

## **POLARITY OR INTEGRATION? TOWARDS A FULLER UNDERSTANDING OF HOME AND HOMELESSNESS**

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*There has been a growing attempt to understand homelessness through an analysis of the concept of home. It has been suggested that home and homelessness are polar opposites and that homelessness represents the absence of home. Drawing from a wide range of literature on the meaning of home and homelessness, this paper argues that this polarity is not useful in developing our understanding of either concept. It examines the underlying assumptions that shape academic debates on homelessness and home. Four strands of the tensions within home and homelessness are outlined. It concludes by suggesting that these concepts are integrated and overlapping and that by further dismantling them, it may be possible to influence design of temporary accommodation, as well as improve service interventions.*

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## INTRODUCTION

There has been an increasing focus on the importance of the personal, social, and cultural variation and diversity in homelessness debates (cf. Mallett, 2004; Neale, 1997; Perkins, *et al.*, 2002; Pleace and Quilgars, 2003). Researchers are demonstrating a growing awareness of the complexity of homelessness through an emphasis on sub-groups and contexts (Christian, 2003; Moore, 2000a). The particulars of the homeless experience are increasingly recognized as being central to understanding the deprivation that homelessness brings (Dordick, 1997; Robinson, 2002). In this way, the debate on homelessness has moved slowly from rooflessness to homelessness (cf. Hutson and Liddiard, 1994; Neale, 1997), less a lack of physical shelter and more as a loss of home (Moore, *et al.*, 1995; Rivlin, 1990; Somerville, 1992).

Homelessness has often been contrasted with home to highlight the multivariate and devastating nature of the homeless experience (cf. Dant and Deacon, 1989; Dovey, 1985; Somerville, 1992; Watson and Austerberry, 1986). However, this has resulted in homelessness being discussed as the antithesis or absence of home (Dant and Deacon, 1989; May, 2000; Neil and Fopp, 1992; Somerville, 1992). The homeless experience as a lack of belonging or being can result in a person being "out of place" (Cloke, *et al.*, 2000:730). In a broader sense, this has contributed to a polarized relationship subtly underpinning much of the sociological and psychological debates on homelessness. This polarization has not adequately represented the complexity of the concepts of home and homelessness. It has had the unintended result of the perpetration of homelessness as "a totalizing condition of lack to which solutions must be posed" (Robinson, 2002:5).

This review of the literature seeks to contribute to this debate by questioning the relationship between home and homelessness, which has rarely been the direct focus of academic discussion (Robinson, 2002), as well as highlighting the ways in which different disciplines have shaped the debate. However, this polarity is not confined to academic discussion. Homelessness research itself, particularly within the U.K., is inextricably linked with shifting policy agendas (Pleace and Quilgars, 2003). It has had distinct trends and flavors shifting from those that examine individual or agency to societal or structural causes and solutions (Burrows, *et al.*, 1997; Moore, *et al.*, 1995; Pleace and Quilgars, 2003). This sociological distinction of agency and structure has been used to position debates on homelessness. The analysis of how these elements work in the dynamic flux of lived domestic and personal experience is rarely examined. If what is needed is a balance between agency and structure in broader homelessness debates (Neale, 1997), then it can be argued so, too, for the relationship between the concepts of home and homelessness.

While this paper is not a presentation of research findings directly, the arguments are based on findings from two studies of homelessness. The first was a two-year study for the Salvation Army on homelessness in London, including interviews with 531 homeless people in hostels, squats, hotels, and the street (Moore, *et al.*, 1995). The second was a one-year ESRC-funded study of 50 young homeless adults in hostels in London and their experience of home, which formed part of a doctoral thesis (Canter and Moore, 1992; Moore, 1998). Short extracts from interviews with 18-25 year old hostel residents are used to illustrate each of the tensions within home.

This paper will first outline the particular theoretical focus underpinning the arguments made here using an environmental psychology perspective. Then, it will examine the concepts of home and homelessness in turn, followed by an overview of the accepted polarity between them and its impact on debates to date. To counter this polarity, inherent tensions shared by concepts are then presented, suggesting that it makes little sense to place them in opposition. Further, there is a section outlining the case for viewing homelessness as presence, rather than absence, with a closing section proposing an alternative integrated approach.

