overall, at these locations combined, I undertook approximately 70-100 informal conversations and 10 interviews with homeless women. Furthermore, the relationship with my gatekeepers did not end once my fieldwork concluded; I later visited these services a few more times to share my findings with them\textsuperscript{37}.

**Fieldwork selection**

Immediately after the audit and networking, I selected main fieldwork areas. Overall, this research was undertaken over a number of Brisbane sites. These locations were selected based on the information gained so far. This section provides a brief overview of Brisbane as the capital city of Queensland and the specific places selected for this research.

\textsuperscript{36} In the beginning it was not planned to use gatekeepers due to the assumption that homeless women see certain service workers as an authority. The literature suggests that the homeless population tends to steer clear of authorities, hence, to avoid any confusion between who the researcher is and who the gatekeepers are, it was first determined not to use gatekeepers. However, their inclusion in this project proved to be very beneficial, especially in developing a positive rapport with participants.

\textsuperscript{37} As per ethnographic processes, findings need to be discussed with participants, yet due to the transient nature of my participants, I was not able to locate most of them.
In 2011, ABS (2013) counted just over two million people living in the Greater Brisbane area\(^\text{38}\) (see Map 1). This area is approximately 16,000 km\(^2\) (ABS, 2013). With the subtropical climate, the Greater Brisbane area appeals to people from overseas (ABS, 2008). Consequently, in 2011, nearly 30% of people who were living in Brisbane were born overseas (ABS, 2013). During 2011, about 70% of the male population, compared to about 60% of the female population, were participating in the labour force\(^\text{39}\), with an average of weekly income of $807 for males and $845 for females\(^\text{40}\) (ABS, 2013). The unemployment rate that year was 5.9% for males and 5.8% for females (ABS, 2013).

\(^{38}\) In 2011, ABS (2013) recorded just over 50% of the people living in the greater Brisbane area were female.

\(^{39}\) This data is relevant to those people aged 15 years and over.

\(^{40}\) As was previously explained in Chapter Two (p. 39), women in low-income households tend to have many part-time jobs and men are more likely to be unemployed (Cerise, O’Connell, Rosenman & Sarat Chandran, 2009; Martin, 2010; Roll, Toro & Ortola, 1999)
The Queensland Government (2009) suggests that due to projected population increases\(^{41}\), by the year 2031, Brisbane will require an additional 156,000 dwellings. At the time of this research, the Greater Brisbane area was flourishing and just before the research was carried out, Brisbane was named as Australia’s ‘new world city’ (Newman, 2009). Yet, the economic prosperity and positioning of Brisbane in a world stage as a site for science and technology tends to be in tension with the lives of the homeless people living on the streets of Brisbane (Parsell, 2010a).

Within the Brisbane area, four large sites and seven specific locations were selected as the main places to conduct this research. These were West End, Fortitude Valley, City and Spring Hill, and locations of gatekeepers and other homeless ‘hotspots’, respectively. These are circled and marked with white on Map 2.

Map 2. Specific Fieldwork Locations

\(^{41}\) It is projected to increase by 1,378,728.
The first large location is West End, a suburb located approximately 1.5 kilometres to the South-West of Brisbane’s Central Business District (CBD). In 2013, there were an estimated 8,839 inhabitants in a mix of primary owner-occupied and privately rented housing (Brisbane City Council, 2014). Out of these residents, 410 (nine percent) were unemployed in 2013 (Brisbane City Council, 2014). For a one-bedroom unit, the average rent in 2013 was $290 per week (Brisbane City Council, 2014). There is a limited number of low-income housing and boarding house accommodation in this suburb. Moreover, a number of homelessness services operate in West End and there are also a few youth hostels. While there are many places in West End where homeless people spend time, two specific areas were selected as the key locations: the Micah Project location (on Peel Street) and Musgrave Park.

The second large location is Fortitude Valley, a suburb located on the North-Eastern border of the Brisbane CBD. In 2013, there were estimated 5,716 inhabitants in this residential, commercial and industrial suburb (Brisbane City Council, 2014). In the same year, there were 198 unemployed residents (4.9%), while the median rent for a one-bedroom unit was $385 per week (Brisbane City Council, 2014). In addition, in recent years, Fortitude Valley has become one of Brisbane’s most popular entertainment districts with numerous restaurants, cafés and adult entertainment premises. There are also many social and homelessness services that operate in Fortitude Valley. For this research, some time was spent on the streets of Fortitude Valley, however the majority of time was spent at the 139 Club location.

The third large location is Spring Hill, a suburb located about two kilometres North of Brisbane’s CBD. In 2013, there were estimated 6,045 residents living in this inner suburb of Brisbane; it is also considered an extension of the CBD (Brisbane City Council, 2014). In the same year, there were 184 (5.5%) unemployed residents and the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment was $360 per week (Brisbane City Council, 2014). For this research, some time was spent at Wickham Park, a historically well-known park (Brisbane City Council, 2014), yet the majority of time was spent at the Roma House location.
The fourth location is the Brisbane CBD, which is primarily occupied by tall skyscrapers with other building and few parks. In 2013, there were 9,791 inhabitants living in the CBD, with 269 (6.3%) of them unemployed (Brisbane City Council, 2014). In the same year, the median rent for a one-bedroom unit per week was $465 (Brisbane City Council, 2014). The Brisbane CBD is home to many businesses (e.g., services and shops), adult entertainment premises, restaurants, and many hotels and hostels. For this research, the majority of time was spent in three specific locations: the Queen Street Mall, King George Square and ANZAC Square Park.

In the Field

This section aims to portray the way my fieldwork was designed and carried out. First, before officially entering the field, I needed to gain ethical approval for my research. Second, through the description of the two main methods, participant observation and life-history interviewing, an explanation of the steps taken in the field are explored in detail.

Ethics

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork for this research project, I needed to gain approval from Griffith University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), which is under the oversight of the National Health Medical Research Council (NHMRC). After lodging an application\(^{42}\) with the NHMRC, HREC required further explanation\(^{43}\) of a few situations that might occur in the field. I described the approaches I would take if those situations were to occur and resubmitted the application\(^{44}\). After almost three months, on the 4\(^{th}\) October 2011, I gained official approval.

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\(^{42}\) See Appendix D.

\(^{43}\) See Appendix E.

\(^{44}\) See Appendix F.
HREC approval to commence my research. Some of the ethical challenges that arose during the fieldwork will be discussed in the last section of this Chapter.

Overall, there were a number of ethical issues that required consideration: the exclusion-inclusion criteria, the recruitment processes, informed consent, the participant-researcher relationship, the researcher’s safety and the potential of witnessing illegal activity. All these issues needed to be considered before entering the field and an utmost effort was made to address these concerns before commencing fieldwork. A brief description of these ethical considerations is presented next.

**The exclusion-inclusion criteria**

Since ethics regulations first developed in medical research, most ethics reviews nowadays emphasise the importance of sampling (Schrag, 2011). Consequently, one of the first considerations in my ethical application focused on my exclusion and inclusion criteria. Here, I explained that this research does not deliberately include or exclude any willing participant, however before starting fieldwork, it would be impossible to know who would be willing to participate and what their background would be (ethnicity, sexuality, age, etc.). In the application, I ensured I would take proactive measures to guarantee that a research participant’s vulnerabilities would be considered and addressed so their participation did not result in the suffering of harm.

I was required to be specific as to ‘types of research participant’ who would be included in, or excluded from, the research. First, I had to specify who would ‘definitely’ be excluded. There were only two exclusion criteria: participants had to be 18 years or older, and they could not be highly dependent on medical care (physical or mental disability). Both of these conditions are considered to impact on one’s capacity to give informed consent.

**The recruitment process**

The next relevant ethical query concerned the recruitment process. Here, I explained how I imagined I would recruit potential interview participants. Basically, the
participants would be recruited using a non-probability method. This means the participant would possess the attributes I wanted to study (Davies, 2008). Over a few months of non-invasive overt observations of women experiencing homelessness, I would then assess who could be a potential participant for life-history interviewing. I would then approach a potential participant whilst they were still in public spaces. I would introduce myself, explain that I am a researcher and advise them the nature and aims of my research. I would explain the potential risks and benefits. I would also explain which measures would be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the information they would provide me with. I would also supply them with the information sheet and informed consent form. Participants would then be required to read the information sheet and sign a consent form. At this point, they would be advised that participation in this research is voluntary, so they could withdraw at any time they wished. It would be required that participants spend a few hours a day with the researcher. During this time, they would be asked to discuss their life story with an emphasis on their homelessness.

**Informed consent**

As per the established ethical guidelines, when researching human subjects, informed consent is required (Wax, 1980; Marks, 2012). The HREC required an example of an informed consent form and a detailed description of the approach that would be taken to gain consent from participants. I explained that the selection of research participants for interviewing would commence during the participant observation phase and that homeless women’s consent would occur during the life-history interviewing phase. Thus, I would move from being an observer into a more active participant mode.

Further, according to the exclusion-inclusion criteria, I was required to consider an appropriate approach for each of the specified groups. Homeless women are not a homogenous group, thus they would be influenced by an intersection of race, class, age, sexuality, mental illness and substance use. The HREC views the participant’s age as highly important. Thus, one of the first and main criterions required participants were aged above 18 years. Another major concern for the HREC was whether women with

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45 See Appendix B.
mental illness and substance abuse have the capacity to comprehend what their participation in this research project entailed. I explained that when encountering a woman with signs of mental illness, I would seek advice from my gatekeepers and/or use my discretion. When encountering women with substance abuse issues, I would try to engage them in a conversation prior to their use of substances. As prolonged substance abuse can impact on people differently, if I needed a better understanding of a particular homeless woman’s situation, I would seek further advice from my gatekeepers.

**The participant – researcher relationship**

Another very significant ethical consideration relates to the relationship between the researcher and participants. I was required to explain my role in the research, more specifically, my role in the field. I explained that, drawing on the work of Spradley (1980), I intended to be a detached observer and ‘moderate’ observer. This means that I would maintain a balance between being an insider of the observed group and being an outsider. Maintaining this balance would be of great importance. In order for me to obtain the required data I needed to form a relationship with the participants, however I was not supposed to get involved in or influence their lives in any real way.

**The researcher’s safety**

The HREC also required I address my safety in public space. To this effect, I obtained guidance from the writings of Chih Lin (2003), who undertook interviews with male prisoners in prison. She used the same interviewing technique as the prison staff. This automatically placed her in the same danger that prison staff experience on a daily basis. She experienced exactly the same risks. However, in her opinion, doing this, expressed her trust in prisoners and in return, prisoners trusted her. Whilst Chih Lin’s (2003) study was not carried out in public space, I explained to the HREC that my

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46 As part of my undergraduate and postgraduate degree, I have undertaken numerous psychology courses, which provided me with information on recognising signs that might point to mental health issues. Whilst my knowledge is not extensive, it allowed me a beginning point to then seek clarification or confirmation with my gatekeepers.

47 Participant observation will be explained in more detail in the ‘Main methods’ section of this Chapter.
approach to address my safety was similar. I exposed myself to the same dangers as experienced by anyone in a public space. However, I still intended to take some safety precautions. During the initial stage of participation observation, I stated that I would never be alone, but rather with one of my gatekeepers, either a case worker, staff member or a volunteer.

Illegal activity

The last ethical consideration relevant to my fieldwork was the issue of illegal activity. Even though, there is limited knowledge on homeless women, due to the role of mass media, homelessness tends to be associated with criminality (Jones, 2013). In the ethics application, I explained that if any participants engaged in illegal behaviour while in the field, I would shift my gaze to not intentionally observe these activities. In addition, I noted that the illegal behaviour in which the participant might be involved in and may cause serious harm (physical or psychological) to another person or herself, will be first reported to the service providers. After the advice from these service providers, I would proceed accordingly.

Main methods

The research methods employed in this research include participant observation and life-history interviewing. These methods were selected on the basis that they provided me with appropriate techniques to collect ethnographic empirical data. Through observing, listening and talking to homeless women I gained relevant insight into their lives. By using these two main methods, I was able to describe the way that fieldwork was carried out and clearly identify my position within the research.

\[48\] The participants will be informed from the day one not to disclose any incriminating information. Thus no legal harms are expected. However, in case if any unintentional disclosure of any legal implications, I will stop the interview/conversation and emphasise again that in case any more details are revealed, I might have to take appropriate steps and report this to my supervisors, and service providers to seek further advice.
**Participant observation**

Historically, the need for participant observation within a specific field occurred when researchers were not able to informing themselves through documents or there were no available documents and the solution was going into the field (Friedrichs & Ludtke, 1975). Friedrichs and Ludtke (1975, p. 3) explain that participant observation “registers perceptible actions in ‘natural’ situations on the basis of a present scheme.” The aim of the observation is to describe a behaviour sequence. Participant observation is a method of data collection over a certain period of time and it is achieved through watching, listening, and asking questions of a group of people as they live their daily lives (Payne & Payne, 2004). Davies (2008) describes the classic form of participant observation as consisting of a single researcher spending an extended period of time living among the people that are being studied. Participating in daily lives of those relevant to the research area gives a researcher a more complete understanding of the cultural meanings and social structures of the studied group, and the interrelation between these (Davies, 2008). As Payne and Payne (2004) indicate, the researcher adopts a role from their surroundings and to some extent becomes a member of that group.

Participant observation offers the following major advantages: the opportunity to observe events that outsiders would not be invited to attend, and to access situations that might be hidden from the public (certain religious rituals, illegal or other socially stigmatised activities), or witnessing certain activities that groups use to maintain their identity (Bogdewic, 1992). According to Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999, p. 91) this process of learning through exposure or involvement in the daily lives of a studied group represents the starting point in ethnographic research for various reasons. First, it is crucial in identifying and building relationships deemed important to the future of the research endeavour. Secondly, it gives the researcher insight to, as well as a reasonable perception of, the way things are organised and prioritised, and the nature of people’s relationships, and the ways in which social and physical boundaries are defined. Thirdly, it demonstrates and later confirms the patterns of protocol, political organisation and leadership, social competition and cooperation, socioeconomic status and hierarchies in practice, and other cultural models that can be harder to address. Fourthly, it endorses the presence of the researcher in the community. Fifthly, it
provides the researcher with cultural knowledge that can be discussed with key informants or participants in the study site and this can then be treated as data.

Spradley (1980) specifies the process of participant observation. First, the researcher has to locate a social situation. Furthermore, every social situation can be defined by three main elements: a place, actors, and activities. Though these elements do not yet explain the social and cultural meaning of social situations, they do serve as a starting point into understanding such situations. Second, after the social situation has been selected the researcher has to consider the degree of involvement with the relevant people and in the activities. Spradley (1980) points to the five different degrees of involvement: non-participation (no involvement with the people or activities studied), passive participation (present at the scene of the action without any interaction with other people), moderate participation (a balance between being an insider and an outsider), active participation (engaging in what other people are doing to fully learn the cultural rules associated to behaviours), and complete participation (the highest level of involvement).

I employed the participant observation method from the first, until the last, day of the fieldwork. I began on Monday, 24th of October 2011. Drawing from Spradley’s (1980) model, my fieldwork involved moderate participation and being a detached observer; I thus sought to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider. I concluded fieldwork on the 11th July 2012. Over this approximate ten-month period, I observed homeless women who dwelled in, and interacted within, the selected public spaces.

At the outset, participant observation (as an overt method) was specified to be moderate participation, and thus centred on maintaining a balance between being an insider and an outsider. This method was used for three major purposes: first, as a means of familiarisation with homelessness and the public spaces where it occurs; secondly, to identify and recruit potential participants for life-history interviewing; and thirdly, to better understand the daily routines of homeless women. More specifically,

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49 The fieldwork locations were described in detail in one of the previous sections of this Chapter.
the focus was on the individual women experiencing homelessness; their behaviours and interactions were observed to establish the best way to approach, and engage, them.

The participation observation phase was carried out in public spaces and at locations where gatekeepers are located. As identified above at Map 2, the main locations were Musgrave Park and the Micah Projects location in West End, the Spring Hill Park and Roma House location in Spring Hill, the 139 Club location in Fortitude Valley, and Queen Street Mall, King George Square and ANZAC Square Park in the Brisbane CBD.

Initially, I spent most of my time at the locations in the four above-mentioned suburbs. I visited these locations on different days and times and throughout the week (Monday to Friday). Due to the transient nature of homeless women, I quickly learned where women spent their time was completely dependent on their daily routine. Thus, I tailored my visits to these locations based on the specific timeframes and days that homeless women frequented these places. During the first month, I was mainly an observer at these locations. After the first month, I slowly started making my presence at these locations known to homeless women; I introduced myself or asked gatekeepers to introduce me.

During a four-month period, I became a little bit more familiar with the field and engaged in numerous informal conversations and undertook four interviews. Towards the end of February 2012, the Micah Projects’ From Street to Home team introduced me to a few other homelessness services, such as 139 Club (drop-in and support), Roma House (accommodation), Spiritus (health based), Footprints (a community-based service for older people), and Pindari Women (accommodation). I met with all the leaders or managers at these services, provided them with my research outline and asked them for their support and cooperation. Out of all the services I approached, Roma

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50 This process will be explained in more detail in the next section, where I discuss life-history interviewing.

51 This service is an outreach service in various locations around Brisbane and while I did have a continuous communication with them, I never accompanied them in their van when they visited homeless people around Brisbane.
House in Spring Hill and 139 Club in Fortitude Valley were enthusiastic for me to access their facilities and help me in any way they could. Thus from February 2012 onwards, I included these two service locations in my participant observation phase. Over the next few months I visited these locations on various relevant days and times.

Over the approximate ten months of fieldwork, the only fixed timeframe and location was at 139 Club in Fortitude Valley on Monday morning and Wednesday evening. This was because they ran art classes on Monday and ‘crash nights’ for women only on Wednesday. Even though those who attended art classes were not all homeless and not all women, the social interaction between the people who attended these classes, the impact of the group on individuals, and the interactions between people who attended the group and bystanders, were of vital importance to my project. On the other hand, Wednesday nights were intended for homeless women only. Women who came to 139 Club on Wednesday night tended to all be experiencing primary homelessness. The numbers of women varied on a weekly basis, still, there were approximately three to five women there every Wednesday.

Besides my regular visits to Micah Projects and 139 Club, I also began to regularly visit Roma House. Roma House is located in Spring Hill and is a service that provides accommodation to homeless people who are currently, or have been, experiencing long-term homelessness. They offer regular meals, adventure and activity programs, and access to other services and programs which are individually tailored to each person’s needs.

In addition to my regular visits to these three services, I visited other places such as Musgrave Park in West End, the streets of Fortitude Valley, King George Square, ANZAC Park and Queen Street Mall in Brisbane CBD. While I maintained my role as a moderate participant at the service locations, I became more of a passive participant at

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52 Overall, the commencement and conclusion of each day in the field depended on the services and the homeless women that accessed these services. At times there were additional factors (such as weather, time of the day, personal circumstances, public holidays, etc.) that influenced the number of women in a certain location. Some of these factors were not controllable; this, combined with the transient nature of the homeless women meant that the days in the field were often characterised by unpredictability and uncertainty.
these above-mentioned public locations. Even though I visited these places on a daily basis for a few hours at a time, I observed that homeless women tend to be very transient in these places. It was not as common to observe the same homeless women at the same locations on a daily basis. This made it more difficult for me to engage in informal conversation or undertake interviews.

Since February 2012, when I regularly visited all three services, I undertook six more interviews and many more informal conversations. Before entering the field I had determined it appropriate to use purposive sampling, that is, the development of a sample with ‘purpose’ in mind (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This sample was outlined by the ethical considerations I needed to address. For the observation phase, the number of homeless women involved was unlimited. Due to the nature of homeless women and spatial circumstances, the size of my sample could not be controlled, however for following interviewing phase, it was assumed the size of the sample would be smaller. From the first, until the last, day of my fieldwork, I observed the social interactions and behaviours of numerous homeless women and engaged in a number of informal conversations with homeless women and employees at various services.

*Life-history interviewing*

In social research, interviewing is seen as the most widely used method of investigating the social world (Davies, 2008). Nevertheless, the format of the interview the researcher employs can vary widely. These range from highly structured to unstructured (Byrman, 2004). According to Sarantakos (1998), there are nearly 30 sub-types of interviews.

53 Whilst there were no exclusion criteria for observation, there were two main exclusion criteria for the interviewing stage. First, women had to be above 18 years old, and secondly, women needed to not be suffering from severe mental illness or severe cognitive impairment. This was because of legal age and their ability to provide me with consent for the interview. Nevertheless, these women were still included in the observation process.

54 This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

55 The number of homeless women who participated in the observations and informal conversations was not enumerated, as some women participated only once, while others participated numerous times. The overall number of participants ranges from 70-100.
For in-depth interviews, Thompson (1978, p. 165) points to certain qualities that the successful interviewer must possess. These include an interest and respect for people as individuals, and flexibility in responding to them; an ability to show understanding and sympathy for others’ points of view; and, willingness to sit quietly and listen. Schensul and colleagues (1999, pp. 121 - 122) outline the functions of in-depth interviews: to explore undefined areas of a central theoretical model; identify new areas; to break down areas into component factors and sub-factors; to obtain orienting information about the context and the history of the study and the study site; and to build an understanding and a positive relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee.

An interview that is carried out by ethnographers whose principal research strategy is participant observation is often virtually unstructured, essentially very close to a naturally occurring conversation (Davies, 2008). The conversation may sway away from the researched topic, thus the ethnographer must steer the conversation back to the research topic without imposing much structure on the interaction. The themes that emerge during these unstructured interviews or conversations tend to relate to a respondent’s past, present and future (Davies, 2008). Such an interview or conversation aims to portray a respondent’s life up to the present moment. Life-history interviewing embodies a distinct approach to a social science biographical perspective (Miller, 2000).

Life-history interviewing has a holistic concern with placement in time, the relationship between the individual and the social structure, and how these interplay, as well as how an individual’s perception changes through time (Miller, 2000). Life-history interviews cover the events of an individual’s life course up to the present (Thompson, 1978). Through this style of interviewing the important historical events and the effects of change across time in an individual’s life are covered (Miller, 2000). This encourages the respondent to move back and forth in their life-history and then makes linkages between different types of experiences and segments in their life. Miller (2000) also points out that the interviewer needs to make clear to the respondent that their life-history expands from the past through to the present and then into future.
Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) indicate the use of qualitative methods as the best way to obtain such an in-depth account with homeless population. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the lives of homeless women, the most appropriate method, in addition to observations, is life-history interviewing. To understand what had happened in the lives of homeless women that led them to be in the situation they are in now, I needed to explore their past and present, and their ideas of the future. In addition, this type of interview also offered these women an opportunity to be heard.

In the early phase of the participant observation process, it was established who eligible participants for life-history interviews were. Given the homeless population is considered a vulnerable population, extreme care was taken in approaching potential participants (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). During the first months of participation observation, it was important a positive rapport with the observed population was developed. Based on informal conversations with service workers and homeless women, it became apparent that such a relationship was important to participants, thus the gatekeepers were used as liaisons between the researcher and the participants.56

The initial intention was to undertake interviews with homeless women who are single57, yet, during informal conversations it was established that most or all of homeless women were in some sort of intimate partner relationship. Even though the majority of these women tended to be by themselves in public spaces, they were not identifying as single. They spoke of being mothers, wives, girlfriends, grandmothers, sisters and aunts, among other relationships.58

Overall, ten homeless women were interviewed. All these in-depth interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the homeless women. Most of the interviews were carried out either at the Micah Project offices or 139 Club. This was

56 The recruitment process was explained in more detail in the ‘Ethics’ Section.
57 The concept of ‘single’ in this context initially applied to the women who were by themselves on the streets.
58 This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five (‘Experiencing’ Homelessness).
also useful in case a participant would request or require counselling after the interview, given she would already be in a facility was able to offer this service. Further, I aimed to structure all the interviews in a way that would make the participant feel safe and relaxed enough to engage in a conversation. Davies (2008) suggests that the best strategy to undertake an interview as part of ethnography is to carry out an unstructured interview. Basically, such an interview should be as close to a conversation as possible. Consequently all the interviews were undertaken in a format involving only one respondent and the researcher. This contributed to the respondent feeling relaxed and the interview eventually became a conversation.

**Taking field notes**

From the first, until the last, day of the fieldwork, brief notes were taken in the field and as soon as the observation ended, the notes were completed to a more in-depth extent. I recorded my observations of social interactions and behaviours, informal conversations with homeless women and service workers, and conversations I overheard. Each day I wrote my general impressions and reflections of the day on a separate page. These notes were assembled into a fieldwork journal.

The method of taking brief notes while in the field and compiling a fieldwork journal can lead to some inconsistencies between what was observed and what was later recorded, yet, the ethnographic literature recognises this data as appropriate (Brewer, 2000; Bryman, 2004; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2001). A fieldwork journal contains a record of all the experiences that occurred during fieldwork (Schensul et al., 1999). Once the fieldwork concludes and a concentrated effort at analysis of the study begins, the fieldwork journal becomes an important source of data (Schensul et al., 1999).

**Analysis**

In ethnographic research, the analysis begins with the start of fieldwork (Bernard, 2002). This means the analysis occurred from entering the field and was ongoing; it required reading and re-reading all collected data. In addition, by employing
a grounded theory approach, I used two main techniques to analyse my data set: identifying categories and concepts, and linking the concepts into substantiative and formal theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To achieve this, I used Birks and Mills’s (2011) coding process in three stages: initial, intermediate, and advanced. As Bernard (2002, p. 463) indicates, “grounded theory is an iterative process by which you, the analyst, become more and more grounded in the data.” This section first illustrates what constituted as my data set. Secondly, by looking at the analytical process, I illustrate how my data was analysed.

Data set (verbatim transcripts and field notes)

The data set for this research consisted of two key materials: the fieldwork journal and ten interview transcripts. The fieldwork journal consists of my daily observations, impressions and numerous informal conversations with homeless women and service workers. According to Emerson and colleagues (2001), ethnographers tend to rely heavily on data that emerges from a fieldwork journal. As Lofland and Lofland (1995) identify, taking notes and compiling a fieldwork journal contributes to the analysis process. Moreover, many ethnographers include notes from the field in their final writings (Emerson et al., 2001).

The verbatim transcripts of the ten life-history interviews were the second source of data. All the interviews undertaken for this research were audio-recorded, and then transcribed into verbatim text. During the transcriptions, I documented participant’s speech exactly as it occurred. This included grammatical inaccuracies, pauses, any specific word emphasis and swearwords. I also made notes to any specific gestures participants made, for example, if a participant pointed to her head or heart.

Throughout the data set, the names of women with whom I had informal conversations and interviews, have all been changed to pseudonyms. As per the ethical guidelines, the information sheet 59 for this study specifically emphasises the confidentiality of research participants. Consequently, once a name of a woman who

59 See Appendix A.
participated in this study was jotted in the field notes, this name was coded and changed.

**The analytical process**

The analytical process involved an initial, intermediate, and then advanced analysis of the two forms of collected data. Birks and Mills (2011) emphasise that using a grounded theory analysis requires that data analysis proceeds in direct relation to the research aims and ‘everything’ is considered a research concept. It is relevant to note that a constant comparative analysis was ongoing throughout the research until a grounded theory was fully integrated (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This technique was used to integrate and generate data.

During the initial analytical phase, each one of the essential grounded theory methods were in this phase classified according to their conceptual output (Birks & Mills, 2011). The first ones were low-level concepts and they were fuelled by the initial coding processes, that is, the first step in grounded theory analysis. Initial coding is usually undertaken by analysing field notes and transcripts line by line (Birks & Mills, 2011). As soon as the fieldwork began, the analysis process for this research began. During the first few months, the analysis consisted of reading and re-reading field notes. At this point, the fieldwork journal consisted of observations and numerous informal conversations with mainly service workers. By analysing the fieldwork journal, I gained a sense of principal conceptual data. I used inductive or open coding (Bernard, 2002), which led to the identification of initial themes. For example by reading my observations of, and informal conversations with, service workers, I identified one of the concepts: the vulnerability of homeless women. As the notes in the two below entries of my journal exemplify:

I saw a new woman at the homeless service today. Before she approached the front desk she smoked a cigarette outside. I turned to the receptionist and asked her if she knows her. She said: “Yeah, that is Fiona. She has a lot of issues!” The receptionist further explained that she has a history of domestic violence abuse and her abusive partner is currently in prison. She is also known to use substances and is struggling at the moment due to her pregnancy. (Field notes on 24th October 2011)
Around 2.30 p.m., a woman came into Micah Project. She was crying and shaking. The receptionist turned to me and said: “Nancy used to be a nurse and worked in oncology (paediatrics) and due to witnessing so many deaths she developed post-traumatic stress [disorder] and a drug addiction. She just started spiralling down and ended up on the streets.” (Field notes on 2nd February 2012)

By identifying these initial concepts, my observations in the field and informal conversations naturally became more focused. For example, identifying vulnerability as one of the chief themes, I became more sensitive to gaining a better understanding of when and what makes homeless women more vulnerable, how they manage their vulnerability and how it manifests, among other elements. Overall, the initial coding led to concepts that further informed my fieldwork.

The second essential method involves medium level concepts and is fuelled by intermediate coding, which follows on from initial coding. In this process, according to Birks and Mills (2011), it is important to group codes, this then leads on to the further formation of categories. Here, the researcher starts to identify explanatory and conceptual patterns. The most important task in this coding process is to link categories together. During these actions, the researcher is able to discover gaps and pose questions which require further data collection and analysis in order to find a suitable answer. At this point of the grounded theory method, the concept of theoretical sampling emerges. Theoretical sampling is “the process of identifying and pursuing clues that arise during analysis in grounded theory study” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 69). Theoretical sampling will continue through into the next stage of analysis until theoretical saturation is accomplished.

These medium-level concepts again required reading and re-reading the data collected so far. This stage took place just before I undertook my first interview in February 2012. The initial themes were grouped into categories that contained conceptual patterns. This conceptualising served as a further mechanism to collect additional data through interviewing. For example, by reading the fieldwork journal, I circled the language women used when they approached service workers. For instance, on the 24th of October 2011, I wrote:
At about 11.20 a.m. a homeless woman (I have not seen her before) came to the front desk of the Micah Projects service and said to the receptionist that she needs assistance regarding her accommodation. She said she is having financial problems at the moment and if she doesn’t sort this out now, she will end up on the street. She said: “I’m gonna be homeless, homeless, homeless.”

By reading through the journal further, I focused on other notes regarding women’s description of homelessness, or behaviours when the word ‘homeless’ was used. This further led me to link these categories around definitions of homelessness to other categories, such as vulnerability. This stage also facilitated me to narrow down the themes I asked about during the life-history interviews.

The third essential analytical method involves high-level concepts that are supported by an advanced analytical process. An understanding of the previous phase of analysis when the researcher links thematic categories is an important step to move the analysis into an advanced stage. Advanced coding is the process that eventually enabled me to develop theory on the basis of the analysis process. This phase included both sources of data: the fieldwork journal and the verbatim interview transcripts. Here, reading and re-reading of the data was required. For example, one of the categories that emerged from the data was women’s experience of hygiene on the streets. This theme indicated the importance of hygiene for homeless women, especially in order to ‘fit in’. Here, I used quotes from the interviews to illuminate the theory, which points to challenges of female self. There were many themes that arose during the analysis process. As sub-themes, these were sorted into four key sections, which also structure the fundamental element of this thesis: ‘becoming’ homeless, ‘experiencing’ homeless, ‘managing’ homelessness, and ‘exiting’ homelessness.

An important part of ethnographic research is to engage in follow-up interviews or have more informal conversations with participants about the findings of the research. However, when I returned to the field, I could not locate the majority of the participants. This is consistent with the transient nature of the homeless population. Instead, I discussed my findings with the identified gatekeepers. For eight homeless

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60 These will be presented throughout the findings Chapters.
women, I met with gatekeepers at Micah Projects and for two, I met with gatekeepers at 139 Club. I provided them an overview of the four key themes that emerged: becoming homeless, being homeless, managing homelessness and exiting homelessness. The gatekeepers all indicated the feedback was relevant to their experiences of working at the homeless service. Some of the gatekeepers were already familiar with some of the ideas. For example, most of them expressed knowledge about domestic violence being a prominent reason for homeless women, yet not all were aware of the way these women experience such violence.

‘Doing’ Ethnography and the Challenges

The following section discusses some of the challenges that occur in the field when employing an ethnographic approach. First, I outline how the ethical concerns that needed to be addressed before entering the field, manifested in the field. Secondly, given the grounded theory approach suggests that researcher reflexivity is an important part of the research; I explore my role and identity within this research.

Ethical principles in the field

Before entering the field I was aware of some elements of unpredictability that can occur during fieldwork. The weather is a prominent factor, especially when researching a social behaviour in public space. However, during my fieldwork, I quickly learned that transiency was a key characteristic of my research participants. These two related factors meant that interacting with homeless women became entrenched in unpredictability and flexibility.

As Shaw (2003) and Israel (2004) explain, not only in Australia, but also internationally, the ethical permission given to ethnographic researchers tends to be obtained with many difficulties. The national and international literature demonstrates that ethnographers often face many ethical challenges in the field, mainly due to the regulations of ethics’ committees (Cloke, Cooke, Cursons, Milbourne & Widdowfield, 2000; Israel, 2004; Westmarland, 2011). Cloke and colleagues (2000) and De Laine
(2000) emphasise that there are some ethical dilemmas that might occur during fieldwork and some of which require the researcher to adapt to certain circumstances during the fieldwork. In my fieldwork, these challenges have created uncertainty and definite restraints that have then required negotiation (Menih, 2013).

Although it is recognised that the situations that can occur in the field can be unpredictable and cannot be fully foreseeable by either a researcher or the ethics’ committee, this is particularly evident in ethnography and compounded when researching a group that is considered vulnerable and under-researched. Furthermore, there is an added contribution of the above-noted unpredictability of social situations (and therefore also the participants) in the homelessness field. Consequently, during my fieldwork, certain questions arose and at the time, no answers were offered. Due to this, I experienced some uncertainty and at times, needed to improvise. Strauss and Corbin (1998) point out that when the nature of research is sensitive and a grounded approach is taken, the researcher has to sometimes improvise when collecting data.

For example, in the actual field, I had to improvise a great deal in regards to informed consent. This was mainly because on meeting homeless women for the first time, it was sometimes difficult to determine their age and whether they were suffering from mental health issues. To provide an example, I was having an informal conversation with a woman whom I believed to be under the influence of substances. Although she agreed to participate in the study, which meant the next step was gaining informed consent, as per the ethical guidelines, I was not approved to undertake interviews with women who were under the influence. Thus I decided to wait until the next day. However, I did not see her for a few weeks and by the time I saw her in public again, she had forgotten about me and my research. Furthermore, she had changed her mind in regards to participating in an interview. I felt disappointed for losing an interview; nevertheless the participant’s ability to provide informed consent is a very significant part of the research. My difficulties around informed consent in the field demonstrate that knowing whether someone, who is considered to be vulnerable, can give consent or not is not always as clear and straightforward as it seems in an ethics’ application. Miller and Boulton (2007) and Murphy and Dingwall (2007) discuss the
process of gaining informed consent and conclude the process should be more flexible with ethics committees trusting in the researcher’s abilities to make the appropriate decisions regarding consent, especially when it comes to unpredictable situations.

Another challenge I came across was when complying with the ethics committee’s requirement to ensure my safety in the field. The nature of my research suggested the essential role of gatekeepers, which was also a limitation when approaching some women. The gatekeepers ensured my safety in the field. However, being associated with them also made my fieldwork less fluid and flexible. I had to adjust my time in the field according to the individual gatekeeper’s work schedule and their work methods. In addition, my research in ‘actual’ public spaces was very limited because of this safety clause.

In the field, I noticed that the majority of homeless women entirely trusted people working at the agencies and service providers where I carried out my observations. On the one hand, women talked to me freely, without any concerns about the presence of the gatekeeper and trust was eventually established. On the other hand, some women viewed these agencies as authorities or in a negative way (as indicated in previous research by Hoffman & Coffey, 2008), which meant they did not want to talk to me and did not trust me. For example, one woman had recently gone through a drawn out custody dispute with her abusive ex-partner. On the day I was scheduled to undertake an interview with her, she learned that her ex-partner had received full custody of their daughter. She came to me and said: “I do not want to talk to the government!” I tried to explain that my role was separate to the service providers, however her mind was set.

Knowledge on homeless women is limited and under-researched, thus carrying out fieldwork in this area can be unpredictable. As already indicated, homeless women are also considered a vulnerable population with complex needs. Due to this, ethics’ committees usually ‘overprotect’ the researcher, which can affect the quality of data collected in the public space (Martin & Dingwall, 2007). Still, when undertaking research with vulnerable populations, dangerous situations are considered to be a part of
it (Lee, 1995). Moreover, these potential dangerous situations can be considered part of such fieldwork (Israel, 2004).

Another instance where there was some ambiguity whether the ethical process was properly followed was when I witnessed illegal activity. To provide an example, one day I spent few hours in the park with a group of homeless people, both men and women were present. One of the homeless women took me there to sit with the group and observe their daily routine. When we sat down, one of the guys pulled out a bottle of alcohol and poured it into plastic bottles to disguise their drinking. Although I am aware drinking in a public space in Australia is illegal, I felt I could not really say anything, as I wanted to observe their daily activity. I noticed that once they realised I did not mind their behaviour, they invited me to have a drink, consequently demonstrating their acceptance of my presence (Marx, 2012).

Although I have never participated in any of these activities, I was a part of them as an observer. I never tried to conceal my identity to the research participants. I made my intentions clear from the beginning and made it apparent that it was important for them to proceed according to their usual daily routines, in spite my presence. Hamm and Ferrell (1998) explain that when researching populations that tend to be associated with illegal activity, researchers often go to spaces that can be uncomfortable at times. Arrigo (1998) emphasises that the most important part when researching a homeless population in public space, especially if deviance is present, all that matters are the words, the meanings, the interactions and the behaviours of participants.

Overall, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) note, when doing ethnographic research, it is always necessary to make compromises, which can create sometimes unavoidable emotional difficulties for the researcher. So, while ethical regulations are necessary, there might be a need for this process to be more flexible to avoid emotional difficulties and any other obstacles for the ethnographer (Katz, 2006; Dingwall, 2008). Hamm and Ferrell (1998) indicate that to fully engage in and undertake ethnographic research, the researcher needs to confront and negotiate certain challenges and dangers that shape the participants, the field and the overall study.
The researcher’s identity

A grounded theory approach suggests that a researcher’s reflexivity is an important part of the research (Birks & Mills, 2011). Further, Davies (2008) notes that due to the connectedness with the object of the research, a researcher’s reflexivity is a significant consideration. This is especially relevant to ethnographic research. Since the ethnographic work is primarily based on fieldwork experience (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), personal history related to the research area, disciplinary focus and broader socio-cultural circumstances have profound effects on the topics covered and people selected for study (Davies, 2008).

Due to the sensitive nature of this research, there is a need to recognise feminist reflections on the research process. Feminist scholars acknowledge the links between relationships and values (Morawski, 1994) and how these are situated in the context of class, ethnicity and sexuality (Collins, 1990; Hurd, 1998). Here, values and power relationships need to be examined and deconstructed (Collins, 1990; Morawski, 1994). Power dynamics tend to characterise feminist research (Letherby, 2003; Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2010) and as Bosworth, Hoyle and Madden Dempsey (2011) explain, this is especially important to consider when gaining access to participants. For their research, access was limited by professionals in the field, which in turn limited their goal of bringing vulnerable women’s voices to light. Providing a platform for women’s voices is a significant element of feminist research (Stanley & Wise, 1983).

Similar to the research undertaken by Bosworth and colleagues (2011), I had to overcome barriers. There were institutional requirements (e.g., ethical application, contact with gatekeepers) before undertaking fieldwork, and secondly, there were challenges in the field. To an extent, this limited the flexibility of the research and, more specifically, my access; before entering the field I felt the research was more about me than the participants. Moreover, once in the field, I felt that some of the women stayed silent instead of speaking up due to my association with the gatekeepers or when I asked
them to sign the informed consent. This is important to consider, as I am accountable for the interpretations of my fieldwork.

As I explained earlier in this Chapter, my role as a researcher involved detached observation and moderate participation. Since I had never worked with homeless people before, the first few weeks of observations can be characterised as nervous with some hesitations. This was softened by my gatekeepers, who not only provided me with an introduction to the field of homelessness, but were also very accepting of my presence and accommodating throughout my fieldwork. During my role as a detached observer, I physically positioned myself in distance. This limited me in overhearing some of the conversations, yet provided me with an opportunity to focus on behaviour and interactions only.

Once my role transitioned into moderate participant, I became more comfortable. This contributed to the development of relationships with homeless women I came into contact with (broadly) and my participants (more specifically). During my fieldwork, I never felt intrusive. I always made sure homeless women were aware of my presence and most of the women even expressed interest in my research. Still, in some instances I noticed the reluctance of participants to open up, which I contribute to three factors. First, by ‘exiting the field’ each day, my status as an outsider became obvious, second, my relationship with the gatekeepers was omnipresent and third, I felt that my research would benefit me more than the homeless women.

