

“THE COMFORT TO BE ME”: HOME AND HOUSING STRUGGLES

IN ST. JOHN'S

by

© Nicole Wilson

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis was completed as part of a Master's program in Anthropology and examines individuals' experiences with housing struggles, home, and homelessness in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. Three main topics are explored within this thesis: the participants' experiences with finding and keeping housing; what *home* and *homeless* meant to the participants; and lastly, how the term *homeless* as a term does not adequately describe real life experiences. I propose that we replace the terms *homeless* and *homelessness* with a spectrum and instead use the phrases *sleeping rough*, *temporary institutional housing*, *precarious housing*, and *bereft-of-home* to discuss the range of housing issues and the emotional turmoil that comes with such struggles.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.0 Marg's Letter

In preparation for our interview, Marg wrote a letter containing what she wanted to tell me in order to make sure that she expressed everything clearly. She read this letter out to me in the interview.<sup>1</sup>

**Marg:** So I just got it titled "Homelessness."  
There's stigma attached to homelessness. We view such a state as  
a person's own fault.  
That is:  
the lazy  
the uneducated  
the alcoholics  
even criminals or the mentally insane.  
I entered Kirby House<sup>2</sup> in February 2000  
I feel I didn't fit into that description.

I fled an abusive marriage after 28 years.  
I had finished high school and graduated as a registered nurse in 1965.  
I was 52 years old  
at the time  
when I left the marriage in 2000.

I left with only the clothes on my back.  
No money, no income.  
I had been injured on the job and retired at age 49  
to try and regain my health.  
I was at Kirby House for four months.  
I had family and friends who had taken me in  
four years earlier when I left my marriage  
hoping things would get better

and I returned to the marriage at that time  
ah

---

<sup>1</sup> I have changed some of the personal details and all of the dates referred to in this letter to protect Marg's identity.

<sup>2</sup> Iris Kirby House is often referred to as Kirby House for short.

this time 2000 there was no going back and I didn't want my family and friends harassed.

I had lived in a lovely home.  
We never even had a mortgage.

To be homeless at age 52, and unemployed  
because of health reasons, is not a good feeling.  
I feared I may end up on welfare.

...Kirby House itself  
was better than I imagined.  
Ahum  
because we just don't have a good view of shelters.  
We think they are really bad, right.

...  
It was wintertime and it was not full  
so I had my own room.  
Having a private room was very important to me  
because I had privacy  
so I could cry whenever I needed  
and by god I cried a lot.

...  
So having a private room was very important down there. I know a lot of women  
go in and it's ah  
they don't get a private room because it's so overcrowded and they don't have  
rooms.

But I was there at a good time.  
Ah  
the staff were ah, really good to me.  
And ah  
they had ah, good resources  
and that was  
very, very important.

Ahum  
they even had a van they'd take me like, I walk a lot and I find exercise really  
good for stress  
they use to take us to the  
...the walking track...

I found  
a lot of the women smoked, I mean I don't smoke and I don't drink, but I find  
walking and exercise and  
that's the things that help me relieve my stress. So that  
to have that van and to be taken over there to be able to walk and  
and they had exercise room there and a treadmill, I use to use that a lot.

So that was really, really important to me.  
...However, many times I felt like I was in an asylum.

I was under so much stress, with no idea what the future held for me.  
I had lost my home  
my marriage  
my community.

Ah  
my life had been threatened many times.  
I was living in fear.  
Having a safe and comfortable home  
is a basic human need.

You know, you can't really move on until you  
until you've got  
until you've got a safe place to live.  
...I remember sometimes at the mall  
while I was living in Kirby House, ahum  
clerks would ask my address and phone number.

Ah, my dear,  
I was so embarrassed, I couldn't say Kirby House.  
I don't know what story I made up.  
But ah  
but, just to know that you don't have a address, you don't have a phone number  
I mean this was something I was never use to in my whole life.  
I was, it was, you know very degrading.  
Ah  
or humiliating, I don't know what words to use.  
...But while I was there, I remember 'cause you got, you got to  
go inside, you got to find the resources within yourself to 'da to go on  
right.  
I remember telling myself:  
"[Marg] inside yourself you are the same person."

Because when I was young I was really  
I  
I was strong  
you know.  
I said to myself "[Marg] inside you are the same person.  
A nice house and marriage do not define you.  
You know you're bigger than that.  
You will rebuild your life."

That's what I kept telling myself.  
And when I was young my mother always told me  
she always encouraged me. She always said "[Marg] you can do it."  
I remember in training, when I had to go into the operating room  
to do my affiliation and there I was afraid. I was 18 or 19 I was scared of going in  
the operating room  
and she always told me, "My dear you can do it."

...I believed in myself, right so  
I knew that was still inside me.  
...That I could do whatever I had to do to get  
to get out of this situation.

...  
Kirby House found me an apartment at [Stirling Manor].  
My rent was subsidized for seven months because I had no income.  
I called it the Newfoundland Hotel it's not, the Sheraton<sup>3</sup>

donated their used furniture to Kirby House and I was a beneficiary to that.  
Moving into [Stirling Manor] I never had any furniture, I never even had no  
clothes.

[My ex-husband] refused to give me everything, anything.

So all this furniture that came from  
well not just me got it many women got it, I was moving in a place with no  
furniture so I

I got a lot of this furniture that came from the Newfoundland Hotel.

That was what it was called in my day.

I guess I'll always call it that.

...Long after I moved, ah

that I received it I went down there with a thank-you card to the manager. Now it  
probably wasn't the same manager that donated it, but I just wanted them to know  
how much

it meant to me who had absolutely nothing.

Ah

and there was many donations from the community  
bags and bags of  
clothes, and  
dishes and pots and pans and bed sheets, everything  
ah

---

<sup>3</sup> Before this statement, Marg refers to the hotel that donated the furniture as the Newfoundland Hotel. The hotel she is referring to is now called the Sheraton Hotel Newfoundland but she states that she will always call it the Newfoundland Hotel.

came into Kirby House.  
And we would go down, and we would go through these garbage bags  
and pick out whatever we needed and it was ours  
to keep.  
And ah  
I'll never

**N:** Take a break if you need to.

**M:** It's hard for me because when my father died, when I was nine  
we were poor.  
So  
I was poor again.  
Even though all my adult life I was not poor.  
But once  
when I  
when I was nine, when my father died, we were poor, a lot of people in the  
community  
helped us.  
And I'll never forget that  
so  
many donations from the community helped me set up housekeeping.  
Before 2000 ended I had bought a condo up on [Flower Street].  
I will never forget  
I will never forget being homeless.

Your self-esteem takes a major blow.  
I had always prided myself on being strong and independent.  
I loved helping people.  
It was not easy for me to ask for help  
or accept help.

I had to learn some hard lessons.  
That it is  
it is okay to ask for help sometimes.

I am so grateful for the community help and resources we have in this city  
...  
And it's been a lifeline  
for me  
and many other women in this city.

...  
It will be eight years in February since I left the abusive marriage. It took six years  
for my ex to finally stop bothering me.

I live alone now.  
I'm safe,  
happy,  
and contented.

I begin with this long excerpt from Marg's interview in order to emphasize the personal, emotional, and deeply human aspects of the research that I conducted for this research project. Sometimes when we are conducting research and then writing about problems that affect people in the world, we forget the deep impact that these issues have on a person's experience. It is important to not let these narratives get lost under statistics and theory. This research is about 15 individuals' experiences with home and housing in St. John's, Newfoundland. Without those people, and those experiences, this thesis would never have been written.

### **1.1 Overview of St. John's**

According to the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, there are an estimated 150,000 to 300,000 people who are homeless in Canada. This figure includes those who are living in shelters or on the streets (HRSDC<sup>4</sup>: 2010). This document states "on any given night, 40,000 people stay in homeless shelters" (HRSDC: 2010). Out of this population, single men comprise the largest segment. That being said, homelessness is on the rise among both single women and single parent families headed by women (HRSDC: 2010). This suggests that, in the Canadian context, men are still the dominant visual image one may associate with the idea of homelessness although women and children are becoming more and more noticeable.

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<sup>4</sup> Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2010

When I began fieldwork for this thesis in July of 2010, the most common refrain I encountered when I told people what I was researching was: “but we don’t have homeless people here.” For the majority of these people, their image of homelessness was of a dirty man who is sleeping on the street, or under a bridge, because he is an alcoholic or has a drug addiction. Their confusion as to why I would be studying homelessness in St. John’s perhaps stemmed from the fact that this particular image is not one that you see readily in St. John’s.<sup>5</sup>

Fotheringham *et al.* (2011) discuss this point in their article about a Calgary, Alberta transitional housing project, stating that the main reason that women’s homelessness has been invisible is that ‘homeless’ has been defined as those sleeping on the streets; the absolute homeless. Fotheringham *et al.* go on to say that this traditional definition

includes the stereotypical image of homeless people pushing shopping carts, sleeping in parks, on benches or in emergency homeless shelters. This definition largely reflects the experiences of homeless men however, rather than homeless women. While there are a small number of women who fit this picture, the majority of homeless women are instead, part of the “hidden” homeless. (2011:6)

What does this mean for a city such as St. John’s where these visual cues are missing? It means that, if we went by this stereotypical idea and image of homelessness, it would be reasonable to assume that homelessness is not a large problem in St. John’s. When walking around the St. John’s downtown core, one is not struck by a large number of people living on the street; in actuality, a visual presence of those who seemed to have

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<sup>5</sup> St. John’s is the capital of Newfoundland and Labrador and has a population of about 106,172 (City of St. John’s website:N.d.).

slept on the street is practically non-existent. Regular panhandlers are out on most days, and there is an increase in the activity of panhandlers over the summer; the sight of *homelessness* does not overwhelm one as it might in other larger Canadian cities such as Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. Despite the lack of obvious visual cues, St. John's has numerous emergency shelters, transitional and supportive housing, and subsidized housing; many of these services<sup>6</sup> have waiting lists and have to turn people away.

Community-based shelters in St. John's collectively served 1,171 individuals in 2008. The number of individuals grew to 1,505 in 2010. Unfortunately, the statistics have not yet been made available for 2011 onward. These clients stayed a total of 22,631 nights in 2009, and the average length of stay was 17 days. Data collected on these individuals revealed that 53% were male and 47% were female. The main reasons for use of the shelters were: partner abuse, eviction, personal safety, lack of housing, and family/relationship breakdown. Some of the contributing factors to those already mentioned are: substance use, conflict with the law, and mental health issues. The lack of shelter beds was the cause of individuals being turned away 68% of the time.<sup>7</sup>

One of the first times that I saw anyone who appeared to have slept on the street in St. John's was on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011. I remember this date because I had just seen Mark Horvath from invisiblepeople.tv speak at City Hall on homelessness across Canada and the USA. I thought it was very interesting that the same day I saw him speak was the

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<sup>6</sup> Examples include the following: Shelters: Iris Kirby House, Naomi House, Choices for Youth, Tommy Sexton Centre, The Wiseman Centre, and The Native Friendship Centre. Transitional Housing: Association for New Canadians, Emmanuel House, Peters Foundation, Pleasant Manor. Supportive Housing: Stella Burry. Subsidized Housing: NLHC Public and City's Non-profit housing. Affordable Homeownership: Habitat for Humanity.

<sup>7</sup> The data in this paragraph was collected through personal communications with Bruce Pearce.



first time I noticed someone who looked as if he had slept on the street. The man was asleep in a doorway of a closed store on Water Street. He was still asleep on his stomach with a cardboard box under his body when I saw him. Sadly, my first reaction was that this was a publicity stunt stemming from Mark Horvath's presence in the city, but unfortunately it was not. As a person who is constantly walking in, and around, the downtown area of St. John's and completing research on homelessness, a person sleeping on the street is a sight that is difficult for me to overlook. I often used to see one particular man and his dog sleeping in an alleyway or under a deck at night, but September 12<sup>th</sup> was the first time I saw what looked to be a person who had spent the night on the street. The man did not try to hide the fact that he was sleeping in the doorway, unlike some of the participants in this research who indicated that they have tried to conceal themselves while sleeping on the street.

The Growing Homes (2012) website states that the problem in St. John's is best understood as "hidden homelessness, in which people are forced to live in unsafe, unsuitable housing." Moreover these places are often still more than people can afford, leading to a cycle of unstable housing, including a continuous threat of eviction and couch-surfing from place to place (Growing Homes 2012). Throughout this research, I have come to see the true weight of this statement and how this hidden suffering has allowed the city and its residents to ignore the problem.

Over the last several years, St. John's has seen a dramatic rise in housing prices and rental costs. The Social Housing Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador from 2009 titled *Secure Foundations* states that "in recent years, lower-income renters have found it more difficult to find affordable housing in the private market. The vacancy rate for the

province has fallen dramatically from an average of 13 percent in the period 1995-1999 to 1.1 percent in October 2008” (NLH<sup>8</sup>2009:4). This report goes on to say that there are a number of factors contributing to this decrease in the vacancy rate. These factors are the lack of new rental construction; a conversion of rental homes to condominiums; an increased demand from seniors and single persons; labour market improvement and the resulting in-migration of households; a recent decline in the movement of renter households to home ownership as a result of higher house prices; and finally, increased rental rates associated with major investments by landlords in rental properties (NLH 2009:4). *Secure Foundations* also states that the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment across the province increased 12.5 percent from 2001-2008 (NLH 2009:4). In October 2010, the average monthly rent for urban centers with a population with 10,000 or more in Newfoundland was \$668 (CMHC<sup>9</sup> Fall 2010).