## THE CURRENT FOCUS

An environmental psychological perspective emphasizes the relationship between individuals and their physical and social surroundings (Canter, 1977; Gifford, 2002). It is concerned with individual experience and action placed within social, physical, and cultural contexts. This is a transactional (Bechtel and Churchman, 2002; Ittelson, 1974; Shumaker and Taylor, 1983) or transactional-contextual perspective (Bonnes and Secchiaroli, 1995), which adopts a dynamic relationship between the person and the environment, focusing as much on the process of change as on current experience (Altman and Rogoff, 1987; Werner, *et al.*, 1988). The concept of home, from this perspective, can be viewed as experienced space, existing in the mind and as meaning-charged activity (Vilkko, 1996). The advantage of this is that the concept of home is not a fixed product, but a dynamic place (Giuliani, *et al.*, 1988; May, 2000), a living process or construction (Tognoli and Horwitz, 1982), or a journey (Case, 1996). Understanding the way in which people negotiate and construct their lives within these limited environments can illuminate the process from homelessness to home.

## THE CONCEPT OF HOME

Research in environmental psychology has demonstrated that home has discrete social, personal, physical, political, and cultural qualities, although these qualities are experienced as a whole (Despres, 1991; Hayward, 1975; Sixsmith, 1986).<sup>1</sup> Home signifies not only a physical place but also represents a center of activities, source of identity, belonging from the past, a goal for personal and social development, an abstract state of being, and a legal concept (Fox, 2002; Moore, 2000a). The challenges and value of using the term "home" itself have been debated (Lawrence, 1995; Rapoport, 1995; Somerville, 1997). It is used here to refer to the psychological essence of dwelling and domestic living that exists within particular social and cultural contexts. (For recent overviews of the literature on home, see Fox, 2002; Mallett, 2004; Manzo, 2003; and Perkins, *et al.*, 2002.)

Home is the "crucible of our modern society" (Saunders, 1990:269) and an anchor for living (Alterman, 1993). Altman and Gauvain (1981) argue that home is both a way of expressing individual identity and a way of belonging to a culture. Home is therefore positioned within particular social and cultural forces. For young adults, for example, home is not just part of their developing sense of self; it is also tied into the rules of the house they share with their parents. This cultural discourse of home is revealed when faced with understanding new household forms, such as sharers or friends living together (Jones, 2000).

In many ways, social science has found itself ill-equipped to negotiate and interpret the complexity and significance of home. Psychologists have tended in the past to neglect the social and cultural myriad of meanings and uses (Despres, 1991). Sociologists have, in contrast, explored the broader social and cultural role of home in society, while leaving aside its fundamental experiential significance. Discussion of home within the social sciences is made more difficult by the differences in terminology and focus therein. Sociological examination has usually been on "the home," which reflects its status as a set of social, political, gender, and economic relations (cf. Saunders, 1989). Clearly these emphases reflect the broader focus of these two disciplines on social structures and individual experience, respectively. "Researchers generally limit their analyses to particular dimensions of home — typically those aspects that routinely fall within their own disciplinary orbit" (Mallett, 2004:64). More recently, debates have drawn together interdisciplinary perspectives on home that offer new insights and hopefully a holistic framework with which to explore this key concept (Gurney and Means, 1993; Mallett, 2004; Moore, 2000a; Somerville, 1997).

In broad terms, the meaning of home is made vivid and fragile by contrasting it with homelessness. As Dovey (1985) suggests, without homelessness, we would not be concerned with what home means. Home and homelessness can be seen as defining each other at a phenomenological level (Wardhaugh, 1999). The importance of home is brought to the forefront in instances of disruption, loss, upheaval, and trauma in people's lives (Altman and Werner, 1985). Rivlin (1990) argues that an understanding

of people's relationships to home has emerged from research on the loss of home and the trauma of being uprooted through studies of people who move (Rossi, 1980), studies of forced relocations (Fried, 1963; Speller, *et al.*, 2002; Young and Willmott, 1957), or studies of the consequences of disasters (Edelstein and Wandersman, 1987). The contrast between home and homelessness serves to make home more valuable, but does it add value to our understanding of homelessness?