**Generalisibility**

There are various ongoing debates regarding qualitative (more specifically ethnographic) research and generalisibility. For example, Denzin and Lincoln (1995) argue that generalisations are not particularly desirable or suitable for qualitative research. Then again, Bryman (2004) notes that ethnographic research provides us with rich explanations that enable ‘transferability’ and consequently, the ability to generalise to theories on a broader scale. Similarly, Payne and Williams (2005) suggest that
Qualitative research can make generalisations; yet, these generalisations tend to differ from those made from a statistically representative sample.

Grounded theory consists of complex and systematic processes that are ‘unduly formalistic’ (Bailey, White & Pain, 1999, p. 173), yet there is also certain creativity present and vital, which points to critical thinking (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus as Baker, Wuest and Noerager Stern (1992, p. 1357) note, the researcher is “considered a social being who creates and recreates social processes”, which means the researcher will bring their own ideology to the research and consequently hold their own interpretations. This is an integral part of grounded theory and urges the researcher to recognise this so the reader is aware of the way the research was carried out and the situated knowledge production (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

At the beginning of this thesis I recognised my theoretical standpoint as coming from both critical criminology (feminism) and anthropological feminism. This standpoint guided my research, and more specifically, my fieldwork. By reviewing the literature, I also demonstrated a gender gap in understanding the experience of homelessness in Australia, which established the need for gendered consideration. Consequently, by being a woman myself, I could better understand specific issues that are grounded in a gendered context.

Birks and Mills (2011) explain that even though research with an interpretative component is not usually meant for generalisation, there tend to be specific questions and unique situations that cannot be fully addressed by the findings. The pertinent issue here is for a researcher to demonstrate that the undertaken study generated relevant and substantial knowledge. My purposive sample consisted of women who are homeless, older than 18 years, with no severe cognitive or mental impairment, and who had experienced, or are still experiencing, primary homelessness in Brisbane at some stage. However, this sample cannot be considered statistically representative of women who are considered primary homeless elsewhere (including Brisbane). This means empirical generalisations cannot be made. Nevertheless, based on the empirical material gathered
for this research and previous research on homelessness in Australia, some careful generalisations were made.
Chapter 4: ‘Becoming’ Homeless

This Chapter portrays the individual stories of struggle, complexity and disadvantage of homeless women in Brisbane. By acknowledging the differences between homeless men and women, and the lack of empirical knowledge regarding women’s experiences in the existing literature, this research explored women’s reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness. Moreover, early into the research process, the lack of cohesion on established definitions on homelessness was recognised, and thus, this research explored homeless women’s accounts of these definitions. By looking at the key themes that arose during the analysis, this Chapter considers homeless women’s stories grounded in their identity. There are four key themes: the reasons for homelessness, pathways into homelessness, meanings of homelessness, and women’s thoughts about the meaning of home.

Before considering the women’s stories, the distinction between reasons for homelessness, and pathways into, homelessness need to be understood. There are two acknowledged types of reasons for homelessness: structural and individual (Snow and Anderson, 1993; Main, 1998). Snow and Anderson (1993, p. 234) elaborate that structural factors “refer to social arrangements and trends that affect the probability that specific events or life trajectories will be experienced.” Further, they separate structural reasons into two forms of dislocation: residential and economic. These include “trends in unemployment and poverty, the housing market, the structure of the economy generally, and large-scale social policies” (Main, 1998, p. 41). These can place masses of individuals at risk of becoming homeless (Snow & Anderson, 1993). On the other hand, the individual reasons include “mental illness, alcoholism, substance abuse, and lack of work ethic” (Main, 1998, p. 41). These personal factors are usually the main reasons that push people who are considered to be at risk over the edge and into a life of homelessness (Snow & Anderson, 1993). Wright (2009) emphasises that there are fewer proponents of structural accounts of homelessness than individual accounts. However, in the scholarly literature on homelessness, structural understandings of homelessness are more recognised than individualistic approaches (Main, 1998). Additionally, Main
(1998) explains that since homelessness is a social phenomenon, it is therefore necessarily ‘caused’ by both individual and structural factors. This means that no one factor, or set of factors, can entirely explain homelessness and that structural and individual reasons overlap.

The reasons for, and the effects of, homelessness are different for each individual. They are based on an individual’s biographical characteristics. How an individual responds to, and experiences, homelessness can only be examined when looking at personal stories. The relationship between an individual’s biography and homelessness experience can provide an understanding of the pathway into homelessness, which is pertinent when creating, or improving, intervention and support mechanisms (Johnson, Gronda & Coutts, 2008). The way homelessness occurs is a process and is referred to as a pathway into homelessness (Johnson et al, 2008). This process is a transition that is different for each individual. This transition can affect anyone, regardless of his or her age, sex, class, or cultural background (FaHCSIA, 2008). Based on these various characteristics and either individual or structural reasons, a homeless person reacts to such situations, which determines their pathway into, and experience of, homelessness (Snow & Anderson, 1993; Chamberlain & Mackenzie, 2003). This means the reason for homelessness seems to directly impact on the pathway into homelessness and while these pathways might have some commonalities across the homeless population, each person experiences this transition differently.

Once in contact with homelessness, the way people adapt to the change (either rapidly or over a longer period of time) determines whether a person becomes cemented in homelessness or transitions out. This also impacts on the way a person understands homelessness. Neil and Fopp (1994) suggest that homelessness implies a great deal more than ‘houselessness’ (connected with the concept of home). Broadly, homelessness can be defined as encompassing all the attributes that are considered to make a shelter a ‘home’, or narrowly, based on specification of the minimum conditions necessary for a shelter to be considered a ‘home’ (Neil & Fopp, 1994).
This study focused on adult women, who are or were sleeping rough in the streets of Brisbane. Based on their reasons and biographical characteristics, each woman experienced a different pathway (transition) into homelessness. Their stories demonstrated complexity in terms of how their homelessness occurred and what exactly contributed towards their homelessness. Due to this, the first section on reasons and pathways demonstrates it is hard to determine only one factor as directly responsible for homelessness for women. The reasons that women identified tended to impact on them both directly and indirectly. Further, these factors influenced their pathway into homelessness and are very different for each woman. Thus, this section explores the individual stories of women’s understandings of their reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness. The last two sections of this Chapter explore the way homeless women define homelessness and consequently home; these contest current definitions.

**Reasons for, and Pathways into, Homelessness**

This section encompasses two themes that emerged from women’s accounts: reasons and pathways. The reasons for homelessness described in this section tended to be of an individual nature and did not necessarily impact on the women’s homelessness directly. In most cases, these reasons led to other problems and consequently impacted on their transition, or pathway, into homelessness.

Through the interviews and informal conversations, some of the homeless women revealed physical abuse they endured at home and how this directly or indirectly led to their homelessness. In their own words, the stories of violence and homelessness depict a picture of disadvantage, struggle and challenge. For Barb, a 20 year old woman, the physical abuse started during her teenage years. The abuse was ongoing and led directly to her homelessness. When I asked Barb to tell me what led to her homelessness, she remembered exactly which specific ‘beating’ led to her first instance of homelessness:

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61 Physical abuse includes direct assaults on the body, the use of weapons, driving dangerously, abusing pets in front of family members, destroying property, assaulting children, sleep deprivation and locking the victim out of the house/apartment (Tually, et al., 2008).
Um, it started when I was sixteen years old and I was the youngest of seven kids. My parents were quite abusive and stuff. And, um, I was quite malnutrition [sic] and sick all the time so I missed out on a lot of school. And, um, every day when it was just my mum and I at home, everyone else was off at school or work, if she got annoyed at something or slightly frustrated or whatever, she’d beat me up. And throw me down the stairs and strangle me and hit me and shit. Just belt me up. But, um, I was also quite clumsy when I was little. Always tripping over, falling off and over and everything so I was covered in bruises. So that was my excuse at school, that I was clumsy. And, um, about a week before I turned seventeen, my mum started laying into me, just belting me up. And, um, I just turned around and told her eventually that I didn’t like the way that she was treating me and just stop. And she threatened with as many things as she could. She belted me up, she punched me in the face, just everything. And, um, she couldn’t get a power trip out of me ‘cause nothing was working, not the threats or anything, so, um, she kicked me out on the street. So I lost my enrolment at school. I lost all of my friends. I lost my family. Um, I lost my job. I just lost everything, um, and I’d just re-enrolled, um, at the Secondary College and I was going there. And none of the teachers knew that I was homeless. (Barb)

For Barb, homelessness occurred overnight. Even though she experienced ongoing physical abuse through the years, her transition into homelessness happened rapidly. For Barb, the abuse was the direct factor that contributed to her homelessness and in her words there was one specific event that led directly to her leaving home. I asked Barb why she waited for so long before leaving. In her words she tried to justify her victimisation:

I was just around all the time and, um, and I wouldn’t fight back and couldn’t walk away. If I walked away I would just get followed and flogged even harder so I sort of had to stay there and cop it. (Barb)

Barb further explained that she was the youngest in her family and in her opinion she was the main target of beatings due to her young age and her small physique. When verbally arguing with her sisters and brothers, her parents never stepped in. Moreover, Barb recalled an event where the whole family completely ignored her getting physically assaulted:

…when my sister bashed me up, um, Jane62, my mum just went to go do the dishes and Jim63, my dad, um, he just stood there about two metres away and just watched her bash me up. And the rest of the kids just kept eating their dinner and then fucked off to their rooms. So… she came after me and tried to attack me again. Um, when I finally got up to my room and I tried to close the door and hold it against her, but she was a lot stronger than me ‘cause she was always in fights with my parents so she… and she was

62 This is a pseudonym.
63 This is a pseudonym.
a dancer since she was really little so had a lot of strength. And, um, yeah, she tried to attack me again and dug her nails into my neck and it started bleeding and stuff. (Barb)

Barb’s story of her experience of physical violence at home depicts a picture of how physical abuse directly led to her homelessness. Even though there was one particular event of abuse, which at one point became too unbearable for her and led to her homelessness, this was an ongoing situation. Unlike Barb, Lisa told the story of violence that indirectly impacted on her primary homelessness. Now in her mid-sixties, Lisa explained she migrated to Australia from New Zealand with her family when she was in her late twenties. She pointed out that first her husband travelled to Australia with their young children. Lisa was hesitant to move from her homeland, however her husband’s power and control showed when he demanded that she follow him. Lisa remembered: “He wanted me to come over, so I came over. I think he was having ... problem[s], a hard time with the children.”

Lisa believed her husband was controlling and also physically abusive. Johnson (2006) explains control tactics, such as the reference to children, can be quite common in domestic violence. With their move to Australia, Lisa hoped things would change for the better. Yet, as she explained: “So I stayed here [in the relationship] for a little while and then he'd never changed.” She continued:

Yeah, because he... yeah, yeah, ‘cause he was bashing me. I've already had given the... you know [referring to time she gave him to change for the better], when we came over, I thought we were going to, he was going to change. But he was still doing the same thing. And my daughter's kids seen it: “Mum, is he still hitting you?” Yeah. (Lisa)

Due to the ongoing abuse, she reached out to her extended relatives: “I was li... living with ‘rellies' then. Um, I think four and a half years, then I got my place, my first place, yeah.” After many years of experiencing secondary homelessness, she finally moved on her own. While it seemed her life had changed for the better, she got evicted. Eviction left Lisa without a roof over her head, but she quickly found a place to stay: “I was staying with my son for a while, then he was getting a bit, you know, lippy64 and I thought uh, no, I'm going.” At that point, her other children offered her a place to stay,

64 “Lippy” in this context refers to being vocally disrespectful.
yet Lisa wanted more independence. These events eventually led to Lisa’s primary homelessness. She looked back at that crucial point in her life and remembered:

Uh, just by losing my other unit and then I ended up on the street. I had parents... um, my children asking me to go and live with them, but that's not what I wanted. I wanted a place of my own, you know, where they can come to me instead of me going to them all the time and I felt as if I might be a burden to them. And when I said that to them, they... they said, 'No, you're not a burden to us. You help us a lot with the children', you know. I said, ‘No, I need my own space’. You know, it's easy for them to say for me to go and stay with them, but then they could, um, kick me out, you know, things because, yeah. Or they may not have, but that's how I felt and when they kick... well, when the father can do it, so can the children. Because they have got his genes, you know. Yeah, um… (Lisa)

In Lisa’s belief, her husband’s violent actions would always be a part of her life, due to their children. For Lisa, primary homelessness occurred as a consequence of personal and structural factors. With a violent past and rental changes which eventually led to eviction, Lisa’s pathway into primary homelessness occurred over a few years.

While Barb and Lisa discussed physical violence as a direct or indirect reason for homelessness, other women experienced physical and sexual abuse. For instance, Niki, a woman in her early forties discussed her journey into homelessness as being impacted by sexual abuse (which occurred during her childhood) and physical abuse (which occurred during her adulthood). When she was asked to state how her homelessness occurred, she said it all started with her parents winning lotto. She then went on to say that this enabled her mother to fly her grandfather from Scotland to Australia to stay with them. Niki’s grandfather was actually the one who was sexually abusing her and no one in the family knew about the abuse:

...he would be waiting for me and he’d molest me when I got home, but some days I could get away from him by being really ... I learned how to be really quiet and stay on his blind side, and hide from him and he used to make me pretend that I was my dead grandmother who I was really close to, while he's doing his business. And I managed to keep it a secret from my brother, and my mother, and my fat... And eventually he went back to Scotland to die and it all stopped. And I never told anybody and my parents were taking me to psychologists because they knew something was wrong, but I wouldn’t say anything, and that was about when I was nine. (Niki)

According to Tually, et al. (2008), sexual abuse is any form of forced sex or sexual degradation, for example, sexual activity without consent, causing pain during this activity, or even assaulting genitals, coercive sex without protection, forcing the victim to perform sexual acts and criticising or using sexually degrading insults.
Niki was, and still is, keeping the abuse secret from her family. After her grandfather moved back to Scotland, she returned to normalcy or as she said: “And then I went and lived this whole normal life.” She was in a relationship and gave birth to her daughter. Yet, this relationship was not without obstacles. As Niki explains: “And yeah sure enough the beating started and he was a really big man, he was like six foot three and he was beating me up but and I was black and blue…” Eventually the relationship broke down and she moved in with her parents for additional support. However, it all came crashing down when in her late twenties she overheard her mother saying she was sexually abused by her father (Niki’s grandfather). At that point, Niki left her parents’ home, as she felt betrayed. She remembered this crucial moment:

And then my world came crashing down because my mother and my auntie were crying and consoling each other over the fact that they had been molested by their father. So I couldn’t believe that my mother would bring him out to live with us and go to work every day and leave me with him, so I blamed her and then within four months I was smoking marijuana and then heroin, which I did solid for seven years and… so that’s when it all came crashing down, until this day they don’t know, they don’t know, still and… (Niki)

As a coping mechanism, Niki said she started using drugs. She then became dependant on drugs and to support her habit, she became involved in relationships that led to prostitution. During this time, she lost the custody of her daughter and basically lived at different people’s places or slept on the streets. These actions demonstrate the chaotic life she lived at that time. Niki’s drug habit led her to one of the main drug dealers (John66) in Brisbane, for whom she also started dealing.

… with drugs comes prostitution… Well it was a boyfriend that put me on the streets, first of all it was agency work [referring to sex work], and he had two kids and his wife to the two kids was a prostitute and a girlfriend he had before me was a prostitute. And then it was like well I’m not going out to do crime, the only way we are going to get money, is if you go and work… and at this stage I was living day to day you know, you know having first of all to work to pay for the hotel and then work to pay for drugs.

And I remember the first time I scored for him for the day it [was] only a hundred dollars and I knew he lied to me and he said he threw a lot of money at me and said here, “You don’t have to go out and do any errands or anything if you stay the night with me.” And he didn’t expect anything he just wanted to be with me because he had a little obsession going. So I continued dealing with him for only a short time… (Niki)

66 This is a pseudonym.
As Niki said: “So then I’d started to get my stuff together and I ended up with a place in Hill End, a really nice house, not a really big [drug] habit even when I was working, my habit wasn’t that big.” At that time she exited primary homelessness and regained control of her life, however this did not last long. Niki spoke of being kidnapped a while later by the drug dealer (John) she used to work with. After this, her life became particularly chaotic. From the day she was kidnapped onwards, her drug habit became worse and she was in and out of homelessness for the next few years:

And they grabbed me and said, “Grab what’s just the most important thing is to you.” You know, I didn’t know what was going on and then they tied me up and they put me in the back of the car. And so we are driving down Boundary Street in West End, John’s rang them up and said, “How is everything going?” And I’m like screaming my head off. And he said, “I don’t want her hurt, but shut her up”, you know. And the next morning I’m like, “Oh well, I better get going now” and that. He said, “No you don’t understand, you live here now.” I said, “What do you mean I live here?” He said, “You live here.” So I proceeded for nineteen days, just nothing but trying to escape… And all the while you know as much drugs as I wanted… But it was nineteen days and then my habit had gone from a hundred dollars to two thousand dollars a day in nineteen days. And so I never forget that after nineteen days, I couldn’t escape because I couldn’t support a habit like that. (Niki)

While Niki’s first contact with primary homelessness occurred rapidly, her second contact with primary homelessness occurred in a different way and lasted for about eleven years. She calculated her time in and out of homelessness by looking at the kidnapper’s age: “He was fifty eight and he died at sixty nine so eleven, twelve years ago…” She explained that she slept on the streets every time she escaped, however due to the drug habit and the attachment she developed, she tended to return to her kidnapper or he found her, as she said: “And it was just easier to stay with him and it wasn’t really until he died a month ago that I really got away from him.”

For Niki, her actual transition into homelessness started in her mid-twenties when she started using drugs, which then led into prostitution, however Niki considered her sexual abuse in her childhood as a contributing factor to her homelessness. She indicated this at the very beginning of the interview when she answered the question on becoming homelessness with her memory of sexual abuse. Unlike Niki, Jade experienced sexual abuse in her adulthood. In addition, Jade referred to sexual abuse as
the direct reason for her homelessness. Jade is an Aboriginal homeless woman in her early-forties. Over the informal conversation with her, she revealed that in the past few years she had experienced domestic abuse (not only sexual, but also physical):

Once, my stepfather tied my mother to a chair… then raped me in front of her… he wanted her to watch. She never did anything because she was afraid… that he would leave her. I never did anything ’cause he had (still does) legal custody of my son and threatened me that if I tell anyone I would never see him again… (Part of informal conversation with Jade)

Jade’s stepfather was also continuously making inappropriate comments to Jade’s son: “...he was always saying I’m a slut in front of my boy.” With the use of negative connotations towards Jade, her stepfather discredited her as a mother and demonstrated his dominance. This eventually led to Jade’s son’s subsequent rejection of her as a mother. Jade explained: “...he was becoming just like him… he started calling me all these nasty names...”

Jade explained that when she left her mother’s place, she got involved in a relationship, which was similar to her situation at home. The man she became financially dependent on was also sexually abusing her. Jade remembered one situation: “He had me locked up, it was like a cage… and then he just had his way with me, whenever...” Understandably, Jade did not want to go into graphic detail regarding her sexual abuse. She indicated that when she finally cultivated enough courage, she left her partner and escaped to the streets. For Jade, the transition into primary homelessness occurred rapidly when she left her abusive partner.

For Mary, now in her sixties, the main explanation for her homelessness is an argument she had with her daughter: “I became homeless because I had a fight with my children, my daughter especially”, yet she also indicated that violence in her childhood eventually influenced her decisions in her adulthood that in turn impacted on her transition into homelessness. She explained:

The thing is, that that’s the reason why I became homeless. Because I took something out of context. I’ve been living with my daughter now for over eleven years. Uh, before that I was living by myself in a… in a unit over at Kedron, and before that, well, let’s just say I used to move around a lot. And that’s because of my upbringing, mainly, and probably because of my ex-husband. Um, see, most of my life, from the beginning. I used to live with my family down in Sydney. And I was either taken off them, or my mother got sick and put me into a home, I can’t... I don’t know, ’cause I don’t
remember. But I remember being with my parents for... at the age of six. After that, I
don’t remember anything because of an accident I had. But also there... in my memory
there is, like, pictures of me getting hit physically, of getting abused mentally, and
getting abused sexually. So I’d say that most of my life was like that. Because my father
was brought up to believe that that’s how you raise children from his father, and his
father. So he wouldn’t have known it... I know that’s no excuse. But when you’re
brought up to believe only one way to bring up children, you care... you tend to believe
that that’s the right way. (Mary)

For Mary, the abuse she endured in her childhood was directly linked to
emotional abuse, which led her to distance herself from the family: “I still don’t talk to
my parents. I can talk to my father, even though he’s bashed me, sexually abused me,
he’s not the one that ran me down. My mum did.” Mary continued:

My… my dad… my dad physically and sexually abused me. My mother was the one
that did the mental damage…She would have to know? She was married to my… to my
dad. If she didn’t know, she was either ignoring it or turning a blind eye. (Mary)

For Mary, it was not only the abuse; it was the lack of emotional support at
home that affected her life. In her opinion, her abusive father and the lack of maternal
love shaped her emotional state:

No, they... no, having a loving relationship between your parents first. You know, it
was something I have never done. Look, there's people out there, their parents love
them. They'll do anything for them, you know. They will teach them the facts of life,
you know, they will be there for them, right, but there's a lot of parents like mine that
didn't, you know. They don't say that they love you, or if they do, it's only words. They,
you know, these days, you will see, you know, people hugging their kids and kissing
them and all that stuff. I never knew what it was like to be hugged. I never knew what it
was like to really be loved because they say… would say they loved me and then, you
know, my dad would say he loved me, but then bash me. Sort of, that's not love, you
know, but to him, it was. Because, you know, his father did it and it was… it was
generational. (Mary)

Mary further referred to the physical abuse that occurred in her past as a contributing
factor for her mental health problems. She indicated the abuse led to her first brief
contact with homelessness in her teenage years:

I was put into a home because I was... I’m really uncontrollable, um, they also said that
I was, uh, what do you call... retarded. Now, to me, retarded means you’re slow, or
there was something mentally or physically wrong with you. I don’t know. I’m still yet
to find that out. At the age of sixteen I left the home [the institution], went home to my
parents. The same thing happened that happened all those years [ago]. The physical
abuse, if not anything else, and the yelling, and the screaming. My mum and dad used to

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yell and scream and rant and rave every... all the time. I remember that. I came home to
that at Christmas. And my dad got angry with me and smacked me. By the back of his
hand. But that was enough, that was the straw that broke the camel’s back. I ran away
from home at the age of sixteen... So I got up onto the Milperra highway and here I was
[hitch-] hiking. Not the safest thing to do back then. Still not safe now. But an off-duty
copper apparently picked me up, asked me where I was going, told him where I was
going, took me down to the Riverview Police Station down in Sydney. And then a
normal police officer said that they would take me back to my dad. Take me home. And
I sat in the corner like that, and I said, ‘You take me home’, in a very small voice, ‘And
I will kill my father, and I will kill my mother’. And I just stared at the police officer,
not moving my eyes, moving... and he went like that. And according to the
Riverview... the... the... the, um... the... it was... sorry, not the Riverview. But it
was a mental institution down in Sydney, that I went to. I’d had a mental breakdown
from all... probably all the physical abuse and everything else that was happening to me.
I spent four years in a place like that. (Mary)

For Mary, the combination of physical and sexual abuse resulted in mental
health problems, which subsequently contributed to homelessness. While Mary’s main
reason for homelessness was indirectly linked to the abuse, her abusive past was
directly linked to her emotional and mental health problems. These also impacted on her
relationship with her daughter, which eventually led to her homelessness. Similar to
Mary, in an interview with Amy, she pointed to her abusive past as a contributing factor
to her homelessness. Amy, now in her mid-thirties, has been in and out of homelessness
for around twenty years. She explained:

I had a bit of rough life when I was living in Casino at my father’s… father’s place after
my mum passed away, you know, in... I was molested at the age of ten, raped when I
was sixteen... I was on the streets when I was thirteen. (Amy)

While Amy never specifically said she suffers from mental illness, her case
worker explained to me that she does have mental health problems; it was not specified
what these problems are. All she said was, “I might not... not be able to read or write
properly, you know, um, but I all... got my education from the news, documentaries and
all that.” Amy explained that she lived with a foster family. She explained how she
ended up with her current legal guardian:

Um, I’m thirty-four now, um... My foster cousin took me and she cares for me and that.
They’re trying to ring me to tell and to go home to... but I don’t want to. I... I want to
see, um, to get somewhere in Brisbane. You know? (Amy)
Amy further clarified: “I know, I’ve got a foster cousin that lives in Morningside and that, but she’s not home and that, and... I just feel that, um, I just want to get out on... get out on my own and that.” Amy indicated she is continuously running away from her foster cousin’s place and sleeping on the streets. Similar to Lisa, Amy was looking for independence from the controlling environment established by her foster cousin. For Amy, a sexually abusive past played a role in her pathway into homelessness. While she never specified the exact reasons for homelessness, she did indicate that her past and her controlling foster cousin were partially responsible.

While Amy never specified she had mental illness, Pam pointed out her issues with schizophrenia at the very beginning of the interview. Pam is in her early forties. She explained that in the late 1990s, she started a TAFE course in Environmental Studies at the Sunshine Coast. However, for Pam the stress was too much and one time after her classes, her problems with mental health began. As she says: “I got back home and I'm... I had... a nervous breakdown.” She explained that she reached out to her parents, calling them few times a day and eventually returned home to her parents in Tasmania. Pam noted that she felt restless at home and wanted to go back to the Sunshine Coast, so her parents offered to help her out:

So, my parents said, ‘Look, um, we'll take you there, we'll make... we’ll take you halfway’. And didn’t… and they dumped me in the middle of nowhere [laughs]. They were a really… they were really a big help [making a sarcastic look]. And that's what the whole bloody problem was. They were being a really big help. And that's all they ever were for the last ten years, a real big help. (Pam)

Through Pam’s depiction of the event that led to her homelessness, she rolled her eyes and shrugged her shoulders indicating sarcasm when saying, ‘They were a really...they were really a big help’. For Pam, her mental illness contributed to her

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67 With the help of one of my gatekeepers and her own testimony, I learned that Pam is medicated through western medicine for schizophrenia.

68 TAFE refers to Technical and Further Education, which is the largest provider of vocational education and training in Australia.

69 The Sunshine Coast is an urban area in South East Queensland, north of the state capital of Brisbane on the Pacific Ocean coastline.
problematic relationship with her parents. Anderson and Rayens (2004) explain that emotional detachment can be directly linked to homelessness. As Pam pointed out:

> And that’s anytime I’d turn to them, or phone them up, you know, their idea was to take me home and deal with me there, and stop being such a public embarrassment and nuisance and a family problem. So I couldn't really get much sense out of them… (Pam)

According to Pam, her parents treated her as an ‘embarrassment’ and due to her poor mental state and dependency, she was in a fragile emotional state; this contributed to her transition into homelessness. Due to her dependency on the family, she reached out to her sister. However, this was not helpful as Pam’s sister had the same opinion of her as her parents: “And she starts threatening me, making fun of me and stuff.” Pam explained further: “…if I went back home to my parents, family and stuff, they... they've give me absolute hell for years over it, you know, absolute shame. How dare you make yourself homeless? You know?” Pam did not discuss her access to mental health services in detail. She very briefly mentioned that she tried to access counselling when she was homeless, however she experienced problems. One of the main problems she pointed out was a lack of knowledge on how these services operate. Pam explained: “And I try and get the file on my... the big file on mental illness when I was about twenty. And all my files, one great big closed book. I don't care, it's just how mental health works, right?”

The reasons for homelessness described by these women demonstrate more of an individual nature and these did not necessarily impact on their homelessness directly. The women’s stories indicate the chaotic nature of their childhood and adulthood, which impacted on their transition into homelessness. Consequently, for these women, it was not just one reason that contributed to their homelessness. The reasons women indicated were likely to be connected to other problems, which eventually contributed to their transition into homelessness. Here, it might be better articulated as contributing factors instead of reasons that led to homelessness.

The existing literature suggests that a high percentage of women who are homeless have had experiences of abuse, and thus this is considered a reason for
homelessness. These women’s stories illustrate that abuse definitely contributes to homelessness, yet, how it contributes has not been explored in detail. In line with other empirical material, my research demonstrates that abuse clearly impacts on women’s transition into homelessness directly or indirectly. However, the women in this research demonstrated that other individual problems from their past or present also impacted on their homelessness directly or indirectly. These problems, which women referred to as direct or indirect reasons, subsequently led to their pathways into homelessness.

For these women, their transition into homelessness occurred either rapidly or through a lengthier period of time. Some women struggled with secondary homelessness for a period of time and eventually transitioned into primary homelessness. For others, the transition into primary homelessness was rapid. Thus, when looking at the reasons for these women’s homelessness, it is not possible to determine only one that directly impacts on women’s homelessness. The same can be said for their pathway into homelessness. The main reasons for homelessness cannot always directly determine women’s pathway into homelessness. Yet, these reasons do play a crucial role, as combined with other social or personal circumstances these women experienced in their lives can consequently impact on their homelessness.

The Meaning of Homelessness

Tucker (1994) states that homelessness is a general state of having no home and no ability to fulfil oneself in one’s environment. This suggests that the meaning of homelessness is not only a lack of a permanent residence, it goes much deeper: “it is a state of lack of self-fulfilment, control of one’s physical environment, lack of emotional comfort, absence of intellectual stimuli, [a] state of utter social loneliness” (Tucker, 1994, p. 184). Crane (1999) explains that there is no universally accepted definition of homelessness and it is often defined differently by policy-makers, service providers, researchers, media reporters and the general public. This is clear within the Australian context, where the complexity of defining homelessness has resulted in various accepted definitions within different areas, such as service providers, the media, the
ABS, among other areas. This section presents the homeless women’s accounts around the idea of being homeless and their own definitions of homelessness.

When questioned whether she thinks she is homeless, Mary pointed to her heart and stated: "I’m homeless in here." She continued:

Alright? I mightn’t be homeless on the street, right? I’ve got a roof over my head, I’ve got bedding. I’ve got food. I’ve got security. But I’m still homeless in here [pointing to her heart]. I’m still homeless in here. I’m not... you know. I feel as if I’m out on the streets physically. Not physically, but mentally. Um, in heart-wise, I’m out on the streets. I’m still battling, right? Because of the problems I’ve been brought up with, because of my past, I have problems relating to people. Phys... emotionally and physically, in heart-wise, all right? So I’m like all the rest of the people on the street. In here, in mental wise, I am still homeless. Because, to me, I’m not whole. Because there’s a lot of... there’s… most of my life that... the dark’s there. But I’m in the light here. Half of me’s there, and half of me’s here. Huh? And that half, I want to bring into the light. I want to know about that half that I can’t… don’t know about. I wanna be able to answer myself so I am at peace at... with myself. So that I can say, ‘Yes I’m not homeless anymore’. But I can’t say that. (Mary)

For Mary, homelessness meant something emotional, something that is not a part of official definitions. According to her words, her past life experiences continue to impact on her emotional and mental state. Likewise, Barb’s definition of homelessness differs from the official definition:

Um, but homeless is reference to the physical structure of a house, so technically yes, um, I am still homeless. Because I don’t physically own a house. But if you refer to family as home, then none of us are homeless. But it… it doesn’t mean, it doesn’t mean that we don’t go without. We go without quite a lot. We live off the most simple things. And people look down on us because we go through shit with drugs, but they don’t realise how… they try and stop it. And the same with alcohol. But they don’t realise how much danger they are putting you in and how sick they are going to make you be by… by forcing you to come off drugs and alcohol cold turkey, like on the spot. (Barb)

By only looking at Mary’s and Barb’s accounts, the meaning of homelessness contrasts the ‘official’ definitions. The other women explained homelessness based on their experiences on the streets. These depictions tended to have negative connotations. For example, when I asked the question of what is homelessness in their understanding, they answered:

It’s, um, ‘neglect’ by the parents really, by parents and the state. But homelessness means is where women… just women and kids… just women actually that just get ‘neglected’ by their own family. (Val)
I was in DOCS\textsuperscript{70}, so I was being ward of the state and stuff like that. And to me, being on the streets, it’s just… feel… you feel hopeless, you feel like that you are low in gutter and stuff like that and when you cry out for help, being… and stuff like that. (Amy)

I just needed a home, that's all. I wanted a home. Oh, no home to go to. Um, you know, being kicked out, um, got nothing on you, you know, like clothes and that, things like that. And trying to help the other homeless people, whether they listen to you or what. Um, you got nothing to yourself, more or less. (Lisa)

While these women portrayed homelessness in a negative context, Sue explained homelessness in her youth in the context of home: “I don’t think of streets as home... I never did... when [I was] young it was fun to be free from parents.” For Sue, now in her early-thirties, homelessness has been her way of living for the past twenty years. As she explained, in the beginning it was fun and it gave her sense of freedom. This notion of homelessness was similar to Deb’s explanation of homelessness:

…and, you know, it’s almost got to stage where I think I’m really used to being homeless and almost like the freedom. Because, you know, when I'm in my squat, which I’ve had on and off for a couple of years now, no one’s telling me what to do. No one’s bossing me around, I’m my own boss, I’m totally private where I am. (Deb)

Homelessness in the context of an emotional state, lack of family, sense of freedom and as a ‘shocking thing’, is very different to what an official definition considers as homelessness. These various testimonies confirm the complexity of defining homelessness. Throughout the interviews and informal conversations there were only two women who explained homelessness within the context of current categories of homelessness. For Hope, it was her case worker who first pointed it out for her: “Well it wasn’t until Jack\textsuperscript{71} pointed it out. Jack said, ‘Look Hope, you... you’re basically homeless’. And I realised that.” Hope explained that at that point she realised she was experiencing secondary homelessness. Similarly, for Pam it was after she was placed into a boarding house by her case worker:

I’m probably [in the] secondary homelessness category in… under Queensland Government legislation. Meaning that I'm in a boarding house, not in the street. Sorry, I

\textsuperscript{70} DOCS: Department of Community Services (Queensland).

\textsuperscript{71} Jack is a pseudonym.
Here, Pam articulated the ‘official’ classification of homelessness, yet she does not actually think of herself accordingly. For Pam, homelessness is a negative experience:

I think it [homelessness] saved my life. I didn’t have any idea of [the] fucking nauseating reality, to start with, maybe with some saving grace. Uh, maybe I got a… maybe I kept a sense of humour over it. Maybe it is a good thing. If you can get through it, you can get through. It doesn’t make you any worse of a person, it’s just in it, you know? A shocking thing. Living my life, no I’m not dream of it, wouldn’t even dream of it, no. Sort of life somewhere out there in the wilderness with it, I suppose. You know? Become a hippie for choice, I don’t know. Yeah. Yeah… Oh disgusting, it’s awful, awful, don’t you agree? All those poor people. You know? Why does God let this happen? It’s a… they deserve to be. You know? Yeah. God is the righteousness, you know, the righteous? Well they put themselves there, though, didn’t they? (Pam)

Even though Pam first pointed to the experience as being her ‘saving grace’, she then continued by explaining the ‘shocking’ nature of homelessness that she experienced. Pam also began to question the status of homelessness for other people in the context of her beliefs.

The review of the literature indicates that accepted definitions and classifications of homelessness focus mainly on a physical structure providing shelter or economic circumstances. In contrast, women’s stories in this research suggest a more in-depth notion of homelessness grounded in their experiences. For most women, the idea of homelessness relates to their emotional, mental and physical levels of well-being within a context of a traditional notion of home and family. Further, while women who were actively involved with homelessness services explained their homelessness in the context of official definitions, they did not necessarily identify themselves accordingly.

The Meaning of Home

The fieldwork provided a crucial understanding of the importance and meaning of ‘home’. Neil and Fopp (1994, pp. 4 - 5) note that in the process of defining the attributes denoted by the concept of ‘home’, different characteristics have emerged. These include security of tenure, security for each member of the household against
internal and external threats, decent standards, affordability, social relations, privacy, control and autonomy, identity, accessibility, compatibility and appropriateness. These attributes are cross-cut by such factors as a ‘gender’, ‘class’, cultural background and age, among others. As a result, what is considered home for one individual may not be home for another; it is therefore very difficult to define what home is (Watson & Austerberry, 1986). Wardhaugh (1999) explains that for society and individuals, ‘home’ represent values and aspirations that societies hold, including those related to ‘gender’, ‘class’, culture and stage of life-cycle. Or as Mallett (2004, p. 84) indicates, the definition of home “…depends upon ‘specification of locus and extent’ and the broader historical and social context.”

This section demonstrates that the women’s accounts of home tend to be complex and that they vary based on the above-mentioned factors. Through the interviews and informal conversations, it became evident that the women portray meanings of home within four typologies: (1) past home based on positive experience, (2) past home based on negative experience, (3) current home and (4) ideal home. These are grounded in the stories of the homeless women and will be exemplified throughout this section.

Hope is in her late-forties and, at the time of the interview, had just recently moved into a unit. From her early thirties until a few years ago, she was in a relationship that eventually impacted on her homelessness. For Hope, home “…is somewhere you, it’s yours, you know, where you can have friends around and entertain people.” For Hope, social relationships seem to be a big part of her life and she associates home with these interactions. Watson (1984, p. 60) explains, that for some “…a ‘home’ implies a set of social relations, or a set of activities within a physical structure, whereas a ‘house’ does not.” By relating home to ‘entertaining people’, Hope is also pointing out something that was missing during her homelessness. Whether she slept on the streets, at a friend’s places or in a boarding house, she could never entertain people at her ‘own’ place. Hope did not specifically say that ‘entertaining people’ was something she used to do, instead she refers to this within the category of an ideal home.
Similar to Hope, Niki explained her definition of home in relation to what was missing on the streets. Niki is in her early forties and has been experiencing homelessness for years. Recently, she moved into a unit with her partner John. She met him whilst on the streets. When asked about the meaning of home, Niki said, “Yes, and my idea, yeah, is like a home-cooked meal and sitting down in front of the TV [pointing to the kitchen and her small TV]...” The reason why Niki associates home with these activities is due to her experiences on the street. Darke (1994) explains that people tend to relate home to positive feelings such as relaxation and loving relationships. Niki pointed out that during her homelessness, she never ate home-cooked meals. She explained: “But John always made sure, you know, we had food, but never like, my idea of a... is a home-cooked meal. Yeah. John always made sure we had something to eat, but they were never home-cooked meals.” In this context Niki is talking about the category of a current home.

Like Niki, Val was recently housed as well. She is in her mid-thirties and has been experiencing homelessness since she was a child. While younger, Val moved around Australia, recently, she ‘settled’ on the streets of Brisbane. When asked about what home should be, Val replied:

It should be a... I’m just thankful that I’ve got a roof over my head at the moment. And... and I just thank him that I can put food on the table, doesn’t matter if it’s rice, doesn’t matter if it’s noodles. I can make things out of... you’ve got... you say you’ve got a new bag of sausages. Um, fry the sausages, cut them up, then I put... then I... then I boil the two-minute noodles, cut them up. Boil... cut your tomatoes, your onion, mix them with the sausages while they’re steaming through. (Val)

For Val, home is a place where she can cook and then sit down at the table and eat the cooked food. Here, food is considered an emotive issue. Home also portrays practical and psychological elements of the way people live or at least expect to live (Darke, 1994). This means Val defines her home in the context of traditional expectation, such as cooking. For Val, her explanation of home is within the category of current home. Likewise, Mary, now in her sixties who was recently housed in a boarding house, compared the traditional home activities such as cooking and cleaning and overall comfort to her idea of home:

Now home is not home home, but it's home. You know, the place where I'm living is still... I'm in a little room, I can cook and clean, I've got a roof over my head, I'm warm.
If I get cold... you know, if I get too hot, I have got the fan on, but I've still got people around me that will talk. That's home. It's not home home, but it's still home. You know, I'm comfortable where I am. Home home to me was, well, my grandmother. You know, being able to walk in there, have that love, um, you know. Know I had a roof over my head, food on the table, get up in the morning, being able to look and clean after myself and, you know. Knowing that I would get hugged and still look after the chickens. That was home home. (Mary)

In the first instance Mary referred to her ideal home as ‘home home’ and related to her emotional attachment with her grandmother. Watson (1984) explains that the home as a social concept is strongly linked with the idea of family. There are certain images associated with the word home, such as comfort, personal warmth, stability and security, “it carries a meaning beyond the simple notion of shelter” (Watson, 1984, p. 60). Other research literature depicts home as emotionally connected to family, for example, encompassing memories of family (Bogac, 2009; Mallet, 2004; Oakley, 1976). For Mary, it was social relationships and a sense of ‘place’. Mary also associated her current living situation with her ideal home and through the comparison established that even though she is comfortable and it is a home, it is not a ‘home home’. A person’s home may be distinctive enough to reveal that person’s identity and it is most commonly marked by emotional attachment to either a place or a person (Tucker, 1994). Unlike the double emphasis on home associated with her grandmother, she referred to her current accommodation as ‘home’. In this context, Mary referred to ‘home home’, which encompasses a sense of belonging and positive social relationships and as such, within the category of past home based on positive experience; and ‘home’, which encompass her situation at the moment as within the category of her current home.