For the St. John’s Metro area, the average monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment was \$614 in 2007 and \$630 in 2008 (City of St. John’s 2009). When I conducted my fieldwork in 2010 the average rent for all bedroom types had increased to \$725, for a two-bedroom it was \$771 (CMHC Fall 2011c)<sup>10</sup>. Rent for a two-bedroom has since risen to \$808 by April 2012 and to \$832 by April 2013 (CMHC Spring 2013).

In 2014, the maximum amount of income support that a single adult living in Newfoundland and Labrador, but not living with relatives, could receive was \$881 per month. This includes the amount allotted for rent or a mortgage, which was \$372 per

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<sup>8</sup> Newfoundland and Labrador Housing

<sup>9</sup> Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

<sup>10</sup> Note: The data collected by CMHC only includes Private Structures that include three or more apartments. This clearly is problematic with places like Newfoundland and Labrador in which many of the apartments are basements in someone’s house.

month (Department of Advanced Education and Skills 2014).<sup>11</sup> In 2010, the average amount that an unattached adult living in St. John's received in income support was \$6,200 a year, which is \$516.67 per month (Newfoundland and Labrador Community Accounts 2014). The 2012 average was \$7,000, which is \$583.33 a month (Newfoundland and Labrador Community Accounts 2014).

The median income in St. John's for all family types was \$44,600 in 2009, and \$45,500 in 2010 (Newfoundland and Labrador Community Accounts 2014b). In 2010, the median income for couple families was \$86,300, for lone-parent families it was \$32,500, and for single adults without dependents it was \$23,000 for St. John's (Newfoundland and Labrador Community Accounts 2014b). During 2009 and 2010, the minimum wage for Newfoundland and Labrador was raised in 50-cent increments over a two-year period, going from \$8.50 per hour to \$10.00 per hour (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 2014).

The vacancy rate for the St. John's Metro area was 2.6% in 2007 and decreased to 0.8% in 2008 (City of St. John's 2009). In a public meeting held on March 3, 2010 to discuss "The Housing Crunch," Lorraine Michael, M.H.A.<sup>12</sup> for Signal Hill-Quidi Vidi and leader of the provincial New Democratic Party (NDP), stated that the vacancy rate for St. John's was then 0.9% and that we were now in a housing crisis. The vacancy rate has since gone up to 1.3% (CMHC Fall 2011 NL) but this is still below the Canadian average

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<sup>11</sup> During the time between the start of this research and thesis completion, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador reorganized its programs and departments. As part of this change, Income Support went from being handled by the Department of Human Resources Labour and Employment to being the responsibility of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills.

<sup>12</sup> Member of the House of Assembly (MHA). Michael is a member of the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly and has served as the leader of the New Democratic Party from May 2006-present.

of 2.5% (CHC Rental Market Survey 2011). Newfoundland and Labrador has one of the lowest vacancy rates in the country at 1.1% (CMHC Fall 2011 NL).

This overview provides a general context for low-income individuals locating housing in St. John's at the time I was completing my fieldwork. I now discuss the focus of this thesis, the theoretical approach being taken, some relevant research by others, and lastly provide an overview of each thesis chapter.

## **1.2 Focus of Thesis**

This thesis is an ethnography about the experiences of 15 people, ten women and five men, living in St. John's who have struggled to find and maintain access to suitable housing. I analyze the research participants' accounts of these experiences and highlight what their struggles with housing or homelessness have meant to them. There is a focus on what happens when and not why these 15 people are in need of housing in order to examine the narratives created around the concepts of *home* and *homeless* when someone is struggling with finding and retaining access to suitable living conditions. The original research proposal was to look at housing struggles from women's perspectives only, but I decided to open up the research to men as well partway through my fieldwork (the reasons for this change are discussed below). It is because of this late switch that the majority of the participants in this study are women.

While completing this research, it became clear that anyone can struggle with housing constraints. However, some people are more vulnerable to housing issues than others. Understanding the variety of events that lead people to experience housing problems is an important step in working toward eliminating these issues. Hearing

individual accounts of those who have experienced these problems is an important step in achieving this goal. Looking at the variety of ways individuals experience these struggles can provide directions for putting policies in place that better address current problems. Examining these experiences will also help to demonstrate the spectrum of housing needs, and contribute to the development of programs that prevent people from experiencing an array of housing constraints. These constraints range from sleeping rough to being precariously housed – terms that are explained below.

Most of the participants in this study do not fit into the stereotypical idea of homelessness. As is stated above, St. John's does not have a strong visual presence of homelessness. What does this relative lack of visual poverty in public spaces mean for St. John's? How does diverging from the stereotypical idea of homelessness affect those who find themselves in precarious housing? Through the participants' struggles with housing, it will become clear how hidden these problems in St. John's

I argue that the terms *homeless*, *homelessness*, and *home* are ambiguous. *Homeless* and *homelessness* do not relay the emotional anguish and physical difficulties caused by insecure or nonexistent housing. Drawing on the participants' personal experiences, this thesis examines what *home* means and raises questions about the use of the word *homeless*.

The term *homeless* is not sufficient in getting across the experiences of those struggling with housing issues. This term does not convey the sense of urgency and emotional upheaval that has been experienced by most of those who participated in this research. The term *homeless* also fails to differentiate between having no shelter and the

feeling that one does not have a place where they feel at home (a view Watson and Austerberry [1986] share).

Our personal understanding of home can change how we view homelessness and when we consider ourselves to be homeless. For most people, *home* has many meanings. It is not simply a place, but also a feeling and/or certain people in our lives. One may have a roof over one's head, but may still feel out of place or homeless if certain aspects are missing. By using others' personal experiences to look at these issues, we can better address the problems facing St. John's and its population, while having an understanding of housing struggles that includes these differing experiences.

The findings from my research, and that of others (for example Watson and Austerberry [1986] and Parsell [2012]), demonstrate that the lack of suitable shelter and the feeling of being homeless are not always linked together in the way we might assume. Most people tend to think of only one aspect of this struggle when they hear *homeless*, and think of a man sleeping on the street. It is important to note that this is also a gendered image of homelessness. I therefore look at the prevalence of *hidden* homelessness (which some term precarious housing) in the context of St. John's. Hidden homelessness refers to those who are living in unsuitable and/or unsafe housing, staying with friends and family (doubling-up), or living outside of their economic means, creating a cycle of unstable housing (Growing Homes 2012).

We need to use terms that refer strictly to what aspect of housing struggles we are discussing and trying to address within policy frameworks. I argue that, in order to discuss a lack of physical and conventional housing, we should replace the word *homeless* with three phrases. These phrases lie along a type of spectrum: *sleeping-rough*, *temporary*

*institutional housing*, and *precarious housing*. Sleeping rough refers to those individuals sleeping on the street, in cars and tents. Temporary institutional housing refers to individuals in shelters and other emergency housing structures. Precarious housing refers to living arrangements that are outside of institutional housing, such as squatting, living in rentals that are unstable or in poor condition, or living temporarily with friends and family. In order to express the emotional side of lacking a home, I use the phrase *bereft-of-home*.<sup>13</sup> This phrase acknowledges the emotional turmoil that being without a home can cause.

Discussing housing struggles in these terms – sleeping-rough, temporary institutional housing, precarious housing, and bereft-of-home – removes the blame from individuals and emphasizes that their life situations do not define *who they are*, but constitute experiences that they are dealing with. Talking about housing in this way does not allow the situation to become the defining feature of the person and keeps their individuality intact. I believe that this framework should be integral to discussions of these issues. It corresponds with the emphasis that many anthropologists (for example Paul Farmer 1999, 2004; Vincent Lyon-Callo 2004; Philippe Bourgois, Nancy Scheper-Hughes 2004) have placed on examining issues of poverty and housing problems in the context of structural violence.

Ideally, I would like to reserve the term *homeless* for when we are discussing both the physical aspects of not having adequate shelter and being bereft-of-home. However,

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<sup>13</sup> The term ‘bereft’ was suggested to me by a good friend, Katie Cull, while discussing the idea of being without a home.

the stigma associated with the general understanding of homelessness, the idea of a marginalized alcoholic man who sleeps on the street, makes this an impossible task. Therefore, I think that we should consider discarding the term altogether.

### **1.3 Theoretical Approach**

Social ideologies tend to focus on a single modality of experience, making it foundational to all others, according formal recognition to only one moment of the whole. It is the task of critical thought to counter this tendency by seeking to describe life in all its aspects rather than reduce experience to that one modality that has been given epistemological currency. (Jackson 1995:161)

#### *1.3.1 Theory Overview*

This section explores the main theoretical perspectives I use to analyze the data collected during my fieldwork. I look at four important ideas within anthropology that have become the basis of my analysis: Michael Jackson's existential anthropology and the anthropology of events; ideas of 'home'; 'structural violence'; and approaches to the public/private dichotomy in feminist anthropology.

#### *1.3.2 Existential Anthropology and the Anthropology of Events*

We all live through and experience life and its events in different ways. In this section and section 1.3.3 *Ideas of Home*, I focus on two books by Michael Jackson – *Existential Anthropology: Events, Exigencies and Effect* (2005) and *At Home in the World* (1995) – to look at why it is important to base research on human experiences.

Jackson believes that it is the task of anthropology to close the space between the actions we take on the world and the outcome of these actions, stating that we as humans tend to forget the part we play in the creation of the world as it is. He states: “practical



knowledge gives way to a purely theoretical knowledge, which tends to lose touch with the immediacies of lived experience” (1995:148). We must dissect our abstract understandings, looking at the practical and social bases of these ideas in order to find the subject behind the act and “the vital activity that lies behind the fixed and seemingly final form of things” (Jackson 1995:148).

Jackson’s existential anthropology refuses to boil down our lived experience into terms such as culture, life, individuality, and so on, or base it on either “subjective or objective realities” (2005:xii). This does not mean, however, that he is against such ideas or denies that people have cultures or individuality; rather, he wishes to *not* make these ideas the fundamentals of our understanding of what it is to be human (Jackson 2005:xii). Jackson also relays the notion that is usually associated with existentialism, which is that existence is adaptation or compliance. As Jackson points out, there are many different species on earth, which indicates that there are biologically many different ways to survive on earth. He argues that we can look at human societies through a similar lens (Jackson 2005:xii). However, for humans this is true not only for the problem of survival, but for “forms of existence and coexistence” (Jackson 2005:xii). Most importantly, “...human wellbeing involves far more than simple adjustments to a given environment, natural or cultural: it involves endless experimentation in how the given world can be lived *decisively*, on one’s own terms” (Jackson 2005:xii).

This endless experimentation creates a constant struggle between humans and the world. Our ‘being-in-the-world’ is relational and we are always trying to maintain or change our relations to others as well as the physical and material world around us (Jackson 2005: xiv). Therefore, human beliefs and ideas are outcomes of an activity that

has taken place in the past, “they haunt but do not govern lived events” (Jackson 2005:xv). This means that we must look at ‘being-in-the-world’ from the point of view of our always-changing ability to create new ways of survival in the world we live in.

It is difficult to collect data systematically on these struggles for existence because we could never know the complete repercussions that follow from these struggles; these repercussions could be ever so slight or could be embedded in “singular biographies as well as social histories” (Jackson 2005:xxv) in which case we would never be able to discern them from the repercussions from other struggles. However, we may look at events or “moments of being”<sup>14</sup> when individuals experience the world around them (Jackson 2005:xxv). Jackson uses ‘event’ to refer to a happening when something important is taking place or when a memorable or momentous occasion has occurred where the “questions of right and wrongful conduct are felt to be matters of life and death” (Jackson 2005:xxix-xxx).

If we follow Jackson’s understanding, our fieldwork becomes not a task of finding or revealing the objective truth but “a method for putting oneself in the place of another, and extending one’s social capabilities. The object of ethnographic fieldwork ceases to be the representation of the world of others; it becomes a mode of using our experience in other worlds to reflect critically on our own” (Jackson 1995:163).

Using this as our basis of understanding, we can end up with an ethnography of events that explores the connection between “the singular and shared, the private and the

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<sup>14</sup> Jackson borrows from Virginia Woolf (1977).

public, as well as the relationship between personal ‘reasons’ and impersonal ‘causes’ in the constitution of events” (Jackson 2005:xxvi).

### *1.3.3 Ideas of Home*

When putting this in the context of *home*, Jackson (1995) brings our attention to the negative feelings that *home* can bring about. He states that “according to Freud, ‘the dwelling-house was a substitute for the mother’s womb’. He [Freud] forgot to mention that it can also be a tomb” (Jackson 1995:3). This statement alludes to the idea that, what may be considered to be home for some, may not be home to others.

Jackson moves out of the Euro-American cultural context, where this subject has been written about often, and looks at home from the point of view of the Aboriginal people in Australia. “By going to Aboriginal Australia, I hoped to explore the ways in which people created and sustained a sense of belonging and autonomy when they did not build or dwell in houses, and house was not synonymous with home” (1995:4). This division between a house and a home allows us to better narrow in and understand what it means to be at home somewhere, anywhere, and what *home* can truly mean.

Jackson relates his ideas about existential anthropology to home, coming up with the idea of home as a lived relationship.