## THE CONCEPT OF HOMELESSNESS

There is no universal definition of homelessness, but a general view prevails that homelessness is a continuum of "housing," ranging from living on the street to inadequate, insecure housing (Cloke, *et al.*, 2000; Watson and Austerberry, 1986). This place-based perspective is most common, although there are other significance-based (individual) definitions of homelessness (Christian, 2003). The complexity of homelessness is further shaped by structural factors such as a shortage of affordable, permanent accommodation; poverty; family conflict; abuse; addiction; and poor mental health.

The physical context of homelessness is important, though it is often neglected in research (Moore, 2004). Homelessness is experienced differently in particular physical settings. For example, in the U.K. these include custom-built hostels, hotels, or bed and breakfast accommodation; squats;<sup>2</sup> and the street. Shelters are more commonly used in the United States and provide dormitory-style mixed accommodation. It makes little sense to discuss homelessness as one phenomenon; it is more useful to talk about the different qualities of or routes to homelessness, or "faces" and "pathways" (Anderson and Christian, 2003; Moore, *et al.*, 1995).

It has been argued that homelessness is increasingly viewed as less an absolute condition than a series of deprivations of varying degrees (Redburn and Buss, 1986). The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS/Habitat, 2000:xiii) argues that "homelessness can be seen as a condition of detachment from society characterized by the lack of the affiliative bonds that link people into their social structures. Homelessness carries implications of belonging nowhere rather than having nowhere to sleep." In this way, for some, homelessness may be mostly a chronic lack of permanent affordable accommodation. For others, it may be a result of some deeper societal disconnection through "an inability to be at home, to feel some connectivity through house, neighbourhood and wider community" (Robinson, 2001a:8).

Homelessness and home are both socially and culturally constructed concepts (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994; Somerville, 1992). Definitions are relative and meanings shift over time and depend on whose ideology, standards, and criteria are accepted (Neale, 1997); they also relate to features of the world in which we live: social status, tenure, and domestic relations (Somerville, 1992; Veness, 1994). Homeless people also access normative constructions of homelessness (May, 2000:739). Those who are homeless and living in hostels often do not define themselves as such due to the image of street homelessness or stigma attached (Hutson and Liddiard, 1994; Moore, 1998; Watson and Austerberry, 1986).

## HOMELESSNESS AS THE ABSENCE OF HOME?

Over the last 20 years, research has contrasted the paucity of the homeless experience with the richness of an ideal home or of a past experienced home (cf. Baumann, 1993; Bunston and Breton, 1992; Dant and Deacon, 1989; Hill, 1991; Neale, 1995). Watson and Austerberry (1986) found that homeless women identified core features of an ideal home, and these were almost the antithesis of their homeless situation. These features included decent material conditions, emotional and physical well-being, loving and caring social relations, control and privacy, and a sleeping/living place. Smith (1994) added a lack of personal freedom and privacy and a lack of permanence as part of the absence of home.

It has been suggested that homelessness may represent an even greater absence — a loss of social and cultural belonging and a form of social exclusion (Neil and Fopp, 1992; Somerville, 1998). Dant and Deacon (1989) argue that the significance of having a home joins the identities of the person, the place, and the social context together, highlighting the impact of being homeless as social, symbolic, and cultural, as well as physical. Without these an individual is excluded and, even in his or her homeless contexts, may also be “out of place” (Kawash, 1998; cited in May, 2000).

Clearly there is value in exploring the absence of something in order to better understand its presence. Benjamin (1995) argues that the opposite of home suggests ways to get at its essence. However, by placing these concepts at extreme ends of a spectrum, there is little room for examining ways in which they overlap and the tensions within each concept. To suggest that homelessness is a total absence of feeling at home, of place, culture, and belonging, is to ignore both the inherent tensions in the concept of home and the presence of homelessness.