Mary’s notion of home in the context of emotional attachment to an important family member is also evident in Lisa’s definition of home. Lisa, now in her late sixties, has only recently exited homelessness. When asked about the idea of home, Lisa replied:

Home should be loving your children, you know, and handle... handle... handle the children. Handle the children, you know. Um, what's she talking about? Yeah, handle the children, you know. Um, they should be looked after. Well, I know that much 'cause I know when, um, I was young, I used to look after my sisters... brothers and sisters, yeah. (Lisa)
For Lisa, her reference to children was directly linked to her experience of raising her children. In this context, Lisa’s notion of home encompasses positive social relationships and is therefore within the category of *past home based on positive experience*. Moreover, Lisa’s meaning of home is very much grounded in the traditional sense of a home. Traditional concepts of home depict a woman who is cooking, cleaning, entertaining people, taking care of children and have a loving family (Oakley, 1974). These notions show that for some homeless women, there is meaning of home not only in the traditional sense, but also in the context of what was missing on the streets.

While these women, who have all recently exited primary homelessness, consider home in a more traditional sense, Barb, who is in her early twenties and is still experiencing homelessness, explains her meaning of home quite differently. She has been homelessness since she was a teenager. When Barb was asked a question about the meaning of home for her, she replied:

> I don’t know. Well, most of us don’t really have families or anything but when we’ve got a partner or a kid, that’s… that’s your home. Like the street is our home. It’s everything that we known and, um, it brings us up a completely different way. Um, yes because, well, your family is who you chose to be your family. Just because you are blood related to someone, it doesn’t make them family per se. So when you’ve chosen your family and they’re people are actually going to stick by you, that’s where your home is, is within the safe boundaries within that small family with those people. Because they will protect you, you protect them. You have always got each other’s backs, keeping each other out of trouble and shit. (Barb)

Barb seems to consider her current situation of living as home. Moreover, she relates her current situation to the notion of family. In this context, Barb probably identifies certain values and norms with this family. Yet, Barb’s idea of family might not be the traditional one. For her, ‘the street’ is in the role of a parent. In this context, although somewhat unconventional, positive social relationships constitute as within the category of *current home*.

Similar to Barb, Sue became homeless at a very young age. She also grew up on the streets. Now in her mid-thirties, she is determined to exit the streets. Sue explained:

> “I don’t think of streets as home... I never did... when [I was] young it was fun to be
free from parents.” For Sue, who has spent years on the streets, public space was never considered her home. She never considered the streets in the context of social relationships. On the contrary, as she explained, she wanted to be free from these. For Sue, the street was freedom, to maintain her agency instead of thinking of home as social relationships or any past experience. In this context, the meaning of home encompasses autonomy of agency and is identified as within the category current home.

Feeling free was familiar to Deb, who indicated: “I like the freedom of not having to have domestic problems with another person which often happens, even in the best of situations.” Deb, now in her early forties, has been experiencing homelessness for over twenty years. She is still homeless and even though she identifies home as the opposite to freedom, the security of having a place to herself became important to her; she explained her ideal home:

Well, I mean, it would be… ideally it would be a place where people just couldn’t tell you to get out ever. It would be a place where, you know, you’d be welcome and it’d be your own place. It’s what I see as a home. So there’d be no, like, oh you’ve got to leave now or it’s time to move on. (Deb)

For Deb, it is evident that her ideal home is in the context of security. Tomas and Dittmar (1995) explain that home tends to be seen as a place of privacy and security and it holds some significance and meaning for a person. The security in this context does not mean feeling safe, but it refers to security in managing a home. The security Deb referred to is a place that is hers; a place she cannot be evicted from.

Similar to Deb, Mary explains the notion of security in the context of home. She is hoping to leave the boarding house and get a place of her own. She wants to get a place that would ensure her security:

When I get to the next place, I want to stay there and I want to put roots down, you know. I want to stay there until I get too old, or die there, you know. That is what I'm looking for. That is my security, you know, to be able not to be able to ever, ever move again, you know. (Mary)

Mary, like Deb, pointed out the negative associations with ‘moving’, however this was in the context of being evicted and of never having to move again. This state of transiency is in direct opposition to the security women are seen to experience...
traditionally. Being the keepers of the home in a traditional sense (Oakley, 1974), the security of having and managing home seems to be important to these homeless women; this can also be considered in the context of an ideal home. The security of home these women relate to is again contrary to what is available in public space. Traditionally, women are seen to be the keepers of the home. Thus, knowing the place a person lives tends to have significant meaning to the women I spoke to. However, this does not necessarily relate to the ownership, but to the control, of their living situation.

Pam, now in her forties, currently lives in a boarding house. After living on the streets for almost a year, she found accommodation in a boarding house. She has been living there for few years now and even though she gained a sense of security, she still points out there are some rules attached to that place, which can be limiting. So, when asked about the idea of home, Pam explained:

You have a key to your own room, you have your own bed, you have your own linen and blanket, and you can come and be as you want, or you don't have to at all. You’ll just be there, and no one can toss you out, you pay the rent. And that’s hard. (Pam)

For Pam, like for Deb, the notion of potentially being evicted indicates a lack of security in accommodation. Further, her discussion of rent seemed to relate to the concept of control. Consequently, the notion of having your ‘own place’ or having ‘a key’ indicates that these women not only desire the security of a home, but also privacy. In this context, these concepts of security and privacy refer to the category of an ideal home.

Privacy is something a person cannot really have in a public space. The desire of privacy for homeless women seems to come from their experience of life in public space. For example, Niki explains that a home is “somewhere where nobody knows where I am.” Her notion of ‘being hidden’ points to the importance of privacy and her past negative experiences on the streets. In this context, home is considered within the category of an ideal home, yet the meaning is constructed on the idea of a past home based on negative experience.

Clearly, security and privacy of home tend to be two important concepts to the homeless women in this research. Yet, there is an additional concept that some women
consider very relevant. This is the concept of safety, or lack thereof, within the home. For example, even though Mary previously explained home in the context of her emotional attachment to her grandmother (positive social relationships), she also attached the meaning of home to negative connotations. For Mary, it was the lack of safety and feelings of fear that she associated with home. In this context, the meaning of home is based on the construction of a *past home based on negative experience*. As she explained:

> Doing all the chores that we got put out. And then waiting for dad to come home. And knowing that he would bash me. That’s what home is. Getting yelled at, getting abused. Mentally. Getting bashed. Physically. Getting sexually abused. That’s home to me. (Mary)

This section illustrates the importance of the concept of ‘home’ for homeless women. Grounded in women’s stories, four typologies of the idea of home were developed. The most commonly referred category was *current home*. This conceptualisation was mainly discussed by women who had recently exited homelessness. Their ideas are based on a traditional notion of home, such as cooking and food, social relationships, autonomy of agency, security and privacy. These concepts vary due to their personal characteristics and backgrounds, yet, for most women, these are constructed on their experiences of homelessness.

The next typology of home women referred to was the *ideal home*. Women who were still experiencing homelessness at the time of the interview and informal conversations (not necessarily primary homelessness) used this conceptualisation to explain their future desires of home. The concepts that encompass the ideal home were in most cases based on their experiences of a *past home based on negative experience*. Here, women actually used their negative experiences of home before homelessness and during homelessness to explain what their ideal home would encompass. Women spoke of having a space to maintain social relationships, security and privacy, as the key elements of an ideal home. The concepts of privacy and security are contrary to the

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72 See also Saunders (1990) and Gurney (1990; 1991) who explore the gender differences in the meaning of home definitions. Both authors establish the positive and negative feelings attached to these.

73 Some women discussed the meaning of home as sitting in more than one category.
ideas relevant to the *past home based on negative experience* category; this was mainly conceptualised through violence at home or on the streets.

Finally, the idea of *past home based on positive experience* was used when women remembered their positive emotive experiences of their past. Here, women remembered their past positive social relationships, predominantly family relationships. Consequently, the ideas relevant to the *past home based on negative experience* category most likely probably impacted on women’s notion of an *ideal* and *current home*.

As explained at the very beginning of this section, the theme of ‘home’ unexpectedly arose during my fieldwork. The women’s stories illustrate that they seem more comfortable discussing the idea of home than the idea of homelessness. This important finding creates an opening for policy and service organisations to be able to emphasise women’s ideas of home in order to address their needs when attempting to exit homelessness.
Chapter 5: ‘Experiencing’ Homelessness

This Chapter discusses the way in which women in Brisbane experience homelessness. The review of the literature revealed there is limited knowledge on women’s experiences of homelessness. In addition, due to the increase of female homelessness in recent years, the national attempts at reducing homelessness lack an appropriate understanding of women’s experiences of homelessness. This research explored homeless women’s accounts of their day-to-day experiences. Four major themes emerged from women’s accounts of homelessness: (1) life on the street, (2) relationships and roles, (3) crime and policing, and (4) shelters and service workers.

The first section provides women’s accounts of their lives on the street. The women’s stories demonstrate that their daily activities include basic human actions that are usually done in a home environment. However, as the previous Chapter demonstrated, women do not consider public space as their home. Moreover, public space is not designed to address women’s specific needs. Thus, women adapted their daily routines accordingly. For example, women indicated the importance of hygiene, especially during the time of menstruating. This of course is specific to gender. In this context, women’s accounts indicate they engage in a process of passing, in order to look ‘respectable’. Many scholars have used the term ‘passing’ (see e.g., Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1963b; Nack, 2000). This research adapts Goffman’s (1963b) notion of passing, which is based on an individual hiding the information about who they really are. This means an individual masks their stigmatised identity with the more socially acceptable one. The homeless women in this research demonstrate the use of strategies and resources available to them to manage their hygiene in order to ‘pass’. The previous Chapter also demonstrated the notion of food and cooking within a definition of home. Traditionally, cooking and eating is done in homes with one’s family. Public space cannot enable such a process; instead, women spoke of eating pre-prepared or uncooked food in public space or at service providers. This means there is no privacy, which some women spoke of as contributing to a feeling of unease. Furthermore, in this context, women cannot control who will be around them when they are in a public space and
consequently, they lose the privacy they would otherwise experience in a home. This coincides with Ardener’s (1992) idea that public or external space is considered dominated by men, and consequently controlled by men.

Similarly, the women spoke of sleeping as a private process. Being in a public space, not knowing who comes along, not being able to control the environment, left most of the women with many sleepless nights. The women explained the presence of fear most nights. This coincides with Mallet’s (2004) statement that in general, public space is associated with fear and vulnerability. Women tend to experience more exposure than men when in a public space (Harden, 2000). The women’s stories indicate they experienced fear at nights. Not having the privacy of a home and being in an environment that is considered dominated by men, potentially exposed these women to risky situations. The women ensured their safety at night by hiding away; during the day, the women tried to be around places that are considered transient and crowded. In addition, such places also give homeless women an opportunity to ‘fit in’ by employing the process of passing.

In addition, public space constrains women’s roles and behaviours. Accordingly, this means that the public space environment does not possess the attributes that would enable a woman to accomplish ‘traditional’ feminine behaviour, such as being domestic (Connell, 2002). Further, as Halberstam (1998) and Connell (2009) explain, at a certain time and in a certain situation, the female body becomes constructed by the social and cultural environment and can adapt by taking on certain masculinities. Yet, women in this study demonstrated that by using the process of passing, they ensured their femininity or at least attempted to ensure it.

The second section considers women’s accounts in the context of Merton’s (1968) concept of role-set and various relationships that come along. According to the women’s stories, five typologies arise: (1) past negative family-relationships, (2) current negative family-relationships, (3) current friendships, (4) past friendships, and (5) current intimate relationships. Within these typologies, only two represent women’s

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74 Next Chapter (‘Managing’ Homelessness) will discuss the strategies women employ to negotiate risky spaces in more detail.
relationships before homelessness (1 and 4), the other three encompass relationships that were established during their homelessness (2, 3 and 5). In addition, the relationships formed and the roles played during their homelessness indicate two significant and inter-related concepts: trust and respect. The women explained that these concepts point to role hierarchy on the streets. Since the structure of this was based on trust and respect, homeless people needed to follow so-called ‘street rules’. Interestingly, this hierarchy was never discussed in the context of gender, yet based on field observations, when women were in a squat, it was usually up to the men to ensure the safety of themselves and others. This is very similar to traditional roles within a household (see Oakley, 1974).

The third section demonstrates that public space can be a risky space for women. Yet, according to the women’s stories, the notion of risk on the street tends to be complicated. In the context of living in a public space, one that often involves unprovoked risk, most women expressed fear for their safety; others also described the presence of fear for others. The first concept of fear was relevant for all women and is based on their personal stories of physical and sexual violence. The second concept was based on their experiences of witnessing various criminal activities in public space. This is also directly linked to the risk of breaching the rules of the street. By contacting the police, the women exposed themselves. According to the women’s stories, homeless people do not intentionally contact the police as this goes against the ‘street rules’. In this section, women also shared stories of their involvement in criminal activity, where they consequently subjected themselves to the risk of incarceration. The women admitted to shoplifting, which was a mechanism to acquire resources for the process of passing, such as food or hygiene products. In addition to risks and fears women experience on the street, the women’s accounts also point to a lack of privacy due to police attitudes. Here, women expressed negative feelings towards police officers as a result of their previous experiences with them. The women who occupied public spaces were continuously moved and searched by police officers. According to the women’s stories, such occurrences were breaching their privacy.
The fourth section demonstrates that the majority of women have had contact with a number of service workers during their homelessness. For most, this interaction occurred during their homelessness. Some considered communication with service workers as a positive experience and identified the government as the ‘bad guy’. The women’s accounts indicate that the main intention of communication with service workers was to ensure a shelter. In this context, shelter refers to either an emergency shelter or a boarding house. Yet, in opposition to the meaning of the term ‘shelter’, for most women, the locations where they were placed was not an experience of safety. Places designated for women usually accommodate all the women in the same space. According to the previous Chapter, women who had just experienced violence tended to, quite understandably, be in a fragile emotional state. Moreover, they required privacy and at least the notion of safety. In this section, the women’s stories illustrate the concept of gendered space: not only public, but also space that is considered a safe place for women, that is, shelter (or institutional space).

Overall, by exploring the four key themes: (1) life on the street, (2) relationships and roles, (3) crime and policing, and (4) shelters and service workers, this Chapter demonstrates the relevance of looking at the big picture. By recognising the reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness, and the women’s ideas of home and homelessness, it can be established that women’s homelessness needs to be explored in the context of their identity, gender and space. The research shows that the way that the women experience ‘being’ homelessness depends on various factors, including personal characteristics and space.

**Life on the Street**

As previously identified, Creswell (1999) points to the outdated notion of ‘bag lady’, yet indicates that homeless women are still thought of as ‘undesirable’ women. As this section demonstrates, this stigma impacts on the way homeless women consider their bodies and self-perceptions on a daily basis. Taking into consideration the following ideas: impression management (Goffman, 1961; 1969), gender-related social
identity (Watson, 2008), and identity and human agency (Butler, 2004), I consider women’s accounts of day-to-day life on the street.

First, homeless women’s daily routines illustrate familiar activities just as any other women. Crossley (2005) emphasises that humans are physical beings, pointing out the duality between biology (body) and sociology (society). The body is moulded by the social world and by (inter)actions (Crossley, 2005). Connell (2009) states that the social and cultural environment that women tend to be exposed to can impact on a female body. For example, when women have access to certain means, their bodies (and accordingly their health) can be better maintained (Friedman, 2000). Consequently, women’s body image can directly impact on their identity and gender roles (Butler, 1990). The women’s stories in this research demonstrate that basic human actions, such as washing, eating, sleeping and social activities, contributed to their ideas of passing. This is in contrast to the stigma of ‘undesirable’ woman as current literature suggests.

Secondly, based on the women’s accounts, this section also explores women’s daily routines (for example, social activities), which in a traditional sense would be inside the home, or in a work environment. Due to spending most of their time in public space, which is stereotypically considered masculine and can be risky for women (Spain, 2008), women organised their daily routines accordingly. For example, they occupied ‘safe’ places at night for sleeping and risky spaces during the day when there were a lot of people around by engaging in activities that are considered ‘normal’ in order to pass.

Through the interviews and informal conversations, homeless women shared their strategies of dealing with personal hygiene, such as washing. When Barb discussed her hygiene, she referred to the way she makes herself presentable every day:

Um, there’s really not much you can do. But find a disabled bathroom that’s open and clean yourself up in the sink. And, yeah, basically wash my hair with hand soap in like a basin in the middle of the toilets. But, yeah, so… yeah, it’s a bit hard but, um, usually all of us have got like a backpack or a bag something and every single item in our bag is everything that we own. Like everything in here is what I own [pointing to her backpack]. (Barb)
Barb further explained that she only owns the clothes she wears, which limit the regular washing of clothing. This means Barb considers not only washing her body on a daily basis as part of process of ‘being presentable’ or passing, but also wearing clean and presentable clothes.

Mary shared a similar experience. She explained that from the moment she wakes up in the morning, she tried to make herself “presentable.” This again points to the idea of passing. She explained:

Um, didn’t know where I could have a shower without having to pay for money, so the rain would be my shower. You know. But I would go into a toilet, I would try to wash my face and comb my hair, and you know. Try to look presentable. You know. So I could get somewhere in life. (Mary)

Mary indicated that in most public places, one needs to pay to shower. Val also expressed the same concern: “I came in middle of May last year and I was freezing and even though there’s showers, but you got to pay like 20 cents if you want it hot.” She then continued to say that if she was in a location where there was no shower, she found a different solution instead of a shower:

Oh, I wear these clothes for two weeks, so I can’t wear them again then. My clothes are not clean. Gosh, I’ve got to have clean clothes, man… Even though I used to jump in the bay once… I jumped in the bay and swam… And swam… yeah, if there wasn’t no showers or that around. Or I used to get in the bay, I’d take my soap, wash myself in the bay. Make sure my hair… make sure the sands get… then I go and use the other shower… On… on the beach, get all the sand off me, on the… then I have my soap again, with my togs on, wash myself, wash my hair with the soap, make sure yeah I’m clean, man. That’ll do, five minutes under that, brrrr, shower myself off, put warm clothes on, man… Throughout the winter too, ma’am… Horrible. Yeah, just [a] five minute job, quickly, quickly man. Shower yourself off. Oh, yes. That was very hard. Hygiene is a women’s thing, man. I can’t go without having clean knickers on, man. Some people might to put them inside out and wear them the next day, not me, mate [laughs]. (Val)

Like Val, Pam also found a solution. Pam explained that she stayed in one of the boarding houses for a few weeks and remembered the routines from people who worked there in order to sneak in and use their bathrooms. Pam explained:

They’re all in bed… I make sure I, you know, clean it…Before I use it, you know… And I always spray something on the toilet seat before I sit down on it because I’m really cautious, you know?… There are some people that, even in there that… don’t even shower their self [sic], you know? (Pam)
For these women, hygiene is “a woman’s thing” (Val) and very significant. Hygiene was even more important when these women were menstruating. Not only was there the question of menstruating supplies, such as pads or tampons, but how to keep themselves ‘clean’ during their menstruation. Through an informal conversation with Lucy, she told me that the majority of homelessness services provide pads and tampons, however if she was too far away and could not access a certain service or if it was after their closing time, she went to the shops and stole some. As she said: “…pads were the only thing I ever stole…” (Lucy).

Like Lucy, Deb also experienced problems with accessing services to receive pads. She explained that most of the time, her alternative to pads was toilet paper from public toilets. This resulted in her underwear getting dirty and being on the streets and limited with clothing, she experienced further problems. Deb explained her latest menstruation:

Yeah, a way, well I get period problems, I’ve just gone through that again. You know, your clothes stink or, you know, you got… you know, it’s really, like because I’m big I find it hard to find undies to fit to and then I don’t put pads on, and, like, I had to hand wash my clothes and wear a sheet last week, but I wore it like a sari. I’m very overweight, but they can’t see that, but… yeah, I think being… having periods is a bit of an issue on the street. (Deb)

Deb also said that in her attempt to “smell better”, she went into the gym close to her squat and gave them 50 cents to use the shower. She said the people at the gym seemed reluctant to let her use the shower, however they gave in and allowed her to use the shower that time only. She did say she tries to do something like this only once a month. Deb was not the only one who experienced problems. Val described that for her, underwear and showering are also very important during her period. As she explained:

My periods, I always make sure I’ve got an old… always have old pairs of granny knickers. I wear my granny knickers in them days. Still today I wear my granny knickers. I have them… Yes, it’s very hard, but I always go into, um… always go into, uh, uh, the wheelchair thing. I wash my knickers out. Scrub my knickers out and wait to dry underneath the dryer thing to dry them and put them back on. Always take a… always buy a second… I used to always buy a, when I got them, was like a third or four pair of pants. Because when you’re on the street, when you got them things, it’s hard to,
you know, but I always go in there… I have a quick shower. Yeah, showers, yeah. Very hygienic. I’ve got a… yeah, but it is sad for some women. (Val)

Women’s stories about hygiene and more specifically, washing during their menstruation, point to Lewis’s (1971) idea of body shame grounded in a woman’s self and identity. In this context, body shame can become debilitating (Tangney, 1996). For women, who already have limited access to facilities to maintain their hygiene, menstruation can incapacitate their self-identity even more. Women tried each day to make themselves ‘presentable’ with the aim to ‘fit in’. In order to pass, the majority of them used public toilets for disabled people as this gave them enough space to wash and some privacy. Even though a shower or other bathroom facilities were not always accessible to these women, they actively sought and engaged in mechanisms that would enable them to complete their passing process, especially during menstruation. Consequently, their experiences during menstruating tend to be negative and embarrassing. Such experience can also be seen in prisons, “where the choice of sanitary protection is limited and where access to facilities for changing soiled pads and tampons is controlled” Smith (2009a, p. 21).

Another basic daily activity is eating, however when a person has limited funds, it is usually more difficult to access food. However, some of the existing services, such as food vans, provide free food daily. These vans are usually supplied with warm coffee or tea and sandwiches or pieces of fruit, and are generally available for breakfast, lunch and dinner. In addition, some of the other services provide warm meals, which might cost a few dollars. Yet, these warm meals are usually limited to breakfast and lunch, due to their closing at about 4 or 5 p.m.

Throughout the interviews and informal conversations, homeless women indicated that even though the easiest way to get food was through food vans, it was not always an easy option. One of the issues that might have prevented homeless women from accessing a food van was their location. Even though these vans tend to go to public spaces where homeless people dwell, they still do not cover all places. Another issue was that a van might have changed their timetable and unless the women had
recently visited a service provider, they would not find out and thus miss out on food. Barb spoke of this problem:

At about 7:00 or 6:45 [p.m.] when it’s starting to get dark, there’s… if the food van turns up, that’s usually in park uh, there’s like allocated spots, um, for food vans to turn up. And if they turn up, then we get a feed. If not, we just, um, head straight back to our squat and just sit there until we pass out. (Barb)

Like Barb, Lisa and Deb explained that although the access to food vans was usually the easiest way to get food, it was less preferable. Lisa noted that the locations where food vans stop were always over-run with men: “...they get, you know, free meals here, free meals there. They walk [to a] few... to every food venue.” She felt uncomfortable being surrounded by all these men. Deb expressed the same concern. During fieldwork, when I visited different food van locations, I noted this as well. A lot of times there were the same people at different locations in one day. Also, as indicated by the above women, the majority of people visiting food vans were men. There were some women, however it appeared they were accompanied by a man or another woman. I did not see any women who were by themselves and there were always more men than women. The gender ratio was the reason why Deb preferred to go to one of the services and get a warm meal. She said: “I go to the 139 Club and get food and meet people.” This also means for her having a meal indoors and sitting down at a table was a form of socialising, which goes back to the traditional notion of home. During my visits to the 139 Club, I noticed that around times of breakfast and lunch, the gender ratio tended to be equal.

The women’s stories and my field observations indicate that women prefer to eat in a space that is considered conventional, instead of eating in public spaces. Burnett and Ray (2012) explain that humans both shape and respond to the environment, which in Western societies indicates that cooking and eating is usually done inside and not on the streets. Consequently, this also points to the relationship between economic capital and food (Burnett & Ray, 2012). Homeless women have limited economic capital, which thus impacts on their access to food. The women’s stories exemplified this limitation; they indicate that they used various strategies to procure food. For example,
Niki was living on the streets with her partner and he was usually the one who would access and provide food. She described one of their strategies:

Oh, we used to go up to the hospital, onto the wards, and go into the fridge and steal the patients’ food... when they would not eat their... sandwiches and stuff... They’d put them in the fridge. And they were never going to be touched. And so, John would come out with pita breads, you know, with meat and salad. And juice and fruit and that. And all from, compliments of the hospital. (Niki)

During our interview, Niki noted that food was an extremely important part of her daily routine. For Hope, food was important as well, however, she was not aware of the available food services for homeless people. Thus when she was hungry, she stole food from shops. Hope explained: “Um...you know, I was just, I’m aware of organisations. I mean, I was aware of them, but I just thought, they were just going to give me tins of Spam and I didn’t realise how good they were.” Once she learned about available services that provide food, she stopped stealing.

Similar to Hope, when Mary became homeless, she was not aware of service providers and the various locations and options for accessing food. She was reluctant to steal food, thus in her first week, she went without food quite often. She said that after exiting primary homelessness, one of the best things to know is: “...you’re not gonna starve.” Like Mary, Lisa did not want to steal food. Lisa said there were people in her squat that did steal food, however in her opinion: “…there is [sic] enough services out there that give us food, some are just picky.” She explained that she would feel too guilty and even if stolen food was shared in her squat, she decided not to eat.

In this context, food is connected to women’s belief and value system. Studies on eating and rituals explore how humans use food based on their beliefs (see Anderson, 1991; Curran, 1989), which also relates to food etiquette (Cooper, 1986). For homeless women in this research, the belief was not in a religious context like most studies explore, but in the sense of values and norms. Here, women considered stealing food as wrong and even with limited resources; their value system is so strong that they would rather starve than eat stolen food.
For homeless women in this research, food and eating is considered on three levels: environmental, economic capital, and belief system. First, the women’s stories indicate they prefer to enjoy their food in a space that is more private, such as indoors. This shows women consider eating in a more traditional setting (in home and at the table). Second, women’s accounts point to a connection between economic capital and food in the context of accessing food. Here, because of limited resources, some women engaged in stealing to obtain food. Third, women’s stories demonstrate a connection between food and their belief system. For some women, their values prevented them from engaging in illegal activity to procure food.

In addition to washing and eating, women’s stories also identified sleeping as a daily human function that was determined by their environment. The two prevalent concepts within each story were fear (safety) and privacy. For Mary, the goal of sleeping to get rest quickly turned into sleeping to survive. The fear of what can happen if she falls asleep was a horrific experience for a woman in her sixties. As Mary described:

Can you imagine what that’s like? Freezing and knowing that you might not survive? Trying to curl up in a corner. Trying to find a dry place to survive. Not knowing where the next meal is coming from. Being out of money. Not knowing if you’re gonna get bashed, or if you’re gonna end up in hospital. That’s the fear that every streeter lives with. Even those new streeters. Because they’re too scared. (Mary)

…it’d be a lot safer. Like, the police be… there was about twenty of us on the night that it was rain[ing], all sleeping, uh, you know, close to the police beat, you know. And even in the mall, it’s still under surveillance. There was about fifty up there all under cover, all knowing that they were safe. It was better than sleeping out there because there was one guy out there, he actually slept down near the toilets there. Now, he’s been doing that for a while but even he eventually had to move because of the rain, you know. And he, you know, he went back into the mall. So you know, most of them know that it’s a lot safer in the mall than what it is out there, you know. Um, you know, it’s pretty bad out there, you know, even, uh, at Wickham Park which is near the dental hospital there. Most of them that have been up there have been bashed. Mostly… most of the time, it’s through the night. The day-time’s safe, you know. They can lay up there, not get molested. Come night-time, it’s a war zone. (Mary)

For Mary, there were two major challenges: the weather, which cannot be controlled, and feeling safe. Based on Mary’s story, Kilgour’s (2007) concept of fear within spatiality and temporality discourse reaffirms the notion that women tend to
occupy certain spaces at certain times in order to avoid being fearful. Mary considered a specific public space safe during the day, yet a “war zone” during the night. For Mary, this space was risky, as she feared physical and sexual violence.

The struggle Mary described was very similar to what other women described. During one of our informal conversations, Sue said to me: “I never know what will happen, I never know if I will wake up in the morning.” With this ever-present fear she has to try and fall asleep each night. Val explained safety at night in a similar way: “It’s very, very important, because, um, you don’t know which day you’re going to wake up. That’s why [I] always pray every night before I go to sleep, because you don’t know which day you could wake up.” Val feared the same thing as Mary and Sue, not waking up. It seems the insecurity of the night left these women without sleep. Moreover, these women put themselves at risk every night when trying to go to sleep. Amy shared the same experience. For her, the safety of sleeping appeared extremely important. She linked her whole experience of homelessness to safe sleeping: “Being homeless, it’s hard, and that. And you think oh I feel like going to sleep but you don’t. You stay awake all night because you're frightened, you know, this... um, being attacked or stuff like that, you know.”

After hearing that safety at night is crucial to these women, I asked them about the main risks that resulted in sleeplessness. Amy portrayed quite vividly her experience: “People walk around with knives. Rapists there. People prostitute there, disgusting, making me sick.” Pam shared very similar experience:

… you can get beat to death easily. There are knives and things. I was at one spot and, uh, a guy pulled a knife on me, right. Another one put another knife and he'd... ‘fuck off’ and it’s... he... ‘cause I... ‘cause he said no. The other guy just stopped him in time, right. He was about to kill me with a knife. (Pam)

While the majority of women have difficulty in falling asleep, some manage to get some rest. Yet, this might not mean they do not fear for their safety. Niki noted that she did experience fear around her safety. However, she was with her partner, which made it a bit better. She explained that besides people who can hurt you, there are also other dangers, such as used syringes:
And... and on the streets, like in the Valley\textsuperscript{75} and that, it’s like, you wake up, and there’s just like syringes everywhere. No one cleans up after themselves. Hundreds of syringes, and then... and then you’ve got the worry of the... the people that are drinking. You know, they just fall asleep wherever. (Niki)

Syringes, people with knifes, rain and other homeless people, are just some of the factors keeping homeless women awake at night. In order to ensure their safety, some women sleep in spaces that are considered ‘safer’. Yet, such spaces tend to be occupied by other people (who might just be passing) and traffic. In this context, it is not fear that keeps them up at night, but lack of privacy. As Barb explained:

Um, constantly getting woken up by police and, um, Brisbane City Council workers. You constantly hear like trucks and like road works and sirens and... and cars and buses and, um, cleaning machines and people walking past and shit like that. And it’s annoying. And then like, um, some people get woken up by trains. But, um, it... it’s just something you have to adapt to. (Barb)

Based on the women’s stories, it seems they only have two options: they can sleep in a space that is more private, yet it might be more risky, or, they can sleep in a space that is considered safer, yet there is no privacy. The previous Chapter demonstrated that both safety and privacy are important to women, especially in terms of a home. However, based on these women’s accounts of the factors that led to their homelessness, they may choose safety over privacy. At night, women tend to occupy public spaces that minimises their risks.

Conversely, during the day, women tend to occupy the safety of public spaces. Through my fieldwork, I observed homeless people at various homelessness services and while both homeless men and women visited these services, men tended to occupy the ‘social spaces’. For example, in the 139 Club, there was an area with computers, pool table and few tables with chairs and books. The pool table was in the middle of this space and every time I was there, the table was occupied by men. Consequently, the other areas around the pool table tended to be occupied by men as well. Even if there was a woman sitting behind a computer, there was little to no communication between that woman and the men playing pool. This might indicate that maybe women did not

\textsuperscript{75} Valley refers to Fortitude Valley.
want to spend time in the same space as men. There were always more men than women ‘hanging around’ the services I observed, especially in the communal areas. Here, I assume women tend to spend their time by ‘moving around’ the city. For most of the women, the days were all about trying to keep themselves busy:

Just check in… check into some kind of food place. Kind of think about where my next move is, think about where I want to… want to be. Think about finding someone who might take me in for the evening or a few days or something. Check around the… the, um, community centres and stuff, see what’s happening. See if I can get a shower somewhere, yeah. See if someone’s talking sense to you that you can talk sense back to them. I, uh, I was very depressed about things, look, like I had no idea what I was doing, but at least I was gutsy enough to admit to it. (Pam)

…wake up in the morning. Have a smoke, go to toilet and brush my teeth, in like just a public toilet. Um, then I, uh, on weekends and stuff, I’ll go and see friends. Like, I’ve got a couple of friends, um, and other than that, just like school and stuff. Then I meet up with my husband in the afternoon, organise a… appointments and get picked up and taken to them. Um, go back, just spend the afternoon hanging out with whoever’s around and it’s like… I don’t know if you can say worth being around, but just people that aren’t going to cause trouble and… Just people that are calm and can just chill with you. And, um, yeah, then, um, at about 7:00 or 6:45 [p.m.] when it’s starting to get dark, there’s… if the food van turns up, that’s usually in park uh, there’s like allocated spots, um, for food vans to turn up. And if they turn up, then we get a feed. If not, we just, um, head straight back to our squat and just sit there until we pass out. And then it’s do the same thing again. (Barb)

And I got up at 5 o’clock in the morning and sit down [at] the train station. (Amy)

And then most of the day it was just walking around the city. Try to keep occupied. Until you could get a meal at lunch or… you know, 139 Club. Go up there for a couple of hours. Right? Wait til close. Get the hot meal of a night. Right. Walk around until you got tired. Bunk down for the night. Same in, same out. (Mary)

Um, I used to go into libraries, museums, have a look around the museums, library… (Val)

Like I’ll get the bus around. I’ve got a go card76. And… but lately I haven’t really had one, so I’ve been sneaking on the buses a bit with an old ticket. So no, I’ve been getting one on and off. But… and then I’ll just go and sit around in a shopping centre or something and, um, or go to the 139 Club and get food and meet people I know and talk on my mobile and go and visit someone I’ve met… Like today, I went to see my friend, and then I went and sit in the shopping centre… I usually go out on the buses a lot, which is getting boring, and then I also go to shopping centre or something and hang out, or go to a in drop-in centre and then… or I’ve got a couple of friends who I could drop in on sometimes. You know, I went to see my friend the other day. Um, really,

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76 Go card is TransLink’s South East Queensland electronic ticket. It allows an individual to travel seamlessly on all TransLink bus, train, ferry and tram services (translink.com.au/tickets-and-fares/go-card).
that’s all. 139 Club… oh yeah, I go places and play Keno\textsuperscript{77} so I can sit in the pub for hours, and play ten cent games. (Deb)

Nothing, there was nothing to do. Just walk around, and that. Wait for the van to come in, and that. Smoke. I was a sniff… sniffer\textsuperscript{78}, but I’m not no more. When I was younger…No, there was nothing on the streets. (Erin)

Um, I used to go to 139 every morning, sometimes I walk from the city to, uh, Brunswick Street and pick up there, have breakfast, have morning tea, have lunch, have a sleep till 4:00 [p.m.] and then you’ve got to move out. You've got to leave because 4:00 is their closing time. Uh, do your washing and drying. It's good there because they've got washing machines and dryers. Only a dollar for each and, uh, you can put, uh, two machines and all of it can go into the dryer all at once, black and white clothes, and they never dye, you know, get dyed. But yeah, that's all I used to do. And then after that, go back on the streets again. Some time I walk from there to… back to the city but there's a lot of us that walks to the city and back. Yeah, that's about it. Other than that, some time you find... some time I get tired of walking but I just have to do it because, you know, you got to, if you really want to get to somewhere, you have to walk it. Yes, so that's it. Well, walking, walking, walking. (Lisa)

Based on the women’s accounts, walking and hanging out are the two main mechanisms these women use to keep themselves busy throughout the day. As Pam put it: “Hanging around, hanging around, just people, talking the talk, you know, doing the thing.” This means, for these women, transiency\textsuperscript{79} during the day is something they all go through. Moreover, this transiency also gives them the ability to employ the process of passing. However, this raises questions about their possessions.

Most of the women indicated they did not own many possessions and what they did own, it was not much. For Barb, all her possessions were in her backpack, which she always carries:

I’ve got, um, my schoolbook, my smokes, heaps of munchy food, um, water, wallet. My husband’s got my phone, but I’ve got like spare pads and tampons and stuff, and, uh, my phone charger. Um, these are like second-hand shoes or something but, um, been wearing the same pair of socks for about a month, maybe two. I’ve only got one set of clothes, like one pair of undies, one bra, one shirt, one just everything. (Barb)

\textsuperscript{77} Keno is a game of chance similar to bingo.

\textsuperscript{78} Referring to petrol or other solvents.

\textsuperscript{79} The concept of transiency will be discussed in more detail in the next Chapter, where the women’s stories portray the strategies women employ on a daily basis to ‘manage’ their homelessness.
During our informal conversation, Deb told me that she only carried essentials with her; she was afraid of getting mugged. For Deb, not even her ‘sleeping space’ (or squat) was safe: “...sometimes I get back to my squat...and...and it’s all gone or messed up.” Similarly, Niki did not carry too many possessions with her: “I get around with [a] suitcase full of clothes.” It seems for these women on the streets, their material possessions do not matter as much as the fact that they cannot carry everything around or it is not safe to leave their belongings in public spaces. Pam explained: “And I'm thinking, I was homeless in the street, lost all my gear again. Everything kept getting nicked. You’d fall asleep and they’d walk off with your gear.”

Val told a similar story, her belongings were continuously stolen. In addition, Val also said: “If you got cigarettes and they haven’t, they’ll go, come after you. If you got... if you got something they really want, they’ll try to take it off you.” While Val explained that people tend to take material possessions such as cigarettes, she also indicated such belongings can be used as good to barter with: “I don’t smoke but I had some cigarettes, so I gave this guy two and he gave me a beer.” This can be related to the notion of barter system. However, the mechanism behind the practised barter system on the street seems to be very much different from the traditional notion of a barter system. Chapman (1980) suggests that all human societies are economically determined and in most societies the exchange of goods is organised predominantly with respect to economic interest. In the lives of homeless women, they can be economically determined by ‘properties’ that are considered valuable to the population of the homeless. As Val’s story demonstrates, the exchange of goods for homeless people seems to benefit more one, than both, sides.

The women’s accounts of their daily routines demonstrate that they experience the same routines as we all do, yet, these experiences tend to be very different to non-homeless women. By adapting the process of passing, women engage in daily activities to help them achieve the best result possible to avoid the stigma of ‘bag lady’. According to Goffman’s (1961; 1969) idea of impression management, in this context, women manage hygiene and daily social activities in a way that makes them pass as
non-homeless. Moreover, homeless women tend to experience risks on a daily basis, mainly during the night-time. The women’s stories demonstrate fear and lack of privacy as factors that determine their sleeping patterns and daily social activities.

**Roles and Relationships**

In our daily lives, we enact a variety of social roles, including, but not limited to, family roles and occupational roles (Allen & van de Vilert, 1984). At times, we change roles or even disregard a role and take on another one (Allen & van de Vilert, 1984). Such a transition has been referred to in different ways: role discontinuity (see Benedict, 1938), role changing (see Banton, 1965), status passage (see Glaser & Strauss, 1971), transitions (see Levinson, 1978) or passages (see Sheehy, 1974). As the previous section demonstrated, homeless women employ the process of *passing* on a daily basis, which aligns with Sheehy’s (1974) idea of passages. Yet, Sheehy’s idea is grounded within an organisational context, which does not directly apply to homeless women.

According to Merton (1968), role-set tends to refer to the complement of role relationships which certain people have within a particular social status in an organisation. For this research, Merton’s (1968) concept of role-set needed to be considered within the social status of homeless women within society. Here, Merton (1968) also points to four key characteristics that impact on the process of role formulation: location, authority, beliefs and behaviours. In the context of this research, these characteristics have been considered in terms of gender relations, gender identity and spatiality. Moreover, the roles that homeless women adopt before or during their homelessness, are grounded in their existing or new relationships.

According to the women’s accounts, relationships refer to any forms of family based relationships, intimate relationships and friendships. In most cases, the women pointed to two categories of relationships intertwined through their lives: those that existed before their homelessness (and may, or may not, exist anymore) and second, those that were formed during their homelessness. More specifically, the women’s
accounts fell into the following five-way typology: (1) past negative family-relationships, (2) current negative family-relationships, (3) current friendships, (4) past friendships, and (5) current intimate relationships. Grounded in the women’s stories, the roles women play (or have played) demonstrate the complexity and transiency of these relationships.