Home is always lived as a relationship, a tension. Sometimes it is between the place one starts out from and the places one puts down roots. Sometimes it is between the experience of a place when one is young and the experience of the same place when one is old. Home, like any word we use to cover a particular field of experience, always begets its own negation. Home may evoke security in one context and seem confining in another. Our consciousness shifts continually between home and the world as in those Gestalt images where figures becomes ground and ground becomes figure. (1995:122-123)

This shows the many levels and dimensions that home can take within the same individual and between people. Jackson calls this lived relationship *being-at-home-in-the-world*. Through his study of the Australian Aboriginal people, he concludes that indeed the

meaning of home cannot be sought in the substantive things like land, house, and family. Experientially, home was a matter of being-at-home-in-the-world. It connoted a sense of existential control and connectedness—the way we feel when what we say or do seems to matter, and there is a balanced reciprocity between the world beyond us and the world within which we move. (1995:154)

I think that this is very true. Throughout this thesis, I show how many of the people who state they have felt homeless have, in fact, lost this feeling of importance. At some point they have been unable to feel at-home-in-the-world, or were bereft-of-home, because they lost the connection between themselves and what they considered to be home.

In a study of people sleeping rough, Cameron Parsell (2012) states that how each of us understands and experiences *home* changes depending on our own lived experiences and the social context in which those lived experiences take place:

While the powerful ideal of home is important, people in this study interpreted this ideal and made sense of it with reference to their individual experiences. The powerful stereotypes of what home is thought to represent provides a meaningful backdrop, but the meanings of home for people in this study reflected their broader biographies and life experiences, as well as their day-to-day experiences in public places. (Parsell 2012:170)

In other words, the meaning of home is derived from the events of people's lives. This stereotypical ideal of home is thought to be a place where one feels comfortable, safe and secure. The participants in my research project in St. John's confirm that these ideals are

part of their understanding and feelings of what home is. I discuss this point in greater detail and with examples in Chapter Four.

Susan Frohlick's (1999) research among single mothers in Vancouver, British Columbia found that the ideal notion of home can have a stressful effect on people who feel as though they cannot create this place for themselves. She comments that the idea that home is a place of belonging and a place easy to be in was not so for the women she studied.

Frohlick use home as the site of examination for her research for three reasons. The first of which is that home is used as a "code for family 'order' " that has a direct impact on the everyday lives of the women in Frohlick's study (Frohlick 1999:88). The idea of a woman being a *single mother* is a social construct of this family order that the women are already out of because they do not have a male partner to raise a child with (Frohlick 1999:87-88). The second reason is that these women had to deal with *home* on an everyday basis but not necessarily on terms of their own making. "It was not exactly their 'choice' to become single mothers, nor did they always have control over the terms of child custody or support payments" (Frohlick 1999:88). It is because of this that "home was not an easy space for the women to occupy as they negotiated its material dimensions (such as locating affordable housing; arranging adequate child care; unpacking boxes). Nor were the strongly felt symbolic dimensions easily dealt with (such as reconstructing home as the 'place in our mind')" (Frohlick 1999:88). Lastly, home was used as the basis of examination because "home was the locale of lived experience... They were spaces in which the women came to know discrimination and oppression intimately" (Frohlick

1999:88). Home, or the idea of home, was in this case a negative. It was an ideal that the women studied felt they had to live up to but felt as though they may not ever get there.

#### *1.3.4 Structural Violence*

In this section I look at and discuss structural violence through the ideas and theories of Paul Farmer, Vincent Lyon-Callos, and Nancy Scheper-Hughes. Structural violence in its simplest form is understood to be the violence that is imposed “systematically—that is, indirectly” by those who are within a specific “social order” (Farmer 2004:307).

Structural violence theory is helpful when looking at the experiences of housing issues in St. John’s because it allows us to see and understand the social processes that lead to the individuals’ vulnerability to housing struggles. When discussing his research on women with AIDS in Haiti, Paul Farmer (1999) states that the stories that he tells may be perfect examples of vulnerability but that we must understand this vulnerability “to AIDS through *social* processes—that is, through the economic, political, and cultural forces that can be shown to share the dynamics of HIV transmission” (Farmer 1999:79 *italics in original*). While I do not look outside the specific life stories that I collected, it is important to remember the social processes and context that all of the individual participants have gone through in order to get where they are. All of the research participants experienced circumstances that forced them to make certain choices. Farmer states of his research participants:

Their sickness is a result of structural violence: neither culture nor pure individual will is at fault: rather, historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces conspire to constrain individual agency. Structural violence is visited upon all those whose

social status denies them access to the fruits of scientific and social progress. (1999:79)

We can see these themes in Vincent Lyon-Callo's (2004) ethnography about a shelter in Northampton, Massachusetts. Lyon-Callo explains that one major problem with the discourse of homelessness is that homelessness has been individualized. This means that homelessness is defined as a problem with the individual and not with society, which leads to a lack of discussion around other factors such as structural violence. Through this individualization of homelessness, the elements that are understood to lead to one's homelessness are medicalized. Lyon-Callo explains that the many components contributing to homelessness are often not controlled by the individual; for example, low wages, lack of affordable housing, and governmental policies. He argues, that in order to understand homelessness, we must examine a mixture of two factors. The first is to scrutinize how neoliberal social and economic practices are linked with the rise of homelessness (Lyon-Callo 2004:10). The second factor is to understand and contemplate how, and if, individuals react to these different social and economic policies not only in theory, but also in practice and what the effects of such actions have been and will be (Lyon-Callo 2004:10). Through an examination of the experiences of individuals using the shelter and through staff who work there, Lyon-Callo shows that "the professed aim of medicalization is to heal or normalize the homeless person so that they can house themselves" and that this "medicalization also has the effect of determining who is deserving and undeserving of housing" (Lyon-Callo 2004:53).

Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2004) discusses structural violence in her research on infant mortality in Brazil, commenting that the state helps to normalize and

create a sense of routine around children's deaths when the state representatives refuse to comprehend and respond to the human suffering indicated by these deaths. She says that the "rapid dispatch" of the children's bodies implies "that nothing of consequence, nothing worth noting, has really taken place" (Scheper-Hughes 2004:280). This is a perfect example of how structural violence is at work, creating a situation in which no one questions or even really sees the suffering that is happening around them everyday.

Keeping these ideas in mind, I now look at how feminist theories and feminist anthropology specifically play a role in how we can understand homelessness.

#### *1.3.5 Feminist Anthropology and the Public-Private Dichotomy*

Some forty years ago Michelle Rosaldo first adopted the domestic-public dichotomy for use in comparative research in anthropology, where domestic "refers to those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children" and public "refers to activities, institutions, and forms of association that link, rank, organize, or subsume particular mother-child groups" (Rosaldo 1974:23). As Rosaldo, notes the basis of this dichotomy was the construction of a theory around the seemingly universal asymmetry between the genders and how male-dominated realms are usually seen as more important, giving males and their activities more cultural weight and authority than those of women (Lamphere 2001:100).

Over time, Rosaldo (1980), and others (specifically Lamphere [2001] and Rapp [1979]), came to rethink the value of this dichotomy with the reevaluation being based on



three key questions: “whether male domination is universal, whether male domination is explained by the domestic-public dichotomy, and whether the concept of domestic-public has relevance in all cultures” (Brettell and Sargent 2001:96). It came to be understood that the domestic-public dichotomy had as its base many assumptions about the universal nature of “womanness”, and that the “spheres” of “public” and “private” are integrated and cannot be separated (Lamphere 2001:104-105). Lamphere states:

What is ‘domestic’ has public ramifications...and the shadow of the family kin group (the ‘domestic’) is present in even the most ‘public’ of situations. What at first seemed like a simple straightforward dichotomy, in the light of actual case material seems very ‘slippery’ and complex. (2001:103)

This dichotomy has been an aid in describing “spatial and functional relationships”, but it does not provide one with an “*explanation* of women’s status” (Lamphere 2001:103). Nannerl O. Keohane also states that this dichotomy “misleads us into thinking of life in two separate boxes and makes it easy to assume that each of us fits more naturally into one box or the other, according to our sex” (1992:xi).

Bhattacharjee (2006) furthers the problematization of this dichotomy; she does this in order to show that this division between “private” and “public” becomes an obstacle when analyzing domestic violence. She focuses mainly on the division and distinction between the “private” and “public” spheres of social life, the private being “understood as the patriarchal family home” and the public being “generalized as outside the family home” (2006:337). Bhattacharjee states that within the South Asian community, the idea of home – which is “commonly accepted as the primary site of domestic violence” (2006:337) – is actually thought of in a variety of ways. *Home* may also have different meanings to those who are struggling with housing issues, creating

problems with the public/private dichotomy. Bhattacharjee also shows that spaces “imagined as being opposite to home can display characteristics typical of home and vice versa” (2006:352). Those who are struggling with housing issues but do not have access to physical shelter may see and use public spaces differently than those who feel comfortable with and secure in their living arrangements. People who are struggling may spend more time outside of their dwellings and in these public spaces.

Watson and Austerberry (1986) use a Marxist-Feminist analytical perspective to look at the issues surrounding women’s homelessness in England, focusing on the patriarchal and capitalist notion of social relations. They state:

Houses...do not simply represent a form of shelter; in addition they embody the dominant ideology of a society and reflect the way in which that society is organized...Consequently the form in which housing is produced, the means by which it is financed and the way in which it is allocated reflect the division of labour both within the labour process and between the sexes... British housing policy and the housing market operate in favour of the traditional nuclear family household. Moreover, this dominant family model assumes a domestic role for women, such that the housing system acts to positively reinforce women’s subordinate economic and social status. An important consequence of this centrality of the family to housing is the marginalization of all other forms of households, in particular single-person households. (1986:3-4)

Watson and Austerberry explain that many of the women in their research struggled with housing because of the disbanding of a household relationship, and that the women were relying on their partners (1986:164). When these relationships broke down, the women found themselves to be lacking the necessary skills and/or financial stability to secure housing. Another group of women lost their housing through the responsibilities placed on them in a patriarchal family structure, such as putting the security of their housing second to taking care of an elderly parent or their children (Watson and

Austerberry 1986:164). Many of the women in Watson and Austerberry's study struggled with housing because of their economic positions. They were

either currently unemployed, or in unskilled employment where the wages and conditions and future employment prospects were poor. The women's low economic status clearly derived from a lack of further education and training and from their expected roles as housewives and mothers within the family. (1986:164)

I agree that this is an extremely important point of view to consider and an analytical outlook that we must not forget. However, I would argue these problems are currently not restricted to women. In a time when many households rely on two incomes, individuals of both genders are likely to be adversely affected by the deterioration of a family and/or a living arrangement. Some of the men in this research have shown how they were pushed into sleeping rough once their family units broke down, much the same as some of the women were forced to move back in with family or into shelters. Gender plays a role in how an individual is able to negotiate his or her new position or situation, but it cannot be considered the most defining feature shaping why one struggles with housing. I now turn to other research that is pertinent to this thesis.

#### **1.4 Relevant Ethnographies on Poverty and Housing Struggles**

A very large and significant body of research has been completed on housing struggles and issues of poverty within anthropology (examples are Bridgman 2003; Connolly 2000; Cohen and Sokolovsky 1989; Glasser 1988; Glasser 1994; Glasser and Bridgman 1999; Hopper 2003; Liebow 1967; Liebow 1995; Lyon-Callo 2004; O'Reilly-Fleming 1993; Spradley 1970 and more). I focus mainly on a few ethnographies from the last thirty years, as these are the most relevant to my study. In order to summarize this

literature accurately, I use the terms ‘homeless’ and ‘homelessness’ as these authors have employed them.

Two previous master’s theses in Anthropology from Memorial University deal with topics relevant to this thesis: Vincent Walsh (1986) writes about men living in a downtown boarding house, and James Rice (2002) writes on the role of a community centre within a subsidized housing area. Both of these works discuss housing options for people who are living in poverty in St. John’s.

Walsh shows us what daily life is like for men<sup>15</sup> who have struggled with extreme poverty and with finding a place to live. Walsh himself lived in the boarding house for four months while completing participant observation. This allowed him to see how the boarding house worked and the conditions under which his participants lived. Walsh has three main questions he wanted to answer in his thesis. The first is “who exactly are the boarders and how do they come to be there?”, the second “what are the social and economic relationships which constitute their lives?” and the last question is “how do these social and economic relationships articulate with the wider society?” (Walsh 1986:12). Walsh finds that the people he studied based their social lives and relationships around meeting their day-to-day needs. He argues that these relationships led the boarders to be dominated both economically and ideologically. For example, “a boarder may gain some meagre economic reward by stealing, but he remains a thief in the eyes of the person who buys the item, and if caught will go to jail” (Walsh 1986:98).

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<sup>15</sup> Women were less prevalent in his research.

Walsh states that similar, but stricter, laws will come out of these behaviours and relationships but that the root causes, such as poverty and unemployment, will continue to be ignored (Walsh 1986:99). This converges with my discussion of structural violence theory. Walsh's research subjects were

excluded from the socio-economic relations of work, and are lacking in social support structures such as ties of kinship or friendship. Their struggle against economic oppression leads them to behaviour not in keeping with the common morality of society, but it is a response to the social structure, the way they cope with poverty. (Walsh 1986:99)

Rice (2002) deals with a community centre that was established in a specific public housing community in St. John's. His focus is mainly on the daily life of the staff in the centre, the use of terms such as *community* and *empowerment*, and the social and economic context in which the housing project was built. Rice's thesis looks at how the Froude Avenue Community Centre engages in "the 'practice' of community" (Rice 2002:1). He uses the "analytical themes of 'community,' 'empowerment,' 'ownership,' and 'cultural capital' " (2002:249) to look at and understand differences between the work of the staff carrying out the Centre's mission statement and the residents' daily lives and understandings of the centre and housing development. Rice finds that the basis of the contradictions between the staff of the Centre and residents is in the different ways each group understood, practiced and developed their cultural capital around the concepts of *ownership* and *empowerment* (2002: 249). Where *ownership* is thought of by the staff and the NLHC<sup>16</sup> as a "display of a sense of responsibility by the residents for their homes, the area in general, [and] the Centre itself"(Rice 2002:250), Rice interprets the practices

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<sup>16</sup> Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

of some residents, for example painting graffiti on and around the Centre, as the residents' way of claiming ownership over the centre and its resources (Rice 2002:250). This thesis is important to the research at hand as it gives some contextualization to St. John's. It also brings to light how feeling ownership over where one lives may change when, and if, one feels at home.