## TENSIONS WITHIN HOME AND HOMELESSNESS

Negative and contradictory tensions within the concepts of home and homelessness have been neglected in the quest for consensus approaches (Manzo, 2003; Moore, 2000a). However, within sociological debates, gendered, economic, and political tensions inherent in home have been examined but rarely integrated (Madigan and Munro, 1991; Rakoff, 1977; Saunders, 1989). These concepts are more fully understood by examining shared inherent tensions. Four of these tensions are discussed briefly here, illustrated with interview material from the ESRC hostel study (Moore, 1998; Moore and Canter, 1993a). These do not represent an exhaustive list: *stay-movement*, *subjective-objective*, *real-ideal*, and *inclusion-exclusion*.

### *Stay-Movement*

Home and homelessness both contain a central tension between movement and rest, rootlessness and rootedness, nomadism and sedentariness, which has its origins in Greek mythology. The two gods, Hestia, goddess of the hearth, invoked to bring harmony into the dwelling, and Hermes, god of thieves, represent two modes of dwelling: dwelling-as-residing (Hestia) and dwelling-as-wandering (Hermes) (Casey, 1993). This represents the roots of the conflict between mobility and permanence that the house seems to symbolize and objectify (Rakoff, 1977). The opposition between being rooted and rootless has been examined by humanist geographers and phenomenologists (cf. Buttimer, 1980; Relph, 1976; Seamon, 1979; Tuan, 1980). Seamon (1979) argues that rest is associated with center, home, and at-homeness, while movement is associated with the horizon, travelling, unfamiliarity, and journey (cf. also Case, 1996). There is a need to balance the need to stay with a need to escape, a need for home and also for reach (Buttimer, 1980; Relph, 1976). The whole of a person's life can be viewed through the dialectic of movement and rest, inside and outside, dwelling and journey (Wardhaugh, 1999). Dovey (1985) argues that there is no sense of home unless there is also journeying, moving from “being at home” to “yearning for home” (Dovey, 1985:46; as cited in Robinson, 2002:37). In this way, we are as individuals in the process of moving in and out of home throughout our lives. Even those who are settled are at the same time struggling with being out-of-home. From the phenomenological perspective, our relationship to all places is experienced in terms of the dialectics of insiderness and outsiderness, so that it is possible to feel “inside” non-home places and “outside” home itself (Buttimer and Seamon, 1980; Manzo, 2003; Relph, 1976).

*I am homeless, because I never had a home in the first place. Even when I was at home it didn't feel like home. I still feel a bit homeless.*

(Adam)

Mobility and attachment to place, the affective, cognitive, and behavioral bonds between people and places (cf. Altman and Low, 1992) have often been seen as polar opposites. In this way, mobility has been considered to devalue deep relationships with places (Gustafson, 2001). However, it is possible to experience strong place attachment and bonds while being highly mobile and vice versa (*ibid.*).

Others identify political underpinnings to place, arguing that the mobile in society are rich and powerful and the poor are restricted through spatial and economic controls (Castells, 1996). In this way, there is an emerging understanding that a simple opposition of movement and rest is insufficient to explain contemporary meanings and experiences.

However, there are those who, while recognizing the importance of home and away, do not present them as polar opposites (Ahmed, 1999; Bammer, 1992; Mallett, 2004; Olwig, 1999). "Home is not a pure bounded and fixed space of belonging and identity that is as familiar as the away is both strange and inhabited by strangers. Home encompasses both movement and strangers. Home can be experienced as strange and/or familiar" (Ahmed, 1999; cited in Mallett, 2004:78). Seamon (1979) suggests that home and movement are not mutually exclusive but often encompass qualities more often associated with the opposite. Mallett (2004:79), agrees in his argument that "homes always involve encounters between those who stay, those who arrive and those who leave ... . There is movement and dislocation within the very forming of homes as complex and contingent spaces of inhabitation."