The women’s stories indicate that before homelessness, the main type of relationships were family oriented. Their roles were those of being a daughter, a mother, a sister, an aunt, a wife or even a grand-mother. Moreover, the relationships these women described before homelessness tended to be mainly negative:

But, um, yeah, and the reason I couldn’t stand being called the name on my birth certificate was because my biological mum, would, um, scream my name at me before she beat the crap out of me, so even to this day I can’t stand it. (Barb)

I stole my father’s car once with my friend. So I don’t know how to drive, but they did and then crashed. Uh, we had to dump the car somewhere. My father turned around and charged me, you know. He used to get in to me and my mother a lot [was physically violent], you know. (Amy)

As I said, I remember being six and living with my family. But after that is a total blank. So whether the abuse started before then, I don’t know. Whether I got taken off of them, I don’t know. But I’ve always felt alone. Ever since the... uh, ever since I remember the abuse. You know… sitting in my room crying. What did I do wrong this time? You know. The bruises, the welts, just not bruises. The… when dad... years ago, they used to have jugs with flex cords. Now they’ve got the plastic cords, right? Dad would use that, or he would use his belt. Now, the belt can do some damage, but if you’ve seen a flex cord, you... it’s like raising a welt on you… you burn yourself, you get a... a welt from a burn, correct? Just imagine using that on a child. And what it would do. Not only a physical trauma, the mental trauma. I still remember getting hit. And being terrified of my father. And yet, people say ‘take it’. But after what he... even though I love him, and I’ve forgiven him… It’s like a light flicking on and off. You know. And yet, for all the abuse, I love him. You know. He’s been through so much. He worked so hard to support us kids. (Mary)

Because my parents drove me like that, you know, too much bashing. Too much hidings. And it wasn't little hidings, it was my head went through the cupboard door, yeah. Yeah, my father, he punched me right through the cupboard door. That's how bad the Polynesians are when they hit. And, um, yeah, I ended up, like, in a gang. I did, when I was eleven years old, I ended up in the gang but I never went with any of the people in the gang, never went with anyone. But I ended up becoming sergeant, uh, of arms. That's how I ended up in the gang, was through my parents, they… 'cause they were party, party every night, every night. And I ended up, yeah, I left my sisters and brothers. I said, 'I'm going, can't handle it any more'. Parents come home, abuse me for nothing because they had too many whisky, they were whisky drinkers. They didn't have anything with it, they used to have those little things and they'd just skull it back. I
ended up like that too because... why? Because the parents more or less was like that. That's where we get it from, is our parents. (Lisa)

These accounts tend to reflect the destructive behaviours within the women’s families. Based on their description of their childhood-family relationships, for these women, the role of being a daughter seemed important. The women’s roles as daughters within such negative relationships points to a lack of emotional connection, which consequently impacted on their identities. This is evident in the previous Chapter, where women explained the meaning of home in the context of past home based on negative experience. Consequently, these stories relate to the past negative family-relationship typology.

For some, these relationships never changed. The women’s stories indicate that their role as a daughter who experienced negative family-relationship did not change even after their homelessness:

Getting away from my evil sister and brothers and mother and father. Who had no idea, none whatsoever. You know? She... she couldn’t be capable of anything, could she? Don't trust her, don't believe her and don't even give her anything for you know? That's about it. I felt like I was one of those ladies in India with those saris and them veils across. Part of Islam, you know? I didn't care half the time. ‘Cause I find myself... I'm just lagging around myself, trying to get my own shit together, wondering why this isn't, the worst thing you should be doing really. I didn't have much of a choice, so I kept… I kept going along with it I think. Because where... if I went back home to my parents, family and stuff, they... they've give me absolute hell for years over it, you know, absolute shame. How dare you make yourself homeless? You know? (Pam)

My... my dad... my dad physically and sexually abused me. My mother was the one that did the mental damage. And I got a funny feeling that, that relates back to that. She never hugged me. She never kissed me. She... I can’t even remember her telling me she loved me. And even though I can speak with my mother, I’m still not comfortable with my mother. I don’t treat her as a friend, I just treat her as a... I do treat her as a friend, but a casual friend. But, she’s not my mother. If that’s... it’s... it’s hard to explain. Right? You know, usually you’re friends with your mother, you know, everything, but that’s not like me and my mother. My daughter was like that. As I said, that’s something I’ve gotta work on. But we were close. Me and my daughter. You know, more closer than whatever me and my mother were ever like. I’m more closer to my father, I can relate more to my father than to what I can with her. I can sit down and talk for hours with my dad, but I can’t... I have trouble communicating with her. (Mary)

For Pam and Mary, like a few of the other women, the traumatic and significant events within these relationships determined their role as a daughter in adulthood. Their relationships stayed negative and influenced their roles as mothers. For instance, Mary
explained that her relationship with her daughter was completely different to the one she had with her own mother, yet she still struggled with the emotional aspect of the relationship. It seems that for most women, the past family relationships were lost. Here, the women’s stories identify with the current negative family relationships typology. Still, for Barb, there was a chance of re-uniting and mending her relationships with her family:

I just told her [my mother] straight up a couple of weeks ago, I was like, um, she goes... I said, “mum do you hate me?” She goes, ‘Uh, I didn’t so much hate you, I was really disappointed in you and, um, I’m sorry if anything that happened at home has like affected you and what-not’. So, we’re kind of on speaking terms now. Like I can call her up and talk to her. I can’t go see her but, um, but I call up occasionally and say, ‘Hey it’s Barb, how are you going?’ (Barb)

The above accounts demonstrate that these homeless women identify themselves within the family-relationship context. Even if these were negative, the women still considered these relationships and the role they played within them as relevant to their current situations. This was especially evident in Mary’s story. On the contrary to the mainly negative family relationships, women experienced a mixture of positive and negative friendships during their homelessness. For some, the role of being a friend helped them through the rough times, and for others this role turned out to be a distraction:

You have… there are times when you… when you don't even care who they are. They’ve been nice to you, you're nice to them, yeah, yeah… I don't trust anyone, I don't. If you can trust somebody, that's nice, but not… not on the homeless scene, you know, yeah. Someone's going to break your jaw, they're going to break your jaw if you hurt them. That's it. (Pam)

I’m on my own, sometimes. But I do have the odd visitor here and there, and… But I just sleep at night and get up first thing in the morning and go out. And I light a candle or an incense and sometimes I’m feeling quite comfortable there… Well, I mean, I’d like to have friends, but I still have friendships even though I’m on the street. I still do have friends, lots of friends. I don’t think that makes a difference. (Deb)

All… there are some streeters out there that I can trust. But there’s a lot of streeters out there that I couldn’t trust… There are some Aborigines I can relate to. But there are Aborigines, when they’re drunk, stay clear away from them. Because when they get on that stuff, whoa! Uh, you’re walking into World War III and more. And then there are people… streeters that have become boyfriend and girlfriend. You know? People that join together. How are you mate? You know. Uh. They’re still people that are lonely, but yet, they know each other, you know, they’re... it’s a lifelong friendship, street people. It’s... you know. You know. There’s people that will...‘Have you got a smoke?’
‘Yeah brother, oh yeah, I got you one, here, but you owe me’. You know. It back... it’s a give and take world. And then there’s people that don’t trust at all. You know. You learn to know who you can trust, and who you don’t. You learn to respect who you can, and who you don’t. You know. And it’s just not the same. If you’re new, people will come up to you, but they won’t tell you their life story, they’ll leave you alone to get used to it. (Mary)

They do help out each other. Only... but they’ll only help out to a certain extent. You abuse a streeter’s trust, he’ll never help you out again. You bash him, he’s not gonna ever help. He’s gonna avoid you, like the plague. I’ve seen people that have helped each other out, and then I’ve seen people, ‘You owe me, when am I gonna get it?’ Or, ‘You bashed me, I don’t talk to you anymore, stay away’. You know? There is a certain limit to even streeters. They help each other out if you help back. It’s a two way street. You abuse that trust of streeters, you’re not gonna get it again. I would never abuse that trust. You know. If it wasn’t for the streeters, I wouldn’t have found this... you know, that place there. You know. Or... or the... or the Big Issue80. It’s streeters and the Big Issue. Both of them together, have helped me get where I am. And I’m never gonna abuse that. But there are people that will. (Mary)

Um, but... yeah, you know, like, um, they’re extremely protective. Like everyone is everyone’s family, like it’s one big family where everyone looks after everyone. You’ve just got to sort of keep to your own, like, you can... it, it’s kind of like a family, like. For a girl, like being a girl, if you’ve got an older sister or something, if she wants something, she will be your best friend. But as soon as she... you don’t have anything she wants, she’ll be the biggest bitch to you, like, she won’t want anything to deal with you. Or probably bash you up or like give you a flogging or something. So, you know, you’ve got to kind of watch out for that. It’s the same sort of scenario, but, um, yeah, like, um, staring... staring is really disrespectful. Mainly what it comes down to at the end of the day is respect. You don’t use your manners, you stare at people, um, you pick fights, anything like that, you get a... you get a hiding. Like, someone will give you a kick up the bum or punch across the face or something like that. Um, but, you know, like, yeah, it mainly does comes down to respect though. (Barb)

The women’s accounts demonstrate two very significant, and inter-related, concepts within the current friendships typology: trust and respect. All the women I spoke to discussed these relationships as the ones they formed during their homelessness. Here, the concepts of trust and respect also demonstrate there is a role of hierarchy on the street, and on the very top of the pyramid is the role of a ‘streeter’. When the women referred to this role, it was not gender, age, or ethnically specific. Instead, the main two characteristics of this role were the ability to provide and accept both trust and respect.

80 The Big Issue is a magazine that is sold on the streets by homeless people (http://www.thebigissue.org.au/).
The stories above indicate a specific role and hierarchy within current friendships, yet for some women these relationships changed after they exited primary homelessness. Indeed, their role has changed. Whilst women still consider these relationships in high regard, the amount of time they spend socialising with them has changed:

I keep in contact. I… I go down there [referring to the CBD] and see them and then I look back. Woah, there's a lot of people, new ones, you know. There's a lot of new ones there. They were… they wasn't even there when I was there. No, there's a lot of people doing that [visiting friends who are still homeless]. I think they just go down there ‘cause they're lonely at their own home. (Lisa)

That’s the trouble. No. I can’t [referring to spending time with friends who are still experiencing primary homelessness] because they use speed. They said, ‘Oh we only do it about once every… once every month or two’. And they meant, must have meant all the time, every month or two [laughs]. You know… You know, two weeks out of every month. And I’d dread their paydays and just think oh my god, it’s going to be hell. (Hope)

These accounts still recognise current friendships as important; yet women who recently exited homeless tend to limit their involvement. For example, during an informal conversation, Natasha explained: “I feel lonely and I miss my friends… so I try visiting them, but it’s different.” In this context, Natasha’s role within this relationship changed. This can be attributed to her transition out of homelessness, which consequently changed the attitudes within the role hierarchy on the street. Here, it can be assumed that someone who exits homelessness, but maintains the relationships with other homeless people, still has a role, yet how high or low on the role hierarchy this fits, is not known.

The women’s stories also encompassed past friendships, the fourth typology. These relationships came to an end without the women’s say. For women, their role of being a friend stayed the same, the roles of others changed. During an informal conversation, Jade said: “They’re [referring to her friends before homelessness] just gone! It’s like they don’t know you anymore.” Similarly, Barb explained:

Um, don’t want to know me. They don’t want to know me. They look down on me because I’m on the street. Because, um, I’ve been through ridiculous amounts of abuse because I’ve been, um, because I started smoking. Because I got caught up with drugs. Because I’ve been assaulted. Just anything like that. The sort of stuff that you need a friend to be there for you for. Not there, they don’t want to know you. So it’s a bit ridiculous and it makes it hard, but… (Barb)
For Barb, the friendships she maintained before her homelessness ended. At this point she lost her social network and support. Nevertheless, she quickly found new friendships on the streets. First, she played a role of a ‘newcomer’ in need of help. Soon, she found people to help her. Moreover, one of these friendships turned into a current intimate relationship:

Um, one of the people who looked after me when I was on the street that I met a couple of years ago, um, we became really good friends. And he used to look after me, and, like, I used to have… ‘cause I used to have a really bad drinking problem. He used to make sure that I won’t get into trouble and stuff. And we started getting really close like just really good friends. And then we ended up dating and then, like, um, then further on down the track, we ended up being engaged. And now we’re married and might be expecting a kid so... Yeah so, even though we’re in a really tough situation ‘cause it’s quite violent out on the streets as well, um, we’re both hoping and look for jobs even though we’re not completely capable of it. And we’re just going to try and, um, start off in community housing. Um, it’s going to be set up for us because I’ve been put in a top priority because I might be pregnant. (Barb)

Similar to Barb, during an informal conversation with Nina, she described her current intimate relationship: “...yeah, I met this guy few weeks ago and we’re together. It’s good to have someone... we don’t always agree, but it’s good.” Like Barb, Nina also met her current partner during her homelessness. In this context, both Barb and Nina adopted the role of girlfriend. In opposition to current intimate relationships, most of the women experienced intimate relationships before becoming homeless. Yet due to the prevailing negative experiences in these relationships, the women did not want to discuss the details. Parts of these stories can be seen in the previous Chapter, when the women shared their stories of violence. In this instance, women experienced past negative intimate relationships, which as demonstrated earlier, impacted on the women’s transitions into homelessness.

The women’s stories indicate the most relevant relationships before homelessness tended to be family-based relationships. In most cases, the women actually described these relationships in the context of their childhood memories. These stories seem to indicate such relations were quite damaging to these women. For most of the women, the relationships (family, intimate or friendship) before homelessness, ceased to exist once they transitioned into homelessness. Instead, new relationships
began. During the women’s homelessness, friendships and intimate relationships took place. In addition, the women’s accounts signify ‘the street’ as a space where trust can help you survive and respect needs to be earned. This further indicates there seems to be certain rules when it comes to creating and maintaining relationships on the streets.

Crime and Policing

The research clearly shows that involvement with the criminal justice system is positively associated with homelessness (Barret, Young, Moore, Borum & Oschorn, 2009). On a most basic level, the ordinary law-abiding acts that homeless people perform on a daily basis in order to survive (such as sleeping, resting, drinking and eating), have become criminalised in many public places; this consequently positions homeless populations at the hands of the criminal justice system (Lee, Tyler & Wright, 2010; O’Sullivan, 2012). According to Donley and Wright (2008) scholars have paid little attention to the criminalisation of the homeless, thus there is not abundance of academic studies focused on this topic. In addition, they argue that there is a lack of evidence to suggest that homeless will respond positively to intimidation and criminalisation of their behaviours. On the contrary, evidence suggests homeless respond positively to approaches such as outreach services (Donley & Wright, 2008). Yet, the depiction of the criminal homeless has been deeply imprinted into the vocabulary of journalists, police and politicians. Evidence demonstrates that homeless people are primarily depicted as criminals, as opposed to victims of crime, even though they are more likely to fall victim to crime than to commit it (Moore, Canter, Stockley & Drake, 1995; Fooks & Pantazis, 1999). In fact, the criminal homeless are described as beggars, aggressive beggars or squatters. These behaviours are all linked back to the historical notions of ‘vagrants’81, which deemed to be illegal. This raises questions in regards to the way the police respond to homeless population.

The depiction of homeless people as victims is rather a subject to one important exception, namely those narratives that relate to homelessness and crime. In this

81 The notion of vagrants and behaviours associated to this idea were discussed in Literature Review Chapter (page 15 and 16).
instance, the relationship between homelessness the risk of victimisation is inverted (see Baron & Hartnagel, 1998; McCarthy & Hagan, 1991; Rothman, 1991). The emphasis is instead placed on the risk to the ‘respectable’ public of criminal victimisation from the homeless (Fooks & Pantazis, 1999, p.124). While this is the most widely reproduced image of homelessness and crime, homeless tend to also be portrayed as the victims of crime by the ‘respectable’ and homeless population alike; and as the architects of crimes against other homeless people (see Carlen, 1996). However, for homeless women in this research, in addition to being criminalised, they are more likely to experience risks, which are unique to their own identity as women (Radley, Hodgetts & Cullen, 2006). Homeless women face dangers such as physical or sexual violence (Rosenthal & Mallett, 2003; Wenzel, Koegel & Gelberg, 2000), and a sense of fear and insecurity (Dordick, 1997). The first section of this Chapter demonstrated that homeless women try to such avoid daily risks by spending their days in public and transitional places and nights in a more private environment. Similarly, Dordick (1997) indicates that homeless women tend to hide away during the night to gain a sense of security. In this section, the women’s accounts portray the notion of fear in two contexts: fear for their safety and fear for others.

Not only are homeless women exposed to certain risks during their homelessness, at times, they are the ones putting themselves at risk, especially by becoming involved in criminal activities. For homeless women in this research, involvement in criminal behaviour was minimal. At this point, the risk was in relation to the possibility of being incarcerated. Yet, this was not the risk that threatened their safety. It was their contact with the police. Here, it comes down to the beliefs and attitudes of homeless people. The second section of this Chapter demonstrated an existing hierarchy on the street, where trust and respect guide behaviours. In this section, the women’s stories indicate that respect can be earned by certain criminal actions and that trust can be lost by ‘being nice’ to the police. The women’s stories indicate this risk as twofold: risk of incarceration and risk of breaching the rules of the street.
According to the women’s accounts, their involvement in criminal activity was not extensive. Yet, most of them were in contact with the police at some point during their homelessness. Women expressed their attitudes towards the police in a negative manner, with an emphasis on the lack of privacy. This notion can be linked to the previous Chapter, where women demonstrated the importance of privacy in their lives through their depictions of home.

During the interviews and informal conversations, I learned that crime and policing are not necessarily a daily occurrence in homeless women’s lives, but it is something they all had come across at some point during their homelessness. For some women, witnessing or being involved in criminal activity occurred during their first days of homelessness, for others, this occurred later. No matter when a certain type of crime took place, homeless women in this study experienced risk. The women’s accounts of physical violence on the streets illustrates the issues of safety and fear:

I certainly… fear of mortal terror what was going to happen to me by… ‘cause they had these rocks smashing into some woman’s head. She went to the police, but I didn’t go there with her, as a witness. I just let it go. I wasn’t any help. I felt like throwing up afterwards, I think. I… I didn’t know… there’s no blood. Just… I just… the… it was just a racial thing. Two black ladies. Just stupid, and I wish it had never happened. They know one another, you know? If it was serious I might. You know? Not just some stupid bloody thing. Yeah, yeah… (Pam)

Some other things I took crap for other people [referring to her relationship with other homeless people], and you… I probably got a bit of a scar there. You can probably see a white line somewhere across my face [pointing to her scar], yeah, and probably up here… A fellow, uh, gave me, what, $5 and I didn’t took… uh, I took it. Because I thought he was friendly. But I’ll end up giving it back to him because he wanted sex and he hit me. Yeah. (Amy)

Most of them [referring to other homeless people] are alcoholics. And drug addicts. To get their next fix… to their… they will rob a person blind, it doesn’t matter who they are. Whether you’re healthy or not. Whether you, um, are walking or not. They will bash a person to get what they want. Because to them, a next fix, the next fix is… that’s what they’re focusing on. Not the person, what they can get. I’ve got to have this, I’ve gotta have this drink. You know. To them, it’s… controls them… Like, the women out there, whether you’re white or you’re black, right, if you get into a group, right, and they really are desperate, right, they will go out and bash… try to look for the loners, as we call them, right. The ones that sleep out by themselves, that are at risk, rest, and even the… the policemen will tell you this, and they will gang up on them to get what they want, whether white or black, right. It doesn't matter whether you're [a] woman, it doesn't matter whether you're [a] man. They will take on anybody, you know. Uh, some men, you know, know how to defend themselves, but when you get more than one on one, it's very hard to… unless, of course, you're physically strong, you don't cope. Men and women alike. And that's the big problem. (Mary)
The women’s stories indicate that even though in most situations in public space it does not matter whether a person is male or female, women still tend to be more at risk. The notion of this higher risk for women was evident in some women’s accounts:

It [sexual assault] does happen, but it's never... you never see that in public. Not, uh, through the day anyway, but if it's going on, it's usually happening of a night, mostly up in the parks and stuff like that, you know. Um, and that's why, you know, everybody now walks in groups. You know, never, ever walk through the parks, uh, by yourself because you just don't know who's waiting, believe you me. It can be very dangerous of a night-time in my... in some of these parks, you know. Some of them are closed, yes, but there's not really a lot of lighting in the parks. You know, unless of course it's a major park like near Roma Street but, you know, um, Wickham Park. Quite a few others have got lighting, but it's not a lot of lighting and once it gets dark, it gets dark. And that's the big problem, you know. And you know, even at 6:00 [p.m.] I've seen groups of women walking together going out for the night because they won't do it all by themselves anymore because it has become too dangerous. And it's just not Aborigines, it's, you know, anybody, you know, drunk, disorderly, it happens all the time, you know. And, you know, the sexual assault can happen mostly in the parks. The violent assaults happen everywhere. More so in the Valley and in the city, especially on the weekends, long weekends and, you know, stuff like that, you know. The drunk and disorderly, you know, they don't care. They will take anybody on. (Mary)

...from the end of the year when I turned seventeen, um, to the end of the year when I turned eighteen, um, I got raped three times. Yeah. Once, by helping someone out that couldn’t get home at about 3:00 in the morning ‘cause [the] trains weren’t running. Um, he tried to sell me drugs for sex and I said ‘no’ and he grabbed me anyway and assaulted me. Um, the second time, um, the second time I was busking into about 1:00 in the morning and went to go to a public toilet. And a guy came in and I spent an hour and a half cleaning up blood off the floor. And then the third time, um, I finally got back in contact with one of my sisters and said, ‘Come out for some drinks, we’re all going to like a bar’ sort of thing, and it was like a club of sort of thing. But I only stand in the bar area and just drank the whole night because of how shocking I was for alcohol. But, um, someone that night drugged my drink and 8:30 the next morning, I woke up. And her best friend had assaulted me while I was, like passed out. (Barb)

Violence, yeah, I was raped at the age of eighteen. That’s how my daughter came into the world. Yeah, I was getting raped in the Valley. (Val)

The women’s accounts in this research support Dordick’s (1997) conceptualisation of women being more vulnerable than men in public space. This is especially accurate in relation to Spain’s (2008) idea that women in public spaces need to be considered within a temporality discourse. As the women explained, certain public
spaces tended to be more dangerous at night than during the day. Accordingly, for these homeless women, *fear for their safety* was often present in their everyday life.

Even with the strong presence of *fear for their safety*, some women also expressed *fear for others*. For example, for Barb, an attack on another woman, or someone else, on the streets would trigger a defence mechanism in her: “*I’d jump in and try and stop it myself.*” In this instance *fear for others* was stronger than *fear for her safety*. Similarly, Val said, “*I would stand up for that woman. I’d stand in the middle of it. I wouldn’t care if I got bashed up... I’d make sure she was safe.*”

Contrary to Barb and Val, other women considered *fear for their safety* more strongly; they did not wish to subject themselves to any more danger than they already faced on a daily basis. Some women indicated they would rather distance themselves and seek help from the police. For example, Amy explained: “*Um, I’ll probably ring the police on them. Uh, then, you see something like that, it’s a bit putting yourself at risk.*” Others described:

Yes [referring to helping someone being attacked]. Especially if it was a streeter. It doesn’t matter who it is, a crime is a crime. You know. I’ve seen people arguing, and I’ve gone up and said, ‘Can I help?’ ‘Uh, we were just having words’. I dunno, it’s an influence. You know. They might just be having an argument. Sometimes, if it’s knives, you don’t get involved. Right? You know. If they ask for help, yes. But if they don’t ask for help, don’t be trying to become involved, if it’s with the knives and whatever else is happening. Go to somebody, that’s somebody of authority and they’ll step in. Like the police. I’d try to help. But if they didn’t want my help I’d step back. If they asked for help I would. Or ‘call the police’. I would. Alright. Because I know what it’s like to be in that situation and not have the help. Uh...Yeah, you know. I would help out if I can. You know. If I can say, ‘Hey brother, calm down’ or, ‘Hey sister, cool down what’s it got to... well this is not the place. Why don’t you go talk about it?’ And sometimes they will. Oh, get out of my face, leave me alone. You back off. You know? You’ve gotta take... You’ve gotta give and take. You know. If they want help they’ll ask. No, they’ll say, ‘Yeah okay, we’ll take it somewhere’. But sometimes, they don’t. Sometimes they have to deal with it in their own way, you know. And as I said, it’s a war. It’s not... maybe not... the war that we think, like over in Iraq, but it’s a war. It’s a mental and physical war. You’re battling with demons that you can’t see. You’re battling with people you can’t see. (Mary)

Oh, if it was bad enough, I definitely would [jump in]. I believe that if someone’s getting hurt, you should ring the police. It depends how bad it was, but I’d probably call the cop... cops if someone was getting hurt. ( Deb)
These stories demonstrate that the women’s fear for their safety is intense and they would rather protect their safety than someone else’s. Yet, according to the women’s stories, involving the police can also have consequences. For example, Lisa explained: “Well, I’d just walk away. I wouldn’t go, because they call you a nark on the streets if you go and tell the cops. They call you a nark.” Similarly, Barb explained: “And... that’s what we call a dog, people that go to the cops and dob82 you in. And dogs, uh, usually get themselves in a lot of trouble or run out of the city.” The second section of this Chapter discussed some of the existing rules on the street, such as trust and respect and when involving the police, women expose themselves to risk of breaching the rules of the street. According to the women’s stories, breaching the ‘street rules’ can impact on their status within role hierarchy.

In addition to the dangers that women can experience by going against the ‘street rules’, women also expose themselves to risk of incarceration. Through informal conversations and interviews, the women shared their stories of criminal activity and the potential of subjecting themselves to the risk of incarceration. The main offence women admitted to was shoplifting:

But I’ve got into to shoplifting a lot more since I’ve been homeless myself because, you know, you lose your shirt, you become dysfunctional, like some people have like milk in their fridge when they get home. You know, you can’t function like a normal person, so it makes you a little bit more like, look, I’m just going to steal this now. Rather than, you know, if you had a home, things would just be going much more normal. Um, but you become dysfunctional. So, it does lead to that kind of crime, I feel. And your stuff gets thrown out and you’ve got to replace it and, you know, or maybe your clothes get filthy and have to steal a dress just to be clean. I’ve done that before. You know, I probably… probably wouldn’t do half this much if I had, you know… (Deb)

Food, mainly. Yeah. Um, just… you know, I was just, I’m aware of organisations. I mean, I was aware of them but I just thought, they were just going to give me tins of Spam and I didn’t realise how good they were. You know, and I realised how lucky I am, really lucky. (Hope)

Some were stealing off one another, you know. Um, yeah, some was going... I couldn't believe it, hey, people would go... adults would go in the shop and steal food. I couldn't believe it. I said to them, ‘Why don't you split your... your... while you're on the streets, why don't you split, uh, your benefit, whatever you're getting from Centrelink in half so you've got money coming in every week. And then when you get a place, you can put... ask Centrelink to put it back whole again. They said, ‘No, not enough money’. I said, ‘There's enough money’. If you have that, you won't have to go in the shop and steal. I couldn't believe adults still doing it, you know. I said, ‘Oh where you going?’ ‘Oh, I'm

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82 According to Urban Dictionary, dob refers to telling on someone or turning someone in.
going to shop, get me…” I said, ‘You haven't got any money’. ‘Oh I'm just going to pinch’. (Lisa)

Yeah, I would steal like pads… or deodorant. I… I want to take care of myself and not smell, so when I get my period I usually steal pads. (part of an informal conversation with Barb)

I got in with the wrong crowd. Um, only little things like stealing food and clothes and, you know, stuff like that. (Amy)

These stories relate to the first section in this Chapter, where women discussed food and hygiene. Shoplifting was mainly a tool to gain the resources these women need to complete the process of passing.

While most of the women were involved in non-violent offences, there were a few who indicated they were involved in physical fights, yet only to defend themselves or their property. During an informal conversation, Jade explained: “I did fight. I did… only when I needed. People attack you for… for nothing. I’m tough! They want your stuff… and… and for nothing.” Val also described:

My good pair of Nikes went. I’m going, ‘I paid $450 for these blooming shoes, where the blooming hell are they?’ I ran after them, I said, ‘You bring me them back, mate’. Oh, blooming hell, I punched them and I knocked them out. But I got locked up for six months for it, for giving a person a broken nose for stealing my thing, man. (Val)

These accounts again reinforce the notion of the risks homeless women are exposed to on a daily basis. In this context, the women did not intentionally subject themselves to a risk. Indeed, it was self-defence that put them at risk of incarceration.

In addition to fear and risks on the street, the women’s stories consider the relationships they have with police officers. In this context, the women portrayed a mainly negative attitude, both from and towards police officers:

Oh, I find them harassing. When… when we sit down and… I think they're trying to move you on. Trying to move homeless people on. And when you're having a cigarette after that, yeah, uh, ah, they're alright. I just think they go… sometimes I want to say trigger happy. Whether this gun’s for real, or if you actually put out… put out something to say are you likely to pull a gun on me? I wondering [sic] if they really would. You know what I mean. And sometimes you think just back off. They've got all this power, all these batons and guns and notepads and hats and badges and crack. Like the… they’re packed full of tanks, you know? I have to see the first punch with, you know? They're overrated. They overrate themselves sometimes. In the most silliest of stupid ways. Talking to a homeless person, packed like a tank to that… ‘Do you know that person?’ ‘Never saw him in my life, just having a cigarette and we're talking.’ “Are
you sure?’ ‘Yes, I’m real sure.’ So they ask him, uh ‘Do you know her?’ said, ‘No, I
don’t, no’. It’s the truth, you can’t handle the truth? Where do these people live? Where
do they come from?’ (Pam)

Don’t go to the police about anything. They… it’s not worth it. They are not
trustworthy. Um, well, in all honesty, they’re really nice people. But, um, people tend to
pick fights with them or stare at them or, um, try and [to] get them to mess up… They
hold high-level respect but, um, because of, um, because of our situation, the police are
really degrading too. Like, they’re like, um, if they come up to us on the street or
something, they’ll search our bags, try and get us locked up for drugs or whatever. Even
if we don’t do drugs, they’re like ‘No, you’re on the street, you’ve got to do drugs’.
With some of the females that can’t fight, they’ll slam them around a bit. Um, the boys,
even in the watch house, get the shit flogged out of them. Like my husband went out
drinking with his friends one day and got a bit drunk. And, um, the cops pinched him,
like grabbed him and threw him in the watch house. And, um, instead of being in there
for like four hours or six hours maximum, only… it’s really only meant to be like four
hours. Um, they kept him in there for about, um, thirteen hours from 1:00 in the
afternoon till 2:00am the next morning. And, um, some of the screws, like the security
or, um, cops or whatever that work in the watch house, um, they slammed him around a
bit and he had a busted up lip and a bit of a concussion and a massive migraine the next
day. Like, he… he wasn’t hung-over, but ‘cause he… his head had been like smacked
into concrete, like, you know, they’d punched into him and stuff. You know, they just
treat us like shit because we don’t fit up to the standards of modern day society, like
because we’re not the same as everyone else. We’re… we’ve got… um, some of us
have got health issues, other, um, others have got, um, drug addictions or alcohol
problems. Or they’re not allowed to work. A lot of them have kids taken off them and
their houses taken away from them. Um, just stuff like that. No, I don’t talk to the cops
about anything. (Barb)

Um, well, I don't draw… um, attention to the police or anything but, um, I, I don’t, you
know, I don’t really… the police, some of them are not much help. You know? Once
they know… once they want to know your name, your date of birth and all that. Check
up on the computer. Oh yeah, she’s been, you know, stealing food and clothes and…
yeah. (Amy)

The police are real bad. It’s like one place you want to busk, but then someone whinges
about it, so you’ve got to move on to another place. Okay. But, um, you want to sleep
somewhere, you know, like, and you’re trying to be safe, some places in Brisbane, they
tell you to move on. Especially in train stations. They won’t… they don’t let you sleep
at all. (Val)

Yes, they’ve definitely come to my squat. Um, they came the day after, um, Easter
Fri… uh, Good Friday. They came on Saturday morning, which I thought was a bit
weird because, I mean, it was Easter. And they were okay, but he said to me as he left,
in a joking manner, ‘If I find you sleeping here again, you’ll be arrested, or lying down
basically’ and I thought… he sort of laughed, and I thought okay, it is a bit of a laugh.
He didn’t really seem to take it that seriously, but on the other hand, I’m homeless. You
know? And also, like, they were okay though. I think they sort of just thought, like… I
don’t know why they didn’t arrest me. But I think maybe they have to have permission
from the actual owner, I don’t know. But they didn’t arrest me. But they definitely came
and it freaked me out. But I was just lying there and I had to take it in my stride that
they knocked on the door and came in, them… it was a man and a woman cop. One
man, one woman. And I just got the feeling they were just checking up on me more…
I've had lots of contact with the police. In my past. I actually blame them a lot for the fact I am homeless. Because I’ve been traumatised through jail. I became separated from my family for a lengthy prison term. And now, my mother’s dead. I’ll never have that back, that really… And to be honest, it’s… it’s cut a… cut a hole in my heart towards the police and, you know, I really had an unfair treatment. In the past. Well, it’s just because, you know, I’ve had problems. And I never thought I could really feel so bad about some organisation, but I’m sorry, um, I do. (Deb)

Yeah, and most of the places that we sleep, cops will go around and shut it down just to make it difficult for us. And, um, I turned around to a detective a few weeks ago who kicked us out of a squat. And I said, ‘You really don’t give a fuck about us, do you, just cause we’re homeless’. And he goes, ‘That’s… that’s not true, there are a lot of people that care’. I said, ‘None of youse fucking care, what would you do if you didn’t have a family, you didn’t have a job, you didn’t have a house, you didn’t have any friends to rely or help you out, not just to rely on but to help out. And you were stuck on the street with no food, no showers, nowhere to sleep, no blankets, nothing. What would you do?’ And he shut his mouth, he couldn’t answer me. I said, ‘and what would you do if someone walked up to you like you are now, following us around and kicking us out of every possible spot that’s going to keep us safe?’ Again, he couldn’t answer me. I said, ‘You guys really don’t give a fuck, do you?’ Still couldn’t say anything. I said, ‘You… you might be an adult and probably twice my age but you really need to pull your fucking head in, and I think it’s a bit sad that someone my age, nineteen, has to tell you that’. And he’s just turned around and walked off. I was like, ‘You’re fucking pathetic’, like this a cop, detective, like, fucking ridiculous. I was like, ‘You need to pull your fucking head in’ and he’s [said], ‘Do you want me to arrest you?’ I said, ‘What, you really think that your power trips are going to work over me when I’m simply stating the fact? That you’re doing the wrong thing and you don’t give a fuck’. And he’s just [said], ‘Shut your mouth and I’ll let it go’. I said, ‘Don’t even try to fucking tell me what to do, hey?’ I said, ‘We’ll walk calmly and quietly, we’ll pick up all of… all of our stuff’. Any rubbish which that was around, which we usually got plastic bags from like a fast food place and put it in, dropped it on the bin, left it spick and span, nice and clean. You know, and, uh, yeah, someone came, found out where our squat was, came down and graffitied all over the walls of the side of this building and it fucked it up for us. They we’re blaming us, trying to arrest us. And they searched our bags and they found, um, like a Sharpie and a pen and some other stuff in my bum bag. And they’re like, um, ‘You’re going to have to come with us, we’re going to charge you with graffiti’. I said, ‘What do you mean?’ He goes, ‘The Sharpie is in your bag’. I said, ‘I go to school, have you ever heard of art class?’ I’m like, ‘labelling books’. Like the front of my book, it’s got my name in big black letters in plain writing, plain capitals across the top of the book. I was like, ‘Are you really going to charge me with graffiti because I go to school?’ and he’s gone, ‘Oh’. I was like, ‘You are a dickhead, an absolute idiot’. The same guy actually I was just like, ‘I thought I told you to pull your fucking head in?’ I was like, ‘You want us to listen to you, but you won’t listen to us’. The fucklets, they’re so stupid and thick, but you know… (Barb)

These accounts indicate one reason that the women formed negative attitudes was due to their lack of privacy. In this context, police officers breached women’s privacy by

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continuously searching their possessions and ‘moving’ them from their squats. As Niki explained: “And it was only the police that would move you on. The people that owned the buildings that I mostly squatted in, they didn’t mind. Because then they knew that somebody was looking after the place.” As the women’s stories demonstrated in the previous Chapter, privacy is a significant concept.

While the majority of women depicted their attitudes toward the police in a negative manner, a few expressed a ‘guarded’ opinion. In this context, the women did not really have contact with the police, yet, they acknowledged their presence. Based on the women’s stories, these women did not experience any negative events that would form disapproving opinions; however, they also did not express approval. Mary explained:

I sort of trust them but I don’t. If I was in trouble, I’d go to them. But at the same time, it’s like standing on the edge of cliffs and saying, ‘There’s a ledge there, will I or won’t I? Will I or won’t I? Will I go down abseiling or what?’ I’m terrified of heights. I’m absolutely terrified of heights. Even going up in the... in the…lifts terrifies me. I can go up on the escalators so long as I don’t look down. But going up, I... I’m like this. You know. And that’s how I look at [a] policeman. He’s there to help. But do you or don’t you? I still don’t trust... not because they’ve done anything wrong, because it was policeman who tried to help me, and in my mental state at the time... I had to go into a mental institution. Not because he hurt me, but because of what my family did. So yeah, in a way I do. But I don’t. Like, I trusted that policeman when he said it wasn’t safe. He just... it’s hard to explain. He was there on his bike and yet, he was the guy that, you know, he did look to... oh, I was half asleep when I... yeah? Who? What do you want? That was how I... I... ‘Oh I’m a policeman’. ‘Oh, I’m sorry, mate’, you know. I cowered, because I thought I was gonna get arrested. And when he said, in a nice voice, that it wasn’t safe there, I trusted him. Don’t ask me why, I just. He was just there. You know? (Mary)

Similar to Mary, Lisa’s opinion was mainly ‘guarded’. In an informal conversation, she explained: “I got nothing against the cops, nothing... I just stay away.”

The core role of the police is to uphold and enforce the law. In the past years the police have often been criticised for their approaches in responding to homelessness, especially when responding to minor public offences committed by people who occupy/live in public space (Coleman, 2012). As women’s stories demonstrated, the interactions can be positive or negative. While this research did not focus on police perceptions of, or approaches tin responding to homeless women, the review of literature reveals that while homelessness itself is not a crime, responses from the police
consider behaviours and action of homeless as criminal (Farrell, 2012). Consequently, such approaches frame women’s experiences with law enforcement (see Hartmann McNamara, Crawford & Burns, 2013). In addition, women’s stories also indicate, that the police tends to ‘move’ them from one space to another. This is consistent with the research on policing the homeless, which demonstrates that one of the main practices the police employ is spatial deconcentration of homeless (Amster, 2003; Berk & MacDonald, 2010; Culhane, 2010; Rowe & O’Connell, 2010; Stuart, 2014).

This section has illustrated that the homeless women in this study experience various risks during their homelessness. These consequently led to their fear, which differs by location and time. Both the concepts, risk and fear, are directly connected to the women’s attitude towards the police. Indeed, these attitudes reflect the women’s notions of home. Here, the women spoke of their negative attitudes towards the police due to a lack of privacy.

**Shelters and Service Workers**

Hoffman and Coffey (2008, p. 219) suggest that to make homeless individuals feel like they have a possibility of becoming a part of ‘mainstream society’, they need to be treated with respect. This would give homeless individuals a sense of dignity (Hoffman & Coffey, 2008). The women’s accounts in this research support the inter-related notions of respect and dignity, especially as a positive effect on women’s self-identity. The review of the literature points to the established research on service analysis and client needs, yet lacks appropriate critical engagement regarding what it means to be a woman on the street. As the previous sections in this Chapter show, the homeless women are struggling with their social role and have adapted a process of passing in order to be a part of the mainstream society. Consequently, the daily interactions with service workers during their homelessness can impact on these women to the extent that limits or furthers their life opportunities. Service workers are considered to be crucial with women’s processes of exiting homelessness. In this

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84 This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven (‘Exiting’ Homelessness).
section, the women’s stories demonstrate their need for recognition of respect and dignity from service workers.

On many occasions, the women spoke of interacting with service workers to ensure a shelter. In this context, a shelter is considered to be an emergency shelter or a boarding house. An emergency shelter offers women a short-term solution either before becoming homeless or during their homelessness. On the other hand, boarding houses offer women a long-term solution. The women’s stories indicate that whilst women do seek safety from the streets or violent homes, they do not consider shelters or boarding houses as safe. For most women, a lack of safety includes a lack of privacy; this also relates to the concept of gendered space.

Through informal conversations and interviews with the homeless women, I learned that boarding houses and shelters seem to be something everyone on the streets comes across. Before the women discussed their experiences of these places, they first explained the availability of such places, with particular reference to gender:

But they don’t let women stay there at Ozcare in South Brisbane. A lot of the places, they don’t let women, it’s only men only. But you can have a shower, as long as you’ve got a towel. (Niki)

Yeah, lack of shelter. This how I go to the women’s refuge, you know? You can only go to a women refuge if you’ve been in the domestic violence with a partner or, you know, stuff like that. Well, they need to pull their finger out and really see people in need that [are] homeless. (Amy)

Um, well they’re mostly men, usually, and... and, you know, and then, you know, um... just fell a little bit out of place because there’s that many men and a lot of them have been in prison or they’re degenerate types and, you know, and... I don’t know. It’s just not really that great. I mean, I’ve got a friend that [sic] lives in one of these places and I go and visit her and there’s urine on the floor of the toilet and, you know. People sort of sticking their nose out of the bedrooms as soon as you make a noise, and... I just don’t think it’s a great scene. Yeah. I’m getting a bit jealous, actually, because, I mean, everywhere you go in Brisbane, I mean, even shelters, all for men. And it’s like, where’s... where’s... you know, they’ve got so many more options than me here. So many more options, and yet it’s worse for a woman to be on the street. Because of periods and, you know, things like that. I think I feel a little bit jealous though that the men here just to get more. I think they do. I don’t give a fuck what anything, you know, I don’t care what anyone says, they do. They get more. And I think that’s kind of sexist in a way. But even the latest boarding housing I’ve... it’s men only, men only. Here’s

85 OzCare is one of the shelters that accommodate men only.
it… I can show it to you. Most people just want men, men in for some reason. And out in society, I think Australia is a bit male-orientated too. You know? (Deb)

According to the women’s stories, the available shelters and boarding houses tend to be gendered and more suitable for men than women. Subsequently, the lack of such shelters disregards women’s needs, for instance, appropriate hygiene (especially during menstruation). As a result, the women’s process of passing might be difficult or limited and their dignity degraded.