Cato Wadel's ethnography *Now, Whose Fault is That?: The Struggle for Self-Esteem In the Face of Chronic Unemployment* (1973) discusses unemployment in rural Newfoundland. Wadel shows how one man in the late 1960s views his situation and how he has come to "adapt to unemployment in a rural area of a 'welfare state' " (1973:xi). Wadel also shows how unemployed men are perceived within the community and "how the inability to secure employment, to earn one's living, tends to lead to problems in fulfilling other roles and in maintaining relations within one's family and community, and in maintaining one's identity and self-respect" (1973:xiii). In rural Newfoundland, one's work ethic, or perceived work ethic, has a great influence on one's social status in the community. Wadel states that "the basis for the social deprivation or stigma resulting from long-term unemployment seems to be the insistence that a man should earn his living and that a man is, himself, primarily responsible for his own economic condition" (1973:ix). He shows throughout his analysis that the notion of being a 'hard worker' is very important, but one that is difficult to prove. Despite having a long working career, a man on welfare can still be understood to be unwilling to work. Wadel comments that statements such as " 'Well, but he was never a *hard* worker'; or 'Well, he's not working that much *now*, is he?'" (Wadel 1973:109-110) are made even if the welfare recipient had a long work history.

The author makes it clear that it is not his objective to show how one becomes unemployed within rural Newfoundland, but to examine how one understands and copes with unemployment. His primary focus is on “the problems which unemployed welfare recipients experience in attempting to maintain their community status, their self-esteem, and their dignity” (Wadel 1973:108). As with Wadel, the main focus of this thesis is not on *how* the participants have arrived at their struggles with housing but on their personal *experiences* of these housing dilemmas. Wadel’s ethnography provides a great example of how to study the ways in which a particular group of people view themselves, their situations, and how they understand how others perceive them. It also identifies some of the stereotypes Newfoundlanders have had historically about people who are out of work. These are all topics that are important to keep in mind when looking at homelessness in St. John’s in the current period.

In Deborah Connolly’s (2000) ethnography on homeless mothers in shelters in Portland, Oregon, she asks how “cultural norms that assume middle-class material privilege and a stable heterosexual marriage contribute to the marginalization of poor white homeless mothers whose lives deviate from ideologies of ‘normative’ mothering?” (Connolly 2000:xvii). These assumptions within a society consider those who fall outside of such categories as marginalized people. Built-in assumptions of who one should turn to, such as stable heterosexual relationships and other familial relationships, create a void for women who do not have such relationships. Connolly looks at homeless mothers’ lives and the cultural norms of mothering in order to question the “coherency of marginalized identities” (Connolly 2000:xix). She explores the differences and similarities between these women’s lives and the norms, showing that such norms create

an ideal mother that cannot be lived up to if one does not have the proper resources. This is similar to what Frohlick (1999) discovers in her research discussed above. Homeless mothers are demonized and seen as bad mothers because they cannot provide the ideal material resources for their children.

Rae Bridgman's (2003) ethnography on homeless women in Toronto is another important ethnography. Within this ethnography, Bridgman looks at the relationship between the shelter, Savard's, and those who stay there. She draws together "the insights of those working in the 'shelter industry' and the perspectives of those they seek to help" (2003:9). Bridgman discovers the similar, as well as different and conflicting, perspectives between the shelter workers and the women who are sleeping there and shows how such perspectives can influence the outcome of a project such as Savard's. She accomplishes this by taking part in the daily activities of the shelter, attending staff and monthly advisory meetings, looking at the daily log books, and through informal conversations and formal interviews with the administrators and staff of the shelter. Bridgman did not formally interview the women staying there themselves, but she had many informal conversations with these women. This ethnography is important to this thesis as, similar to Rice's (2002) research, it shows differences between the ideas service providers and service users had about the situation at hand. When trying to understand the experience of housing struggles, we must keep in mind how these differences between the views of service providers and service users affect the effectiveness of the service.

Elliot Liebow's (1993) ethnography *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women* is a great example of understanding homelessness through the lived experiences of women. Liebow explains that he wanted to write a straightforward account of how the



women in his research experienced and saw homelessness but, when looking through his notes, he realized “how inadequate it was to think of them in one-dimensional, stereotypical terms such as ‘mentally ill’ or ‘alcoholics,’ as incomplete persons deficient in morals or character, or even as ‘disaffiliated’ persons, go-it alone isolates no longer connected with family or friends” (Liebow 1993:1). He shows that it is very easy to become homeless, but that without help it takes extraordinary efforts to be able to climb out of homelessness and sometimes a woman’s tremendous efforts are still not enough (Liebow 1993:2-3). Even when these women turned to social services for help, Liebow explains that they found that they were treated with demeaning attitudes and some did not want to give up their self-respect for social assistance (1993:3). The women in Liebow’s research saw less “craziness” within homeless persons than there was within the services to help them (1993:3).

The system that is designed to help the women defined as ‘homeless’ separates the ‘deserving’ poor from the ‘undeserving’ poor. It makes the women seem, and then blames them for being, “demanding”, “unreasonable”, “ungrateful”, and “uncooperative” instead of looking at how the system is failing the women as individuals facing a variety of struggles (Liebow 1993:3). This is closely related to the research discussed above on structural violence. What Liebow is pointing to, and discussing, is how the services in place to help those who are struggling with housing seem to forget the many pressures society has placed on an individual and how structural violence can cause housing issues. I now outline each chapter found in this thesis.

## 1.5 Chapter Overview

Chapter Two contains a brief introduction to the people who participated in this research. It is followed by Chapter Three, where I outline the methods used to gather the data and discuss the ways in which I recruited participants and the types of interviews in which we collaborated. In this chapter, I also discuss how my relationships with the participants affected the interviews.

In Chapter Four, I look at the meanings of *homeless* and *home* to the participants and discuss how the terms affect each other. Chapter Five provides an overview of the experiences each participant had while living with housing insecurity in St. John's. It covers the spectrum of problems (sleeping rough, temporary institutional housing, and precarious housing) in finding and keeping a place in which to live, and the conditions of participants' the apartments. Chapter Six considers the participants' perspectives on how to eliminate housing struggles in St. John's. It also includes some of my recommendations to better address housing issues and to help those in these situations. Chapter Seven is the conclusion, where I summarize the main points covered in the thesis and offer some closing remarks.

## **Chapter Two: Introduction to the Research Participants**

In this chapter I give a brief introduction to each research participant in order to provide some context to comments and statements used later on. All of the names in this thesis have been changed to allow for anonymity; this includes anyone who is mentioned by the participants and any street and small community names. The age of the participants in this fieldwork ranged from 25 to 64. I interviewed one man who is Inuk, and strongly identifies with Inuit culture. None of the other interviewees explicitly mentioned belonging to a national or ethnic minority. I did not discuss sexual orientation with any participants. Based on our conversations about their past relationships, however, I assume all of the participants to be heterosexual.

### ***Ann***

Ann is 28<sup>17</sup> years old and was born in St. John's where she has lived continually. She has a son, a Bachelor of Arts, and was working on her Master's degree at the time of our interview. Ann has struggled with finding and keeping a suitable place to live for herself and her son since he was born. She purchased a house with the father of her son. However, through the breakdown of their relationship, she lost all the financial investment she had in that house. Since then, Ann and her son have lived in some "nice" and some not-so-nice apartments. At the time of interview Ann was living at her parents' house, a situation that she found to be very stressful. I knew Ann before this research had

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<sup>17</sup> All ages are what were recorded at the time of the interviews.

begun; she contacted me through Facebook, stating that she wished to share her story with me.

***Betty***

Betty is 26; she was born on a Caribbean island, but grew up in two small towns in Newfoundland. Betty explains that she moved to New Brunswick in the middle of the night at the age of nine with her mother, her mother's new boyfriend, and her siblings. This move occurred not long after her parents separated. She later moved to Ontario. While there, Betty started a house fire while making French Toast for herself and her sister. The community was very generous at this time and helped the family to rebuild their material lives. Shortly after that, she and her younger sister moved back to a small town in Newfoundland. Betty was then 13 and she moved in with her godparents. When she was 18, Betty moved to England to live with her father and went to university, but she did not complete the program. Two years prior to our interview, she came to live in St. John's where she has lived with roommates and with her godparents. Betty has had a few jobs while in St. John's. She worked at a call centre, a grocery store, a convenience store, and at Wal-Mart. At the last point of contact, Betty had moved back to England to live with her sister and father. Betty contacted me through the posters I had put up around St. John's; we had not known each other before our first interview.

***Dave***

Dave is 34 and grew up in a Newfoundland outport community and has six siblings. He has a young son who lives with his mother, Dave's ex-partner, in a small town in Newfoundland. Dave says that, before his parents separated, they lived in a small bungalow. When his parents separated, however, his dad bought a mansion in which

Dave lived for a time. During this period, Dave's mother lived in subsidized Newfoundland and Labrador housing. Dave came to St. John's frequently as a child, but moved here permanently in 2007 for employment. He has also lived in Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Alberta. Dave returned from Alberta after he developed an addiction to cocaine, and lived with his mother while he "kicked the habit". Dave has struggled with keeping employment and housing while here in St. John's. He lived in a tent for one week in September 2009, has stayed at The Wiseman Centre<sup>18</sup> twice, and has lived in multiple apartments and houses with others. I first met Dave at The Gathering Place where I was volunteering at the time. We quickly became friends and would play pool together. Dave is a genuine guy who says he would help out most people if given the chance; I do believe, however, that my gender may have been a factor in him opening up to me and wanting to participate in the research. I think that, if I had been male, he may have placed more barriers between us and had more apprehension about participating. The second time I saw Dave, he was in pretty rough shape after being jumped on George Street and, as he describes it, "left for dead on the side of the road." This was one of a string of awful things that had happened to Dave that led to our meeting and his decision to participate in this study. While Dave has gone through a lot in his lifetime, he tries, to have a positive outlook and mostly succeeds. Despite this positive outlook, his trust in people has greatly diminished and he has often cautioned me that I trust people way too much.

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<sup>18</sup> The Wiseman Centre is run by the Salvation Army and is an emergency shelter for men between the ages of 30 and 64. They have 20 beds. The Wiseman Centre also has 10 supportive housing units for men who have greater needs. In October 2012, the Wiseman Centre opened another wing with four units reserved for women.

### ***Dorothy***

Dorothy is 47. She was born in Nova Scotia while her family was on vacation, but grew up in Newfoundland. Dorothy lived and worked in Alberta for 10 years until she was forced to return because of a medical condition. She had been back in St. John's for five years when I met her; during four of these years, she had been in and out of the hospital. At the time of the interview, Dorothy and her male friend were living with her mother, in her mother's house. Dorothy's mother was battling cancer and was very sick herself. Dorothy found this situation to be very stressful and was trying every way she could to find decent, mould-free, private, and secure housing. Dorothy got in contact with me through my posters and we met for the first time at our interview.

### ***Eliza***

Eliza is 27. She was born in St. John's and spent her early years in the Greater St. John's area. Her mother left her family when Eliza was 15 years old, and she lived with her father and her three sisters. Eliza did not have any contact with her mother after she left, but her two younger sisters lived with their mother on and off. Eliza has struggled with her health since she was born. These health concerns have stopped her from working and from completing the university program she had started. Eliza places a great importance on her community of friends and family, stating that she does not know how people can survive without these support systems. Eliza started couch surfing earlier on, staying at friends' houses for a few days at a time during high school and then more and more over the years. Eliza has also spent time working and travelling in British Columbia. Eliza was an acquaintance before our interview and she contacted me via Facebook.

### ***Gail***

Gail is 49 and was born in New Jersey, but moved to St. John's when she was very young. Gail has struggled most of her life, beginning with experiences of abuse during her childhood and youth, and on to her challenge as an adult to find and keep housing. Gail has stayed at the Catherine Booth shelter<sup>19</sup> and she participated in the Emmanuel House<sup>20</sup> program when she was in her mid-twenties. Gail lived in subsidized housing for 12 years, but because maintenance had to be completed on the building, she was evicted. She now lives in an apartment that is covered with mould and is run by someone she described as "a slumlord." Gail wanted to participate in this research because she wanted the people of St. John's to know that people are being thrown onto the streets here and that human rights abuses are happening within St. John's. Gail saw my poster while waiting for the bus and called me to set up an interview time. Her interview was one of two interviews I completed that was not in the space provided by The Lantern. Gail and I met up at local coffee shop for our interview.

### ***Gordon***

Gordon is a 35 year-old man from Ontario, who has moved around frequently. Gordon first came to St. John's to study carpentry approximately a decade before our interview. Since first coming to St. John's, he moved to Prince Edward Island before returning to Newfoundland. He works on and off as a carpenter around the city and gets

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<sup>19</sup> Catherine Booth was a shelter in St. John's run by the Salvation Army. It is now closed.

<sup>20</sup> Emmanuel House provides counselling and support for adults, helping them to overcome social and emotional difficulties. It also has a residency program for adults dealing with a wide range of issues, aid these men and women in further developing skills to integrate into the community.

most of his jobs through Manpower.<sup>21</sup> He lived in an apartment by himself at the time of our interview. Gordon has twice stayed at The Wiseman Centre and has also lived in bedsitting rooms and boarding houses. I met Gordon at The Gathering Place and he offered to participate after hearing my announcement about my research. We split our interviews into two sessions, as Gordon found it difficult to concentrate for long periods of time.