### *Subjective-Objective*

One key element of the home and homelessness relationship concerns the apparent objective nature of homelessness as contrasted with the subjective, intangible quality of home (Dovey, 1985; Neil and Fopp, 1992). Homelessness is presented in material and physical terms, such as rooflessness, while home is considered in emotive terms (Robinson, 2001b). It would be easy to be drawn into the concrete physical condition of homelessness whilst paying insufficient attention to the shades of grey in the experience of homelessness.

*What do you mean homeless? I've got a place to go, so I can't be homeless. We tend to put people in boxes. We hate somebody who doesn't belong to the box. A box is a simplification. It's subjective. "Homeless ... homeless, yes ... but what is home?"*

(Alex)

Another way of expressing this tension is between the particular and the general. All social groups consider "peculiarity" as an essential and desirable quality of the home (Kannike, 2002). If homelessness is placed in opposition to this, it can only ever be understood in terms of generalities. As Robinson (2002:33) suggests, "Rather than an 'objective category,' homelessness is more about both negative and positive configurations of relations with place." Ultimately, the experience of home and homelessness are both subjective, as May suggests (2000:738), "Ideas of home and homelessness are relational but tend to be mobilized according to individual experience."

*The street was my home for ten years.*

(Joe)

### *Real-Ideal*

Home has to be discussed without the idealistic rosy glow that typified earlier debates. For many, it is not a secure, free, safe, or regenerative space (Wright, 1993). Home as a romantic space is not the reality of most people (Jones, 2000; as cited in Mallett, 2004).

*None of the places I lived in with my parents felt like home. I remember one incident, when I was sleeping in my room. The police came in with sniffer dogs and everything, looking for drugs. I remember them coming into my room and ripping up all my toys and that.*

(Carol)

Nevertheless, home is continually mythified as an almost universal site of utopian longing (Bammer, 1992). This creates a tension between individuals' perception of what relationships within the home should be like and what they are really like (Despres, 1991; Moore, 1998; Sommerville, 1997). This complex ideology of home includes our expectations and desires and is both an imposed ideal and a potent individual ideal (Wright, 1993).

*My bedroom, I'd have it, it would be pastel green or lilac with big, fluffy clouds on the ceiling, just coming down a little bit around the walls at the top. I'd have a big four-poster bed and I would fold*

*all my jumpers like they do in the shops, a rail for my clothes like in the shops and my shoes in shoeboxes. That's how I'd like my flat, but of course I'm dreaming ... but I don't think about it too hard because I don't want to be disappointed.*  
(Alice)

Home is most often presented positively, in ideal terms, and homelessness is invariably positioned negatively as a darker reality (Manzo, 2003; Moore, 2000a). This is despite the fact that women are more likely to be killed and assaulted at home than in any other space (Goldsack, 1999). In this way, home can be a contradictory notion for some homeless people (Dant and Deacon, 1989). Despite being felt on a deeply personal level, our relationships with places are products of a larger political, social, and economic reality (Manzo, 2003:55).

There is also a tension between the concrete and abstract home. The desire for home is not merely measured in concrete terms, such as buying a house, but it acts as a goal and motivator. Tucker (1994) argues that most people spend their lives in search of home, in the gap between the natural home and the ideal home (cited in Mallett, 2004:69), and that it might be our best approximation of our ideal home, under a given set of constraining circumstances.

The ideal home can act as a form of social control (Chapman, *et al.*, 1999). It can also act as a form of exclusion for some, such as for older people (cf. Hockey, 1999; Lewin, 2001). Chapman, *et al.* (1999) chart the ways in which people "dare to be different" and resist conforming to idealized notions of home, such as total institutions, religious communities, and nomadic lifestyles. It could be argued that homeless people also challenge the social norms in this way.