As evidenced above, it seems that most shelters and boarding houses are often places that are occupied predominately by men, contributing to these becoming gendered spaces. This means that the women tended to avoid these places. In this context, the women seek safety and privacy. For example, Mary explained: “For me, it’s safe because it means that I know I’m not gonna get bashed. You can lock your door. You can lock your window.” Yet for others like Niki, the experience was different. As she explained: “…they put me in a boarding house which was horrible.” Similar to Niki, other women described their experiences as negative:

If there’s any fights, the police are there, the ambulance is there, and the care… the boss, as I call him, is there. He won’t… look there were fights the first week I got there. Those people was… get out. You know. He didn’t give them as… you know. They’d been doing it for a while so he… he gave them one warning and that was it. Second warning, you go. You’re not welcomed. You know. There are rules. And you’ve got to abide by some rules. You know. If you want a roof over your head, you’ve got to be able to accept what’s there, and not knock it. And don’t look if… as… my grandma said, don’t look a gift horse in the mouth. And I didn’t. I was very happy to get off the streets, because I didn’t know where my next meal was coming from. I didn’t know if I was ever gonna be dry again. Even with all that security, you still… you know, can get bashed. Even though you get arrested, you can… it can still happen. Even with the police still there. Yeah. That can’t be stopped. You know. If people really wanna take something from you, they will do it, whether the police are there or not. There’s nothing you can stop that if they’re desperate enough. (Mary)

…because in Pindari, I’ve been there twenty-four times and I’ve had guitars stolen. I’ve had my purse stolen. I’ve had me being beashed in there. I’ve been stabbed in there. That’s why I would never be sent [sic] a person back to Pindari. Women are getting bashed in there. (Val)

Well, sometimes I feel, you know, it’s a bit unfair that why can’t someone sort of help me or take me in, but I’ve only had a few offers. But, um, I just feel like, you know, you never know, some of these places. You give your money, but you don’t know if they’re going to boot you out86 the next day. So, it’s a worry that, you know, you could part

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86 This is slang to mean to ‘discharge’ or ‘evict’ someone.
with some money and that, settle in, and that. And the next minute, you’re back out on the street again. So it becomes quite fearful for that reason. And yeah, um, you know, unless it’s an established place, I suppose, but even the boarding houses that’s… can be similar. (Deb)

And, um, what they need to do with that, what they do when they mixing people with schizophrenia with the normal people. Where the normal people won’t stay at them places because they’re so… there’s mixture with mental ill patients. Some are violent and aggressive. Some attack you… The food’s crap, you know, um. Where the people that can’t shower themselves, they should be showered twice a day, not like five days a week and then left from Friday to the weekend in a mess. And they’ve got all termites and everything in… in that place. Diseases going on and that. (Amy)

The women’s stories indicate that the level of violence in available shelters seems the same as on the streets. Once again, the women point to the notion of safety and privacy.

Moreover, these stories demonstrate lack of appropriate support, especially in terms of space. Here, Mary added:

And until you get people that do that and understand where we're coming from, you're still going to get that minority that are going to shun us. But more and more [we] are understanding just what it… you know, you know, there… there have been people out there that have lost jobs and become homeless, you know, and it's going to get a lot worse before it's going to get better. (Mary)

In this context, Mary explained that homeless women’s needs have to be properly addressed by the understanding of their life struggles. As the previous Chapter and this current Chapter demonstrate, the women I spoke to transition into homelessness due to a variety of complex factors. Consequently, in order to successfully address these, a full understanding of their experiences is required. For Mary, this understanding needs to be recognised by the government. Other women expressed similar concerns:

Um, I think that there’s… absolutely nowhere near enough help. Like, um, a lot of women’s shelters, um, they are quite violent. A lot of the girls will… will always want a fight. And there’s always, um, drugs around and stuff and you’ve got to either do them or sell them or you get robbed and stuff like that. So it’s a really bad environment to be in. No one should be out on the street whatsoever, but in the government’s views, you have to… you have to work or learn. And they are making it harder to get disability support for all of us that need it. And like pensions and stuff like that ‘cause not all of us are… are able to work, we don’t have the ability to be able to work. And they don’t see that. And we are not getting enough support. But yeah, it’s… it’s just really messed up. The… the government is not doing enough like… But, you know, they’re… they’re really messing things up a lot. Like, they could be… they could be helping other people, like this time they help disabled children in schools by giving them carers and stuff like that. And, but, you know, there is… and instead of shelters there should be… there should be, like, more room for people, like… Like, they should… every time when someone is homeless, there should be, um, a certain business that has a building, like an
office set up very close together just everywhere. Like Centrelink [offices] and stuff, they have got Centrelink, like, spread out around Brisbane and what-not. But, um, that they should have that to be able to get people onto Centrelink, set up bank accounts, refer them to like, um, psychiatrists and doctors and, like, career employment agencies and stuff like that. So that they can get into a house. And, like, if you get fined, you have to pay the money back to the government. So why can’t they set someone up in an agency like that, um, and use, like, a, um, housing department agency. So it’s cheaper. And pay their rent for a little while until they get onto their feet and then have something similar to a spare account, where they can pay that money back to the government. So therefore there is not as many people getting attacked or abused or left on the street, they are all in houses. And the government’s not going to be in as much debt. Because people can go to work and make that money back and pay it back. That way, they have got a better life…(Barb)

No support, nothing. Where they need to start, you know, the government needs to start spending money on the… for homeless shelters instead of… they built a motel. That money could’ve went [sic] for the homeless people, you know? They got a place down there called The Soup Kitchen87. And that… it’s in… they’ve… it was what used to be a pub. (Amy)

While the women’s stories indicate they feel that the government lacks an understanding of their situation, these stories did not point to a lack of understanding by homelessness service workers. On the contrary, the women seemed to feel respected by service workers. Not only did the women specifically discuss this, I also observed it. At times, the women walked into services and when they noticed their case worker, they called out their name in greeting and had a quick catch-up conversation. There were many more occasions like this. For example, during a visit to the Micah Projects’ facilities, Mary walked in all dressed up. She came up to the reception desk and said she would like to see her case worker. She then continued: “How do I look? Betty88 wanted to see me in a dress for once and I feel pretty. I never felt pretty in my life.” Clearly, Mary’s self-identity was on a positive note.

Similarly, while I was visiting Roma House, one of the service workers celebrated her birthday. During lunch time, she received a cake from her co-workers. She carried the cake out to the dining area, where all the homeless people enjoyed their lunch. She then called out to everyone to get a piece of cake. This action placed

87 One of the services located in Brisbane, which provides homeless people with food.

88 This is a pseudonym for Mary’s case worker.
homeless people on the same level as the service workers. Based on my observations and women’s stories, service workers treated women with *respect* in order to ensure their *dignity*.

This final theme has continued to illustrate the importance of other sections in this Chapter: *privacy*, *safety*, and *respect*, which points to *dignity*. In this context, dignity refers to the women’s self-identity, which according to their stories and my observations, was respected by service workers, but not by the government. Moreover, through the women’s accounts of shelters, the notion of gendered space was evident, which indicates a lack of safety, privacy and short or long-term sanctuary.
Chapter 6: ‘Managing’ Homelessness

This Chapter considers the strategies that homeless women utilise to ‘manage’ their homelessness. The data is predominantly based on observations and informal conversations. In addition, this Chapter draws on the previous two Chapters and demonstrates the importance of gender and space within the lives of the homeless women. While this Chapter is divided into three sections, the women’s accounts tend to overlap across these, accordingly demonstrating the complexity and uniqueness of their lives. In addition, this Chapter demonstrates the importance of understanding the dynamics between the women’s identities and their physical bodies in a man-made environment. The key themes for this Chapter are threefold: (1) ‘managing’ the street, ‘managing’ stress, and (3) ‘managing’ identity.

The first section identifies the theme of ‘managing’ the street as a significant part of the women’s lives. The relevant literature portrays homeless women as restricted to institutional homelessness spaces, for example shelters (Casey, Goudie & Reeve, 2007). Subsequently, Wardhaugh (1999) suggests that homeless women become invisible within such spaces and within the context of homelessness the street is considered an archetypically male space. In addition, and in line with findings in the previous Chapter, Smith (2005a) indicates that the street or public space is less likely to be occupied by homeless women, especially during the night. Indeed, Wardhaugh (1999) concludes that women tend to be partially visible during the day and in the shadows during the night. The women’s stories in this research identify two strategies to manage space during the day: transiency and invisibility. In this section, women’s accounts also point to the third strategy, squatting. According to Wardhaugh (1999), during the night women tend to seek protection from men, which coincides with the idea of squatting, which also implies not sleeping alone. Yet in this research, women only spoke of squatting as a strategy to maintain their safety during the night. The stories do not identify any specific role a man would play in this strategy.
The second section demonstrates the importance of ‘managing’ stress during homelessness. Homelessness is considered to be continuous over life cycles as well as across generations and can have severe damaging consequences (Hayes, Gray & Edwards, 2008). Based on the women’s stories, the majority of women consider homelessness as a no way out situation. Due to this, the women experienced feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression. In this context, women discussed three types of coping strategies. The most detrimental coping strategy women utilise is substance use. While for most, this strategy helps manage their anxieties at night, for others, substance use helps them endure depressive monotonous days. On the other hand, the strategy of social networking seems to be managed via various mechanisms (such as in-person, computers, or mobile phones) and provides women with much needed support during their days. In addition, during my field observations, I concluded that the art therapy classes affected homeless women in constructive and encouraging ways.

The third section in this Chapter explores the strategies that the women use to maintain their femininity. Using Goffman’s (1969) concept of impression management, the women’s stories point to the strategy of resistance, which allows them to maintain their own identity instead of adopting a homeless identity. Indeed, homeless women tend to actively resist the stigma attached to homeless women, such as bag lady (Cresswell, 1999). Yet for some women, the negotiation between resisting and adapting leads to a loss of self. Here, women exhibit a transition in and out of feminine behaviour and appearance.

‘Managing’ the Street

The previous Chapter demonstrated the methods homeless women utilise on a daily basis to be a part of a ‘mainstream society’. Through the process of passing, women manage their basic daily actions, such as washing, eating and sleeping. Moreover, during the day, they spend time in transient and busy public spaces and at night, they resort to hidden public spaces. This section focuses on the mechanisms that women use in order to ‘manage’ the public space that they occupy on a daily basis and
their bodies in such space. Here, the women’s stories and my field observations encompass all the previously discussed concepts, such as privacy and safety. In addition, women’s stories point to three main strategies they use to manage public space: (1) transiency, (2) invisibility, and (3) squatting.

One of my first assumptions during fieldwork was the glaring concept of transiency. For instance, on Wednesdays, I usually spent the mornings at the Micah Project facilities, the afternoons around the Brisbane CBD and the evenings at the 139 Club (for Crash Beds). Almost each week, I came across the same women in two or more of these locations. I did not necessarily interact with these women at these locations, but I did observe and identify their transiency. I realised that if I was not aware that these women were experiencing homelessness, I would probably not consider them homeless.

During an informal conversation with Sue, she explained: “I just do walkabout. I spend hours and hours just walking, everywhere. I ruined my shoes, but I still do it.” Similarly, Lisa explained: “Yeah... I walked for like 3 hours a day, every day... just different places.” For Sue and Lisa, like others who shared their stories89, transiency not only allows these women to pass, but also gives them an opportunity to manage public space, to control the space by being transient. In this context, women change and move from, or to, a public place, which enables them to utilise another coping strategy, invisibility. Mary described this:

Because they’ve learnt to hide. You pass people in the... have you ever walked in the street and seen how many people walking, how many people wait for a bus? And then you see the ones who don’t get on the bus. Have you really taken any notice? They’re the street people. They sit around. They’re in the mall every day. Or they’re up at the 139 Club if they don’t have a... room... That is how they... they hide. Or you... they might be normal people in the street, but you don’t notice them. They look like everyday people, just sitting on the bus stop or in the mall, but you don’t notice them. It’s easy to hide in a crowd full of people. (Mary)

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89 These stories were discussed in Chapter Five (‘Experiencing’ Homelessness), in the ‘Life on the street’ section, where women explained their daily routines.
In this instance, Mary points to *invisibility* by describing how homeless people occupy public spaces, yet manage to stay invisible. She continued: “*I usually sit few hours at one [Cultural Centre]*[^90] *bus station before going to the next one.*”

After I talked to Mary, I intentionally spent some time at the Cultural Centre bus station. Interestingly enough, I observed many women spending a few hours at these stations and on occasion, they change their seats. I noticed that the bus stations and the personnel working there, allow these women to maintain complete *invisibility* due to the transient nature of this space. The majority of the people whose primary intention was to catch the bus, spent only few minutes at the station and did not really interact with other people at the station.

According to the women’s stories, another location that allowed them to maintain their *invisibility* was at the shopping mall. Again, I intentionally spent some time in a shopping centre on Queen Street Mall[^91]. Similar to bus stations, there were a few women who spent hours walking around shops. There were probably more women who were homeless than I observed, however I only noted the women I knew from previous interactions, which further demonstrates their *invisibility*. In addition, the women’s *invisibility* seems to be connected to the process of *passing*. Barb explained: “*… a lot of us, just, we wear like the same clothes as everyone else. And if we keep them clean and stuff, you know, they are not going to notice.*”

During my fieldwork, I came across another public space where women utilise their *invisibility* due to the transiency of non-homeless people. This was ANZAC Park[^92], which is located in the Brisbane CBD and is frequented by many people during the day. This Park is surrounded with shops and bus stations. I observed a variety of people here: tourists, homeless people, students, families, older people, and people who work close by on their lunch break. Such diversity enables homeless women to maintain their *invisibility*.

[^90]: This is one of the main bus stations in Brisbane, located between the CBD and West End.

[^91]: This is one of the Brisbane CBD locations where I undertook my fieldwork.

[^92]: This is another Brisbane CBD location where I undertook my fieldwork.
By maintaining their *invisibility* and *transiency*, women not only manage their identity as women, but also manage their bodily privacy. Moore (2003, p. 215) explains this as “a right to control access to one’s body, capacities, and power.” Moreover, for humans, the ability to control such privacy is essential to our well-being. For women in this research, the notion of privacy played a significant role in their lives and by using *transiency* and *invisibility*, women re-gained the control of their physical privacy. This privacy consequently ensures these women’s safety. As established earlier, women tend to be more vulnerable and fearful in male-dominated space. Mary explained this vulnerability:

Yes, some of them are [referring to vulnerability]. Some of them aren’t, some of them do suffer a lot, you know. They become weak. They, um, become vulnerable. Uh, I would have been very vulnerable, even though I can fight, because of my handicaps, I can fight on one on one but if it’s more than one, you don't stand a chance unless, of course, you know how to defend yourself. And that was my problem. And there's a lot of women out there like me that would have that same problem. You know, they could probably fight on one on one, but any more than that, they wouldn't know how...But yet, this lady could, you know, nobody, nobody. Uh, it didn't matter how many there were, she seems to have been able to, you know, get back... something’s there, you know. It's not physical, it's not mental but she has learnt how to defend herself against anybody and, you know, if it was more than one, she'd take them out. And, you know, if you live for a long while on the streets, you've got to learn how to defend yourself. You have got to become tough to survive because it's a tough world. And there's some I wouldn't even take on and they're... they’re skinnier than me. (Mary)

In addition to *transiency*, women use *invisibility* to manage their homelessness in public spaces during the day. Due to the nature of public space during the night, these two strategies do not imply to these women. For most women, the best strategy to manage their hopelessness and vulnerability within public space during the night is *squatting*. In this instance, the women’s stories again point to the previously identified concepts of *fear, safety and privacy*:

But with a squat it’s good, you know, because you know it was an old abandoned place, and, you know, you’d know every sound. And, um, so if somebody came in, even in the dark, you know where to go, and that. And they don’t. Yeah, and I had a great squat…I always found somewhere under cover. But John, he was from Melbourne, and that’s all he knew. He’d never had a roof over his head. He only knew squats. And so he taught me how to live like that, and he even got a little TV that run on batteries. So it was only the… the screen was only that big [demonstrating through motions]. But you’d have… and once you had your area, people tend, like a home, they tend to not, you know, but the area was only where you slept… John would always manage to find somewhere that
had, uh, toilets, you know. Like it was in amongst other places. You know, like a tyre company was next door. And they to have toilet… Facilities. So had that, but you didn’t have shower or anything like that. (Niki)

Um, we find squats. And, um, we don’t tell anyone else where they are, even the other streeties. So if some trouble breaks out or whatever, we got somewhere safe. Well, it’s not safe, but it’s better than being out in the open and getting attacked, so we’ve got somewhere that we can go… Um, if other people happen to walk by our squat and find out where we are. If the cops find out where we are and hassle us to move on and threaten to arrest us for being there, like, we try not to break the law but, um, the… the thing is… is like where else you’re gonna go? You’ve got the street. If you’re not allowed to sleep there and keep moving on, obviously you’re gonna try and tuck yourself away. So we do our best to keep the other way of the yuppies and stuff, so… yuppies being just like, normal business people that walk around, like people that are on the streets, so…(Barb)

I think it’s the… the security, you know. They… they know that… you know, they will pick a place where they know they’re going to be safe, where they know that they’re not going to get bashed or… or anything like that. Where a lot of the men, most men, sort of, know how to defend themselves. Even though the women can… they’ve become hard as nails, they still… are still looking for that, sort of, comfort zone, you know. (Mary)

The women’s stories demonstrate that during the night, they are able to manage their homelessness in public space by squatting. This is mainly to counteract the fear and lack of privacy that the women experience on a daily basis. Moreover, for some women, the location of their squat plays a role as well. Sue described her squat: “It’s usually two or three of us and… and we try to find somewhere away from people.” Similarly, Deb explained:

But it’s near enough to a civilised area. Where, if you really had problems, you could probably get help. There’s a garage over the road, but it’s a little bit further. Um, but it’s within… and I always have my mobile as well. And it’s got neighbours that would hear you scream, and they’re not that far away. (Deb)

While Sue and Deb described the location of their squat, Mary illustrated the notion of home within the idea of a squat: “the women, they seem to… ’oh yeah, that’s a good spot. That’s mine’, you know. It’s like having a home, you know, sort of, that’s their… that’s their personal space, you know.” For these women, squatting tends to be a strategy that is specific to managing living in public space during the night time. This strategy ensures these women a certain level of safety and privacy.
As demonstrated, for homeless women, ‘managing’ public space plays a vital role in their daily routines. Homeless women tend to utilise three strategies that allow them to complete their process of passing during the day, and tackle their fear during the night. The nature of public space in Brisbane enables homeless women to be transient and invisible during the day and enable women to resist homeless identity. During the night, the same public space that is considered transient during the day becomes riskier during the night. In this instance, women use squatting to avoid risk and guarantee their safety and (bodily) privacy. Homeless women carry out daily activities and challenge public space actively. As Casey, Goudie and Reeve (2008) suggest, this can be understood as a form of resistance, not passively accepting the regulations, and resisting gendered spatial belonging.

‘Managing’ Stress

Previous research demonstrates that homelessness tends to be very stressful for women (Huttman & Redmons, 1992; Thrasher & Mowbray, 1995), yet limited studies explore how homeless women manage such stress (Milburn & D’Ercole, 1991). Milburn and D’Ercole (1991) propose a stress theory model grounded in traditional coping theories in order to establish the ways in which homeless women cope with stress. In this instance, it was suggested that the domains of coping with stress is unique to homeless women (Milburn & D’Ercole, 1991).

Klitzing (2003) examines the links between homeless women living in shelters and the use of leisure to cope with stress. She suggests that for homeless women there are different types of stress and consequently various conscious and unconscious ways of coping with stress. In addition, Klitzing (2003) points to the diversionary leisure activities, such as watching television or listening to music as critical past-times for homeless women to cope with stress. Yet, her study focuses on women who live in a shelter, where they were able to access such activities. Homeless women in this research experienced primary homelessness and were limited in their ability to engage in diversionary activities.
Similar to Klitzing’s (2003) study, the previous Chapters in this thesis recognise the complex and chaotic nature of the homeless women’s lives. Consequently, this section demonstrates the complexity and uniqueness of coping strategies homeless women use. The women’s stories portray a struggle with stress, which leaves these women in a so-called no way out situation. While the majority of these women endure this situation, for others, they additionally use three types of coping: (1) substance use, (2) social networking, and (3) art therapy.

During an informal conversation with Sue, she indicated that in her opinion most of the people on the streets have some sort of mental health problem, for example, anxiety, depression or feelings of isolation. She continued: “You do not really have happy moments, you feel depressed, sad, lonely, and trapped. There is no way out.” Other women expressed similar opinions:

I used to cry my guts off sometimes. I sat on the street one day and just cried my fucking guts off. I remember that. I couldn't see the way out of it… Someone asked me why did you… why were you crying the other day for when I… we saw you out there, you know? I said ‘grief’. Grief, it is, yeah. (Pam)

…sometimes, you know, it’s like… just really feeling depressed, you know, no way out. It happens all the time and I’m really unhappy, and… feeling like, you know, this is never going to stop and almost really depressed, almost really, really depressed. Feeling bad about the whole thing. Wasting your life, what’s going on, when’s it going to end. (Deb)

There were no good days. I’d just wake up feeling terrified. I still do. I still do, it’s sort of like become a habit. I wake up and I think oh my God, how am I going to cope, what am I going to do today, how am I going to fill in my day, you know, without going [pointing to her head to indicate the notion of crazy]. (Hope)

I don’t relate to people because of what’s happened to me. I don’t relate to people because I know I’ve got problems up here [pointing to her head], mentally. I can’t tell people that I’m slow, because I feel ostracised if I do. Shut out from their… I don’t make friends because of that. I have trouble relating to people. So yes, I feel very much alone. (Mary)

The no way out situation led most of the women to feelings of anxiety and depression. Sue explained: “…having nothing to do the whole day and then trying to go to sleep feeling like you are just wasting your life… I was just getting more and more depressed.”
A few of the women made an attempt to manage their mental health problems. Yet, access to certain mental health services tends to be limited. For example, during an informal conversation, Ivy explained: “Today I got caught up in stuff and missed my appointment and they said I need to wait like a week... so now I don’t know what’s gonna happen. I don’t wanna go crazy.” For Ivy, her chaotic life left her without her anxiety medications. For Barb, it was different. She described:

I don’t have enough money for it. So I can’t get a medication. So I just have to wander off on my own whenever I feel like I’m going to explode instead of letting other people put up with my bullshit. (Barb)

The women’s stories of a no way out situation demonstrate the harsh reality of homelessness. Moreover, the nature of their lives tends to limit their access to the services that might help them manage anxiety and depression. In addition, women’s accounts point to the feelings of anxiety during the night and feelings of depression (and isolation) during the day. Regardless of the mental health problem, anxiety or depression, a few of the women discussed coping through substance use.

As previously identified, during the night, women experienced mainly anxiety. Sue explained: “…yeah, the only way I could fall asleep and not feel paranoid was to get high or drunk…” Jade shared similar story: “You just don’t know if you will ever wake up... so, if I wanted to sleep, I smoked [referring to marijuana].” For these women, the danger of public space during the night affected their well-being to the extent that they developed anxieties. Their stories identify substance use as one solution to such stress.

While the women experienced anxiety at night, during the day most women described their feelings of depression. For example, Deb coped with feelings of isolation during the day accordingly: “You just went with others...so, when they drink or smoke, so do you. I didn’t wanna be alone.” Likewise, Erin explained: “Nothing,
there was nothing to do. Just walk around, and that. Wait for the van [referring to food van] to come in, and that. Smoke. I was a sniff... sniffer\textsuperscript{93}, but I'm not no more."

During my fieldwork, I spent one day walking around with one of my participants, Gail, where I observed her coping strategy of \textit{substance use}. First, she visited her friend who sold her a small amount of marijuana. At that point, she turned to me and said: "This is for tonight." Then, we walked from a park in Spring Hill to ANZAC Park in the Brisbane CBD. During our one hour walk, she revealed her daily plan to me. She said: "So, first I go to [the] bottle-o\textsuperscript{94} to get what I need. Then we go across to the park, where I make the mix. And then we will see." She then purchased the cheapest bottle of whiskey and a large Coca Cola. We then walked across the street to the ANZAC Park where she found a spot to sit. She took a non-transparent sports bottle from her bag and started mixing the whiskey and Coke. She added: "So, I just sit, hang around and wait if someone I know walks by. It's depressing actually."

In this instance she identified another coping strategy: \textit{social networking}. About an hour later, Gail all of a sudden got up and ran to the other side of the Park. I observed that she ran towards some of the people she knows. They were just passing by so she returned very quickly and with a disappointment said: "They're on a go, don't have time to hang." We spent another hour there by ourselves before she spotted one of her friends. He joined us. We spend about two more hours in the ANZAC Park before heading back to Spring Hill. During these two hours I was more an observer than participant in their discussion. Interestingly, both just wanted to talk. Once we returned to Spring Hill, Gail said to me: "It was good today. Will you be back? It's lonely other days." For Gail, her coping strategy entailed the mixture of \textit{substance use} and \textit{social networking}.

Unlike Gail, Kat’s story identified only \textit{social networking}. She explained: "I come here [referring to the 139 Club] and look for people I know. We sit here and watch TV. If they’re not here, I call them." During our informal conversation, one of her

\textsuperscript{93} This is referring to solvents and petrol.

\textsuperscript{94} This is Australian slang for a shop that sells alcohol.
friends walked in. Kat then said: “See, always someone here. No need to call [pointing to her mobile].” Many homeless women I observed own mobile phones. Yet, most indicated they use them to call their friends for a meet up or to play games to pass time.

In addition to mobile phones, I observed the use of Internet, more specifically Facebook. Yet, this was limited only to their visits to service providers that offer the use of communal computers. One day at Micah Projects, I spent time hanging around the common room where there are three computers available for homeless people to use. That day I was talking to Peggy. She was sitting behind the computer visiting the Facebook website. She explained to me: “I found some people here [pointing to her Facebook page] that are going through the same thing I am. They live in America.”

During my fieldwork, I observed that every time Peggy visited Micah Projects she walked to the common room in order to use the computer. At times she spent hours just communicating with her ‘Facebook friends’. For homeless women, the use social networking as a coping strategy varies by two types of communication: in-person interaction, and interaction via mobile phones or computers. Rowe and Wolch (1990) identify the impact of social networks on homeless women as both negative and positive. However, whether negative or positive, both tend to impact on women’s identity.

In addition to the previously discussed two coping strategies, during my fieldwork I spent a lot of time observing women who attended the free art classes at the 139 Club and the Lotus Centre. Here, I identified the third strategy: art therapy. The classes were scheduled once a week and were open to everyone, including men, women and non-homeless people. During approximately twelve weeks, I observed the interaction and behaviours of homeless women within classes at both locations. Based on my observations and informal conversations, I established that engaging in art therapy allowed these women to manage their stress on three different levels.

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95 This will be discussed in the next section (‘Managing’ identity).

96 This is a part of Micah Projects.
First, since the group was not limited to only homeless people, the women who were homeless felt included, instead of socially excluded. This allowed for the establishment of relationships outside of the homeless network; accordingly, I observed occasions when the homeless women spent time with the non-homeless women outside the class. To provide an example, one time, I noticed that two women (one was homeless, Flo, and the other was not) walked into the 139 Club together and were talking. They were also interacting throughout the class. At the end, when the class was finished, just before Flo left, she said: “Let’s meet up for coffee before next class again.” During our next session, Flo explained to me that she met the other woman at this class and they get together before the class “to chat.”

Second, the attitude within the art class group was at all times very positive, thus impacting on people’s confidence in an encouraging way. One time, one of the women coloured the canvas red and drew a few dark lines with a light border on it. Interestingly, everyone in the group expressed their admiration for the painting; I noticed a smile on her face. Moreover, she felt encouraged, picked up another canvas and started painting again.

Third, the feelings of gratification and fun resulted in forgetting all the problems for a few hours. I observed this during the conversation I had with one of the homeless women. During the classes, people shared positive nostalgic stories or talked about anything else, but their current problems in life. On one occasion, Mary said to me: “I had a bad night last night, I just want to paint now.” During that class, she never mentioned what happened the previous night; she just enjoyed the random conversations and painted.

My observations indicate a positive impact of art amongst homeless women. While the existing literature links between art therapy and homeless women is limited, the research on other vulnerable populations illustrates the relevance of art therapy as a coping strategy. The literature shows strong positive effects of art therapy. These include:
• increased cooperation with others, communication, and a collaborative sense of empathy and growth (Clover, 2011);
• self-exploration and a redirection of emotional energy (Kidd, 2009);
• better management of everyday challenges, an increase in self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-pride, socialisation, and a decrease in depression (Bryne, Raphael, & Coleman-Wilson, 2010);
• an increased ability to better communicate, better social interactions and control of personal states (Sweeney, 2009);
• a sense of inclusion, warmth and achievement, and a positive view of the future (Froggett & Little, 2012);
• an increase in self-esteem, empowerment, self-confidence and independence, and a decrease in negative self-image perceptions (Heenan, 2006); and
• a sense of belonging, relaxation, socialisation and creativity and improved abilities to self-manage (Lipe, Ward, Watson, Manley, Keen, Kelly & Clemmer, 2012).

Based on this literature and my observations, it can be concluded that the coping strategy of art therapy affects these women positively.

In addition, women’s coping strategies identified in this section can impact positively on their identities and their likelihood of exiting homelessness. While the impact on identity will be explored in the next section; the probability of the positive impact of women’s constructive social networking and art therapy strategies, and the more negative substance use coping strategy, will be further explored in the following Chapter.

‘Managing’ Identity

Snow and Anderson (1993) explain that homeless people engage in a variety of strategies, such as role distancing and role embracement to manage their ‘self’. In this context, an individual either resists or actively negotiates their identity (Snow & Anderson, 1993). As Casey and colleagues (2007) argue, homeless women adapt or
resist a homeless identity through the presentation of self. At this point Goffman’s (1969) concept of performance management needs to be considered in order to identify the strategies that women utilise to either adapt to, or resist, a homeless (spoiled) identity. According to Goffman (1969), it is assumed that homeless women want to appear credible to others and want (or need) to make a good impression. In this section, the women’s stories demonstrate their resistance to a homeless identity and instead maintain the idea of ‘preferred identities’ (Charmaz, 1987).

In addition, Goffman (1963b) points to stigma, which is directly linked to the concept of ‘spoiled identity’. For homeless women, “to find ways of being homeless, and to begin to find their place in the world” (Wardhaugh, 1999, p. 106), needs to be understood to challenge the stigma of homeless women and the stereotype of a bag lady. Casey and colleagues (2008) indicate that women’s resistance of this stigma influences how, and in which ways, women use public space, their interaction with homeless services, other interactions, and needs. In this instance, the link between gender identity, gender relations, and spatiality plays a vital role in understanding women’s identities on the streets.

Radley and colleagues (2006) suggest that for women to occupy public space at various times, their behaviour is considered transgressive. In addition, such behaviour is identified as risky and these women risk being identified as persons willing to risk their virtue (Radley et al., 2006). This is in contrast to what homeless women’s accounts indicate. For example, Val explained: “…because we feel like, or, especially in our sexuality, we feel like more vulnerable.” Similarly, Barb explained: “It’s not like I am putting myself out there on purpose.” In this instance, women identified their sexuality in the context of vulnerability. Moreover, their stories demonstrate their actions do not willingly put themselves women at risk, instead, their bodies in public space expose their femininity to risks.

As the previous Chapter demonstrated, some women tend to be involved in current intimate relationships, which indicate these women want to express their sexuality in the same manner as non-homeless women. For example, one evening at 139
Club (Crash Beds), Deb was there and she was wearing quite heavy make-up (dark blue eye-shadow, eye-liner and some blush). She said: “Do you like it? I got it at the shopping centre... you know from testers.” She then continued: “I want to look nice... you know... I would like to meet a guy.” By emphasising her feminine appearance, I deduced Deb was seeking to express her ‘self’ as a woman and not a homeless woman.

Cresswell (1999) points to the notion of homeless women who are outside the normal spaces and prescribed social roles. According to this notion, homeless women’s femininity is at risk. For example, when I first met Sue walking around Spring Hill, she was with three homeless men. Initially, I was not aware that she was a woman. She was wearing shorts, a baggy T-shirt, a hooded jumper, sneakers and a baseball hat that covered her short hair. Her appearance was very similar to the homeless men’s. Moreover, her behaviour was exactly the same as the behaviour exhibited by the three men. In this instance, Sue adopted a more masculine based clothing and behaviour. Interestingly, a few weeks later, I saw Sue at 139 Club (Crash Beds) and her appearance and behaviour was completely different. During the Crash Beds night, women have the opportunity to wash their clothes, and try on donated clothes and shoes. At one point, Sue tried on a dress and shoes with a small heel. She twirled and said: “How do I look? I like these shoes, nothing like what I have.” Within few weeks, Sue demonstrated a so-called loss of self by changing her behaviour and appearance.

For Sue, her performance management also indicates the notion of gendered self-imaging process (Cloke, 2004). To this effect, Cloke (2004) suggests four categories: women who hide by concealing their homelessness; women who associate with homeless men for protection; women who are at the centre of attention on the streets; and women who live in a controlled and temporary accommodation. In this context, Sue first associated with homeless men and then changed her appearance and behaviour in order to conceal her homelessness. This means she resisted a homeless

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97 According to Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007), Sue’s behaviour can be considered ‘female masculinity’, which relates to situations where women are employed in positions assumed ‘traditionally’ masculine. The behaviour exhibited relates to their walking – they were staggering a bit; and they were holding cans of beer.

98 This concept is grounded in Charmaz’s (1993) work on the loss of individual’s self-image.
identity and re-established her femininity. Nevertheless, there are still some women whose gender identity might be more vulnerable and their femininity can become displaced. As Mary explained:

Um, well, see, if they're in a home, they would start looking after themselves, they comb their hair, you know, they do all the things, right. They treat everybody as... with respect and that. Out in the street, that's all gone, you know. That... their... their number one is them, right. Most of the women, some of them women were looking after themselves, most of them weren't, you know. Their respect, their dignity, everything was gone, you know. If they were clean, that was it. If they weren't, they did… they just didn't give a… a damn, you know [nodding her head with disappointment]. And some of them didn't even bother. (Mary)

Mary pointed to the notion of respectability and the loss of such, which could mean one’s identity would be spoiled. In addition, this also demonstrates the vulnerability of homeless women’s identities.

While managing femininity was probably a struggle for many homeless women, it seems that when these women adapted the process of passing and actively resisted a homeless identity, their actions were in line with their femaleness. Barb used the process of passing to ensure her femininity:

Well… well a lot of people that I’ve met say that I don’t look homeless. That’s because I keep my clothes as clean as I can. Try and keep myself, like, really like cleaned up and stuff. Um, I’ve got really good hygiene and stuff so I keep myself fairly clean. And even though I’ve got, like, a lot of piercings and metal in my face, um… I’m not exactly 100% presentable. But I’m not like disgusting. (Barb)

Barb’s story was not an exception. In the previous Chapter, the women’s stories identified the process of passing, which allowed these women to resist a homeless appearance and identity and thus ensure their femininity. During my fieldwork, my observations confirmed the women’s stories. One day, when I went to see Gail at Roma House, she took me to her room. She then applied make-up, did her hair and changed her clothes. At one point, she turned to me and said: “What do you think? This dress or the other one? I’m lucky I am at this place, I need a place to get ready.” This again demonstrates resistance.

Besides Sue, I rarely came across women who adopted masculine behaviour or a homeless identity during their homelessness. For most women I spoke to and observed, their self-image aligns with Cloke’s (2004) assumption of hiding one’s homelessness by
utilising the process of *passing, resisting*, and maintaining or re-establishing their femininity. In addition, during their homelessness, some women negotiate their identity, which can lead to *loss of self*. In this instance, the women experience uncertainty and insecurity in terms of their appearance and behaviour, which points to the vulnerability of their identities. Yet, women’s stories demonstrate that these women try actively to assume so-called preferred identity (Charmaz, 1987), which enables them to distance themselves from the stigma of a ‘bag lady’.
Chapter 7: ‘Exiting’ Homelessness

This research did not initially set out to explore the exiting strategies of homeless women. Yet during the fieldwork, it became apparent that the transition out of homelessness is as complex as the transition into homelessness. Furthermore, most of the women transitioned between primary, secondary or tertiary homelessness during their homelessness experience. In addition, to fully understand the successful transitions out of homelessness, I would need to access personal and confidential files within certain service providers. For this, I would need to gain additional ethical approval, and due to the nature of women’s transiency it would have been hard to determine which service providers actually handled their cases. As a result, the current Chapter portrays women’s perspectives on ‘exiting’ homelessness. The key themes for this Chapter are threefold: (1) willingness, (2) moving on and (3) adjusting to the life off the street.

Piliavin, Wright, Mare and Westerfelt (1996) emphasise that researchers have neglected the transitions out of, and back into, homelessness. The nature of homeless people suggests numerous exits and returns to homelessness (Piliavin et al., 1996). Thus, these transitions need to be appropriately addressed. In recent years, the literature on homelessness indicates stable and permanent housing as the key element for a successful transition out of homelessness (see e.g., Thompson, Pollio, Eyrich, Bradbury & North, 2004). Yet, similar to the literature on reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness, the literature largely focuses on structural, instead of individual, factors. Accordingly, this Chapter explores this gap and considers the individual stories of homeless women.

The first section depicts women’s aspirations for transitioning out of homelessness. Here, the women’s stories indicate two levels of willingness: *purposive willingness* and *willingness to engage*. Their stories demonstrate that while all the women in this research desire to exit homelessness, not all have the strength to actively

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99 During my fieldwork, I interviewed three women who have successfully exited homelessness. All of the others were still experiencing primary, secondary, or tertiary homelessness.
engage in the process of exiting. Their stories indicate the importance of engaging with homelessness services.

The second section describes the women’s stories of transitions. Unlike the transience embedded within daily life the women spoke of in previous Chapters, this transiency relates to the moves within the types or categories of homelessness, that is, primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness, or exiting homelessness altogether. Based on the women’s accounts, contact with services seems to be imperative to their process. While some literature indicates the importance of social networks, this section demonstrates that for these women, contact with services provides them with the best opportunities to either exit homelessness completely or transition out of primary homelessness.

The third section briefly explores the women’s lives off the street. Here, the women who successfully exited homelessness discuss the concept of ‘managing’ life off the street. For women who exited primary homelessness and are currently experiencing tertiary homelessness, the next suggested step is an absolute exit out of homelessness. In this instance, women point to expectation in terms of space and expectation in terms of well-being. The women also shared their thoughts about their future hopes upon exiting homelessness.

**Willingness**

The women’s stories thus far strongly demonstrate the chaotic nature of their lives. Life on the streets challenges their identities and continuously exposes them to various risks. This section suggests that all the women in this research desire to end their homelessness. As previous Chapters determined, women’s relationships, roles, daily risks, stress levels and daily routines tend to be complex and unique to their own identities as women. In this instance, the established models for exiting homelessness might not be appropriate. This section suggests that for these women to successfully
exit homelessness, individual factors play a vital role. Moreover, this willingness has
two levels: *purposive willingness* and *willingness to engage*.

The women’s stories portray their hardship, but also their aspirations to
transition out of homeless. My fieldwork observations point to the remarkable strength
of these women. Based on the stories I heard, all the women wanted to change their
current situations. For some, it would be more difficult than others. For example, Barb
explained:

…even though we’re in a really tough situation ‘cause it’s quite violent out on the
streets as well, um, we’re both hoping and look for jobs even though we’re not
completely capable of it. And we’re just going to try and, um, start off in community
housing… Yeah, but looking for a boarding house is really difficult too, like. Um… I
went through about three different A4 size folders, like as thick as the tissue box. And
called up, um, every single shelter that I’d been the, uh, age range for, and they are all
completely booked out. So it’s really, really hard to find somewhere to go most of the
time. So you sort of just gotta find somewhere tucked away to crash and yeah… (Barb)

Similarly, Kat said: “*I feel like I can’t fight anymore, but I need to... I need to leave the
street. I want my life back.*” As Chapter Four established, most women experienced a
form of violence before (and even during) their homelessness, which suggests they are
(potentially) continuously exposed to violence. In saying this, their willingness to
transition out of homelessness seems to over-power their previous struggles. In this
instance, the women’s stories point to *purposive willingness*.