### ***Jane***

Jane is 59 and was born in St. John's. She spent the majority of her adult life on the mainland of Canada. She has one son who is 39 and lives on the mainland. Jane has been married twice. Her first husband was an alcoholic, and she felt that her second husband was jealous of her relationship with her son. One of her ex-husbands has since passed away. She came back from the mainland of Canada about three years before the interview and has been on social assistance since then. At the time of the interview, Jane was being evicted from her apartment building because she was caught drinking alcohol there three times. I met Jane at the New Hope Community Centre and we conducted the interview on site.

### ***John***

John is a 45-year-old man who was born in St. John's, but lived all across Canada while growing up. He was in seven foster homes and six group homes, all before the age of 13. John also spent time in a psychiatric ward while a minor. He has three children, one who is still a minor and two who are now adults. A fourth child passed away a few years

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<sup>21</sup> Manpower is a company that helps match the workforce with a wide range of employers.



before our interview. When this happened, John left his common-law partner and lived in his car for three days. At the time of this research, John was living in a house in downtown St. John's with three other men, and acting as the property's caretaker. I met John my first day at The Gathering Place. As with Dave, John and I became quick friends. When I told John that I had opened up my research to men, he said asked to participate.

### ***Lori***

Lori is 49 and has two adolescent children. She was born in St. John's but has moved around a lot as both an adult and a child; her father relocated the family often as part of his job. When Lori was in high school, after her parents had divorced, she and her mother had trouble getting along so she went to live with her father and his girlfriend of the time, who were living on the West Coast of the province. This was short lived and she moved back to St. John's. Lori moved away from Newfoundland with her husband and she returned to St. John's a few years before the interview. Lori's husband had passed away 10 years before the time of interview; they were separated, but not legally divorced, at the time of his death. Lori struggles greatly to survive daily with the money she has and finds it difficult to provide for her children. She has been successful in obtaining housing from the provincial government, but was very worried that this housing would be taken from her when her kids move out. Lori got into contact with me after her daughter saw my poster and convinced her to contact me through electronic mail (e-mail).

### ***Marg***

Marg is 64 and she has two sons in their early 30s. She grew up in a rural town in Newfoundland. Her father died when she was seven years old, after which point her

mother struggled to feed Marg and her seven brothers and sisters who ranged from age four to twenty. Marg came to St. John's as a young woman to become a nurse. She worked as a nurse for over 30 years on both a full-time and casual basis. Marg was in an abusive marriage and left her husband of over 30 years several years before our interview. She stayed in Iris Kirby House for four months when she first left her marriage. She had tried to leave before but, because of the threats her now ex-husband made to her and her family, she went back. It took her the four months she was at Iris Kirby House to get some money together and to find a suitable and safe place where she did not have to fear her ex-husband. She explains in her interviews how important the shelter was for her safety and ability to move on with her life. Marg got into contact with me after she saw my poster and was very happy to share her story, especially when she heard that I was conducting the interviews at The Lantern – a place that she knew and was comfortable with.

### ***Rob***

Rob is 48 and is from Ontario. He came to St. John's not long before the interview. He came for a visit a couple of months before our interview and decided to move here at that time. Since our interviews, Rob has moved back to the mainland but had planned to come back to St. John's over the summer. He has three children who are adolescents and young adults; Rob no longer has contact with his children. The relationship with his wife broke down and ended in a "messy" way. After the break-up happened, Rob tried to stay in contact with his kids, but they refused to talk to him. He also tried to continue living in the same town as his family, but he could no longer afford to. He spent time crashing on a couch in the basement of his work-place and then rented

an apartment from a friend; after a while, he could not afford the rent and had to move. He later moved to Toronto to live with his parents, before deciding to relocate to St. John's. Rob has been unable to work full-time, but has done odd jobs, being paid under the table, at the time of our interview. Rob receives a cheque once a month from the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). He contacted me after seeing my posters, and was very eager to share his story.

### ***Renee***

Renee is a 43 year-old women born in Ontario and has two young adult daughters. With support from the Province of Quebec's social welfare programs, Renee was able to get most of her university education paid for. She completed both her undergraduate and graduate degrees in her chosen field. She moved from Quebec to St. John's for a full-time job that she held at the time of interview. Her housing situation was stable when the interview was completed and she was happy with this living arrangement. Despite having had full-time employment, as a single parent, she has struggled to find affordable housing in St. John's and elsewhere. Renee and I had been distant acquaintances before this research began and she contacted me after seeing one of my posters.

### ***Tom***

Tom is a 36-year-old man from Labrador. He first came to St. John's to go to Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). He took a break from school and went back to Labrador for a little while; however, he soon realized that he wanted to come back to St. John's, so he enrolled in a two-year program at the Career Academy.<sup>22</sup> Tom

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<sup>22</sup> The Career Academy was a private vocational training institute in St. John's that went bankrupt in 1998.

lived on the streets of St. John's for a period of time, sleeping under a bridge with his friend. He now lives alone in a nice apartment that he likes a lot. I first met Tom through The Gathering Place. Once he heard about my research, he e-mailed me telling me his story and we later set up an interview time.

### ***Victoria***

Victoria is a 25 year-old women from St. John's and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. She has spent most of her time in St. John's and surrounding areas with the exception of when she was in university and one year where she lived in Saskatchewan with her mother. Victoria has a full time job, which pays above minimum wage, yet she still struggles with housing. At the time of my field research, Victoria was living with her mother and her mother's partner. Victoria has a lot of apprehension about this housing arrangement, describing it as "degrading" and "stressful." Victoria and I had a pre-existing friendship and, after much discussion with me about my research and the data that I was collecting, she asked if she could participate.

## **Chapter Three: Methodological Approach**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter explains how the interviews came about and what research methods I used in conducting this study. I also discuss the impact that I had on the research process, both as the interviewer and in analyzing the data through my own lens of the world. As Patai states about her research:

These are accounts individuals constructed within the interview situation. It is therefore necessary for my readers to know how these interviews came to be conducted, the circumstances and constraints that framed them, and my own role in what was, after all, a dialogue, not a monologue. (1988:144)

First, I discuss the ways in which I recruited participants, then moving on to how I went about collecting the data and how I transcribed the interviews. Finally, I reflect upon my relationships with the participants.

### **3.1 Participant Recruitment**

Throughout the development and conduct of this research, the main focus of the project changed considerably during both the proposal and fieldwork stages. My original proposal was to focus on a narrower and “clearer” definition of homelessness than the one I ultimately came to study. I originally wanted to focus only on women’s experiences while they were staying in a shelter, assuming that they were *homeless*.

Through many months of unreturned phone calls and e-mails with a women’s shelter, it was concluded that, because of the privacy policies in place at the shelter, I would not be able to complete this version of the research project. The reluctance on the

part of the shelter was echoed by other community facilities that I approached. This was not always because of a lack of interest in, or understanding of, the research but because of the stressful and busy lives of people working for such organizations. Most of these institutions are severely underfunded and their importance is understated. Those who work for such institutions are chronically overworked; however, the issues at work in this case seem to run even deeper.

I am not the first researcher to come across such issues while completing research among vulnerable populations, such as women struggling with housing. Those who work within organizations that deal with homeless populations, and in particular women and children, see it as their responsibility to protect these people from possible harm. They often act as gatekeepers. Rae Bridgman (2003:ix-xii) discussed this dynamic in the introduction to her ethnography *Safe Haven: The Story of a Shelter for Homeless Women*, commenting that the staff of the shelter saw interviewing as intrusive. Due to this viewpoint, they did not allow Bridgman to complete interviews with the women staying in the shelter. Instead, she interviewed the staff members, attended staff meetings, looked at staff logbooks and observed the day-to-day happenings at the shelter (2003:ix-xii).

Some ethnographers have also worked around gatekeepers by themselves becoming employees at a shelter or at a social service agency. They have also met their participants by going directly to the streets. For me, neither of these approaches was a viable option. Instead, I decided to broaden my research so that it included other housing issues, such as precarious housing, as well as what I considered to be homelessness at the time. With my new focus on understanding women's experiences with housing issues and homelessness, I put up posters around the downtown area, paying close attention to areas

around soup kitchens, shelters, and community centres. I also sent posters to contacts who work within the housing advocacy sector. In addition to these efforts, I reached out to my social networks via word of mouth and Facebook.<sup>23</sup>

These recruitment strategies had both advantages and disadvantages. One important benefit was that the participants got involved because they identified with the research in some way; they wished to tell *their* story and share *their* experiences. These participants were self-selected and voluntary participants because of this style of recruitment. Despite these advantages, there are also problems with this approach. One problem in particular, which Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) and others I spoke to reminded me of, was that those who find themselves with housing issues are sometimes unable to read, and often have lower levels of education. Therefore, I had to be careful about the recruitment language that I used and the wordiness of the poster; I struggled to find a layout that I thought would work. The poster in the original form, which did not work well, is found in Appendix A.

Another issue with this way of recruiting research participants is that people who are struggling with housing issues do not always have reliable access to a phone or the Internet, and therefore would be unable to get into contact with me and vice versa. I hoped to remedy this by stating on the poster that I would be at Hava Java<sup>24</sup> every Sunday from 8-11 p.m. until December 2010. One man responded to this invitation and began to

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<sup>23</sup> Facebook is an international social networking site.

<sup>24</sup> Hava Java is a local coffee shop on Water Street.

tell me about what he was going through and about his experiences on the streets of St. John's, and elsewhere. When this interaction took place, I had interviewed two women.

The conversation with this man at Hava Java led me to wonder what I was missing by only interviewing women. Such thoughts were strengthened by another interaction with a man I met at the New Hope Community Centre.<sup>25</sup> This particular man was very upset that I was only studying women, stating that 'men need people to talk to as well.'<sup>26</sup> He further said 'I am sick of when things like this come up it always being just for women. There are more men struggling with these issues and have a lot to say.'

I began to wonder if he was correct in saying that more men are struggling with these issues. It seems that, within St. John's, men struggling with housing and poverty are at least more visible than women. Employees, and volunteers, at the New Hope Community Centre, The Gathering Place, and the For the Love of Learning Centre, told me that more men use their services than women. But do men outnumber the number of women struggling with housing and homelessness? Do the men and women who find themselves in these situations deal with the problems differently? Do they have different reasons for struggling with housing? These questions are questions that I could not investigate without interviewing both men and women, and were in fact some of the questions I could not answer within the scope of this research.

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<sup>25</sup> The New Hope Community Centre is run by the Salvation Army. It provides many services along such as housing support, trade training, as well as a soup kitchen on certain days.

<sup>26</sup> I have used single quotation marks here because I am using what was in my notes the day of this conversation. I am not sure on the exact words he said. When I am paraphrasing or quoting from my notes, instead of direct quotes from recorded conversations, throughout this thesis I will be using single quotation marks.



Talking with these two men had a huge impact on me. As I told my supervisor in one of my fieldwork reports, it was very difficult to sit across from them and not validate their experiences by including them in my research. In the interviews that I had completed up until that point, I felt as though I was working toward bettering the women's situations, even though I was not doing anything for them in particular. My research objective was to understand their experiences, with the goal being to help others who may find themselves in similar situations in the future. Many of the women I interviewed said that it was good to be able to talk with someone about these issues, especially someone who is there to listen and not to judge, or to try and change them in any way. However when I sat across from these men and listened to what they had to say, as I had done with the women I had interviewed, I felt as though I was not placing as much importance on their stories. I felt that my initial research plan had been exclusionary.

Multiple men opened up to me and told me their life story within minutes of meeting me at The Gathering Place where I had been volunteering once a week since October of 2010. This was not the case with the women I met at The Gathering Place. Some of the women only opened up to me after almost six months of knowing them. I asked myself why men were more visibly using soup kitchens and non-gender specific spaces than women, and why men were seemingly so much more willing to open up to me than the women were. Without talking to men, I was missing an important part of the story that would help to answer this question. As a result of these experiences, I made the decision to include men in my research. I made a new poster and put it up around

downtown and The Gathering Place. The layout of these posters was much better than the first set, with more concise information (see Appendix B).

The posters are important, as their placement and layout had a significant impact on which participants came forward and which stories I heard. The people who chose to participate may have been more educated and affluent than others in similar situations, whom I did not talk with. However, I believe that the stories I did receive provide a much-needed insight into the experiences of those struggling with housing in St. John's.

In the end, I recruited research participants from the posters, Facebook, personal networks, through the contacts I made while volunteering at The Gathering Place, and through announcements of my research at the New Hope Community Centre and The Gathering Place. As is mentioned in the previous chapter, I personally knew three of the women before this research; two of the three made contact with me via Facebook, one from a Facebook page that I made, and the other through Facebook messages. Six women and one man contacted me through the posters, and four of the men were recruited from my volunteer work at The Gathering Place. I gave a very short announcement of my research one day at The Gathering Place to bring attention to my poster; I also passed out information sheets to those who were interested and this was the only active recruitment I did while at The Gathering Place. I interviewed one woman whom I met after the announcement of my project at the New Hope Community Centre.

The Internet and Facebook played a large role in my ability to contact people, schedule interview times, and keep in contact with participants. As I have already discussed, two of the participants first contacted me through Facebook and that is how we contacted each other for the duration of the research process. I also used Facebook to

message other participants after we had made contact through other means, such as through The Gathering Place. E-mail was also an important means some people used to contact me. One woman in particular stated that calling people intimidates her greatly, and she was glad to be able to e-mail me instead of calling to set up our first meeting. A couple of people did contact me first through phone calls I noticed that these were usually people who did not use computers regularly in their daily lives.