### *Inclusion-Exclusion*

Having a home also denotes those who do not have one. It is bounded and often linked to particular social and physical groups and locations. Fundamentally, the concept itself contains notions of exclusion: Passaro (1996) argues that a home is delimited by walls and is as much about exclusion as inclusion. We are partly at home because it gives us permission to be private and to control our territory and personal space on a psychological level. According to Rakoff (1977), the house symbolizes personal control by giving people a feeling of freedom and to achieve some kind of self-fulfillment. However, this is underpinned by social and political values concerning the value of home. There are powerful social and political pulls towards home. Pahl (1984:324) argues that there is an "overall set of values concerned with homeliness, cosiness, domesticity, and a belief that, if one can control just a small part of this large and threatening world, then one has achieved something worthwhile."

Some argue there is societal discomfort with homelessness because it represents a threat to this inclusion. Veness (1992) provides a socio-historical overview of the usage of home and homeless in the U.S. since the 1860s. She argues that "homelessness is defined as the opposite of what society wants and expects. It keeps a category reserved for those who do not conform. The home and homeless dichotomy ... upholds an insider-outside division that is part of human experience ..." (*id.*, 464). Robinson (2001b:6) stresses "the ways in which [these] young people feel excluded from and yearn for a sense of home and of belonging which is connected not just to immediate safety but to family, neighbourhood and community." To belong again, there is a prevalent mythology that homeless people have only to make home again. There is increasing evidence that the pull towards homemaking as a route to social inclusion is extremely powerful (Kellest and Moore, 2003).

*Fantasies in my head really. To have my own home would be ... I suppose part of it's pride. Feeling like I've got something of my own, where I can have people come and stay. But really, I suppose most of it's ... just to have somewhere where I can decorate it the way I like it, do everything the way I want it. To have a place the way I want it; for it to be there consistently. To have that and to be able to start on some kind of career; to be able to answer my own telephone.*  
(Cheryl)

A further point is that it is not useful to polarize home as inclusion and homelessness as exclusion because this positions homelessness as the problem to which home is the answer (Gilroy and Woods, 1994; Robinson, 2002). There are those for whom homelessness may be the answer to a difficult home situation, such as women experiencing domestic violence (Tomas and Dittmar, 1995).

If these tensions are present in both home and homelessness, it is difficult to see them at opposite ends of a polarity. Home is not always present at one end, and homelessness absent at the other.

## THE PRESENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

What is interesting about homelessness is not what is being said, but rather what is perhaps presumed absent (Robinson, 2001a). It is important to understand homelessness as a way of being in the world in itself (Robinson, 2001b); to keep focusing on what homelessness is, rather than on what it is not. "It is in the context of what they have, not what they lack, that those who seek to improve their circumstances must provide solutions" (Dordick, 1997:201).

Olufemi (2002) argues that negative connotations of homelessness act as a barrier to understanding home and homelessness and that neither can be fully appreciated without contextualization, (which in that particular African case, included socioeconomic exclusion and HIV/AIDS).

Home and homelessness can both be viewed as products or states, as well as a set of processes (Rapoport, 1995; Rivlin and Moore, 2001). People arrive and leave home, make and develop home over a lifetime where key homemaking skills are developed, as is a sense of internal home. As Veness (1993) argues, homeless people migrate in and out of homelessness and homes, and the ideological divide between the two is both arbitrary and unimportant.

It is possible to be homeless and at home at the same time, as home has more to do with a state of mind and an emotional engagement than it has to do with a fixed place. It is possible to be homeless in one, some, or all of these categories at the same time. Mallett argues (2004:79), following Brah (1996), "that home is the lived experience of locality. Being at home involves the 'immersion of a self in a locality.'"

Homeless people, too, are actively engaged in this process, in that they are endeavoring to make sense of their circumstances and follow their rational and appropriate choices (Veness, 1992). Homeless people display active agency: "As individuals, the people I met clearly wanted to escape homelessness at some time in the future. As participants in relationships rich in obligations and expectations, however, they directed most of their daily activity at sustaining and surviving their present situations" (Dordick, 1997:199).