One night at 139 Club (Crash Beds), Jade was smoking a cigarette on the
balcony and looking down at the city lights. I approached her and said: “*Amazing view,
right?*” Jade replied: “*Yeah, it’s nice. Soon, I will have my own place with a view like
this... I will get there.*” She continued: “*I have to get off the street... so depressing.*” A
lot of other conversations like this emerged during the Wednesday’s Crash Beds.
Women were in a safe place for the night, with access to proper bathroom facilities and
food. In this instance, it was probably the spatial setting that reminded them of their
conceptualisation of an *ideal home* and consequently inspired their *purposive
willingness*. 

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Another situation that influenced positive thinking in homeless women was their participation in structured activities. The previous Chapter demonstrates that for some women, participation in art classes encourages them to expand their social networks, change their way of thinking and eventually impacts on their well-being in a positive manner. This can impact on their willingness to engage with service providers or expand their social networks. In line with this, Thomas, Gray, McGinty and Ebringer (2011) identify participation in structured activities, such as art therapy, as the first step towards an increased chance of exiting homelessness. Engaging in art or other creative activities encourages positive community involvement that constructs new identities, routines and roles that offer alternatives to the issues associated with homelessness and act as a diversion to alcohol and substance abuse (Thomas et al., 2011).

In addition to art classes, homeless people can attend Homeless Connect, which is an event held twice a year by Brisbane City Council. Here, homeless people can familiarise themselves with all the essential services that are offered throughout Brisbane. On the 25th May 2012, I attended this event. Throughout the day I spoke to many homeless women. One in particular stood out. In my conversation with Cara, she explained: “Being here and seeing the services... I mean, a friend told me about this, and I’m glad I came. It’s reassuring to see all the help. Gives hope.” Here, participation in an event initiated willingness to engage.

At the time of these informal conversations and interviews, these women experienced primary homelessness. Their stories demonstrate their purposive willingness to leave the street life or at least transition into tertiary homelessness. These accounts also point to the notion that experiencing homelessness without any help (such as service providers or social networks) might be particularly challenging. In this instance it is suggested that women who participated in structured activities exhibited a willingness to engage. This will be explored further in the next section, where women describe their strategies for transitioning out of homelessness.
Moving on

Zlotnick, Tam and Robertson (2003) imply links between disaffiliation and exiting homelessness. In this context, disaffiliation refers to decreased contact with existing family and friends, a lack of contact with homelessness (and other) services, and the absence of treatment for substance use (Grigsby, Baumann, Gregorich & Roberts-Gray, 1990). In this research, the women’s stories demonstrate these disaffiliations manifest based on their experiences. For example, Chapter Five clearly illustrates that for most women, their relationships with their families are quite complex and are considered to be within the past negative family relationships and current negative family relationships categories. Yet, all the women spoke of experiencing current friendships. Due to the nature of women’s lives in this research, this section explores the stories of women who have either transitioned out of primary homelessness or have completely exited homelessness. In this context, the women’s stories validate that their contact with services enabled them to either exit homelessness or to transition out of primary homelessness.

During an interview with Lisa, she explained that she spent a few months on the streets and rarely interacted with homeless services. Nevertheless, as she said: “I wanted to leave, [I] just didn’t know how.” Eventually, an outreach section of Micah Projects approached her:

Um, and then Micah... Micah come and see me every... every week. And then after a while, they said to me, ‘Oh, would you like to... would you like a place?’ I said, ‘Oh yeah’ and then they took... they didn't bring me here, they got all the furniture and bought it themselves. I didn't come until later when they had all the furniture, well, most, you know, all set up. Yeah, and then they brought me here and I thought woah, you know. I have got a home, this is my home, you know. (Lisa)

In contrast, Niki explained that together with her partner, they were in constant contact with one of the service providers. For Niki, the help she received seemed invaluable. For our scheduled interview, the workers took me to Niki’s place (where I undertook the interview) and as soon as we walked in, Niki handed the two workers who were with me and had been working with her for months, an envelope. I later discovered that she had written the two workers a very long letter expressing her
gratitude. This shows that for Niki the contact with services played a crucial role in her exit out of homelessness.

Both Lisa and Niki transitioned straight from primary homelessness out of homelessness. This was unlike the remaining majority of other women in this research, who have been transitioning between primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. For example, during my fieldwork, Deb was considered as experiencing primary homelessness. Once she explained her transitions to me: “Yesterday I slept at my friend’s place, on her couch. I sometimes go there, just to be inside.” In addition, I saw her at one of the boarding houses. Yet, she spent only few days there. Similarly, Amy described: “I go to [a] boarding house sometimes or to my friend’s place...she just got her place...but yeah, I kinda move around.” Val also remembered: “I've been into boarding houses. I've been in brothels and all stuff.”

This section briefly portrayed the women’s transitions between different categories of homelessness, or their exit out of homelessness. During my fieldwork, a few women also moved into boarding houses and maintained their tertiary homelessness until I exited the field. As part of my observations, I spent time at various services where workers helped these women move into boarding houses or other types of accommodation. In this instance, my observations and the women’s stories point to the importance of contact with services when exiting homelessness.

**Adjusting to a Life off the Street**

There is little literature that explores women’s strategies of maintaining a non-homeless status once they leave the street. This section provides a brief insight into how the women adjusted to a life off the street. For the women who successfully exited primary homelessness, either completely or to a tertiary homelessness stage, it is evident that they still faced other obstacles. They had to adjust to a ‘new’ life. Based on the women’s stories, two major themes emerged: ‘managing’ life off the street and expectations.
The women’s accounts illustrate that for the women who have exited homelessness completely, their next challenge is ‘managing’ life off the street. For example, Lisa explained: “I have a small garden that I need to watch. I need to pay bills also. But I put money aside for that now.” In this context, Lisa was talking about managing her space by maintaining the garden and paying rent. Similarly, Niki described:

And trying to get used to… I know it’s normal, but it just seems like when you’re not used to paying bills, you know, electricity and things like that, you’re not used to that, and then you pay that, and it’s like… It’s like, uh, how am I going to cope? But that’s… that’s what everybody has to do. You know, everybody has to pay bills. Manage the money. Yeah. So, instead of it going onto drugs, it goes to the electricity company, or whatever. (Niki)

It seems that for the women who have exited homelessness, the main adjustment is the fact that now they have a space they need to maintain and manage much more so that during their lives on the streets.

For the women who remain homeless, yet have transitioned into tertiary homelessness, their stories reveal the notion of expectations, that is, the idea of what will happen once they actually exit homelessness. In this instance, their purposive willingness to exit seems to increase as well. In addition, the women think of these expectations in two different ways: in terms of space and in terms of well-being.

The women who expressed expectations in terms of space emphasised the words ‘my own’. For example, Gail said: “I want my own house with my own garden… and yeah, I know how it sounds, but I want a husband.” Similarly, Pam described:

I’ve [been] looking for permanent accommodation of my own, like a studio flat, yeah, yeah, so…I’m trying to learn my lesson on how to be, still. How to be around people who think homelessness is an evil thing, think that dependency is there… is another person’s blame for themselves. Is tormenting middle-aged women about their own social situation, their business, smutty kids and smutty language and smutty parents and smugness. I’m just trying to say, “Che sarà sarà”, you know? That’s about it. Yeah. That’s what I’m living at the moment, across the road from clubs. An all-night discotheque happens. (Pam)

While for some women, their spatiality was the priority, for others, it was their well-being they cared about. Kat explained: “I just want my health back…you know, not to be sick all the time ‘cause of sleeping on the concrete.” Others described:
I wanna understand why I do that [relating to her anger issues]. Because that’s something I don’t understand. So that I can learn to control it, so that I don’t end up back on the streets. I didn’t know how to speak to people. I still don’t. You know, I… I get... I think oh they don’t wanna know, I’m mentally impaired, you know. I’ve got something... why would they wanna talk to somebody that’s got brain damage? That’s the way I look at this. See, a mental... I’ve got an acquired brain injury which is a mental impairment, right? And there’s still a stigma attached to that. A very big stigma, you know? When you try to... No thank you, I don’t wanna know. No, no. People look at you and think, you know, and talk, you know, you see the impairment. I can relate to that, because, uh, I’m coming from there. So the only counsel I get is through my psychologist. You know. I have never talked about my abuse to anybody, because I didn’t know how. I didn’t know you could. And there’s a lot I can’t tell them. I can even remember the physical abuse, but I can’t tell them where it started, I can’t tell them when it stopped. (Mary)

I just want to take good care of my health and my... you know, my emotional health, emotional stability. And, um, you know, I don’t think of being on disability [social security payments] as... I mean, the thing is, I have a criminal history and that makes it really hard getting a job. But you know, even if it’s volunteer work, I know that can be overcome. I shouldn’t be… I tend to be a bit defeatist about working, but the thought of never working again, even if it’s only… I, you know, three days a week nursing would be fine. You know, even just as a nurse assistant. I don’t want to lose my marbles [laughs]. I like being active, you know, and, you know, it’s a good way to… you know, it’s a good social network… (Hope)

The women’s stories also point to the notion of fear. This fear is in the context of losing the security they gained by exiting homelessness. For example, in the above quote, Mary said: “…that I don’t end up back on the streets”; she fears the idea of transitioning back to primary homelessness. Even for Lisa, who exited homelessness completely, this fear is present: “I don’t wanna do anything wrong here [pointing to her unit] because I wanna stay here...yeah, I don’t wanna go back out.”

For all these women, life at the moment seems quite optimistic. They point out that activities like paying bills, getting a job and stocking a cupboard with food, among other tasks, relates to the concept of ‘home’. All these actions seem to indicate that the women are trying to rebuild their lives and overcome any issues from the past. For some, it might mean they need to learn how to be independent, for others, it might be the start they were looking for. Either way, most of the women seem to be satisfied with their current life situations.
Chapter 8: Discussion

This thesis has explored homeless women’s stories in the context of four key themes: (1) ‘becoming’ homeless, (2) ‘experiencing’ homelessness, (3) ‘managing’ homelessness, and (4) ‘exiting’ homelessness. The sub-themes discussed within Chapters Four to Seven tend to overlap somewhat. These key themes point to the importance of looking at women’s experiences in a holistic way instead of focusing on one specific aspect of their homelessness. This Chapter is thus structured in this way to consider the original research aims and the implications of the findings.

This Chapter first summarises and discusses the key findings from this research. These are considered with reference to the research aims. In this instance, I critically reflect upon the proposed aims, the key themes and the theoretical considerations. This discussion demonstrates the value of understanding homeless women within a gendered and spatial context. The second part of the Chapter considers the ways in which the women’s stories point to practical and policy concerns. These include social inclusion/exclusion policies, early interventions and research recommendations.

Aims

On reflecting on the literature on homeless women and the theoretical considerations about gender and spatiality, I recognised an important gap in understanding the experiences of homeless women. Within the context of the Australian Government’s goal of halving the numbers of homeless people, I identified the importance of comprehending the experiences of homeless women to appropriately address any future intervention and prevention strategies. The ABS’s and SHS’s statistical information demonstrates that women’s homelessness in Australia is on the increase. As a result, this research proposed three key aims:

1) To explore women’s reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness;

100 FaHCSIA’s White Paper as discussed in Chapter Two (Literature Review).
2) To explore women’s experiences of homelessness that are grounded in their identities; and

3) To explore how homeless women experience ‘risky’ social spaces (public spaces) and how they negotiate and manage their spatialised selves.

During almost ten months of ethnographic fieldwork, I observed and spoke to many homeless women on the streets of Brisbane. Some of these women had recently exited homelessness, some are still experiencing primary homelessness and others are transitioning between primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. This section discusses the three key aims of this research grounded in the homeless women’s stories. Four key themes emerged and although these themes were considered separately, there are many sub-themes that overlap within the four key themes. Importantly, in discussing these themes, I draw on the three major theoretical elements outlined in the proposed theoretical model in Chapter Two: gender relations, gender identity, and spatiality.

**Research aim one: Exploring women’s reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness**

The first aim was to explore women’s reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness. The women’s accounts in this research illustrate that their reasons tend to be complex, individualistic, gendered, and grounded in their identity and relationships within the private sphere of the home. Discussion in this section is structured in two key ways: reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness. First, the women’s stories point to the complexity of precisely determining one specific reason that led to their homelessness. In this instance, the women’s notions of ‘home’ needs to be considered as their stories demonstrate that their reasons for homelessness impacted on their perceptions of home. Here, it is important to understand the link between the women’s reasons for homelessness and their ideas of home. Secondly, the women’s accounts demonstrate that their transition into homelessness can occur rapidly or over time and these transitions tend to be determined by direct and indirect reasons. In addition, to better comprehend the women’s experiences of this transition, their conceptualisations of both shelters and more generally, homelessness, is considered. To this end, the
women discuss the concept of privacy. The women’s stories demonstrate that shelters represent a place that is lacking privacy and consequently not providing the safety they need.

For most of the women, the struggle before homelessness was more on an individual than a structural level. More specifically, their struggles were in most cases due to their experiences of childhood sexual or physical abuse and/or abuse in their adulthood, which occurred within their home. The scholarly literature recognises both individual and structural reasons for women’s homelessness (Snow & Anderson, 1993), yet recent research and responses focus predominately on structural factors (Wright, 2009). Moreover, the existing literature on homeless women lacks the in-depth understanding of the ways women experience these casual factors for homelessness (see e.g., Chung et al., 2000; Tually et al., 2008). In this research, the women’s stories illustrate the need for a better understanding of the individualistic factors that lead to homelessness, especially given that for the women in this research, the abuse they experienced took place in the so-called ‘safety’ of their home (Mallet, 2004). Nevertheless, an understanding of structural factors remains important.

In addition to the prevalence of abuse in the women’s lives, their accounts also indicate that these individual factors can be dormant for a long time before impacting on their transition into homelessness. For example, the women who experienced abuse in their childhood tended to live ‘normal’ lives until a specific problem in their adulthoods upset their daily routines and then they began to struggle. For the women in this research, such problems tended to be of an individual nature, more specifically, an abusive relationship. According to the women’s stories, it seems that their experience of abuse in their childhood tends to impact on their behaviours and attitudes within their relationships in their adulthood; in most cases, the women continued to endure such abusive relationships. This establishes the vulnerability of these women before their

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101 For example, Niki explained that she experienced abuse in her childhood and her adulthood, yet she considered the sexual abuse in her childhood as the key reason for her transition into homelessness in her late twenties.

102 For example, Mary described her childhood experiences of violence as the determining factor for her problematic relationships in her adulthood. She explained that this impacted on her understanding of love.
homelessness and within their home. Smith (2005b, p. 143) explains that it is in private spaces (such as the home) is where the danger is located and where “many women face their greatest threat.” In this instance, women’s stories point the notion of vulnerability in a domestic space, which is specific to their sex. In addition, the women’s experience of abuse in a domestic space impacted on their perceptions of home.

Harden (2000) adds that women’s vulnerability (being at risk or taking risk) is related to the experiences and perceptions of their own bodies in a particular given space. This establishes that women’s experience of spatiality is specific to their sex. The women’s stories in this research demonstrate their susceptibility at home (their experiences of the abuse), which contributed to these women being more prone to the additional personal struggles in their lives; this also impacted on their transition into homelessness.

Grounded in the women’s stories, a four-way typology of ‘home’ was developed: (1) past home based on positive experience, (2) past home based on negative experience, (3) current home and (4) ideal home. Within the context of the reasons for homelessness, the second and fourth categories play particularly important roles. First, when the women reflected upon their negative experiences of the abuse, they constructed their idea of home. In this instance, the women directly linked their experiences of the abuse to the notion of domestic space, where the women’s stories point to the lack of privacy and safety. This is in agreement with Mallett’s (2004) suggestion that for women, a private sphere of home is described in terms of safety and security. Second, on the grounds of the above four-way typology, the women’s accounts point to the notion of ideal home. Here, the women identify home in opposition to their experience of abuse. Moreover, the concepts of privacy and safety are identified as the key elements of ‘home’.

The literature suggests that the reasons for homelessness are directly linked to the pathways into homelessness (Johnson et al., 2008), yet according to the women’s stories, their transition tends to be more complex and individualistic. The women’s

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103 The concept of pathway into homelessness was explained in Chapter Four (‘Becoming’ Homeless).
accounts demonstrate that their reasons for homelessness are likely to determine their transition into homelessness, either directly or indirectly. This was established when women pointed to the abuse in their childhood as part of the reason. For those women who experienced childhood abuse, they did not necessarily experience additional abuse in their adulthood, instead the childhood abuse led to personal problems\textsuperscript{104}, which consequently steered these women into homelessness.

In addition to these direct or indirect links, the women’s perceptions of homelessness impacted on their awareness of their transition into homelessness. According to the women who experienced childhood abuse, their pathways into homelessness occurred over time and were relevant for each woman’s idea of homelessness. Some of these women transitioned into homelessness during their teenage years, but did not stay homeless for long. Other women tended to move around a lot during their adulthood and spent time at their friends’ places or in boarding houses. In line with the official definitions, this is considered secondary and tertiary homelessness (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2009), yet most of these women did not see themselves as homeless. It can be thus concluded that the women’s awareness of their pathways into homelessness varies depending on their perceptions of homelessness and their personal circumstances. For the women in this research, the transition into a homeless status seems to be impacted by their perception and versions of social reality. The women’s awareness of their situation is directly linked to their version of social reality. For example, Hope explained that until one of the service workers pointed out to her that she is experiencing homelessness, she did not consider herself homeless. In this instance it can be assumed that a phenomenological jolt occurred when women like Hope realised that they were actually homeless.

For the women who experienced abuse in their adulthood, their transition into homelessness seemed to occur rapidly. These women experienced ongoing abuse with a specific incident, which directly prompted their decision to leave their homes. According to these women’s stories, this relates to the two key elements they considered when thinking about home: privacy and safety. Even though the street is a

\textsuperscript{104} For most women, these problems tended to be linked to their well-being (depression, drug use, etc.).
public space and there is a certain element of potential intrusion, most women still selected the street, rather than to stay in an abusive home or go to a shelter; women’s perception of shelter comes into play. The women spoke of these places as not offering enough privacy, which is integral to their idea of home. In addition, for some women, shelters did not represent a safe enough space. This is consistent with Wardhaugh’s (1999) argument that shelters and hostels are frequently dangerous for homeless women.

In conclusion, the women’s stories illustrate the complexity behind the causal factors for, and transition into, homelessness. In the first instance, the women’s narratives related to the main reason for homelessness and abuse, suggests a male dominated in domestic environment. These negative experiences, which are grounded in the women’s identities and relations, emphasise their vulnerability in the domestic sphere and also directly impact on their construction of the meanings of home. In addition, the women’s stories demonstrate that their reasons for homelessness tend to directly or indirectly determine their pathways into homelessness. Depending on the women’s individualistic experience, the transition into homelessness occurred either rapidly or over time. The women’s stories also indicate that their awareness of the transition into homelessness depends on their perceptions of homelessness, which are directly linked to their versions of social reality. It was evident that most of the women do not consider themselves to be homeless in the same way that the homeless services (or the Government) define homelessness.

**Research aim two: Exploring women’s experiences of homelessness that are grounded in their identities**

The second research aim was to explore women’s experiences of homelessness grounded in their identities. The intention was to gain a more in-depth understanding of the way women spend their days without having a home, as it is known in a traditional sense. The women’s stories indicate the complexity of their personal identities and the importance of understanding their experiences in the context of these identities. The following discussion draws on both the theoretical underpinnings outlined in Chapter Two and the ideas presented in all four key themes, which through various sub-themes,
demonstrate the way the women experience the daily routines and struggles on the street. Consequently, the core components of this discussion are gender relations and gender identity; further, this discussion is grounded in the women’s stories and the theoretical concepts of spatiality.

First, when reviewing the theoretical literature on gender relations, I began to question women’s construction of femininity for those who do not have a home in a traditional sense. Holmes and colleagues (2007) explain that most cultures around the world have their own definitions of masculinity and femininity, and differentiate between the characteristics attributed to males and females within a particular society. It is suggested that perhaps homeless women as a group might identify the idea of ‘being feminine’ differently to the ideas of femininity according to non-homeless women. This research intended to acquire an understanding of femininity grounded in the lives of homeless women to therefore gain insight into the women’s experiences of homelessness.

According to Connell (2002), women continue to experience gender inequality, which enforces the notion of women in the context of domesticity. These experiences tend to be specific to spatial context, that is, private and public space. Bearing in mind that women construct their experiences in various social settings according to the position of gender in such circumstances (Panelli et al., 2005), questions of power, roles and status in the lives of homeless women arise. The street shows the same structures of gender relations as the family and state (Connell, 1987). Consequently, it is assumed that in the public space, men maintain power and control as they do in a patriarchal structure of domestic space (O’Brien, 2004).

In this context, women discussed role hierarchy on the street. The women spoke of an existing hierarchy on the street specific to the group of homeless and pointed to two interlinked concepts: trust and respect. This indicates that power relations on the street might not necessarily be directly linked to gender. Instead, it is associated to the status that a person acquires during their homelessness by ‘following’ the rules of the street. Here, a few of the women discussed an example that is specific to the concepts of
trust and respect and impacts on the status within *role hierarchy*: ‘dobbing’\textsuperscript{105} to the police. While it was expected for there to be a specific structural power balance on the street (men *vs.* women), the women in this research demonstrate that in the context of power, relations and relationships are based on concepts of trust and respect. However, an implication of this finding, which is specific to gender,\textsuperscript{106} is that homeless women, who are sexually assaulted on the street by another homeless person, tend not to report this to the police.

While the women’s stories indicate that power relations on the street tend to be linked to the concepts of trust and respect, the power relations within shelters, boarding houses\textsuperscript{107} or service facilities tend to be more gender-specific. The women spoke of their reluctance to stay at boarding houses because the common or shared spaces were predominately occupied by men. This is again related to the women’s individual situations and their notions of home grounded in the concepts of *privacy* and *safety*. This is especially relevant if a woman’s reason for homelessness was linked to abuse in the home. However, although the women discussed avoiding spaces that were crowded with men, they still preferred to spend time indoors at various service providers rather than out on the street. This was particularly obvious in my observations when I visited various locations where food vans provided food to homeless people. There were always more men than women at these locations. Or, while waiting to speak to a service worker, men tended to stay outside where they smoked and socialised, while women tended to stay inside in the waiting area. When I observed women at food van areas or outside homeless services, they were usually in the company of a man.

The women’s accounts of these relations, which in turn influence their occupation of space, can be linked to their vulnerability. As Lamas (2002) explains, women’s sense of vulnerability only reinforces the masculinity of space. Bearing in mind the abusive background of some of the women and their perceptions of home, fear

\textsuperscript{105} This is Australian slang, which means to inform on someone, or report someone to an authoritative figure.

\textsuperscript{106} This is based on the homeless women’s stories which demonstrate that women are more prone to sexual assaults on the street than men (Pain & Francis, 2004).

\textsuperscript{107} In this context, shelters and boarding houses are considered as an institutional space.
within certain spaces was an identified issue. However, this was not specific to private/public space. Grounded in the women’s experiences of past home based on negative experience, the women also spoke of fear in other spaces, such as service facilities and boarding houses. Besides vulnerability, Skeggs (1999) notes that women tend to feel ‘out of place’ in masculinised public spaces. The women in this research confirmed this idea as they avoided public places occupied by men.

In addition to the women’s occupation of space, relationships during their homelessness also impact on their experiences of gender and space. During the ten months of fieldwork, there were very few occasions when I observed friendships between homeless women and homeless men. Most of the homeless women had male acquaintances and there were some who had intimate relationships. This indicates the relationships women experience on the street tend to be very similar to the relationships non-homeless women experience. According to the stories, the women’s relationships can be better understood through a five-way typology: (1) past negative family-relationships, (2) current negative family-relationships, (3) current friendships, (4) past friendships, and (5) current intimate relationships. While all these relationships influenced women in some way, such as impacting on their ideas of home, during their homelessness, only the second, third and fifth categories directly impacted on their experiences. Like role hierarchy, current friendships were grounded in the concepts of trust and respect, yet most women formed friendships with other homeless women, not men. On the other hand, current intimate relationships were mainly gender-specific as the women formed intimate and heterosexual relationships with homeless men. In this instance, I would like to acknowledge that even though I did not observe any same-sex relationships, such relationships most likely exist. The women I spoke to never specifically mentioned homosexual relationships, however, on a few occasions service workers presumed these relationships and pointed this out to me.

Stereotypically, women do not only occupy specific space (private/public), they also play different roles within these spaces (Oakley, 1974). Recent social changes have contributed to the blurring and shifting in gender roles, which in turn impacts on the
surge of individuality, such as women’s economic independence. In this instance, the notion of ‘female masculinity’ (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2007) is considered potentially relevant to women who do not have a home in a traditional sense. For example, Holloway and colleagues (2009) argue that gender plays an important role concerning public consumption of alcohol. In this research, the women spoke of drinking alcohol mainly as a coping strategy. Their stories also indicate that this was usually done in less visible areas. This can be linked to the concept of ‘respectability’, which assumes that woman’s actions and behaviours are performed within the limits of normative femininity (Skeggs, 1997). In addition, the women discussed the importance of managing washing, eating and social activities on a daily basis to maintain their femininity. Therefore, even without the traditional home, women tend not to take on traits of ‘female masculinity’; instead they exercise agency in attempting to maintain their femininity.

These relationships and roles also influenced the women’s ideas of what it means to be a woman. Accordingly, the following section focuses on the second part of the discussion, gender identity during homelessness from two major perspectives: identity and the body. The majority of women spoke of using the process of passing to manage their gender identity. By adapting to the environment of the public space, the women employed various mechanisms to become ‘presentable’ on a daily basis. This is grounded in Goffman’s (1963b) notion of passing and the concept of impression management (1969), which argues that people try to represent themselves as they think is the desired way. In addition, the women’s stories indicate that they maintained their own identity instead of adopting a homeless identity, by resistance.

The women in this research actively resisted the stigma attached to homeless women, such as ‘bag lady’ (Cresswell, 1999) and the regulations of gendered spatial belonging: occupying public space (Casey et al., 2008). In this instance, the rules that govern public spaces, which deem homeless women as unwelcome, apply to the status

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108 An example here might be an increase of women working in more professional roles and male-dominated work areas and vice versa, such as IT work (Dema-Moreno & Diaz-Martinez, 2010).

109 It is important to note that not all women successfully exercise agency.
of homelessness and not gender (Casey et al., 2008). Radley and colleagues (2006) note that the behaviour of women, who appear wherever and at whatever time they wish, is considered transgressive in today’s society. Moreover, in general, homeless people are considered out of place in public space. However for homeless women, who carry out their daily activities (e.g., washing or sleeping) in such as space, which is considered non-domestic, their behaviour is considered disturbing (Radley et al., 2006). Since homeless women live in public space and tend to occupy this space at various times of the day, it becomes important for homeless women to find the ways of ‘being’ in public space by resistance (Casey et al., 2008).

The women’s stories demonstrate that they attempted to exercise agency on a daily basis by utilising two key processes: passing and resistance. This helped women to manage their ‘being’ and ‘doing’ in public space to maintain a certain level of autonomy. As Butler (2004) suggests, individuals express agency within a structured frame of norms and expectations, which also influences how others interpret the performance. Consequently, the women’s stories demonstrate that by utilising the process of passing, they managed their performance of non-homeless women. Yet, for some women, the negotiation between resisting and adapting led to a loss of self. Charmaz (1983) explains this concept as being influenced by four elements: leading restricted lives, experiencing social isolation, being discredited and burdening others.

Due to limited financial resources, limited relationships and the stigma of being an ‘undesirable’ woman, some homeless women struggle to manage their identities and bodies. According to Watson (1999), the nature of homeless women threatens the social construct of feminine body. Consequently, by making use of two additional processes, transiency and invisibility, the women discussed managing their bodily privacy and loss of self. For homeless women, intrusion is an everyday occurrence by living in public space (Moore, 2003); thus, their ability to control and manage their privacy is limited. While transiency allows homeless women to actively control the physical space and bodily privacy, invisibility (through hiding their homelessness status) gives homeless women an opportunity to manage their bodily privacy and identity.
The key example of a particular experience of homelessness specific to gender identity is personal hygiene during menstruation. As Roberts (2004) explains, in everyday life, women conceal their menstruation due to the belief that menstruating women are somehow tainted. Yet, this becomes difficult living in a public space with limited resources and restricted access to washing facilities. Tangeny (1996) points to the notion of body shame during menstruation and the negative impact it can have on a woman’s identity. This is especially true in today’s society with the idea of menstrual concealment, where cultural and social ideals objectify women’s behaviour based on their appearance (Roberts, 2004). The women in this research spoke of the process of *passing*, which helped them to manage their identity during this time and maintain their respectability. In addition, some women indicated that, by putting themselves at risk of *incarceration*, they shoppedlifted the necessary hygienic products.

In addition to the notion of body shame (Tangeny, 1996), for homeless women, the concept of spoiled identity (Goffman, 1963b) seems to be imperative. The women’s stories demonstrate that by *passing*, they managed not only their bodies, but also their identities as homeless women in public space. Goffman (1963b) explains ‘passing’ as the process where an individual avoids stigma symbols by the use of ‘disidentifiers’, props or actions that would lead others to believe they had a certain status. He explains this in the context of deviance and the discreditation of someone due to stigma. For homeless women, this was the stigma of ‘bag lady’ (Cresswell, 1999) or ‘undesired’ woman (Goffman, 1963b). In this context, women ‘disidentified’ (Nack, 2000) themselves from a homeless identity (and the sub-culture of homelessness) in order to pass as non-homeless.

The way women manage ‘being’ homeless helps them to find their place in the world (Wardhaugh, 1999) and to manage their homelessness. This means that by finding a sense of self and who they are, homeless women can better maintain their homelessness. As discussed above, homeless women tend to actively *resist* a homeless identity and stigma by managing their individual ‘selves’. Yet, the coping strategies women developed during homelessness tend to be restricted by the experience of homelessness. Relatedly, most of the women described homelessness as a *no way out*
situation, which demonstrates the harsh reality of homelessness. The women spoke of experiences of anxiety, depression or feelings of isolation during their homelessness. These consequently impact on their identity and their perceptions of self. In order to manage themselves, in this research, the women’s stories point to three coping strategies: *substance use*, *social networking* and *art therapy*.

For most women, substance use was not the preferred choice as they recognised that the effects wore off eventually. However, it was a quick, and at times the only, accessible solution to manage their anxiety and depression. The women spoke of a preference for spending time with other people. While for some women that meant *current friendships* as an in-person interaction, other women noted that interaction via mobile telephones or computers helped them. In line with Rowe and Wolch (1990), the women’s stories indicate that these two strategies influenced their identity in both positive and negative ways. On the other hand, the third strategy, art therapy, impacted on women only positively. I witnessed this first hand by attending various art classes. I observed a definite improvement regarding the women’s levels of self-esteem and a sense of belonging. The progress was visible mainly during the class, when women became more talkative, and the attitude towards their own work (and the work of others) turned out more encouraging each week.

A major conclusion of the second research aim points to the importance of understanding the experiences of homelessness within a gendered context. The discussion encompasses two key elements: gender relations and gender identity during homelessness. While not considered in too much detail, a gendered discussion embraces the concepts of spatial context (private/public space). The women’s stories illustrate the importance of the gendered context to ‘be’ and ‘do’ within public space to survive homelessness. This discussion also demonstrates the vulnerability in the context of gender relations and gender identity that homeless women face in public space. By actively exercising agency, most homeless women manage their homelessness by passing, resisting, transiency and invisibility.
**Research aim three: Exploring homeless women’s experiences of ‘risky’ social spaces and their spatialised selves**

The third research aim was to explore how homeless women experience ‘risky’ social spaces (public spaces) and how they negotiate and manage their spatialised selves. Some ideas relevant to this aim were mentioned within the previous two research aims, however, this discussion focuses mainly on the concepts of fear and risk in the lives of homeless women. The discussion encompasses all three elements of the proposed theoretical model: gender relations, gender identity and spatiality. In addition to the previously mentioned status of vulnerability, this discussion points to the relevance of temporal discourse (day/night).

All four key themes illustrate the notions of fear and risk within a specific space. This is especially noticeable in women’s ideas of home, where the concepts of safety and privacy play key roles. Yet, the women spoke of experiencing different levels of fear and risk whilst on the street. For example, all the women experienced fear for their safety on a daily basis and some of the women indicated they experienced fear for others in specific situations. This fear was explained in the context of gender, where the women explained that at times they were fearful for other homeless women. This confirms Dordick’s (1997) notion that women are tend to experience insecurity and fear in public space.

As discussed above, the vulnerability women experienced on the street was specific to their sex and individual identity. While homeless men and women both experience risk, the way they perceive this risk differs according to their sex and identity (Gustafson, 1998). Similarly, risk-taking is grounded in gender and identity (Chan & Rigakos, 2002). This means that the risks homeless women take whilst homeless depend on the women’s perceptions of themselves. In addition to risk perception and risk taking, it is important to consider spatial and temporal discourses when considering risk in the lives of homeless women (Kilgrour, 2007).

Green and Singleton (2006) argue that women use time and space based on their perception of risk; public spaces are considered safe during the day and risky during the
night (Spain, 2008). With respect to these ideas, the women’s stories demonstrate that they managed ‘risky’ space during the day by *transiency* and *invisibility*. However, during the night, the women discussed retiring to hidden public spaces and tended to manage their risks by *squatting*. Similar to Pain’s (2001) idea that women counteract fear during the night by occupying spaces that make them feel safe, the women spoke of staying around places that had security cameras, were hidden or were close to the police. According to the women’s stories, these are the key mechanisms that assist in assuring their *safety* and *privacy*. This is consistent with Wardhaugh’s (1999) premise that homeless women become invisible during the day and shadows during the night within the public (male dominated) space.

In addition, the women’s stories revealed that they do not expose themselves to any unnecessary risks, for example engaging in an altercation with a non-homeless individual. While women’s perception of risk was not specifically defined, women did identify their sexuality in the context of vulnerability. In this instance, it is assumed women referred to the vulnerability of their physical bodies and their identities. The women also indicated that they do not willingly expose themselves to risks during their homelessness. This is in contrast to Radely and colleagues (2006), who suggest that women who occupy public spaces at various times, willingly risk their virtue. Instead, consistent with Kilgour (2007), the women tended to actively re-negotiate and re-define their positions in space to avoid risk. Yet, women might not assume that they are at risk due to employing the process of passing (Nack, 2000). Thus, by passing as non-homeless, women might not perceive the actual risks around them or they potentially ignore the notion of risk.

In the context of risk, Pain and Smith (2008) discuss the concept of ‘responsibility’, which impacts on the way women experience risks (and risk-taking) in everyday life. In this instance, it is not only women’s responsibility to regulate femininity (Campbell, 2005) by passing, but also their responsibility to others (Olstead, 2011) by engaging in behaviours that might put them at a specific risk. With respect to these ideas, the women first discussed that they actively accept responsibility and manage the risks by managing the street (space), stress, and their identity. Second, the
women indicated they would accept responsibility by putting themselves at the *risk of breaching the rules the street*, when they *fear for others* (particularly other homeless women) and would get actively involved.

In concluding the third research aim, this research demonstrates that homeless women try to avoid everyday aspects of risk and manage their spatialised selves by utilising various mechanisms, such as transiency, invisibility and squatting. The women’s stories established their existing fear of certain public spaces during specific times of day. Consequently, by recognising their fears, the women spoke of accepting such responsibility and developing coping strategies which enable them to actively resist and negotiate everyday risks.

In considering the research aims with respect to the emergent themes and findings, I have established the importance of understanding homeless women’s experiences as grounded in their lives. More specifically, this experience needs to be understood within gendered and spatial contexts. The women’s narratives also indicate the significance of recognising that the experience of homelessness tends to be conditioned by specific events from their lives.

**Implications of the Findings**

In this section, I consider some of policy and research implications from the research findings. The White Paper published by FaHSCIA (2008) highlights reducing national homelessness. In addition, this document recognises the complexity of homelessness and the significance of understanding homelessness beyond this complexity. While it has been suggested that ending homelessness in general is not as difficult as assumed (Johnson et al., 2008; Parsell, 2010a), addressing individual problems that impact on female homelessness might be more challenging. The women’s narratives demonstrate that their reasons for, and pathways into, homelessness were not directly related to housing. This again stresses the importance of acknowledging the individual, rather than just the structural, aspects of homelessness. Accordingly, this
section considers the relevant aspects of the women’s stories to suggest some policy and research recommendations and responses that might be relevant for intervention and prevention strategies to reduce women’s homelessness. Thus, this section’s discussion is threefold: (1) social inclusion/exclusion policy, (2) early interventions and (3) research recommendations.

**Social inclusion/exclusion policy context**

In the last decade, the notion of social exclusion has been central to social policy makers and public services (Horsell, 2006). Whilst social exclusion can affect a variety of groups or individuals, lately this expression has been closely related to ‘the poor’ or the ‘underclass’ (Lynch, 2005). This exclusion is directly relevant to homeless people. Lynch (2005) explains that while the reasons for, and consequences of, homelessness are varied and complex, the experience of social exclusion is common. There is therefore a strong correlation between homelessness and social exclusion. This implies there is a need to determine factors for the social inclusion of homeless people.

First, it is necessary to explore the flexibility of social exclusion as a tool of policy analysis and intervention in relation to homelessness. Social exclusion can be hard to define principally due to different points of view, and in different societies it can relate to diverse social problems (Byrne, 1999; Pierson, 2010). Marsh and Mullins (1998) explain social exclusion as a tool used in policy analysis and Pleace (1998) adds that it is a process by which someone finds themselves excluded from society and from its moral order. Furthermore, Jones and Smyth (1999) describe a broad range of social issues to which the term social exclusion relates. One such issue is homelessness; Horsell (2006) points out that in recent years, the discourse of homelessness has been discussed through the lens of social exclusion.

For the purpose of this discussion, I rely on Pierson’s (2010, p. 23) definition of social exclusion:

Social exclusion is a process that deprives individuals, families, groups and neighbourhoods from obtaining the resources for participation in social, economic and political activity that the great majority of society enjoys. These resources are not just
Further, Hayes and colleagues (2008) explain that in an Australian context, the term social inclusion lacks agreement in meaning and definition. An Australian Government’s social inclusion policy approach states:

...to be socially included requires opportunities for securing a job; accessing services; connecting with others in life through family, friends, work, personal interests and local community; dealing with personal crisis, such as ill health, bereavement or the loss of a job; and being heard (Hayes et al., 2008, p. 9).

This is further reinforced by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2010); they point out that limited resources, opportunities and capabilities can lead to people not fully involving themselves in society. Therefore, people need to have resources, opportunities and capabilities to learn, work, engage and have a voice.

Saunders, Naidoo and Griffiths’ (2008) study focuses on how low-income Australians experience and perceive poverty, deprivation and exclusion. The authors developed three main indicators of social exclusion: disengagement, service exclusion, and economic exclusion. Some of these indicators of disengagement include irregular, little or no social contact with other people, no participation in community activities, no social life, issues related to the payment of transport services to a location where a certain activity is happening, or being unable to pay for social activities. Some of the indicators for service exclusion include no or limited access to health services, an inability to pay for certain amenities and limited or no access to disability services. Some of the indicators for economic exclusion include not having emergency savings, not having enough money to get by, being unemployed, and owning few or no assets.

The majority of the above indicators are very relevant to the homeless population. For each of the three areas, there are indicators that are strongly applicable to homeless people’s situations. Whilst these indicators are being widely debated as to how to establish mechanisms and solutions that would help certain populations, little is known whether addressing these can actually help social exclusion (Saunders et al., 2008). Homelessness is considered to be continuous over life cycles, as well as across generations and can have severe damaging consequences (Hayes et al., 2008). These
can influence the health and well-being of the adult homeless people, and for younger homeless people, these can impact on their development and educational participation (Hayes et al., 2008).

Some of the women in this research spoke of managing stress with various strategies, such as attending art classes; I also observed this to seem beneficial. During my fieldwork I attended two different art groups, which offered insight on the impact of art on the lives of homeless women and men. Here, I discuss four key observations that facilitated the conclusion that art can be a constructive tool to address social exclusion in the lives of homeless women.

- First, the group was not limited to only homeless people. As a result, I observed that people who were actually homeless felt socially included (a positive sense of inclusion); this also impacted in an encouraging way on their self-image.
- Second, the attitude within the group was at all times very positive. This affected the homeless women’s perceptions of belonging, self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Third, the contact and social skills between homeless and non-homeless people were increasing, even outside the groups. This positively influenced the homeless women’s social skills, and feelings of empowerment and social inclusion.
- Fourth, the homeless women’s feelings of gratification and fun resulted in forgetting all their ‘problems’ for the few hours the classes ran.