I did receive some e-mails and phone calls that, unfortunately, did not lead to an interview. Sometimes the participant did not show up to our scheduled meeting time or we could not come to an agreement on a time and place due to scheduling conflicts. This is completely understandable, as those who are in the midst of a housing crisis have as their first priority finding housing, and taking the time to talk to a researcher can be an added pressure that they do not need. This is why I believe that all of the participants whom I interviewed had dealt with these issues in the past, or had obtained a relatively stable place to live. One participant was an exception to this rule, as he moved into temporary institutional housing between the time when we set up the interview and the time when the interview took place.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

I used two different methods of data collection for this research project: interviews (semi-structured and life story) and audio-visual methods.

#### *3.2.1 Interviews: Semi-Structured and Life Stories*

I completed semi-structured interviews with fifteen people, ten women and five men, and prepared twenty main questions about the person's life and housing experiences

(see Appendix C for the interview schedule). While completing most of the interviews, I did not stick strictly to these questions. Sometimes, I did not ask many questions from the sheet; I instead let the conversation unfold naturally and used my prepared questions only as a guideline. In other interviews, I was much more formal and went through the questions one by one. The degree to which I used the prepared questions depended on how much the participants were opening up and the level of comfort between us.

Semi-structured interviews provide a way “to capture something of the ‘control’ of structured interviews without the need to use closed-ended questions or force people into the role of a ‘respondent’ rather than that of an ‘initiator’ of information” (Fife 2005:94). These semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to feel more in control of what information they related to me and, therefore, resulted in dialogical exchanges that helped them to relax and discuss what were often emotional topics.

Gauging the response from the initial semi-structured interviews, I re-interviewed four of the women and one of the men for a more in-depth semi-structured life story interview (see Appendix D for the interview schedule). As with the initial set of interviews I did not stick strictly to this interview schedule. I used the questions as a starting place from conversations and to keep some idea of what I wanted to discuss.

The main goal of this thesis is to understand the experience of struggling with housing issues in St. John’s; therefore, gathering the life stories of some of the participants gave a more in-depth contextualization of these experiences. Bertaux and Kohli (1984) state that, if we are to take personal histories as a research method seriously, we must differentiate between life history and life story. Life histories are broader, more exhaustive personal narratives and life story method are fragments of these narratives.

Cole (1991) states that life stories “allows for and acknowledges the dimension of storytelling in the process, the playfulness of memory, and the brevity and selectivity of some subjects’ accounts of their lives” (1991:n154). Using these definitions of personal narratives, I collected the participants’ life stories, meaning I gathered information on how the participants see, understand, and experience their own lives and the world connected to their lives.

As Clark notes, to research women on their own terms means to discover what women’s roles are in their daily lives and within the wider social and economic context (Kindl 1999:64). This, Kindl states, includes “using life histories to describe their [women’s] situation in life” (1999:65). Life histories allow a woman to reveal her point of view about her life, and community, and to compare her past with her present (Kindl 1999:65). While, historically, life stories were often a way in which to bring a woman’s point of view into the research realm, this interview style is also an important way to learn about and understand men’s experiences. Listening to both men and women, to find out how people understand their social position and live within the context of their daily lives, is an effective way to understand how their lives are affected by what is going on around them.

Faye Ginsburg (2006) focuses on gathering life stories in her research on the debate over abortion in the United States. Life stories, she states, are “narratively shaped fragments of more comprehensive life histories” (2006:236). This focus allows her to see the how the women who participated in her fieldwork use their abortion activism “to frame and interpret their experiences – both historical and biographical” (Ginsburg 2006:236). With the use of life stories, we can recognize how individual experiences are

interrelated with particular social and historical conditions. For Ginsburg, this relates to distinguishing the differences between the membership on each side of abortion debate and, for my research, help me see how housing has been a problem for the women and men participating in this research.

### *3.2.2 Participatory Photography and Photo Elicitation Interviewing*

In addition to the two sets of semi-structured interviews, I asked some informants if they would like to participate in a self-reporting project. Self-reporting can take the form of many different projects and it can help to gather worthwhile information (Fife 2005:107). The insights gained from a self-reporting project “can often be effectively used to expand topical areas for discussion within a research project. They can also...be utilized as a technique for gathering more subjective information on a topic that has already come to light during a period of prior research” (Fife 2005:107).

I gave six participants a disposable camera, explaining that they should photograph what was important to them, such as objects, places, and people. Once they had finished with the disposable camera, they returned it to me for developing. We got together at a later time to look at and discuss the photographs.

I received four out of the six cameras back and completed photo elicitation interviews with those four participants. Photo elicitation interviews are another way to get the participants to open up and tell stories about their lives that may not come out through other types of interviews. Collier and Collier (1986) discuss this method of elicitation in their use of photo interviewing as part of a study of mental health in the Maritime Provinces of Canada and in a research project on Navajo experiences and note that “the

photographs invited open expression while maintaining concrete and explicit reference points” (1986:105).

Sarah Pink explains, “when photographs become the focus of discussion between ethnographers and informants certain questions arise” (2007:82). Photographs become a way in which the participants are able to “reference aspects of their experiences and knowledge” (Pink 2007:82). This particular way of “interviewing with images” (Pink 2007:82) has been a well-established way in which to gain information from informants and has provided me with another way of retrieving the experiences of the men and women who participated in this research.

Pink dislikes what the term *photo elicitation* suggests about the act of photographic interviewing, stating that “*photo elicitation* implies using photographs to elicit responses from informants, as such to ‘draw out’ or ‘evoke’ an ‘admission, answer *from a person*’ ” (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1982, quoted in Pink 2007:84). She says that this understanding is more in tune with photo-interviewing of the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, with the postmodern turn in the way ethnographies have been carried out and new understandings of visual images, photographic interviews now are more along the lines of an open ended conversation between the ethnographer and the informant, discussing their “different understandings of images, thus collaborating to determine each other’s views” (Pink 2007:84).

In the photo elicitation interviews carried out for this research, the participants and I discussed what the pictures were of, and why they were important to them. However, I did not discuss what I thought the photographs were of, or why I thought they might be important. I used the photographs taken to elicit stories and responses from the

participants, going back to the more traditional sense of the term “photo elicitation interview”.

For this round of unstructured interviews, I had no prepared questions and allowed the interviewee to be in complete control of the interview. This once again allowed the participants to feel at ease and discuss what they felt was important. Collier and Collier state:

Because photographs are examined by the anthropologist and informants together, the informants are relieved of the stress of being the subject of the interrogation. Instead their role can be one of expert guides leading the fieldworker through the content of the pictures. Photographs allow them to tell their own stories spontaneously”. (Collier and Collier 1986:106)

This open-ended way of interviewing did, however, backfire on one occasion. One participant stated after our photo elicitation interview that she was less comfortable with this interview than she was with the semi-structured interview we had completed earlier because I let her have so much control over the interview. She stated that she was not sure what I wanted from her, which made her nervous and unsure of what to say.

Three females and one male participated in this part of the project. Two of the women were among those with whom I had completed the life story interview phase of the research. This approach has been of benefit to the analysis since participants documented aspects of their lives that they did not mention during our other interviews and reinforced other aspects. Andre Irving (2007) used a type of self-reporting project in order to gain an understanding of the experiences of people living with HIV and AIDS. When discussing what these methods produced, Irving (2007) stated that in the process of deciding what memories to make public the participants



‘fill in’ what is not immediately visible to the reader and anthropologist. A ‘sense’ of how HIV/AIDS is located within contemporary African societies slowly emerges and opens up people’s lives and neighbourhoods rather than fixing them through explanation, inviting us to re-create the experience for ourselves and fill in various gaps between the informants’ words and photographs. (Irving 2007:205)

This method has also been used by many other anthropologists (for example Mizen [2005] and Goopy and Lloyd [2005]), to gain access to information about aspects of the participants’ lives that the researcher may not have been able to participate in. Participatory photography opens up anthropologists to different forms of knowledge when age, gender, status as a researcher, or other factors may deny their participation in certain aspects of the lives of the informants (Pink 2007:88-91).<sup>27</sup>

### *3.2.3 Notes on Transcribing*

Before referring to sections from my transcribed interviews in later chapters, I should first explain why I transcribed the interviews the way I did. It was very important to me that I kept as much of the cadence of each participant’s speech in the written version of each interview in order to pass along the experiences of each person. I wanted to portray the way in which each of the participants expressed their thoughts and feelings to me in their own words. This, I feel, allows the reader to understand each person’s circumstances better and provides a greater opportunity to identify with the participant.

Both Daphne Patai (1988) and Dennis Tedlock (1983) have discussed the way in which we transfer the oral word into the written word. In her discussion of the use of life stories and life histories as a way to dig deep into cultural phenomena, Patai states that

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<sup>27</sup> Participatory photography has led to the establishment of the PhotoVoice method for self-advocacy in the last few decades. For further information, see <http://www.photovoice.org/>

she wants the reader to be able to hear it from the participants in their own words (1988:148). Along these lines, Tedlock states that oral narratives usually evoke rather than describe emotions and we need to remember this when creating the written forms of oral narratives (1983:51). This is also my goal in bringing forth these stories. I want the readers to be able to engage with and create a dialogue around these stories for themselves and be able to feel what each participant is expressing as they share their experiences with us.

I have therefore used large sections of my transcribed interviews in the body of this thesis. Within these long quotations, I have followed both Tedlock (1983) and Patai (1988) and used little punctuation in order to mimic the flow of the spoken word rather than transferring everything into prose. These sections of text are intended to be read along the lines of the rhythm of free verse poetry. Each line break indicates a pause in the person's speech. An inhale, or exhale, and a break between lines indicates a lengthy pause— the larger the gap, the longer the pause in speech. For example:

**Nicole:** So have you ever considered yourself homeless at any point in your life?

**John:** No.

**N:** No?

In this section of transcription, the white space between my question and John's answer indicates the silence of his long pause to stop and think about the answer before verbalizing it.

Commas are used to help reflect the flow of words and to separate out ideas or thoughts that may be confusing for the reader. For example, commas may indicate when a

person is stumbling over words, has a false start to a sentence or thought, or is repeating. Periods are used normally and indicate a complete thought. For example, notice the placement of the commas below:

**Eliza:** Yeah when I was staying [on John Ave.], I considered myself homeless yeah.

I, cause I spent, it was really weird, cause I  
yeah, I mean I was staying there, umm  
I guess by the end of it, I was much more comfortable, but I use to get  
it was like a halfway house, is how I felt. I would get up every morning and I'd  
leave the house all day.

Eliza is a very quick speaker and has a tendency to start sentences, and then jump into the next thought without fully completing the first. I try to keep the flow fast pace while making it easier for the reader to follow along. In the quote above, I also make use of square brackets; these indicate that I have altered the sentence somehow and, in most cases, it was to change a name to protect the participant's identity. Another way I indicate a forced change or emission is an ellipsis. I use them to sometimes omit tangents, and stumbles over words and thoughts. Even though the use of the ellipsis helps to 'tidy up' the participants' speech and keep the quotes on topic, I dislike using them, as I did not wish to alter the participants' speech even though at times it was necessary.

Tedlock (1983) explains that the idea that prose exists outside of the written word is false. He wrote that prose is unable to portray living speech because the silence is missing (1983:115). Silence is an important part of the speech pattern. Silence can tell us when people are struggling with what to say, hesitating on what they are saying, or doubting their answer. Silences can indicate when a person is confused, or may also be used to create suspense, among many other things. As Tedlock shows us with an example

from a Zuni narrative (1983:115), people may also string complete sentences together as they discuss something. Each person's speech pattern is slightly different and may vary depending on the topic and/or situation they are speaking in. This is why I believe that it is integral to keep as much of the natural flow of a participant's speech pattern intact within the written quotes in this thesis. The silences, breaks, pauses, and even thinking words such as 'like', 'ah', and 'um' are important in understanding how the speakers are expressing themselves and their experiences. As Patai explains, this way of transcribing allows us to not only learn

the "facts" of this woman's life, we can now proceed with a very different task that of trying to comprehend how a person verbally constructs an image of her life, how she creates a character for herself, how she becomes the protagonist of her own story. (1988:150)

### **3.3 Relationships with Participants**

Of course, my relationship with the participants affected each interview. The different ways in which I recruited each participant, and whether or not I knew them before the interview took place, seemed to also change the dynamic of the interviews altering both the interviewees', and my own comfort levels.

The comfort level of both a participant and myself during the interviews had a large impact on how much and what sort of data I received during the interview. In the two shortest interviews that I had, I was very uncomfortable. I was not sure if the participants of these two short interviews really wanted to be there to talk to me about their housing issues. In these interviews, I did not ask as many follow-up or probing questions because I was uncomfortable and found it difficult to relax. This of course changed the dynamic of the interview and changed the kind of data that I was able to

collect. After one of these interviews was complete, I wondered if there might have been outside pressure for her to share her experience with me. I had a dilemma about whether or not I should include this interview within my data because of my suspicions. I decided that, because I went over the consent form in detail with both participants, explaining verbally what they were there for and what I was going to do with the data, that perhaps my suspicions were unwarranted and that I would include the interviews in this thesis.

I felt that some of the male participants' motives for participating in this research were more than only wanting to share their experiences. These feelings were not completely unfounded as some of the male participants asked me if I would go on a date with them. I tried to be as clear as I could about our relationship, explaining why the interview was taking place, and that I could not as a part of my ethical code for the research and volunteering at The Gathering Place see them outside of the interviews or my days at The Gathering Place. One man even asked if he stopped going to The Gathering Place if I could go out with him then. This was a very difficult conversation to have with these participants, I did not want them to feel as if they were being used and I did grow fond of the participants and enjoyed the time I spent with them, getting to know them and listening to their stories.