*I did feel out of it several times. But I never let myself go down the drain too much. I always shaved every day and polished my shoes. I wanted to do something.*  
(Martin)

## THE PRESENCE OF HOME

While people may be without a roof, it could be argued that home is never wholly absent. Bachelard (1964) suggests that all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home. According to Heidegger (1971), dwelling identifies the essential element of what it means to be a human being living in the world, and we are all in the process of homemaking. Rootedness has been used to describe a broader sense of belonging, a symbolic positioning in the world (Hummon, 1992) that can be experienced, whether in or out of home. Moore (1999:155) found that young homeless people did not feel rootless, despite their lack of accommodation. "They were as 'positioned' as a sample of students in relation to Ireland [and Irish identity]."

The social and cultural richness of the concept of home gives it "omnipresence" as purpose or experience. Being homeless does not render the concept and meaning of home absent. Both are actively, individually construed, developed, and acted upon. It is a shared cultural goal, as well as a past individual experience and a guiding individual purpose. Even without a roof, we are experiencing, remembering, or desiring home. In this way, homeless people's understandings of home tend to mirror those qualities most usually associated with a sense of home by the housed population (May, 2000:739).

It would seem obvious that some environments are more home-like than others. Home is a network of connections that do not rest in one place or self alone (Robinson, 2002:9). May (2000) suggests that by exploring broader place relationships, the focus can be moved away from home as residence. Different forms of inhabiting place should be recognized as home (Veness, 1992; cited in Robinson, 2001a:2). What is important is not necessarily the assumed comforts and securities with which home is associated, but rather the varied qualities valued by particular groups at particular times. This is supported by the ways in which home qualities have been evaluated in any context, even a roofless one (Desjarlais, 1997; Moore, 2000b; Wolch and Rowe, 1993). Van der Horst (2004) gave an example of residents discussing the reception centers in the Netherlands using discourses of home and how this was not recognized by policy makers who focused on discourses of shelter and efficiency.

Previous research has demonstrated that home can be present in homeless contexts. Moore, *et al.* (1995) developed a typology of hostels for the Salvation Army after a two-year research study of homelessness in London. The typology reflected the views and evaluations of 531 homeless people living in hostels, hotels, on the street, and in squats. This study identified sub-groups of homeless people across homeless settings whose temporary accommodation lacked particular home qualities. Homeless settings were examined in terms of their qualities of home and "hearthfulness." These qualities included comfort, independence, safety, social life, and affordability. Hostel residents, while positively evaluating the comfort and security they found there, did not feel they had much independence and control. Those on the street valued their sense of control and independence despite the obvious lack of physical home qualities. Despite the lack of physical comforts, many made sense out of their situation through a pride in their lone survival, while others valued social contacts, sharing their resources, knowledge, and social care. Those staying in hotels or bed and breakfasts evaluated fewer home qualities than those staying in squats, with the latter valuing their sense of independence and control (Moore and Canter, 1993b). Staying in a bed and breakfast, there was little or no access to a kitchen or living room. The research concluded that it was possible to experience qualities of home in "homeless" places. The research further concluded that people have a "vocabulary for talking about an inner and outer movement toward making a home" (Horwitz and Tognoli, 1982:339). Moore, *et al.* (1995) drew on existing models in identifying the need for a range of emergency, short, and longer term accommodation (Dant and Deacon, 1989; Garside, *et al.*, 1990). Their research recommended that a single hostel type was not appropriate for all homeless people and that hostel provision needed to correspond more closely with what smaller subsets required. These needs reflected health, age, and gender differences, as well as the qualities of home and place that were positively evaluated. The research demonstrated that the views and evaluations of homeless people could be instrumental in shaping design solutions and countered prevalent views that successful hostel provision can only be small-scale, home-like, and with high levels of support.<sup>3</sup>

## FROM STATES TO PROCESSES: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED RELATIONSHIP

It is not possible to do away with the differences and tensions that make it possible to exist in places at all (Masefield, 1994). Home itself is multivariate, ambivalent, and contradictory. If so, its opposing position to homelessness then becomes less viable. While there is value in highlighting the paucity of the homeless experience through its comparison with home, putting these two concepts at polar ends of a spectrum belies their complexity and ultimately limits our analysis, reflection, and response.