Overall, linking Pierson’s (2010) definition and Saunders and colleagues’ (2008) indicators of social exclusion to these findings, I conclude that allowing homeless people to participate in free local and cultural activities, such as art classes, positively affects their feelings of social exclusion. Some of the women who attended the art classes indicated that they managed their isolation by attending the class each week. Consequently, the attendance at these classes, interaction with other people and activities, impacted positively on women’s self-image and their identity.
**Early interventions**

Within the field of homelessness, the terms ‘early intervention’ and ‘prevention’ have different meanings. As Chamberlain and Johnson (2000) explain, ‘early intervention’ tends to relate to young people and can be implemented at any time until a shift to chronic homelessness occurs. However, in the case of adults, early intervention cannot be implemented after the household loses their home; it needs to take place before homelessness takes place. On the other hand, ‘prevention’ comprises of developing policies that are specifically designed to address the structural reasons of homelessness\(^{110}\). Yet, a review of the literature and findings from this research suggest that the reasons for homelessness among adult women tend to be more of an individualistic nature and less structural. Chamberlain and Johnson (2002, p. 36) explain that early intervention mechanisms focus on “preventing households\(^{111}\) from entering the homeless population.”

Chamberlain and Johnson (2002) also point out that intervention programs for adults tend to be different from those for young people. In addition, for an intervention to be successful, there are four characteristics that are required: (1) assistance needs to be provided when a household is at risk before losing accommodation; (2) the workers in housing services need to have a high level of interpersonal skills to communicate with people from various backgrounds and in various situations; (3) the workers in housing assistance departments need to have an extensive knowledge of policy and public/private housing systems; and (4), there needs to be sufficient funding for agencies providing early intervention strategies (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2002). Of particular importance, women who are experiencing domestic violence are considered an ‘at risk’ population. Yet, if the ‘at risk’ population is not being managed appropriately, it can lead to the loss of current accommodation, consequently resulting in homelessness (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2002).

\(^{110}\) An example of prevention could be government funded rental assistance through social welfare.

\(^{111}\) In this context, a household is referred to a group of people living together, who are not necessarily in a family relationship. In addition, Chamberlain and Johnson (2002) discuss early intervention in the context of household instead of individual homelessness.
Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2009) explain that when homelessness occurs, it needs to be addressed as soon as possible; otherwise it can lead to chronic homelessness, which can be very challenging to exit. At this point, the emergency shelters offer women who are ‘at risk’ secure and safe accommodation. Currently, in Brisbane, emergency shelters offer 46 beds for women, 30 for young people and 200 for men. However, on any given night, there are around 4000 women experiencing primary, secondary or tertiary homelessness; there is an obvious lack of available beds.

In addition to the lack of available beds in emergency shelters, the women’s stories in this research show that current shelters or boarding houses do not offer these women security and privacy. Chamberlain and Johnson (2002) point out the importance of safe and secure accommodation, yet according to the women’s accounts, which are grounded in abusive homes, the majority of available emergency housing does not accommodate the needs of these women. Consequently, the availability of beds and the structure (or atmosphere) of these shelters needs to be re-considered to prevent women who are ‘at risk’ of transitioning into homelessness. More recently, Spinney and Blandy (2011) suggested that women and children who are experiencing violence at home need to have a choice whether to stay at home or leave. Additionally, Spinney’s (2012, p. 70) research on Australian policies and practices aiming to prevent homelessness among women and children notes that “Australia should move to the provision of homelessness prevention schemes that are as extensive as the current provision of refuge and crisis accommodation.”

**Research recommendations**

This research aimed to provide an understanding of the experiences of homeless women. While this was achieved, the women’s stories and policy implications suggest there is a need to explore specific issues in more detail. This discussion demonstrates that even with an important theoretical contribution to the understanding of homeless women, since women are not a homogenous group, there are additional concerns that need to be addressed. Here, I recommend further research within a socio-cultural context that would add to the current understanding. Moreover, I recommend further
research within a policy context that would contribute to women’s pathways out of homelessness.

The women’s narratives point to the relevance of understanding their needs in a gendered context, especially with their conceptualisations of privacy and safety. While previous research established the link between violence and homelessness without exploring this in detail, this research focused on the experience of this link. It was recognised that most of the homeless women who participated in this research lived in abusive homes either in their childhood or adulthood. In addition to this, Chung and colleagues (2000) also argue that the violence that these women experience needs to be understood in its particular cultural and social context. This suggests a change from a structural, to more of an individual, understanding of the reasons for homelessness in both the academic and practical (service providers) community. Consequently, further research needs to be undertaken to explore a cultural and social understanding of violence at home and the experiences of this for women who later transition into homelessness.

Further research is also required to explore the extent of change in social inclusion/exclusion policies and how this can contribute to homeless women’s pathways out of homelessness. This research established a positive link between social activities such as art and its positive impact on homeless women’s stress and identity. In addition, the above discussion on social inclusion/exclusion policy suggests the importance of such an approach in efforts to ‘ending’ female homelessness.
Chapter 9: Conclusion

At the start of this thesis Mary’s story introduced the key elements from her life before her homelessness, with her story ending with her transition into primary homelessness and her desire to become a ‘better’ person. While Mary’s story was introduced through the rest of the thesis, where Mary discussed her experience of homelessness, this Chapter develops her story further and specifically from the last key theme of ‘exiting’ homelessness. At this point, Mary transitioned from primary homelessness to tertiary homelessness and was eager to eventually exit homelessness definitively. Mary’s journey continued:

I want to be a better person, but at the moment I don’t know how. I want to be able to get past the difficulties that I’m having with my children and… even if I don’t have that close relationship, I can still relate to them. I will want to be able to make friends without having that physical background between us. Because believe you me, there is a wall between, you know. Even though I can talk to you, there’s… I don’t know if I could be close to you, because that’s still… you can’t see the physical barrier but I know it’s there.

As Mary explained earlier, her emotional issues relate to her problematic relationship with her mother. While she did not consider the underlying factors of this destructive relationship in her childhood until now, her awareness of the consequences of her past life events led to her recent breakthrough. Mary recently came to the realisation that she has to accept her past in understand the sources of her problematic behaviour. Mary explained:

And for me, that’s a major problem. You know. To be able to… be able to go out to the society and know that I’m better than what my mother said. I’m already better than what my mother says, I know that. But to get a lot more self-confidence. Uh, to get a lot more confidence than what I’ve had. You know… as I said before, I’m still coming to terms with “gee, you’re beautiful”, and… you know. Who you talking to? I still do that, you know. I still have problems with that. Because of all those many, many years of what I’ve went through. If I can get more self-confident, if I can get past those barriers, and be able to relate to people in a better way, to me… to me, be a better person than what I am. For me, that’d be a major milestone. At the moment I’m taking little bits [sings], you know.

I still remember the interview, and more specifically, when Mary discussed these points. The reason why this stayed with me is due to her emotional reaction during our
conversation. Mary shared the quoted words above with me just before she ended her first interview. She never actually said: “Let’s end” or “that’s it for today”, instead, Mary just leaned back into her chair, started nodding ‘no’ with her head and made a gesture with her hand that indicated she wanted to finish with the interview. Once I turned off the voice recorder, Mary said: “We can talk more next week, I have to go now.”

Even though Mary said she would talk to me again, she could not provide me with an exact date. Mary explained that before making an appointment with me for our next interview, she would like to “sort some things out.” Until I saw Mary a few days later, I did not know what she needed to resolve. She later explained that she is really trying to organise her daily schedules in a way that will provide her with the best opportunity to make positive changes in her life. Some of the ‘things’ she was seeking to resolve were various appointments, for example with a mental health practitioner, service worker and unemployment services.

Ten days later, I undertook a second interview with Mary. The conversation during this interview was much more relaxed than during our first interview. While it was shorter than the first one, over the span of next four months, I had numerous informal conversations with Mary and I sought out information about her progress. Mary’s willingness to change her life and exit homelessness completely was more determined and inspiring each day. Up to the day I exited the field, I observed major changes in Mary’s personality in addition to her physical appearance. For example, Mary attended numerous art classes where initially she tended to sit at a desk on her own. Over the period of a few weeks, she became more socially involved and was working on developing her conversational skills.

For Mary, ‘exiting’ homelessness entails more than just physically moving into her own place. It is a long journey, one that includes a focus on gaining self-confidence, expanding her social networks and becoming independent. She is also looking for a job opportunity that would allow her to not only ensure her financial security, but also help her improve her life opportunities. Mary pointed out her work skills and indicated that
due to all the difficulties in her life (more specifically the accident): “I will probably have to relearn most of the technical skills, like sewing... I was good at cooking and sewing... I want to be useful.”

Mary’s story depicts a picture of a woman in her early sixties whose journey is perplexed with a troubled past, improvements in the present and an inspiring future. During Mary’s journey there were many bad days and even some good days. However, Mary considers one specific day as her best day so far:

My best day is when I came up here [Micah Projects] after I got told that I could get help. And Betty sitting me down and said, ‘Yes we can help you, we can’... and walk... being able, with her help, to go out there. And that room was like, as if I was walking into a... the bright sunshine. The sun. You know. There wasn’t no sun, it was raining, but I’m in heaven. That’s the best way I can describe it. I felt comfortable, you know, I felt ‘yes! I’m gonna be safe at last’. Even though I’m not safe in here [pointing to her heart], mentally I’m, you know. Physically I was safe.

I believe Mary’s story represents the overall theme of this thesis in its full context. Mary’s journey is emotionally, mentally and physically challenging, yet invigorating, a life story that is undoubtedly similar to many other stories homeless women have yet to share with us.

Homeless women have been traditionally considered outside the normal spaces and prescribed social roles (Cresswell, 1999), with a stigma of an undesired woman (Goffman, 1963b) attached to their situations. In this instance, homeless women face challenges that are more complex than only dealing with the daily risks on the streets. In general, the street is considered dangerous for homeless women (Wardhaugh, 1999). By reviewing the existing literature on homeless women, this research firstly demonstrated the existing gaps in knowledge in the field of homelessness, where the lack of a gendered experience is obvious. A grounded theory and an ethnographic approach was undertaken to explore the lives of homeless women in Brisbane.

This research provides an important contribution to the limited understanding of women’s experiences of homelessness. Homeless women need to be understood in gendered and spatial contexts. With recent social changes contributing to the blurring of, and shifting, in gender roles, which impact on the surge of individuality, this
research demonstrates the additional complexities in the lives of homeless women. The women’s stories demonstrate the importance of understanding the individualistic nature of causal factors for, and transition into, homelessness. In this instance, the individualistic and gendered context of people’s perception of social reality provides a better understanding of women’s experiences of homelessness.

The key elements that the women’s stories in this research point to are concepts grounded in gendered aspects: passing, resisting, transiency, invisibility, privacy and safety. Within these concepts, the women discussed their experiences of homelessness, which were grounded in their identities. In addition, this research also indicates the importance of spatiality in the lives of homeless women, which is specific to the experience of fear and risk. As the women’s stories demonstrate, for most homeless women, the notion of a ‘safe’ and ‘private’ home (Mallett, 2004) is a social reality they would like to ‘be’ in. This is opposite to their reality before homelessness, where a private space such as their homes posed a greater risk to their lives (Smith, 2005b) than they experienced whilst living on the street. This also indicates the vulnerability of women in a domestic sphere. Moreover, the women’s stories show that private space (home) is not the only space where women’s vulnerability was highlighted. Institutional spaces, such as shelters or hostels also represent a certain type of danger, violence and a threat to women’s identities (the stigma of a spoiled identity). As acknowledged earlier, women are not a homogenous group, which indicates that further research is needed to establish and study any cultural and social differences within an established gendered and spatial context.
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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Participant Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the Research:
An Ethnographic Study of Homeless Women in Brisbane

Researcher:
Helena Menih
PhD Student
School of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Griffith University, Queensland 4222, Australia
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Supervisors:
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Tel: +61 (0)7 3735 1066

Prof Philip C. Stenning
School of Criminology & Criminal Justice
Tel: +61 (0)7 3735 1149

Why are we doing this research?
The purpose of this research is to understand how women experience homelessness and what
the reasons for their homelessness are. We will interview women who are homeless. In the
interview you can talk about your life story from before you became homeless and while you
are being homeless.

It is also important for us to understand the reasons for homelessness, so we can prevent women
from becoming homeless. We want to hear the stories from homeless women. This research is
also part of Helena’s study (PhD in Criminology).

Who can participate?
We want to talk to as many homeless women as possible. This research only looks at women’s
experiences. We don’t want to interview men, or young people. We will not interview pregnant
women or women who have mental health issues which would make them unaware of our
research.
Your Role in the Research?
If you choose to participate, you will take part in an interview about your life history, which means that you will talk about your life before homelessness and your life after you became homeless. The interview will be divided in few sessions. One session will be at least an hour long, however if you feel like you need more time then the interview can go for longer or it can be cut short.

What are the benefits of this research?
The research aims to provide a description of female homelessness that comes out of the experiences of women themselves. This will provide a necessary first hand insight into women’s views of the needs of homeless women in Brisbane. This research will provide explanations about women and homelessness for the field of homelessness as well as providing information for policy makers, government and non-government institutions, women groups, and advocates for the homeless, who are concerned with women’s homelessness. It will provide information that will help improve the lives of homeless women and prevent their homelessness in the first place. In doing so, this research will provide an important contribution to the field and the policy debates around intervention and best practice.

What are the risks to you?
There are some risks that may occur during your involvement in this research. First, there is a low risk of psychological harms and second there is a very small risk of legal harms. During the interview some issues may arise that can cause you some distress or discomfort. If you experience any distress or discomfort in the interview, please let us know. We will then stop the interview. We will also put you in contact with community counselling services. These services do not cost anything. You can also choose to stop the interview at any time. Also, we will tell you at the beginning of the interview not to talk about any illegal behaviour you might be involved with. If you do start talking about illegal behaviour the interviewer will ask you not to do so and may stop the interview. Please be aware that if you talk about illegal behaviour that you are involved in (such as causing harm to another person), we may have to report this.

Confidentiality:
All information provided by you for this research will be kept strictly confidential subject to any reporting of illegal behaviours as advised above. Your name or any identifiable information will not be included in the review of the research or any other written or verbal report on the research. All information will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and all the electronic information will be stored in password protected files. The only person with the access to the information will be the researcher. All the stored information will not include any names. For the feedback purposes you can identify yourself in the interview with a made up name or a nickname, which will be used for any written or verbal report.

Your participation is voluntary!
You can choose to take part in this research as this research is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to answer any question that might make you feel uncomfortable. Also, you may withdraw from the research at any time without any specific reason. In case you decide to withdraw, any information provided by you will be destroyed.

Feedback:
After our work is completed you can ask for a copy of my findings or have another informal conversation about my findings with me. Also, it is recommended for you to attend follow-up meetings and interviews, where I will see if the data was reviewed appropriately and to ensure that information you provided was not used for any other purpose.
Ethical Review:
This research has been cleared by Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee, which means this research will be conducted in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. If potential participants have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project they should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on 3735 5585 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

Your Privacy:
The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and / or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at [http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan](http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan) or telephone (07) 3735 5585.
Appendix B – Interview Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Research title:
An Ethnographic Study of Homeless Women in Brisbane

Researcher:
Helena Menih, PhD Student

By signing below, I confirm that I have read (or had explained) and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that my involvement in this research will include (interview sessions, where I will be discussing my life story).
- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand the risks involved.
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research.
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary. I can refuse to answer any questions, and can withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that all information provided by me will be tape-recorded and transcribed and that the recordings will be erased after transcription.
- I understand that all the information provided by me will be kept confidential and that no names or other identifiable information will be included in any publication from this research.
- I understand that I may ask any additional questions about the research or my part in it at any time.
- If I identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, I can speak with the researcher about any Indigenous issues in relation to participating in this research.
- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on 3735 5585 (or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and
- I agree to participate in the project.

Participants name………………………………………
Participants signature………………………………..
Date…………………………………………………
Appendix C – Biographical Sketch of the Interview Participants

Amy
Amy is in her mid-thirties and has lived on the streets for many years. During these years she continuously migrated between primary and secondary homelessness. When I met Amy, she just spent the night on the street; however, she was considered as experiencing secondary homelessness by the service provider. While she had a guardian to help her with her financial situation, Amy did not want to be controlled; she wanted her freedom. She achieved this by running away from her guardian’s home and sleeping on the streets of Brisbane.

Barb
Barb recently turned nineteen. She has been living on the street since she was sixteen. Barb’s experience on the street has been quite a struggle. Not only was she sexually assaulted twice, but she has been arrested few times as well. She has been dealing with drug addiction for a while now and is really keen to change her life and exit homelessness with her husband, whom she met during her homelessness. When I met Barb, one of the first things she told me was that she and her husband want to leave the street-life and get a nice home where they can raise a family. They would like to have a baby very soon.

Deb
Deb is in early forties and has been experiencing primary homelessness for about twenty years. She is originally from New Zealand, however has been living in Australia since her childhood. When I met Deb she told me she would like to go back to New Zealand one day. Deb has a brother who is also homeless, however they are rarely in contact. Every time I talked to her, she tried to be cheerful. She always had a song up her sleeve or made up a rhyme that would make everyone laugh.

Erin
Erin is in her mid-fifties and identifies as an Aboriginal female. When I first met Erin she was really talkative. Interestingly, she was conversational every time we talked, besides the time we sat down and carried out the interview. She experienced primary
homeless years ago and has been living in her own place for the past few years. Still, she comes to services almost once a week to say hello to service workers and other homeless people she knew from her days on the street.

Hope
Hope is in her mid-forties and while she did not experience primary homelessness for a prolonged time, she has been considered secondary homeless for years. She was working as a nurse before she developed an addiction to drugs. She was in a long-term relationship with a man who recently died. On occasions, Hope remembered her ex-partner and cried. I first met Hope on the day she moved from a boarding house to one of the housing units. On that day, she took amphetamines and was quite talkative. When I returned later to undertake the interview, she apologised for taking the drugs and has since been regularly attending help groups.

Lisa
Lisa is in her early-sixties and spent around four months on the streets of Brisbane. She identifies herself as Polynesian. She moved from New Zealand to Australia with her family many years ago. When I met Lisa, she had just moved into a one-bedroom apartment, where I carried out the interview. She was so excited to be off the street and in her own place that she invited me for tea or coffee. Lisa has a big family and while she mentioned her children, she predominately talked about her grand-daughter, who is also experiencing homelessness (she ran away from home).

Mary
Mary is in her sixties and experienced primary homelessness for a short period of time. When I met Mary, she explained how happy she felt to have a place in a boarding house. While she does not particularly like the other tenants, she appreciates the roof over her head. Mary’s sense of humour is definitely noticeable, however she can also come across as little threatening. She is very intelligent and likes to read. After one of our interviews she told me she had read a book the night before and was up late because she could not put down the book without getting to the end.
Niki
Niki is her early-forties and has been on and off the streets for the past twelve years. Recently, she moved into a small unit with her partner. When I first met Niki, she asked me if she could smoke during the interview. She was addicted to drugs for many years and has been clean for some time now, but one habit she said she could not ‘kick’ is smoking. Niki lived with her partner, whom she met during her homelessness. She told me he is a cook and likes to prepare a home-cooked meal for them as often as possible. While Niki is still in a fragile state after her experience on the street, she is trying to keep herself busy by doing crafts. She is hopeful to find some work in the future.

Pam
Pam is in her early-forties. When I first met Pam, one of the first things she told me was that she suffers from schizophrenia. She is on medication and is managing her illness quite well. She currently lives in a boarding house and would like to move into her own place soon. Pam is originally from Sydney, where she also experienced homelessness before coming to Brisbane. Even though she has some family in Sydney, she wants to live in Brisbane. She likes the weather and people. When she compared the streets of Sydney to the streets of Brisbane, she said that while homelessness is not a good experience in general, if she had a choice, it would be the streets of Brisbane, mainly because of the people on the streets.

Val
Val is in her early-thirties and identifies herself as “white Aboriginal”. When I first met Val, she was playing a guitar. She is a social person and likes to interact with everyone. She experienced homelessness in her childhood and youth. Her family stories were a bit inconsistent, however one point came across very clearly, she was stolen as a child\textsuperscript{112} and then abandoned by her foster family. While she has been off the streets for a while, she is still experiencing tertiary homelessness. Val lives in a boarding house and would like to have her own place sometime in the future.

\textsuperscript{112}In this context, this relates to the Stolen Generation. Between the 1900s and the 1960s, the Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families, to be brought up by white foster families or in institutions.
Appendix D – Ethics Application

National Ethics Application Form
Version 2008 - V2.0

Proposal title: An Ethnographic Study of Homeless Women in Brisbane
For submission to: Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00182)
Name: Ms Helena Menih
Address: Griffith University Accommodation Office (CP601)
170 Kessels Road
Nathan QLD 4111
Australia
Contact: (Bus) (07) 373 55600
(AH) -
(Mobile) 0450644098
(Fax) no

Proposal status: Complete

Proposal description:

A review of studies conducted on pathways into homelessness demonstrates the lack of research in this area in Australia and indicates that the research that has been conducted tends to be gender-blind. Additionally, previous studies suggest that women who are homeless are battling with their social role as women. Therefore little is known about homeless women’s experiences, however the few studies that do exist suggest that women may be doubly disadvantaged on the street: first, for being homeless and second, for stepping outside the traditional social role. As a result, a more in-depth understanding of why women become homeless is essential.

The proposed project aims to examine women’s pathways to homelessness and their experiences of homelessness. In doing so, it recognises the importance of understanding homelessness from the point of view of women living outside of the ‘traditional home’. Home is considered to be domestic – woman’s, private space - while public space is considered a more male dominated sphere. The project is grounded in the experiences of homeless women themselves. In hope to give ‘voice’ to homeless women living in Brisbane and ethnographic approach has been chosen. Such approach allows individuals to reveal their own experiences and conceptualisations. Data will be collected first, through initial audit of current policies and services on homelessness and second through participant observations and life histories interviewing.

This research will not only provide necessary explanations about women and homelessness for the field of homelessness, it will also provide information for early intervention to policy makers, government and non-government institutions, women groups, and advocates. In doing so, this research will provide an important contribution to the field and the policy debates around intervention and best practice.

Previously submitted to:

Commercial-in-Confidence

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Administrative Section

1. TITLE AND SUMMARY OF PROJECT

1.1. Title
1.1.1 What is the formal title of this research proposal?
An Ethnographic Study of Homeless Woman in Brisbane

1.2. Description of the project in plain language
1.2.1 Give a concise and simple description (not more than 400 words), in plain language, of the aims of this project, the proposal research design and the methods to be used to achieve those aims.

A review of studies conducted on pathways into homelessness demonstrates the lack of research in this area in Australia and indicates that the research that has been conducted tends to be gender-blind. Additionally, previous studies suggest that women who are homeless are facing with their social role as women. Therefore little is known about homeless women’s experiences, however few studies that do exist suggest that women may be doubly disadvantaged on the street: first, for being homeless and second, for stepping outside the traditional social role. As a result, a more in-depth understanding of why women become homeless is essential.

The proposed project aims to examine women’s pathways to homelessness and their experiences of homelessness. In doing so, it recognises the importance of understanding homelessness from the point of view of women living outside of the ‘traditional home’. Home is considered to be domestic—woman’s private space—while public space is considered a more male dominated sphere. The project is grounded in the experiences of homeless women themselves. In hope to give ‘voice’ to homeless women living in Brisbane and ethnographic approach has been chosen. Such approach allows individuals to reveal their own experiences and conceptualisations. Data will be collected first, through initial audit of current policies and services on homelessness and second through participant observations and life histories interviewing.

This research will not only provide necessary explanations about women and homelessness for the field of homelessness, it will also provide information for early intervention to policy makers, government and non-government institutions, women groups, and advocates. In doing so, this research will provide an important contribution to the field and the policy debates around intervention and best practice.
2. RESEARCHERS / INVESTIGATORS

2.2. Principal researcher(s) / investigator(s)

2.2.0 How many principal researchers / investigators are there? 1

2.2.1. Principal researcher / investigator 1

2.2.1. Name and contact details

Name: Dr Carin (Kate) Smith
Address: Griffith University School of Criminology and Criminal Justice
            176 Messina Ridge Road
            Mount Gravatt QLD 4122
            Australia
Organization: Griffith University
Area: School of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Position: Senior Lecturer
Contact: (Bus) +61 (0)7 3735 1066 (AH) - (Mob) - (Fax) -
Email: k.smith@griffith.edu.au

2.2.2. Summary of qualifications and relevant expertise NS 4.8.7 NS 4.8.15

BA (Hon) MSc PhD

2.2.3. Please declare any general competing interests

There are no competing interests.

2.2.4. Name the site(s) for which this principal researcher / investigator is responsible.

The principal researcher is responsible for all the sites.

2.2.5. Describe the role of the principal researcher / investigator in this project.

The principal researcher will be responsible for the associate researcher.

2.2.6. Is the principal researcher / investigator a student? No

2.3. Associate researcher(s) / investigator(s)

2.3.1. How many known associate researchers are there? (You will be asked to give contact details for these associate researchers / investigators at question 2.3.1.1) 1

2.3.2. Do you intend to employ other associate researchers / investigators? No

2.3.1. Associate Researchers / Investigators 1

2.3.1. Name and contact details

Name: Ms Helena Menih
Address: Griffith University Accommodation Office (CP601)
            170 Kessels Road
            Nathan QLD 4111
            Australia
Organization: Griffith University
Area: School of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Position: Student
Contact: (Bus) (07) 373 55600 (AH) - (Mob) 0406 44098 (Fax) no
Email: h.menih@griffith.edu.au

2.3.1. Summary of qualifications and relevant expertise NS 4.8.7 NS 4.8.15

Commercial-in-Confidence
2.3.1... Please declare any general competing interests  
There are no competing interests.

2.3.1... Description of the role of the associate researcher / investigator in this project.  
The associate researcher will be conducting two methods of data collection - participant observations and life history interviews and is fully responsible for the whole research.

2.3.1... Name the site at which the associate researcher / investigator has responsibility.  
The principal researcher is responsible for all the sites.

2.3.1... Is this associate researcher / investigator a student?  
Yes

2.3.1... What is the organisation, faculty and degree course of the student?  
Organisation: Griffith University  
Faculty: School of Criminology and Criminal Justice  
Degree course: PhD

2.3.1... Is this research project part of the evaluation of the student?  
Yes

2.3.1... Is the student's involvement in this project elective or compulsory?  
Compulsory

2.3.1... What training has the student received in the relevant research methodology  
I have completed a Bachelor degree in Anthropology, which requires an extensive knowledge in qualitative methodology and conducting fieldwork. I have also completed Masters with Honours in Criminology and Criminal Justice, where it was required to complete either Qualitative or Quantitative Social Research course. Furthermore, as a part of my bachelor degree I have been involved with many projects requiring the knowledge of qualitative research methods:  
- Relationship between Teams: An Observational Study of Participation and Inter-personal Connections in Women's Volleyball (2005) – a covert participant observation method;  
- The Family Team: A Secondary Analysis of the Influence of Sport on Families (2006) – secondary analysis of qualitative data (semi-structured interviews);  
- The Olympic Games versus The Para-Olympic Games: A Comparison Study into the Public Awareness of Disabled Athletes (2006) – structured interviews;  
- Confronting the Finishing Line: How Athletes Cope at the End of their Careers (2007) – open ended interviews;  
- 'Bedrest' Project – The European Space Society Analysis of Muscle Deterioration (2007) – My part in this bigger project was an overt participant observation of attitudes between participants;  
- Public Perceptions of Disabled Women (2007) – surveys and structured interviews;  
- Stigmatised Individuals with Physical Disability (BA thesis, 2008) – discourse analysis;  

2.3.1... What training has the student received in the ethics of research?  
I have conducted an extensive reading of the literature concerning ethnographic research and vulnerable groups that will participate in the research. As an undergraduate student of Anthropology I have also completed all the courses and trainings that specialize in ethics point of view of researching. I have also attended Workshop on Ethnography, Crime and Governance on 30th June 2010 at Law School, University of Sydney and Workshop on Working with Marginalised Women on 26th July 2011 at Mercure Hotel, Brisbane. Both of these workshops are relevant to my fieldwork and provided me with a better understanding of working with vulnerable population.

2.3.1... Describe the supervision to be provided to the student.  
I have two supervisors, the principal and associate supervisor. At least twice a month I will meet both of the supervisors to update them about the progress of the research. Furthermore, the principal supervisor will be available for me at all times.

2.3.1... How many supervisors does the student have?  
2

2.3.1... Supervisor 1

2.3.1... Provide the name, qualifications, and expertise, relevant to this research, of the student's academic advisor.
2.3.1... Supervisor 2

2.3.1... Provide the name, qualifications, and expertise, relevant to this research, of the student's academic supervisor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Prof</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Name</td>
<td>Philip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surname</td>
<td>S.J.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of qualifications and relevant expertise</td>
<td>The research expertise: - Public and private policing - Gender based violence - Governance of inner-city &quot;skid-row&quot; communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4. Contact

Provide the following information for the person making this application to the HREC.

2.4.1. Name and contact details

Name: Ms Helena Menih
Address: Griffith University Accommodation Office (CP001)
170 Kessels Road
Nathan QLD 4111
Australia
Organisation: Griffith University
Area: School of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Position: Student
Contact: (Bus) (07) 373 55600 (AH) -
(Mob) 0450644098 (Fax) no
Email: h.menih@griffith.edu.au

2.5. Other personnel relevant to the research project

2.5.1. How many known other people will play a specified role in the conduct of this research project?

3

2.5.1... Describe the role, and expertise where relevant (e.g. counsellor), of these other personnel. Experts in the field of housing and homelessness and experts in counseling people in distress. I will use the assistance of these experts before entering the field and during my fieldwork.

2.5.2. Is it intended that other people, not yet known, will play a specified role in the conduct of this research project? Yes

2.6. Certification of researchers / investigators

2.6.1. Are there any relevant certification, accreditation or credentialing requirements relevant to the conduct of this research? No

2.7. Training of researchers / investigators
2.7.1 Do the researchers / investigators or others involved in any aspect of this research project require any additional training in order to undertake this research? No
3. RESOURCES

3.1. Project Funding / Support

3.1.1. Indicate how the project will be funded

3.1.1.1 Type of funding.

[Please note that all fields in any selected funding detail column (with the exception of the code) will need to be completed.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By Researchers Department or Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Grant / Sponsor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffith University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amount of funding</td>
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<td>3000.00</td>
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<td>Detail in kind support</td>
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<td>The money will be used for interviewing</td>
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<td>equipment, photocopying and printing.</td>
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Indicate the extent to which the scope of this I am conducting the research through School of Criminology and HREC application and grant are aligned Criminal Justice as a fulfillment of a Doctorate of Philosophy

3.1.1.2 How will you manage a funding shortfall (if any)?

There is no shortfall expected, however if it does occur it is expected to be covered by the principal researcher.

3.1.2 Will the project be supported in other ways eg. in-kind support/equipment by an external party eg. sponsor

No

3.2. Duality of Interest

3.2.1 Describe any commercialisation or intellectual property implications of the funding/support arrangement.

None.

3.2.2 Does the funding/support provider(s) have a financial interest in the outcome of the research?

No

3.2.3 Does any member of the research team have any affiliation with the provider(s) of funding/support, or a financial interest in the outcome of the research?

No

3.2.4 Does any other individual or organisation have an interest in the outcome of this research?

No

3.2.5 Are there any restrictions on the publication of results from this research?

No
4. PRIOR REVIEWS

4.1. Ethical review

4.1.0. Duration and location

4.1.0. In how many Australian sites, or site types, will the research be conducted? 1

4.1.0. In how many overseas sites, or site types, will the research be conducted? 0

Provide the following information for each site or site type (Australian and overseas, if applicable) at which the research is to be conducted.

4.1.0...Site / Site Type 1

4.1.0... Site / Site Type Name
Site 1

4.1.0... Site / Site Type Location
Brisbane City

4.1.0...Provide the start and finish dates for the whole of the study including data analysis
Anticipated start date 12/04/2010
Anticipated finish date 12/04/2013

4.1.0...Are there any time-critical aspects of the research project of which an HREC should be aware? No

4.1.1 To how many Australian HRECs (representing site organisations or the researcher's / investigator's organisation) is it intended that this research proposal be submitted? 1

4.1.1...HREC 1

4.1.1... Name of HREC Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00162)

4.1.1...Provide the start and finish dates for the research for which this HREC is providing ethical review.
Anticipated start date or date range 01/10/2011
Anticipated finish date or date range 01/10/2013

4.1.1... For how many sites at which the research is to be conducted will this HREC provide ethical review? 1

4.1.1...Site 1

4.1.1... Name of site Site 1

4.1.1... Which of the researchers / investigators involved in this project will conduct the research at this site?
Principal Researcher(s) Dr Catrin (Kate) Smith
Associate Researcher(s) Ms Helena Menin

4.1.2 Have you previously submitted an application, whether in NEAF or otherwise, for ethical review of this research project to any other HRECs? No

4.3. Peer review

4.3.1 Has the research proposal, including design, methodology and evaluation undergone, or will it undergo, a peer review process? Yes

4.3.1... Provide details of the review and the outcome. A copy of the letter / notification, where available, should be attached to this application.

The confirmation document has undergone the appropriate evaluation. External examiner examined the methodological and theoretical approach along with the research design. The outcome of the review was positive and confirmed the need for this research.

Commercial-in-Confidence
Ethical Review Section

Summary

Applicant / Principal Researcher(s)

Ms Helena Menih

Dr Catrin (Kate) Smith
BA (Hons), MSc, PhD

Potential conflicts of interest
There are no competing interests.

Associate Researcher(s) / Investigator(s)

Ms Helena Menih
BA Social and Cultural Anthropology and Cultural Studies
MA (Hons) Criminology and Criminal Justice

Potential conflicts of interest
There are no competing interests.

Other Relevant Personnel

Dr Catrin (Kate) Smith
BA (Hons), MSc, PhD

The research expertise:
- The body and social control
- Gender and crime
- Qualitative research on crime and justice

Prof Philip Stenning
S J D.
The research expertise:
- Public and private policing
- Gender-based violence
- Governance of inner-city “skid-row” communities

Dr Catrin (Kate) Smith
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- Public and private policing
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5. PROJECT

5.1. Type of Research

5.1.1 Tick as many of the following 'types of research' as apply to this project. Your answers will assist HRECs in considering your proposal. A tick in some of these boxes will generate additional questions relevant to your proposal (mainly because the National Statement requires additional ethical matters to be considered), which will appear in Section 9 of NEAF.

This project involves:

[X] Research using qualitative methods NS 3.1

5.1.2 Does the research involve limited disclosure to participants? NS 2.3 Yes

5.1.3 Are the applicants asking the HREC / review body to waive the requirement of consent? NS 2.3.5 No

5.2. Research plan

5.2.1 Describe the theoretical, empirical and/or conceptual basis, and background evidence, for the research proposal, eg. previous studies, anecdotal evidence, review of literature, prior observation, laboratory or animal studies (4000 character limit). NS 1.1

The central focus of this research is to explore and understand the daily routine of homeless women in Brisbane. According to Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2009) in 2006 there were 104076 homeless people in Australia, 20782 in Queensland. Furthermore, 44 per cent of homeless population in Queensland were females. However, according to the anecdotal evidence this number is even higher, actually there seems to be equal numbers of homeless men and women. Nevertheless, the literature that would provide an in-depth understanding of homeless women in Australia is particularly sparse.

In contrast to the international literature (particularly United Kingdom and North America), most of the Australian literature on homelessness is in form of reports commissioned by either government or non-government agencies (Parker and Fopp, 2004). The main focus in this literature is on the extent or numbers of homelessness, which is interpreted by media and policy makers as causes and causation; the characteristics of homeless men compared to homeless women; pathways into homelessness for youth or older population. Consequently there is more relevant literature about homeless rather than hearing those who have been denied their own basic peace and space (Parker and Fopp, 2004). The qualitative research that has been conducted in order to bring the 'voices' of homeless people to live are gender-blind.

Aims

There are two main aims in this research. First, to provide description of homelessness that is grounded in the identities/experiences of homeless women themselves. Second, to explore women's pathways into homelessness.

Theoretical framework

This research is influenced by feminism from critical criminological and anthropological perspective. The concepts established by these two paradigms will be explored in order to establish how valid (if at all) these are in today's society. This will be achieved through the grounded theory approach. This means that the main theoretical framework will emerge from the data.

Methodological approach – making homeless women visible

Ethnography is identified as primarily relevant and useful in the homeless research (Martin and Kunnen, 2008). Lampping and Ezzy (2005) describe it as "especially appropriate" for sensitive research involving vulnerable participants (homelessness research has been described as falling into category of sensitive research because it engages with participants who are more likely to be vulnerable or disadvantaged), because its "flexible, fluid and facilitative" methodologies obtain more in-depth information and enable participant's voices to be heard through the research process. Thus this research will use participant observation and life history interviewing to 'give voice' to homeless women in Brisbane.

This research is conceived in three stages:

Stage 1 (developmental phase) involves literature review on research that has been conducted on homelessness (and homeless population) and an audit of services available to homeless population. Furthermore, it involves meetings with cultural consultant and specialists in the field of homelessness.

Stage 2 (main fieldwork phase) involves two research methods: participant observation and life history interviewing. First, using an overt method over a ten month period women who are homeless and who reside and interact within public spaces in inner-city Brisbane will be observed. This method will be used as a
means of (1) familiarisation with homelessness and the public spaces where it occurs, (2) to identify and recruit potential participants for life history interviewing, (3) to better understand the daily routines of homeless women. Brief notes will be taken either in the field or as soon as the observation ends. All the notes will be after the field is exited assembled into a fieldwork journal.

Second, after first few weeks of participant observation, it will be established who the eligible recruits to engage in life history are interviewing. A target of at least 25 women will be aimed for although the number may be higher. All interviews will be conducted in a format involving only one respondent and the researcher. With participants permission all the interviewing will be audio recorded. All the interviewing will take place at an environment suitable to research participants, thus interviews may take place outdoors.

Stage 3 (analysis and feedback phase) would involve analysis of data in three phases and a series of feedback meetings. The analysis of data is also an ongoing process that will start from day one of the main fieldwork phase.

5.2.2 State the aims of the research and the research question and/or hypotheses, where appropriate.

Although it is common that in most studies the research question directs the course of the study, in grounded theory, the researcher is supposed to enter the field of study without narrow research questions which are common in other research designs. The researcher should state the research questions more broadly and in terms that reflect a problem-centered perspective of those experiencing or living the phenomenon to be studied (Birks and Mills, 2011, p. 21). Early in the research process the more narrow research questions are establish. Thus there are two broad aims.

First, to provide description of homelessness that is grounded in the identities/experiences of homeless women themselves. More specifically, the following aims will be pursued:

- Home and ‘homelessness’ are important, yet complex, concepts to define (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1992, 2003). This research aims to explore the interaction between the experience of homelessness and the meaning attached to homelessness for women.
- US-based research on homeless women suggests that more women than men report physical or sexual abuse as a cause for their homelessness. Further, some Australian data also suggest that victimisation levels for homeless women are much higher than for men. Thus, it is important to understand the survival and coping mechanism that homeless women use on the streets.
- Limited research has considered the lives of homeless women in the context of public and private spheres. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring what roles women play in the public and private spheres.

Second, to explore women’s pathways into homelessness:

- While research in Australia has established main reasons for homelessness, limited research has focused only on homeless women. Thus, the aim here is to explore the causes for women’s homelessness

5.2.3 Has this project been undertaken previously? No

5.3. Benefits/Risks

5.3.1 Does the research involve a practice or intervention which is an alternative to a standard practice or intervention? No

5.3.2 What expected benefits (if any) will this research have for the wider community? This research aims to provide an important contribution to the field and the policy debates around intervention and best practice. We aim to provide a description of female homelessness that is grounded in the experiences of women themselves. This will provide necessary first hand insights into women's perception of the needs of homeless women in Brisbane. This research will not only provide necessary explanations about women and homelessness for the field of homelessness, it will also, provide information for early intervention to policy makers, government and non-government institutions, women groups, and advocates for the homeless who are concerned with women's homelessness and are aiming to improve the lives of homeless women and prevent their homelessness in the first place. In doing so, this research will provide an important contribution to the field and the policy debates around intervention and best practice.

5.3.3 What expected benefits (if any) will this research have for participants? NS 2.1

This research aims to provide an insight into lives and experiences of homeless women. It is assumed that with the better knowledge of women's pathways into homelessness and their needs better or new mechanisms can be put in place in order to reduce the the risks for women to become homeless. Also, the more insight of their lives we have the better understanding of why and who homeless women are, consequently improving the public's perception and attitudes towards homeless women.

5.3.4 Are there any risks to participants as a result of participation in this research project? Yes NS 2.1

5.3.5 Explain how the likely benefit of the research justifies the risks of harm or discomfort to participants. NS 1.6

There is a possibility or it might even be unlikely that the participants may suffer some psychological/mental.
distress or discomfort during the life history interviewing, however it can not be categorically ruled out. With conducting interviews there is a potential to uncover or trigger feelings of distress or discomfort, however with an extensive background in working with people I will draw upon my skills and knowledge to discuss issues in a manner that is unlikely to cause distress or discomfort. In addition to this, I will also have the contact details of various counselling and support services that work free of charge with people experiencing homelessness. If interviewee starts experiencing any discomfort I will stop interview and explain that in case they feel to distressed they can withdraw from the interview. Also, I will encourage them to turn to various community counselling services that are free of charge to marginalised population.