In the collection of essays *Dispatches from the Field: Neophyte Ethnographers in a Changing World* (2006) anthropologists share their experiences about conducting fieldwork, and many authors discuss the boundaries between fieldwork and friendship. Kristen Drybread's (2006) article in this collection discusses the issues she faced while studying a Brazilian Juvenile Prison. Drybread explains that she came up against many bureaucratic obstacles throughout her fieldwork. About nine months into her fieldwork,

and after visiting the prison yard for those nine months, she was told that she was no longer allowed to visit the yard. Drybread was told that this was due to concerns for her safety and mainly a concern that she might get raped. Within this discussion, Drybread is clear to state that at no point did she ever feel at risk of being raped, but that she did receive attention of a sexual nature:

Rape, however, is not a danger. Despite the fact that I periodically received love notes and invitations to “feel what its like to *tregar com um bandido*” (fuck a gangster), I have always been able to deflect such overtures with candor or laughter—as the situation requires. The boys outwardly respected my “No.” Not one of them has made me fear the dangers of sexual assault. (2006:47)

The lines between researcher and friend can be very difficult to keep clear and has provided a struggle for anthropologists all over the world in many different research situations. The challenge of knowing what we, as researchers, owe our participants is very difficult to figure out, especially when deeply emotional topics are being discussed. The participant and researcher will naturally develop a bond and a sense of trust. Knowing the boundaries of these relationships is a trial and error process and differs from one research project and participant to the next.

I recruited the male participants differently from the way in which I recruited most of the women and one of the men. I believe this difference to be linked to the confusion about my interest in them. The men who seemed confused by my interest in their stories were all people I met through The Gathering Place where we had formed a friendship around playing pool, joking, and chatting. This, I think, created another level to the relationship; I did not initially consider having such an impact on their understanding of my academic interest in their lives. These exchanges altered the dynamic of subsequent

interviews and, I feel, had an impact on what they were willing to share with me about their lives. They knew me as more of a friend and making the switch to the interviewee and interviewer relationship was a little more difficult than it was with those participants with whom I had had no previous relationship. I found this also to be the case with the women I had known before the research began.

### **3.4 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter I have reviewed the methods I used to gain insight into the experiences of five men and ten women living with housing problems in St. John's. I have explained how I recruited the participants and how they identified with the research, making them voluntary self-referring participants. This is important to remember when reading the data on home and homelessness that follow in subsequent chapters. I have explained the importance of my interview style and the knowledge that can be gained from completing life story interviews which allow us to see the value placed on particular events within a person's life. Finally, I have commented on how I, as a researcher, affected the stories collected within the boundaries of my relationships with the participants and how these stories are represented through my transcriptions of the spoken interviews.

## Chapter Four: Homelessness and Being at Home

“At the end of the day, when I am going home  
I don’t feel like I am going home.” - *Betty*

### 4.1 Introduction

What exactly does it mean to feel homeless? The word homeless refers to a loss or absence of something, but what is it that is really missing? In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (N.d.) the term *homeless* is defined as: “having no home or permanent abode,” but what does this really mean that one is lacking? Home often holds a special spot in people’s hearts but it can mean a variety of different things for each of us, from family and friends, to a place where we can be ourselves. Home can also be a place of danger, violence, or entrapment (see Frohlick 1999; Bhattacharjee 2006). The participants in this research have made it clear that homelessness, and the feeling of homelessness, are much more than a lack of a roof over one’s head at night. Being homeless can signify a deep feeling of not belonging, it can be the feeling that you are intruding on someone else’s space, it can be the loss of family, such as a partner or children, and it can most certainly be sleeping in a tent, or car, because you have nowhere else to go. The two terms *home* and *homeless* are intertwined and it is difficult to discuss one without discussing the other. Throughout this research I have come to see that, when individuals feel homeless, it is often linked to their ideas of home.

In Watson and Austerberry’s (1986) study, mentioned in the introduction, they show how complicated feelings of homelessness are; these feelings are not as



straightforward as perhaps we would think. It is expected by many that, if you do not have a place to live, are sleeping in your car or in a shelter, or even squatting, you consider yourself to be homeless. Watson and Austerberry's study shows that this is not always the case. The women in their research who had no secure sleeping arrangements did not always think of themselves as homeless; in contrast, some of the women in their study who had shelter still thought of themselves as homeless. In my research, I came across similar "contradictions" and it has led me to question our understanding of homelessness. Within this chapter, I examine what *homeless* means and how it is problematic. I also discuss what being homeless meant to the participants, what *home* meant to them, and how these two ideas are linked and affect each other. Before I turn to these matters, I will give an overview of some research that has been completed along these lines. In the following section I discuss a very small fraction of the voluminous body of research completed on *homelessness* and *home* that is closely related to my findings. I first look at the term *homeless*, including how it has been defined, and the problems with the term.

#### **4.2 The Term *Homeless***

The concept of homelessness needs to be reconstructed if not abandoned. To a large extent the difficulties inherent derive from the notion of a 'home' and what that means. (Watson and Austerberry 1986:167)

This section looks at the deconstruction of the term *homeless*. As mentioned above, the term *homeless* is problematic as it is too broad and often does not reflect the actual lived experiences of those who have dealt with housing problems. I look at two key issues that Glasser and Bridgman (1999) have identified with defining *homeless*; first,

that there are many different types of living arrangements considered as fitting into the category of *homeless*; and, second, that those we think are homeless may not consider themselves to be homeless. Next to be discussed is Hulchanski's (2012) article on how *homeless* is a catch-all term that whitewashes the issues and helps to blame the individual for problems instead of emphasizing the real factors at hand. Keeping in mind the analysis and problems stated by Glasser and Bridgman (1999), and Hulchanski (2012), I suggest that we break down *homeless* into *sleeping rough*, *transitional institutional housing*, and *precarious housing*. These terms better reflect the lived experiences of individuals who are suffering in these difficult housing circumstances.

Glasser and Bridgman (1999) discuss two key issues to defining homeless and the impact these definitions can have. First, they mention Peter Rossi's conceptualization of homelessness. Rossi puts homelessness into two categories: those who live on the street and have "no access to conventional" housing, which he refers to as the "literally homeless," and those who have temporary or less conventional housing, which he refers to as the "precariously or marginally housed" (Glasser and Bridgman 1999:2). We must be able to differentiate between these two groups of people in order to discuss the issues properly and to put the proper policies in place for each group. The experiences of one group may not be the same as those of the other, and using the term *homeless* to encompass both unwisely lumps them together.

The second key issue Glasser and Bridgman discuss is that most anthropologists "use the self-appellation of the group under study" (1999:3). But within research on homelessness this can be tricky because, as is mentioned above, in Watson and Austerberry's (1986) research on British women's experiences with homelessness

(discussed by Glasser and Bridgman as well) some people do not think that they are homeless but also do not consider where they are living as home. Watson and Austerberry (1986) asked sixty women about their housing experiences. The two main questions they asked were “Do you think of yourself as being homeless?” and “What does the word homeless mean to you?”. Out of these women, 30 percent said that where they were living was not home; however, they did not see themselves as homeless either. On the other hand, 32 percent of the women thought that where they were living was home, but also referred to themselves as homeless (Glasser and Bridgeman 1999:3).

J. David Hulchanski (2012) provides a brief but informative history of the term *homelessness* in North America. He states that, in the 1980s, *homelessness* became the term for numerous social and economic failures. Before the 1980s, the term *homeless* was used to refer to transient men and it was used to refer to individuals who were no longer part of a family home. Some of these people were unhoused, but most lived in poor quality ‘skid row’ housing (Hulchanski 2012:4).

A major problem with *homeless*, which has been mentioned earlier, is the use of the word *home*. “Confusion is created by not making the distinction between the notions of *house*, the physical structure, and *home*, the social and psychological place that a house should be” (Hulchanski 2012:4). In the 1980s, as incomes fell, housing costs rose, and social programs were cut back, more and more people in wealthy nations found themselves with housing necessities (Hulchanski 2012:4). As these housing demands increased there was “a need to give a name to the obvious rise in the number and diversity of people finding themselves unhoused” and unfortunately the term *homeless* filled that need (Hulchanski 2012:4).

I think, as does Hulchanski (2012), that in order to eliminate or be closer to eliminating housing problems we must truly define what it is we are seeking to change. He brings our attention to the point that *homelessness* seems to make sense as a term because we can define people by a common fact, the lack of a secure and sufficient place to live. However, because we are then focusing on the individuals, instead of the real problems, it is easy to blame the people (Hulchanski 2012:4) as I discussed in the introductory chapter to this thesis with reference to structural violence theory and the ethnographies by Bridgman (2003), Connolly (2000), Liebow (1995), and Lyon-Callo (2004). Hulchanski goes on to say:

We need to clearly name specific societal injustices as social problems requiring action. Economic inequality is an injustice. Economic inequality exacerbated by prejudice and discrimination directed at certain specific groups is a more specific set of injustices we can better identify their characteristics, likely causes, and a range of possible responses. Aggregating many societal injustices into a catch-all term like “homelessness” is not helpful. We have a thirty-year history of doing just that. Who or what is better off today than in the 1980s? (Hulchanski 2012:3)

For this reason, and in agreement with Watson and Austerberry (1986), I approach the topic of struggles with housing from the perspective of a spectrum from outright ownership, and the security that comes with that, to sleeping rough. This is why I propose using the terms *sleeping rough*, *temporary institutional housing*, and *precarious housing* instead of *homeless* when discussing people’s lack of physical and conventional housing. As previously mentioned, *sleeping rough* is used to refer to those sleeping and living on the street, in tents, cars, and so on; *temporary institutional housing* for individuals in shelters and other emergency housing structures; and *precarious housing* to refer to living arrangements that are outside of institutional housing, such as squatting, staying with

friends and family, living in unstable and/or in poor conditions. Those living in precarious housing are often called the hidden homeless. Precariously housed individuals may not be able to stay where they are currently living, are in danger of losing this arrangement, or the physical structure is unsuitable. The next section will discuss *home* itself, what that means and how it may affect one's idea of homelessness.

#### **4.3 Relevant Research on Concepts of Home**

This section discusses how participants in three studies understood home through their life experiences. I will first look at Cameron Parsell's (2012) article and his research on the idea of home among those sleeping rough in Brisbane, Australia in 2007-2008 and how these experiences changed the way they think about home. Home, for these individuals, starts with a physical structure. Next, I will discuss Peter Kellett and Jeanne Moore's (2003) research on homeless youth and the process of home-making in the 1990s. For the individuals involved in this research, home is more than just a roof. The last study I will discuss in this section is Einat Peled and Amit Muzicant's (2008) research on what home means to young Israeli women who have run away from their family "homes". They look at the difference between home as a concept and the women's actual homes. To these young women, the ideal home is a positive place; however, the actual homes they describe are discussed as if they were prisons. The last part of this section discusses the phrase *bereft-of-home* and how I believe this phrase helps us to discuss the emotional aspect of being without a home, which I argue is missed when we use the term homeless.

In Parsell's (2012) article he examines what home means to those who are sleeping rough in Brisbane, Australia. For this article, Parsell selected 20 participants out of his larger research group to focus on questions of home; all 20 of these individuals self-identified as homeless. Parsell finds two main themes with regards to the meaning of home for these 20 people. The first is that a physical shelter was important to the participants' idea of home, and the second is that *home* is a strong ideal that many focused on, even if they never had a good home while growing up.

Parsell (2012) explains that, because the participants were sleeping rough, physical shelter was essential as a starting point to the creation of a home. They wanted and needed to get out of public places so they would feel safe and have more control over their lives. In this case, a home was synonymous with a house and was understood as being the opposite of sleeping rough. Dwellings' physical structures were rarely discussed when participants were asked about home. Parsell (2012) also states that participants did not give any detail about the housing structures, but discussed these as places in which they would live. In my research, I also found that when asked, "What is home?" many of the participants would start with a place, but not describe the physical structure, and then move into a discussion of more of the emotional and abstract aspects. We cannot completely separate the physical need of housing from *home*, but the idea of *home* is much more than just a physical structure. Parsell (2012) makes this abundantly clear in his findings as well stating:

While it is not useful to conflate home with housing, and recognising that the meanings of home have been extended by psychological and emotional dimensions, for those in this study, housing and home were synonymous. More specifically, the physical structure that housing provides was a necessary requirement in order for them to ‘feel’ or ‘be’ at home’. (2012:170)

The second point that Parsell (2012) makes about home is that his participants had a very strong ideal of what *home* is and should be. *Home* was seen as the solution to their problems, or at least the starting point, and none of the negative sides of home were mentioned in the participants’ descriptions of a home. This was also true in my research as none of my participants mentioned negative feelings about a future home, although there were often negative feelings attached to homes of the past. Parsell states:

Nearly all people in this study described that they had never or rarely experienced positive homes or positive life experiences prior to homelessness. They spoke about past family ‘homes’ that were abusive, or families and experiences at ‘home’ they felt unconnected to... None of these life experiences, however, were mentioned when people in this study spoke about what home was to them. Their constructions of what home was, and their expectations of what life would be like with a home, therefore, were often not based on homes they had previously experienced. (2012:169)

It is through Parsell’s (2012) qualitative research examples that we can see how *home* is idealized and how strong these stereotypes are. Parsell (2012) shows that his participants not only used their lived experiences to define *home*, but they also used the surrounding culturally hegemonic ideas. The participants saw having a home as a way to gain a ‘normal’ way of life and to become part of mainstream society (Parsell 2012:169).