Home is neither wholly absent nor present, shaped by many factors including the personal, temporal, physical, social, economic, cultural, and political, and marked by presence and absence in various ways (Robinson, 2001b). It is as possible to feel out-of-home whilst living in permanent and stable accommodation as it is to find small pockets of home whilst on the street (Moore and Canter, 1993a). "Home and homelessness exist in a dynamic, dialectical relationship. They are not, as some suggest, fixed oppositional terms. Rather they refer to 'complex and shifting experiences and identities' (Wardhaugh, 1999:93) that emerge and unfold in and through time" (Mallett, 2004:80).

The social, physical, and individual contextualization of homelessness is increasing and broadening with a greater research focus on homeless people themselves, their motivations, daily activities, choices, and desires. To understand the homeless experience, it is necessary to accept that people find ways of coping that demand respect. It may not be obvious to the onlooker, but in the course of the social and physical structure of daily life, for many people, sleeping rough reflects their dignity and ingenuity. It may be our discomfort rather than theirs that has led to a focus on the absences in this experience, rather than the presence.

By viewing homelessness in terms of the absence of home, the stereotypes and assumptions about home have been placed in the way of the development of solutions (Veness, 1994). What is valued by homeless people is often ignored, diminished, and set aside in favor of a set of steps back to the stereotypical home (Moore, 1998; Rivlin and Imbimbo, 1989). Often the qualities of the homeless experience are overlooked in the rush to draw them back into conventional models of temporary accommodation. In acknowledging and respecting the homemaking struggle, homeless people can be helped where they are, in physical and personal terms, in developing homemaking skills. In understanding the fabric of homeless lives, more appropriate support can be offered. When home is understood as an on-going process, resettlement work and help in making home will become as important in policy terms as finding temporary accommodation. In the development of such accommodation, this approach would suggest that small hostels or shelters could be developed, not necessarily reflecting the dominant domestic model. Homeless people are harshly penalized for avoiding traditional family life, and trying to force them into societal molds is not helpful (Wagner, 1994). It may be the case, rather, that a variety of models are needed, some of which are modelled less on domestic themes and more on the qualities of independence and control (Garside, *et al.*, 1990; Neale, 1997). In respecting homeless people's contexts and evaluations, a greater correspondence will be achieved between their needs and appropriate accommodation. However, the provision of temporary accommodation, resolving the immediate problem of rooflessness, does little of itself to reintroduce stability into a person's or family's life.

Homemaking is a process that may never result in permanent, stable, and independent living for many individuals, but without resettlement support, being homeless becomes a chronic and more permanent problem (Rivlin and Moore, 2001). The focus on homemaking could extend to homelessness prevention, whereby vulnerable groups are given help before their situation becomes chronic. In the U.K., it is encouraging to note that there is an increasing focus on prevention in government policy (Fitzpatrick, *et al.*, 2000) and greater awareness in academic debates of the need to empower homeless people to be involved in the development and delivery of policy and services to meet their needs (Anderson and Christian, 2003:115).

In broad terms, by further exploring the home-homelessness relationship, it may be possible to target and improve design and policy interventions for homeless people, as well as enrich academic discussions on the concept of home.

## NOTES

1. A useful way of understanding this slippery concept is to apply Rybczynski's analysis of comfort (1986:230), which says understanding home "is like trying to describe an onion. It appears simple on the outside, but it is deceptive, for it has many layers. If it is cut apart, there are just onion skins left and the original form has disappeared. If each layer is described separately, we lose

sight of the whole. The layers are transparent so that when we look at the whole onion we see not just the surface but also something of the interior.”

2. Hostels range from small to large residential centers with shared facilities, usually for single people; hotels and bed and breakfasts are used by local authorities across the U.K. to house homeless families; and squats are illegally occupied residences.

3. Hostels based on this typology have been built around the U.K. in the last 10 years, e.g. Dublin and London. Although considered successful, they are challenged by the lack of affordable long-term accommodation, which would allow them to be used for shorter lengths of time.

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