Furthermore, there are no legal harms expected. The participants will be informed from the day one not to disclose any incriminating information. Especially during the life-history interview stage this will be emphasised before any the sessions starts and again when the recording of the interview begins. However, in case if any unintentional disclosure of any legal implications I will stop the interview and emphasise again that in case any more details are revealed, I will have to take appropriate steps and report this to my supervisors.

Although these are unlikely risks and will be appropriately dealt with, the benefits of the research findings will help a wider population, such as marginalised women, women with risks of becoming homeless and homeless women.

5.3.8 Are there any other risks involved in this research? eg. to the research team, the organisation, others

Yes

5.3.8.. What are these risks?

Except for the risks mentioned before, my safety as a researcher might be at risk.

5.3.8.. Explain how these risks will be negated/minimised/managed.

One of the main ethical considerations is the safety of the researcher in the fieldwork. Chih Lin (2003) conducted the interviews with male prisoners the same way that prison staff conducted their interviews. This was one of the major safety risks, however it was the exactly same risk prison staff ran daily. Also, in her opinion this expressed trust and in return the prisoners trusted her as well. Thus, I understand that there are some dangers I might be exposed to. It cannot be assumed that since the lives of homeless people are in public, every single person that comes in contact with this population is exposed to the same dangers. However, I still intend to take some safety precautions. The initial stage of participant observation phase includes women who are homeless and who dwell and interact within public spaces in inner-city Brisbane. These public spaces are specific places where Vans And Kitchen5 (VAKS) offer food and drink each morning to homeless and marginalised people. VAKS go out on the street every day of the year and serve food and drink. I will ensure volunteer people working in such VAKS will be aware of my presence and my research. I will approach VAKS and provide them with all the details of my study and try to help their mission as a volunteer, so homeless people will become aware of my presence.

Furthermore, I will observe places where The Street to Home team provides their support (in public places around Brisbane, where rough sleepers dwell). The Street to Home team is situated within Micah Projects Homelessness to Home Support Services. The team operates 7 days per week covering a span of hours with three daily shifts from 6 am – 2 am weekdays and 11 am – 2 am weekends. I will approach the team and provide them with all the details of my study and try to help their mission as a volunteer, so homeless people will become aware of my presence. Also, at all times of my fieldwork I will keep at least one person informed about my approximate time of entering and exiting the field.

5.3.8.. Explain how these risks will be monitored.

All the risks that might become apparent during the research will be reported to the principal researcher as soon as possible so that can be managed in the appropriate way.

5.3.8.. Explain how any harm to participants, resulting from these risks, will be reported.

There is no expected harm to participant resulting the above mentioned risks to the researcher.

5.3.9 Is it anticipated that the research will lead to commercial benefit for the investigator(s) and or the research sponsor(s)?

No

5.3.11 Is there a risk that the dissemination of results could cause harm of any kind to individual participants - whether their physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, social or financial well-being, or to their employability or professional relationships - or to their communities?

No

5.4. Monitoring

Refer to NS 3.3.10 - 3.3.25

5.4.1 What mechanisms do the researchers / investigators intend to implement to monitor the conduct and progress of the research project? NS 5.5
All the responsibilities rest on me as an associate researcher to meet and report to my supervisors my either weekly or fortnightly progress.
6. PARTICIPANTS

6.1. Research participants

6.1.1 The National Statement identifies the need to pay additional attention to ethical issues associated with research involving certain specific populations.

This question aims to assist you and the HREC to identify and address ethical issues that are likely to arise in your research, if its design will include one or more of these populations. Further, the National Statement recognises the cultural diversity of Australia’s population and the importance of respect for that diversity in the recruitment and involvement of participants. Your answer to this question will guide you to additional questions (if any) relevant to the participants in your study.

6.1.1 Tick as many of the following ‘types of research participants’ who will be included because of the project design, or their inclusion is probable, given the diversity of Australia’s population. If none apply, please indicate this below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>b) Probable coincidental recruitment</th>
<th>c) Design specifically excludes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People whose primary language is other than English (LOTE)</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women who are pregnant and the human foetus NS 4.1</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children and/or young people (ie. &lt;18 years) NS 4.2</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in existing dependent or unequal relationships NS 4.3</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People highly dependent on medical care NS 4.4</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with a cognitive impairment, an intellectual disability or a mental illness NS 4.5</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples NS 4.7</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who may be involved in illegal activity</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You have indicated that it is probable that:

- People whose primary language is other than English (LOTE)
- Women who are pregnant and the human foetus
- Children and/or young people (ie. <18 years)
- People with a cognitive impairment, an intellectual disability or a mental illness
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples
- People who may be involved in illegal activity

may be coincidentally recruited into this project. The National Statement identifies specific ethical considerations for these group(s).

6.1.3.. Please explain how you will address these considerations in your proposed research.

All the participants for life history interviewing must be women who are homeless in Brisbane. The targeted number is from 25 - 30 participants. The recruitment strategy does not deliberately include or exclude any of the willing participants. At this point there is no way of knowing who will be willing to participate and what their background is (ethnicity, sexuality, age, etc.). Thus I will take proactive measures to ensure that research participant’s vulnerabilities are considered and addressed so that their participation does not result in the suffering of harm.

I am aware that with the lack of formal education or limited English proficiency, there might be additional challenges in some potential respondents when offering informed consent. I will ensure that all aspect of the research, especially what participation in the interviewing stage would involve, are explained to participants in a manner that is accessible to as large range of participants a possible.

I might come across women who are pregnant and young people during my participant observation phase, however these two groups will not be included/recruited for life history interviewing.
To achieve the best standards in ethical research where Indigenous people may be included I will consult specialists that are concerned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I will also outline recommendations from the 'Guidelines for ethical research in Indigenous Studies' (AIATSIS, 2000). Although these guidelines are not prescriptions for the achievement of ethical practice, they will guarantee that my study addresses the important issues when regarding Indigenous people. I have attended the Workshop on Working with Marginalised Women, which provided me with ten important guidelines for working with Indigenous women.

Furthermore, when addressing these considerations it is important to ensure that participants are aware that participation in this research is voluntary. For example if participants present signs of cognitive impairment, an intellectual disability or a mental illness, I will assess whether these issues will interfere with their ability to give informed consent.

6.2. Participant description

6.2.1. How many participant groups are involved in this research project? 1

6.2.2. What is the expected total number of participants in this project at all sites? 25

6.2.3. Group 1

6.2.3.1. Group name for participants in this group

Homeless women

6.2.3.2. Expected number of participants in this group

25 - 30

6.2.3.3. Age range

18 - 65

6.2.3.4. Other relevant characteristics of this participant group

The recruitment strategy does not deliberately include or exclude any of the willing participants. At this point there is no way of knowing who will be willing to participate and what their background is (ethnically, sexuality, age, etc.). Basically the inclusion criteria at this stage is that all the participants are adult women who are homeless in Brisbane.

6.2.3.5. Why are these characteristics relevant to the aims of the project?

This research is aiming to explore the lives of homeless women, hence the characteristics of being a woman, homeless and living in Brisbane.

6.2.4. Your response to questions at Section 6.1 - Research Participants indicates that the following participant groups are excluded from your research. If this is not correct please return to section 6.1 to amend your answer.

People in existing dependent or unequal relationships with any member of the research team, the researcher(s), and/or the person undertaking the recruitment/consent process (e.g. student/teacher, employee/employer, patient/patient, officer, enlisted soldier, patient/doctor)

People highly dependent on medical care

6.2.4.1. Have any particular potential participants or groups of participants been excluded from this research? In answering this question you need to consider if it would be unjust to exclude these potential participants. NB 1.4

This research is concerned with population of homeless women in Brisbane, thus children and men who are also homeless are excluded from this research, otherwise there is no other specific exclusion criteria at this point.

6.3. Participation experience

6.3.1. Provide a concise detailed description, in not more than 200 words, in terms which are easily understood by the lay reader of what the participation will involve.

Participants will be recruited using a non-probability method, meaning that they are possessing the attributes I want to study. Over a few months of non-invasive overt observations of women who are experiencing homelessness I will assess who are the potential participants for the study by interviewing. At the completion of participant observation, I will approach a potential participant whilst they are still in public spaces. This will entail introducing myself (again or for the first time), advising them of the nature and aims of my research. Furthermore, I will explain what the participation entails and what are the potential risks and benefits. I will explain what measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the information they would provide me with. I will also supply them with the information sheet and informed consent. Participants will then be required to read the information sheet and sign a consent form. They will also be advised that participation in

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this research is voluntary, so they can withdraw at any time they wish. It will be required that participants spend few hours a day with the researcher. During this time they will be asked to explain their life story.

6.4. Relationship of researchers / investigators to participants

6.4.1 Specify the nature of any existing relationship or one likely to rise during the research, between the potential participants and any member of the research team or an organisation involved in the research. There is no existing relationship between the potential participants and any member of the research team (principal researcher and supervisors). There is also no expecting relationship to rise during the research as the involvement of the researcher will be moderate.

6.4.2 Describe what steps, if any, will be taken to ensure that the relationship does not impair participants' free and voluntary consent and participation in the project.

All the participants will be treated in the same way and the same information about the research team and the research will be given to all participants.

6.4.3 Describe what steps, if any, will be taken to ensure that decisions about participation in the research do not impair any existing or foreseeable future relationship between participants and researcher / investigator or organisations.

None.

6.4.4 Will the research impact upon, or change, an existing relationship between participants and researcher / investigator or organisations?

No

6.4.5 Is it intended that the interview transcript will be shown or made available to participants?

Yes

6.4.6 Why is it considered important that participants have access to this information?

According to anecdotal evidence, homeless population feels exploited and stereotyped in the media. Thus, I will ensure all the participants with the access to the data collected (interviews conducted). Also, it is important when analysing data to get the feedback from the participants in order to confirm my findings.

6.5. Recruitment

6.5.1 What processes will be used to identify potential participants?

Participants will be recruited using a non-probability method, meaning that they are possessing the attributes I want to study. Over a few months of non-invasive overt observations of women who are experiencing homelessness I will assess who are the potential participants for life history interviewing. At this point there is no way of knowing who will be willing participants and what their background is (ethnicity, sexuality, age, etc.). I will include in my interviews only women that are willing to participate and want to be heard. Also, as homeless women are not a homogenous group they are likely to be influenced by intersection of race, class, age, sexuality, mental illness, and substance abuse. Although the foremost aim is for the participants to be single adult women I do not want to exclude anyone that is willing to participate, thus these factors needs to be considered.

6.5.2 Is it proposed to 'screen' or assess the suitability of the potential participants for the study?

Yes

6.5.2... How will this be done?

As mentioned before, the non-probability method will allow me to process the attributes of the willing potential participants.

6.5.3 Describe how initial contact will be made with potential participants.

Over a few months of non-invasive overt observations of women who are experiencing homelessness I will assess who are the potential participants for life history interviewing. At the completion of participant observation, I will approach a potential participant whilst they are still in public spaces. This will entail introducing myself (again or for the first time), advising them of the nature and aims of my research. Furthermore, I will explain what the participation entails and what are the potential risks and benefits. I will explain what measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the information they would provide me with. I will also supply them with the information sheet and informed consent. Participants will then be required to read the information sheet and sign a consent form. They will also be advised that participation in this research is voluntary, so they can withdraw at any time they wish to. It will be required that participants spend few hours a day with the researcher. During this time they will be asked to explain their life story.

6.5.3... Do you intend to include both males and females in this study?

No

6.5.3... Please explain why only one sex is involved in the study. In doing this you will need to demonstrate why this approach is valid.

Almost half of the homeless population in Australia are women, a 2006 study revealed (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2009). Since 2006 the number of homeless has increased annually. Further, these approximately equal numbers of homeless women and men suggest that every day there are more homeless women than men. A review of studies conducted on pathways into homelessness demonstrates...
the lack of research in this area in Australia and indicates that the research that has been conducted tends to be gender-blind. Additionally, previous studies suggest that women who are homeless are battling with their social role as women (Brown and Ziefert, 1990). Therefore little is known about homeless women’s experiences, however the few studies that do exist suggest that women may be doubly disadvantaged on the street, first, for being homeless and second, for stepping outside the traditional sexual role. As a result, a more in-depth understanding of why women become homeless is essential.

6.5.4 Is an advertisement, e-mail, website, letter or telephone call proposed as the form of initial contact with potential participants? No

6.5.5 If it became known that a person was recruited to, participated in, or was excluded from the research, would that knowledge expose the person to any disadvantage or risk? No

6.6. Consent process

6.6.1 Will consent for participation in this research be sought from all participants? Yes

6.6.1.1 Will there be participants who have capacity to give consent for themselves? Yes

6.6.1.2 What mechanisms/assessments/tools are to be used, if any, to determine each of these participant’s capacity to decide whether or not to participate?

All the potential participant will undergo a scanning process through which it will be determined who are the participants suitable for the research. The only two mechanisms used will be participant observant method and the initial contact with potential participant. After both it will be established if the participants are suitable for the research.

6.6.1.3 Are any of the participants children or young people? No

6.6.1.4 Will there be participants who do not have capacity to give consent for themselves? No

6.6.1.5 Describe the consent process, i.e. how participants or those deciding for them will be informed about, and engaged whether or not to participate in, the project.

After the participant observation phase, the selection of research participants for interviewing will proceed. I attempt to obtain homeless women’s consent in order to conduct my life-history interviewing phase. I will approach women in order to gain their consent with engaging them into conversation. This means that I will move from being an observant into a stage where I am also more active participant.

I will include in my interviews only women that are willing to participate and want to be heard. Also, as homeless women are not a homogenous group they are likely to be influenced by intersection of race, class, age, sexuality, mental illness, and substance abuse. Although the foremost aim is for the participants to be single adult women I do not want to exclude anyone that is willing to participate, thus these factors needs to be considered. First, race, class, and sexuality are assumed not to play any major roles when it comes to them providing me with an informed consent. Second, age is an important factor and since this research focuses on adult women and not young girls it is assumed that the participant will be aged above 18 years. Third, mental illness and substance abuse are factors that need the most consideration. The major concern is if women with mental illness and substance abuse have the capacity to comprehend what their participation in this research project entails. Thus, for the women that will be substance I will attempt to engage in conversation when they still have the ability to provide an informed consent, which is assumed to be prior to their use of substances. For the women who demonstrate signs of mental illnesses I will discuss with them their perceptions on obtaining informed consent and then proceed accordingly. When the research participants will be given the informed consent they will also receive statement of confidentiality, which will ensure them that their identity is completely confidential unless they desire otherwise. I am also aware that there might be some women with the lack of formal education or limited English proficiency. Here might be some additional challenges in potential respondents when offering informed consent. I will ensure that all aspect of the research, especially what participation would involve, are explained to participants in a manner that is accessible to as large range of participants as possible.

Also, I have attended the Workshop on Working with Marginalised Women, which provided me with few important guidelines for working with Indigenous women. Through this workshop I gained an understanding of the best way to approach and engage in conversation with women who are marginalised.

6.6.1.6 If a participant or person on behalf of a participant chooses not to participate, are there specific consequences of which they should be made aware, prior to making this decision? 4.6.6 - 4.6.7 No.

6.6.1.7 Might individual participants be identifiable by other members of their group, and if so could this identification expose them to risks? No

6.6.1.8 If a participant or person on behalf of a participant chooses to withdraw from the research, are there
specific consequences of which they should be made aware, prior to giving consent?

No.

6.6.1. ... Specify the nature and value of any proposed incentive/payment (e.g., movie tickets, food vouchers) or reimbursement (e.g., travel expenses) to participants.

Participant will not be receiving any specific payment. However, during the interviewing some refreshments might be provided when desired.

6.6.1. ... Explain why this offer will not impair the voluntary nature of the consent, whether by participants' or persons deciding for their behalf. No. 2.2.10 - 2.2.11

This should not affect any of the participants, since the incentive is not something that would make any separation between participants.

6.6.3. Do you propose to obtain consent from individual participants for your use of their stored data/samples for this research project? Yes
8. CONFIDENTIALITY/PRIVACY

8.1. Do privacy guidelines need to be applied in the ethical review of this proposal?

8.1.1. Indicate whether the source of the information about participants which will be used in this research project will involve:

[X] collection directly from the participant

8.1.2. Information which will be collected for this research project directly from the participant

8.1.2.1. Describe the information that will be collected directly from participants. Be specific where appropriate.

It is expected that the participants will describe their pathways into homelessness and also what are the survival methods they 'picked up' on the streets. It will also be discussed what was their assimilation process and how are they able to separate public from private sphere. It is also expected that there will be much more information provided through the interview, since the nature of the interview is life history. The exact details of the information cannot yet be determined.

8.1.2.2. The information collected by the research team about participants will be in the following form(s).

Tick more than one box if applicable.

[X] non-identifiable

8.2. Using information from participants

8.2.1. Describe how information collected about participants will be used in this project.

This project employs two research methods, thus two data sets will be collected. First, through the participant observation stage brief notes will be taken either in the field or as soon as the observation ends. All the notes will be (at the end of six months) assembled into a fieldwork journal at the end of the fieldwork. Once the fieldwork phase concludes and the analyses of the study begins, the fieldwork journal becomes an important source of data. Fieldwork journal contains a record of all the experiences that occurred during fieldwork (Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte, 1996).

An interview that is carried out by ethnographers whose principal research strategy is participant observation is often virtually unstructured, essentially very close to a naturally occurring conversation (Davies, 2008). Nevertheless, the conversation may sway away from the researched topic, thus the ethnographer must steer the conversation back to the research topic without imposing much structure on the interaction. The points that come up during these unstructured interviews or conversations tend relate to respondent's past, present, and future (Davies, 2008). Such interview or conversation aims to portray respondent's life up to present. Life history interviewing embodies a distinct approach to social science – biographical perspective (Miller, 2000). This perspective has a holistic concern with placement in time, the relationship between the individual and the social structure and how these interplay as well as how its perception changes through time (Miller, 2000). Life history interviews cover the events of individual’s life course up to the present (Thompson, 1976). Through this style of interviewing the important historical events and the effects of change across time in individual’s life are covered (Miller, 2000). This encourages the respondent to move back and fourth in their life history and then makes linkages between different types of experiences and segments in their life. Miller (2000) also pointed out that the interviewer needs to make clear to the respondent that their life history expands from the past through the present and into future. This is important in the context of a social structure change and in the passage of time.

Analysis phase involves the analysis of the data collected that will take part in three stages (initial, intermediate, and advanced). When analysing data in grounded theory (Birks and Mills (2011) point out two rules: everything is a concept and data analysis needs to proceed relation to the research aims and unit of analysis planned for in the initial research design. It is relevant to note that constant comparative analysis will be ongoing throughout the project until a grounded theory is fully integrated (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). This technique is used to integrate and generate data. Advanced coding is the process that eventually enables the data to become theory.

8.2.2. Will any of the information used by the research team be in identified or re-identifiable (coded) form?

Yes

8.2.2.1. Indicate whichever of the following applies to this project:

[X] Information collected for, used in, or generated by, this project will not be used for any other purpose.

8.2.4. List ALL research personnel and others who, for the purposes of this research, will have authority to use or have access to the information and describe the nature of the use or access. Examples of others are: student supervisors, research monitors, pharmaceutical company monitors.

Associate Researcher: Helena Menih

Commercial-in-Confidence
8.3. Storage of information about participants during and after completion of the project

8.3.1 In what formats will the information be stored during and after the research project? (e.g. paper copy, computer file on floppy disk or CD, audio tape, videotape, film)

All the data will be electronically stored and also in a paper copy form.

8.3.2 Specify the measures to be taken to ensure the security of information from misuse, loss, or unauthorised access while stored during and after the research project? (e.g. will identifiers be removed and at what stage? Will the information be physically stored in a locked cabinet?)

All the data will be electronically stored and password protected. All recorded and written documentation, including consent forms and transcriptions will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the Griffith University.

Given the research involves a proposed waiver of consent and the intent of exposing illegal activity [see NS 4.6.1] the HREC must be satisfied that your response to this question has justified that there is sufficient protection of the privacy of the participants.

8.3.5 The information which will be stored at the completion of this project is of the following type(s). Tick more than one box if applicable.

[X] non-identifiable

8.3.6 For how long will the information be stored after the completion of the project and why has this period been chosen?

All the information will be stored for the period of five years after completion of the research and publications or presentations. This period of five years was chosen because this is the period that is allowed for verification.

8.3.7 What arrangements are in place with regard to the storage of the information collected for, used in, or generated by this project in the event that the principal researcher / investigator ceases to be engaged at the current organisation?

All the data will be locked in a filing cabinet in a locked room.

8.4. Ownership of the information collected during the research project and resulting from the research project

8.4.2 Who is understood to own the information resulting from the research, eg. the final report or published form of the results?

The associate researcher.

8.4.3 Does the owner of the information or any other party have any right to impose limitations or conditions on the publication of the results of this project?

Yes

8.4.3... Specify any limitations on publication.

Any visible information that could identify any of the participants should not be published.

8.5. Disposal of the information

8.5.1 Will the information collected for, used in, or generated by this project be disposed of at some stage?

Yes

8.5.1... At what stage will the information be disposed?

All the data will be disposed of after the appropriate time, which will be, as suggested, five years.

8.5.1... How will information, in all forms, be disposed?

All the transcripts and other paper documentation will be shredded and all the audio recording will be deleted.

8.6. Reporting individual results to participants and others

8.6.1 Is it intended that results of the research that relate to a specific participant be reported to that participant?

Yes

8.6.1... Specify in what form the results will be reported to participants.

All participants will be informed that if they wish to see the outcome of this research they will either receive a copy of my findings or have another informal conversation about my findings with me. Also, it will be suggested that participants to attend follow-up meetings and interviews, where I will see if the key themes emerging from the data are matching their own interpretations.

8.6.1... How will the results be communicated to participants? eg telephone call, individual letter, copy of publication, consultation with a medical practitioner or other

The results will be communicated in person, the same way the interviewing will be conducted.

8.6.1... Who will be responsible for communicating the project results to participants?
The associate researcher.

8.6.2 Is the research likely to produce information of personal significance to individual participants?  Yes
8.6.3 Will individual participant’s results be recorded with their personal records?  No
8.6.4 Is it intended that results that relate to a specific participant be reported to anyone other than that participant?  No
8.6.5 Is the research likely to reveal a significant risk to the health or well-being of persons other than the participant, eg family members, colleagues  No
8.6.6 Is there a risk that the dissemination of results could cause harm of any kind to individual participants - whether their physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, social or financial well-being, or to their employability or professional relationships - or to their communities?  No
8.6.7 How is it intended to disseminate the results of the research? eg report, publication, thesis  
All the results of the research will be gathered in a thesis that is a part of completion of Doctoral degree and publications or presentations.
8.6.8 Will the confidentiality of participants and their data be protected in the dissemination of research results?  Yes
8.6.8... Explain how confidentiality of participants and their data will be protected in the dissemination of research results  
All the data gathered will be presented in a manner to reduce the likelihood of inferred identification. Meaning that respondent’s contributions will be presented so that they are unlikely to be identified by their stories or other characteristics.
9. DECLARATIONS AND SIGNATURES

9.1 Project Title
An Ethnographic Study of Homeless Women in Brisbane

9.2 Human Research Ethics Committee to which this application is made
Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00162)

9.3 Signatures and undertakings

Applicant / Principal Researchers (including students where permitted)

I/we certify that:
- All information is truthful and as complete as possible;
- I/we have had access to and read the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans;
- the research will be conducted in accordance with the National Statement;
- the research will be conducted in accordance with the ethical and research arrangements of the organisations involved;
- I/we have consulted any relevant legislation and regulations, and the research will be conducted in accordance with these;
- I/we will immediately report to the HREC anything which might warrant review of the ethical approval of the proposal NS 5.5.3 including:
  - serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants;
  - proposed changes in the protocol; and
  - unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project;
- I/we will inform the HREC, giving reasons, if the research project is discontinued before the expected date of completion NS 5.5.6 see NS 5.5.6(b);
- I/we will adhere to the conditions of approval stipulated by the HREC and will cooperate with HREC monitoring requirements. At a minimum annual progress reports and a final report will be provided to the HREC.

Applicant / Chief Researcher(s) / Principal Researcher(s)

Ms Helena Menih
Griffith University

Dr Catrin (Kate) Smith
Griffith University

Associate Researchers

Ms Helena Menih

Supervisor(s) of student(s)

I/we certify that:
- I/we will provide appropriate supervision to the student to ensure that the project is undertaken in accordance with the undertakings above;
- I/we will ensure that training is provided necessary to enable the project to be undertaken skillfully and ethically.

Dr Catrin (Kate) Smith

Prof Philip Stenning

Dr Catrin (Kate) Smith
Heads of departments/schools/research organisation

We certify that:
- we are familiar with this project and endorse its undertaking;
- the resources required to undertake this project are available;
- the researchers have the skill and expertise to undertake this project appropriately or will undergo appropriate training as specified in this application.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>First name</th>
<th>Surname</th>
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<tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Organisation name</th>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Signature</th>
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</table>
10. ATTACHMENTS
This page and all pages that follow don't need to be submitted to your HREC.

10.1 List of Attachments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Attachments</th>
<th>Attachments which may be required/appropriate.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment/invitation</td>
<td>Copy of advertisement, letter of invitation etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Information</td>
<td>Copy or script for participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For parent, legal guardian or person responsible as appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent Form</td>
<td>Copy for participant</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For parent, legal guardian or person responsible as appropriate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For, optional components of the project eg. genetic sub study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td>Copy of peer review report or grant submission outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HREC approvals</td>
<td>Copy of outcome of other HREC reviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attachments specific to project or participant group</th>
<th>Attachments which may be required/appropriate.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research conducted in the workplace or possibly impacting on workplace relationships</td>
<td>Evidence of support/permission from workplace where research will be conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People whose primary language is other than English (LOTE)</td>
<td>English translation of participant information/consent forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children and/or young people (ie. &lt;18 years)</td>
<td>Information/consent form for parent, legal guardian or person responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with an intellectual or mental impairment</td>
<td>Information/consent form for legal guardian or person responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People highly dependent on medical care</td>
<td>Information/consent form for legal guardian or person responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples</td>
<td>Evidence of support / permission of elders and/or other appropriate bodies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 10.2 Participant information elements

**Core Elements**

Provision of information to participants about the following topics should be considered for all research projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Elements</th>
<th>Issues to consider in participant information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>About the project</strong></td>
<td>Full title and / or short title of the project</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plain language description of the project</td>
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<td>Purpose / aim of the project and research methods as appropriate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demands, risks, inconveniences, discomforts of participation in the project</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outcomes and benefits of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project start, finish, duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>About the investigators / organisation</strong></td>
<td>Researchers conducting the project (including whether student researchers are involved)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisations which are involved / responsible</td>
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<td>Organisations which have given approvals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship between researchers and participants and organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant description</strong></td>
<td>How and why participants are chosen</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How participants are recruited</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How many participants are to be recruited</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participant experience</strong></td>
<td>What will happen to the participant, what will they have to do, what will they experience?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benefits to individual, community, and contribution to knowledge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Risks to individual, community</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Consequences of participation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participant options</strong></td>
<td>Alternatives to participation</td>
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<td>Whether participation may be for part of project or only for whole of project</td>
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<td>Whether any of the following will be provided: counselling, post research follow-up, or post research access to services, equipment or goods</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participants rights and responsibilities</strong></td>
<td>That participation is voluntary</td>
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<td></td>
<td>That participants can withdraw, how to withdraw and what consequences may follow</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Expectations on participants, consequences of non-compliance with the protocol</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How to seek more information</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How to raise a concern or make a complaint</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Handling of information</strong></td>
<td>How information will be accessed, collected, used, stored, and to whom data will be disclosed</td>
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<td>Can participants withdraw their information; how, when</td>
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<td>Confidentiality of information</td>
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<td>Ownership of information</td>
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<td>Subsequent use of information</td>
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<td>Storage and disposal of information</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Unlawful conduct</strong></td>
<td>Whether researcher has any obligations to report unlawful conduct of participant</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Financial issues</strong></td>
<td>How the project is funded</td>
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<td>Declaration of any duality of interests</td>
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<td>Compensation entitlements</td>
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<td>Costs to participants</td>
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<td>Payments, reimbursements to participants</td>
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<td>Commercial application of results</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Results</strong></td>
<td>What will participants be told, when and by whom</td>
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<td>Will individual results be provided</td>
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<td>What are the consequences of being told or not being told the results of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Core Elements</td>
<td>Issues to consider in participant information</td>
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<td>research</td>
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<td>How will results be reported / published</td>
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<td>Ownership of intellectual property and commercial benefits</td>
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<td>Cessation</td>
<td>Circumstances under which the participation of an individual might cease</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Circumstances under which the project might be terminated</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Research Specific Elements**

Provision of information to participants about the following topics should be considered as may be relevant to the research project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific to project or participant group</th>
<th>Additional issues to consider in participant information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples</td>
<td>describe consultation process to date and involvement of leaderswhether ATSI status will be recorded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E – Ethics Application Additional Questions

Dear Ms Menih

I write further to your application for ethical clearance for your project "Full Review: An Ethnographic Study of Homeless Women in Brisbane" (GU Ref No: CCJ/31/11/HREC). This project has been considered by Human full review.

The Committee resolved to grant this project provisional ethical clearance, subject to your response to the following matters:

Please note that not all members of the HREC were present at this meeting and therefore the information is subject to amendment. We have allowed 14 days for our consultation with the absent members. We will contact you again if any further comments or conditions arise from that consultation.

The applicants are asked to clarify how the researcher will identify herself and make it clear to participants that she is not simply a volunteer but has a research interest in their welfare. The Committee believes that the researcher could obtain help from the organisations who provide care for homeless women to identify participants as it is possible that homeless women already feel threatened while being observed.

Clarification as to how the researcher will not become a significant person in the lives of the homeless and thus by removing herself from the relationship may cause anxiety and stress to participants.

Following on from above how will participants be able to access support services as it is unlikely that they will all have access to telephones or money.

Clarification of the end dates as listed in s4.1.0 and s4.1.1 as they are contradictory.

Clarification as to the screening process to be used to exclude participants who are cognitively impaired as there is no mention of any specific tests for this impairment; p17 s6.6.1 refers only to a scanning process. Furthermore, it is noted that impairments may be intermittent.

Given the research issues and context, what counselling services will be provided for the researcher? Will there be opportunities for her to be debriefed?
Please amend either the application or the informed consent materials as s6.6.1 includes pregnant women yet the Participant Informed Consent materials exclude pregnant women.

It is important that the informed consent material be easily understood by all participants, it should be written in simple lay language and in a more personal manner.

Given that participants are homeless how will the researcher provide feedback to them?

Provision of some indicative questions or areas of thematic interest, that give a sense of the most ethically sensitive or intrusive line of questioning.

Amendment of the informed consent package to include a legal privacy statement. Please note that the Commonwealth Privacy Commissioner has classified opinions as personal information. Sample wording for such statements can be found in Booklet 22 of the Manual for example; where no ordinary disclosure is anticipated: The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and / or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan or telephone (07) 3735 5585.

Clarification of whether [video, audio, digital] tapes are to be erased following transcription / analysis. This should be discussed in the informed consent materials and specific consent sought for any proposed retention and use beyond transcription / analysis.

Given that Indigenous women may make up a significant portion of homeless women in the study who are the cultural consultants and specialists with whom the researcher plans to confer and how will the researcher deal with cultural issues?

Further clarification as to how the researcher will deal with issues arising from substance abuse as the researcher says she will seek consent prior to the uses of substances but how likely is it that the researcher will know whether this is the case?

Clarification as to whether information will be stored in identifiable form (see s8.1.1 and 8.2.2), as this will impact on participant capacity to withdraw from the research.

Given that the identification of illegal activity is highly likely what activities (e.g. victim abuse, criminal activity) will be reportable and as such should be known listed on the informed consent material.
This decision was made on 13-Sep-11. Your response to these matters will be considered by Expedited Ethical Review Panel.

The ethical clearance for this protocol runs from 13-Sep-11 to 12-Apr-13.

Please forward your response to Chris Rose'Meyer, Policy Officer, Research Ethics and Governance, Office for Research as per the details below.

Please refer to the attached sheet for the standard conditions of ethical clearance at Griffith University, as well as responses to questions commonly posed by researchers.

It would be appreciated if you could give your urgent attention to the issues raised by the Committee so that we can finalise the ethical clearance for your protocol promptly.

Regards

Chris Rose'Meyer  
Policy Officer, Research Ethics and Governance  
Office for Research  
G39 3.56 Gold Coast Campus  
Griffith University  
ph: +61 (0)7 5552 7227  
fax: +61 (0)7 5552 9058  
email: c.rosemeyer@griffith.edu.au  
web:

Cc:

At this time all researchers are reminded that the Griffith University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research provides guidance to researchers in areas such as conflict of interest, authorship, storage of data, & the training of research students. You can find further information, resources and a link to the University's Code by visiting http://www62.gu.edu.au/policylibrary.nsf/xupdatemonth/e7852d226231d2b44a25750c0062f457?opendocument

PRIVILEGED, PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL  
This email and any files transmitted with it are intended solely for the use of the addressee(s) and may contain information which is confidential or privileged. If you receive this email and you are not the addressee(s) [or responsible for delivery of the email to the addressee(s)], please disregard the contents of the email, delete the email and notify the author immediately.
Appendix F – Researcher’s Response to the Additional Questions

The applicants are asked to clarify how the researcher will identify herself and make it clear to participants that she is not simply a volunteer but has a research interest in their welfare. The Committee believes that the researcher could obtain help from the organisations who provide care for homeless women to identify participants as it is possible that homeless women already feel threatened while being observed.

The researcher will be identified to the homeless population by MICAH projects, the community based organisation which will also act as a gatekeeper. The organisation will identify the researcher’s intention and purpose from the beginning. It will be emphasised that I am there for research purposes.

Clarification as to how the researcher will not become a significant person in the lives of the homeless and thus by removing herself from the relationship may cause anxiety and stress to participants.

Throughout the participant observation phase the researcher will have a moderate role, which means that the observer does not become a participant in daily activities of the women being observed. The researcher will make clear that in case of any distress or harm homeless women might experience they will be directed to the MICAH projects where they can seek the help they need.

Following on from above how will participants be able to access support services as it is unlikely that they will all have access to telephones or money.

All the participants that might experience any harm or distress will be directed to MICAH projects, where there is help available and a phone free of use for homeless people for such purposes.

Clarification of the end dates as listed in s4.1.0 and s4.1.1 as they are contradictory.

In s4.1.0 the dates listed (12/4/2010 – 12/4/2013) are the dates of enrolment. In s4.1.1 the dates listed are the dates which indicated anticipated start date of the fieldwork phase (1/10/2011) and the anticipated date (1/10/2013) of reporting data to the participants. The second date entails extra few months in case there is extra time needed for the fieldwork phase, since this field of research is unknown and unexplored.

Clarification as to the screening process to be used to exclude participants who are cognitively impaired as there is no mention of any specific tests for this impairment; p17 s6.6.1 refers only to a scanning process. Furthermore, it is noted that impairments may be intermittent.

Participants who have severe cognitive impairment and whose cognitive impairment can be established without any test will be assessed by counsellors working at MICAH project to confirm the justification for their exclusion from the project. Furthermore, the participants whose cognitive impairment might be intermittent will be assessed by the counsellors working at MICAH projects whether they can or cannot participate in this research. It will be assessed whether they can willingly consent to the participation and what impact participation might have on them.
Given the research issues and context, what counselling services will be provided for the researcher? Will there be opportunities for her to be debriefed?

The researcher will have regular meetings with her supervisors. The main of these meetings is regular update from fieldwork. In case there are some issues that arise throughout the fieldwork regarding the wellbeing of the researcher she will have her supervisors at the disposal as well as counselling services through MICAH projects and Griffith University.

Please amend either the application or the informed consent materials as s6.6.1 includes pregnant women yet the Participant Informed Consent materials exclude pregnant women.

In s6.6.1 pregnant women are referred to as probable coincidental recruitment. This might occur through the participation observation phase before any further details of participant are known. As soon as can be established whether a participant is pregnant, she will be excluded from the interview phase. This is due to the fact that homeless pregnant women have different needs than non-pregnant homeless women.

It is important that the informed consent material be easily understood by all participants, it should be written in simple lay language and in a more personal manner.

Please see attached revised Informed consent and information sheet.

Given that participants are homeless how will the researcher provide feedback to them?

All the participants will be advised to refer to MICAH projects for feedback. They will have researcher’s contact in case any participant would like to meet with the researcher outside arranged time for feedback. Otherwise, for each participant there will be arranged time and date for follow-up meetings and feedback meetings. In case they will not show up at the arranged time and date it will be assumed they are not interested in feedback.

Provision of some indicative questions or areas of thematic interest, that give a sense of the most ethically sensitive or intrusive line of questioning.

This research entails life-history interview method, which means the participants will be asked one initial question in the beginning. The question is: “What can you tell me about your life so far?” During their response the researcher will make sure the answer stays relevant to the research. In case the participant may be shy of talking in the beginning or may sway away from the relevant topic, the research will use sub-questions (this depends on the situation) that will require the participant to go back to the initial question. Within the answer the participants will discuss their reasons for becoming homeless, which in most cases might be sensitive especially if these reasons are individual and not structural causes.

Amendment of the informed consent package to include a legal privacy statement. Please note that the Commonwealth Privacy Commissioner has classified opinions as personal information. Sample wording for such statements can be found in Booklet 22 of the Manual for example; where no ordinary disclosure is anticipated: The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and / or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to
meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A
de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research
purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded.
For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at
http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-
university-privacy-plan or telephone (07) 3735 5585.

Please see attached revised Informed consent and information sheet.

Clarification of whether [video, audio, digital] tapes are to be
erased following transcription / analysis. This should be discussed
in the informed consent materials and specific consent sought for any
proposed retention and use beyond transcription / analysis.

Any recorded data will be stored for suggested time of five years (as explained in s8.5.1). Thus it will not
be destroyed after the analysis. This is also due to the fact that the researcher will go back and revisit the
participants, thus the recordings might come useful in that time. However, all the recorded data will be
used only for the purpose of this research and will not be used beyond proposed purposes.

Given that Indigenous women may make up a significant portion of
homeless women in the study who are the cultural consultants and
specialists with whom the researcher plans to confer and how will the
researcher deal with cultural issues?

The researcher will consult with cultural consultant at Griffith University and at MICAH projects. The
researcher has already discussed these issues with MICAH projects. Furthermore, the researcher attended
a workshop “Working with Marginalised Women”, where 10 main points were raised when working with Indigenous marginalised Women.

Further clarification as to how the researcher will deal with issues
arising from substance abuse as the researcher says she will seek
consent prior to the uses of substances but how likely is it that the
researcher will know whether this is the case?

The overt symptoms of psychiatric illnesses and intoxication from alcohol and illicit substance in
participants will be observed in the first phase of the fieldwork. This will raise questions about their
capacity to comprehend what their participation entailed. Because people presenting in ways that question
their ability to provide informed consent might represent a large number of those observed, the researcher
will not automatically exclude them. Excluding people who appear intoxicated and display overt
symptoms of mental illness would not only greatly diminished the sample, but would mean the sample
represent a small minority of people observed. Instead of excluding women on the basis of mental illness
and intoxication, the researcher will first attempt to engage them at times which facilitate their ability to
provide informed consent (National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007, p. 65-6). At
this point it cannot yet be established when this might be. It can occur that the interview will take place in
the early morning, prior to their use of alcohol and substances. Please note that this only refers to the
interview stage, during the participant observation stage it is not relevant whether the participants are
intoxicated.

Clarification as to whether information will be stored in identifiable
form (see s8.1.1 and 8.2.2), as this will impact on participant
capacity to withdraw from the research.

All the collected data will be stored in the non-identifiable form. Participants will be given an option to
provide a made-up name or nickname for the data storage purposes. If they decline, the researcher will
provide a commonly used name for them. This will further be discussed once the interview stage commences.

Given that the identification of illegal activity is highly likely what activities (e.g. victim abuse, criminal activity) will be reportable and as such should be known listed on the informed consent material.

The illegal behaviour which will be further reported is one in which the participant might be currently involved in and may cause serious harm to another person or herself.
Appendix G – Ethics Approval

GRiffith University Human Research Ethics Committee

04-Oct-2011

Dear Ms Menih

I write further to the additional information provided in relation to the provisional approval granted to your application for ethical clearance for your project "Full Review: An Ethnographic Study of Homeless Women in Brisbane" (GU Ref No: CCJ/31/11/HREC).

The additional information was considered by Expedited Ethical Review Panel.

This is to confirm that this response has addressed the comments and concerns of the HREC.

Consequently, you are authorised to immediately commence this research on this basis.

The standard conditions of approval attached to our previous correspondence about this protocol continue to apply.

Regards

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At this time all researchers are reminded that the Griffith University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research provides guidance to researchers in areas such as conflict of interest, authorship, storage of data, & the training of research students. You can find further information, resources and a link to the University's Code by visiting http://www62.gu.edu.au/policylibrary.nsf/xupdatemonth/e7852d226231d2b44a25750c0062f457?opendocument

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