Kellett and Moore (2003) examine what *home* means for homeless youth in Dublin, Ireland and London, England, and for informal dwellers in Santa Marta, Colombia. They state that, in order to understand the experience and meaning of homelessness, we must

examine “the relative meanings and experiences of home” (Kellett and Moore 2003:123).

In order to do this they look at the process of and common purposes of home-making in each place, but without trying to find universal meanings of home and housing. Kellett and Moore state:

By taking examples from homeless and transitional contexts, the emphasis naturally shifts away from bricks and mortar towards the personal, social and cultural transformations that may assist people in the move towards greater stability and social inclusion. (2003:124)

Kellett and Moore (2003), along with Parsell (2012), argue that the idea of *home* can provide a path to feelings of belonging. The goal of having a home and what that means within society can “shape and motivate homeless people’s experience and behaviour” (Kellett and Moore 2003:124).

Kellett and Moore (2003) show that the lack of a home can indicate social exclusion and that “striving for a home could be critical to redefining a place in society and establishing a sense of belonging” which can provide a path back into mainstream society (Kellett and Moore 2003:137). Depending on the cultural context, being in London, Dublin or Santa Marta, these paths will vary and take different forms.

The emphasis on personal, social and physical aspects of home helps to highlight the often neglected fact that home does not come with a roof, but is a more complex process that builds over time, and which is a myriad of personal, social, cultural and physical qualities (Kellett and Moore 2003: 131).

Peled and Muzicant (2008) researched what *home* means to Israeli “girls”<sup>28</sup> who have run away from home. *Home* in the case of this research meant simultaneously each

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<sup>28</sup> Peled and Muzicant use the term girls to refer to their participants whom they state are between the ages of 13 and 21.



girl's home, and also the concept of home in general. Peled and Muzicant also sought to discover what locations were thought of by the girls to be home and how they "created a sense of homeliness" (2008:437). Peled and Muzicant (2008) found that home was present in the lives of the young women who participated in two main ways: "as a conceptualization of the ideal home and the description of the actual home" (2008:439). The ideal home was a place of love and warmth; however, the actual homes they experienced were described as being like a prison. Linked with the feeling that 'home is a prison' are feelings of being homeless in one's own home. Peled and Muzicant state:

The home as it is "supposed to be" did not exist and they had no alternative home to go to. Many girls felt they were homeless within their own home, either occasionally or all the time...For these girls, the distinction between a well-ordered, protected interior and a chaotic world outside did not exist. Home was not a refuge from the outside world. It did not provide protection but rather inflicted injury. (2008:442)

For some of the participants, feeling homeless in one's own home is an important aspect of their reality. Once again, the feeling of not belonging and the idea of being imprisoned contributed to the sense of feeling homeless, as will be discussed below.

When the young women ran away from their "homes", they did not gain a sense of freedom or liberation. Peled and Muzicant state that the girls described running away as an attempt to escape a "lack of space where they were trapped all alone, not knowing how to escape or where to escape to" (2008:442). The action of running away can be understood as an attempt by these young women to find a better home and to lessen the difference between their idea of how home should be, and how home is (Peled and Muzicant 2008:443).

There are three main themes in these articles. The first is that how one understands

one's experiences with being homeless affects one's idea of home. Secondly, home is an emotional place as opposed to only a physical place. It is a path to belonging somewhere. The last is that there are strong ideals about what a home should be and when these ideals do not match up to people's lives, they feel that something is missing; they long to belong.

In my research, these three themes are also evident. Part of the emotions that have been attached to the feeling of being homeless by the participants is feeling out of place where they are, and thinking that they do not have a claim on the space in which they live. There is also a sense of loss of place and intimate relationships associated with cohabitation, such as partners and/or children to which one formerly belonged. In relation to this theme, Watson and Austerberry explain:

A problem with the concept of homelessness is the notion of a 'home'. A 'house' is generally taken to be synonymous with a dwelling or a physical structure, whereas a 'home' is not. A 'home' implies particular social relations, or activities within a physical structure, whereas a 'house' does not. The home as a social concept is strongly linked with a notion of family – the parental home, the marital home, the ancestral home. The word 'home' conjures up such images as personal warmth, comfort, stability and security, it carries a meaning beyond the simple notion of a shelter. (1986:8)

Despite *home* on its own being understood as constituting more than shelter, *homelessness* on the other hand is thought of as only a lack of shelter. Precarious housing does bring to mind some of the emotional states, as well as referring to the physical lack of comfort, instability, and the possible loss of housing which in turn brings up feelings of uncertainty and stress. This is why I believe, as mentioned before, that we need to have another phrase, *bereft-of-home*, to refer to the emotional and mental aspects of housing need; the feeling that one is home-less. Bereft-of-home better describes this feeling of

lacking a home and brings to mind a sense of loss that is more than just the lack of a physical shelter. This phrase works with Jackson's (1995) idea of being-at-home-in-the-world and how home is "lived as a relationship" (Jackson 1995:154) between oneself and the world one lives in. Being bereft-of-home is the feeling that people have about losing the connection between themselves and what they consider to be home. Being bereft-of-home is still a broad term as the meaning of *home* changes from person to person, but it allows us to differentiate between sleeping rough, temporary institutional housing, precarious housing and the feeling of lacking a home. Now it is time to look at what the participants had to say about these ideas.

#### **4.4 Participants' Experiences with Home and being Bereft-of-Home**

In this section, I examine what the participants in this research said about *home* and *homelessness* by comparing and contrasting the two ideas. I look at the abstract ideas the informants have of home, along with their actual experience of home; I do the same for the concept of homeless. When carrying out these interviews, I had not yet found the words to describe my concerns with *homeless* as a term. Therefore, in my discussion with the participants we did use the term *homeless*. In my analysis of what they have said, I explore their experiences through the four terms: *sleeping rough*, *temporary institutional housing*, *precarious housing*, and *bereft-of-home*. Throughout this section, you will see that *home* is described as many things by the participants: comfort (safety, security, and stability), privacy, a sense of belonging, and the presence of people (family and/or friends). *Homelessness* was described as many things as well: missing family, having no options, feeling trapped, and so on.

In this section of chapter four, I have grouped together the participants' experiences and discussed different themes that run throughout the interviews. They are: "A Home of the Past", "Moving Back in with Family", "Back Home and Bereft-of-home", and "Staying in Temporary Institutional Housing but not *Homeless*." Because we are looking at real life experiences, these themes are not black and white with clear-cut boundaries. To pretend that the experiences of the participants and analysis of these life situations are anything but messy would understate the emotional turmoil that these events have caused the participants. I thus avoid splitting the dialogue into small bits to fit my categories; many quotes bleed into other categories. Throughout all of the sections in this chapter, I discuss three more themes brought out by the research discussed above: how individual experiences of homelessness affect one's understanding of what home is, home as an emotional place, and the strong ideals of what home should be. These themes will be more prevalent in some sections than others.

I start by examining what Tom had to say about his experiences. Tom's ideas and thoughts on home and homelessness were much different from those of most of the other participants.

*Tom*

"Nature in and of herself is the home of the soul."  
- *Tom*

Tom discusses the ideas of both being homeless and home in a much more abstract way than any other participant. His heritage and beliefs in the Inuit way of life brought many different aspects into our discussion that were not touched on with any other participant. Tom started our dialogue about the idea of being *homeless* with the stereotypical image of homelessness, but quickly moved into the idea that being poor is

lacking in good nature, not material objects, and therefore to be homeless is to be spiritually poor. Home, for Tom, is happiness; it is nature and being-at-home with yourself and the world around you. Jackson's (1995) research with Aboriginal people in Australia echoes Tom's views. Jackson has come to understand home as more than people, places, or things. For both Jackson (1995) and Tom, home is a relationship individuals have with the world around them.

**Nicole:**...When you think homeless what do you think of?

**Tom:** Ahum

I guess ah

the

maybe the most popular one is a Bum on the street.

Humm

not looking so well, and hungry, and alone and

lonely and

hungry

sad

like, very much in motivation

begging, asking for money on the street.

But aah

being a Native person aah

like when I was growing up

poverty materially

well poverty in itself, wasn't really, I guess on a material level, wasn't really an issue.

Like, we weren't fancy about

having to get stuff

materially.

We're okay

being poor and we didn't know

that poverty would be an issue.

But it was

an issue when it was told

that

we were  
if we didn't have  
nice material things.  
...They were starting to teach us about shame.  
They were giving us shame  
saying you can't be that way.

So when you start feeling  
this is my thinking  
aah  
start being humiliated  
and being almost second class  
to White people  
cause they like material stuff  
aah

that's the basis  
or definition of being rich or successful.  
...We didn't have a problem with poverty but our sense of poverty was on the  
spiritual level.  
Humm  
like, if you are not a nice person then you are poor  
in your spirit

and that's more  
that's

infinitely more important than

more valuable in that frame of mind than thinking what we think is  
materially important.

...So you don't want to be a bad person  
so I guess in that sense

that's what we call  
aah  
being poor.  
Being spiritually poor.  
And ahh

not a whole lot of people know that  
aah  
the name  
I mean they might know the name but they don't know what it means

the name of the northern mountain of Labrador

...

The word is Torngat but it means aah

‘Place of the spirit’

aah

I think Inuit recognized there’s  
like Labrador has an old feeling to it

and I think Inuit  
recognize that  
like ah

it’s like our ancie,  
an ancient beauty there  
an old  
soul, or an old  
ancient spirit there.

Anyone  
any human being can believe  
or be comfortable with thinking that nature  
aah,  
has an essence  
that’s beautiful  
and perfect.  
You feel comfortable with it when you go outside  
it has  
resonance within you.

Ummm  
and that’s what I think Torngat means, that nature  
in and of  
herself is the home of the soul.

Ahum

but if you are not a very spiritual person

you may not get that feeling so

you might be homeless almost like in that sense.

You know homeless spiritually cause you're not a very nice person,

like you don't have a place in the world

because you're a bad person.

Nobody wants to be with you

no

cause you're giving off

spiritually bad feelings.

Which is ahumm

a catch umm

what do you call a catch 20-20?

Humm

if you're taught to be materially successful

you need to be formally and academically mindfully educated

not to be nice spiritual

aah

so people who are

prefer let's say being like me,

being artistic

ah

are more free and more time

in the world.

aah

so someone who becomes homeless

aahum

they are taught that their value

is not good like

aah

they are taught to be spiritually bad

and if you are taught to be spiritually bad then you can't be motivated to be formally educated

when formal education doesn't look at spirit

spirituality as a good thing.

Do you see where I am trying to go?

N: I think so, yup.



**T:** Like if you are being formally  
academically

clinically trained and educated  
you're not taught about  
even religion at university,<sup>29</sup> here at MUN is almost bastardized  
even  
some much so.

They try to look at it even in a bad way  
saying religion is bad

they don't see it as ah  
basis of what is supposed to be good.

So if you're being taught something that is supposed to be good as bad

then you're going to be a bad person and  
you're not going to be,  
you'll be sitting  
in a front desk in your office  
and in a not very nice person.  
You're getting lots of money in, you're rich in that sense, but  
you're almost like  
spiritually homeless.

As a person who is actually homeless and maybe a very nice person but not  
educated formally.

...

**N:** So for you when you say that you were homeless, what do you mean at that  
time in your life?

**T:** Hum

I guess, aah

I value what I learnt.

What I was going through  
that no one can take that away

but on a material level I was poor.

**N:** ...So going more

---

<sup>29</sup> Memorial University of Newfoundland does have a Religious Studies program that offers  
courses in which one can learn about many religions.

back like what Western society would say  
homeless,  
the Bum on the street  
**T:** Well if I could be  
if I could be native  
and myself  
homelessness means being spiritually poor.

**N:** ...So then what would home mean to you?

**T:** Humm

I guess aah

Happiness.

...A home  
a real happiness is the heart.

...Nature is the home of the soul

and the city is home in  
material things.  
Home of,  
yeah of material things.

**N:** So where you're living now  
would you call that home?

**T:** Aah

no.

I try not to think of it that way at all.

If anything I would say I am borrowing it  
and that's  
because of my philosophy

my belief.

I'm afraid, I'm scared to call it my home materially  
'cause umm  
if that's the case it might be snatched away from me just like that.  
If I get attached to something material

Ah

it's going to be taken away from me by

...whom I call God or Creator or  
Great Spirit.

So I always try and look at it as, aah

it's not mine  
I am just kind of taking care of it.

I mean

I'm perfectly I think I'm perfectly okay  
being guilty and saying  
I'm  
I'm, might be lucky  
that I might have a whole building to myself  
and an apartment  
where I can do anything, decorate it and I have decorated it  
umm very much  
compared to when I first moved in  
it is very different  
and it's more  
nicer and colourful in there.

So my philosophy is to stay away from calling it, aah  
a conventional home.

...  
in my belief as a spiritual person

but, aah, I guess in the meantime it is

aah

physically

and I tried to  
go into the mindset that it is more and more all the time.

aah  
when I was with my friend, umm

I, it's perfectly okay on the civ, civil level  
on the society level  
that, aah  
you go in somebody's home  
you respect it.

They  
they develop their own standards  
aah  
standards of living with their home.

But I, I told her

it's not really your home.  
It's your  
your kind of like borrowing it

and I think she was more adamant  
about  
no this is my home.

I guess, aah  
because of my  
trying to change my mindset  
I think about place, physical place as  
shimmer or illusion.

For Tom, the term homeless has two separate meanings; his lived experiences with sleeping rough, and his cultural and spiritual understanding. In an e-mail I received from him when we were setting up the interview, he explained his circumstances to me and referred to himself as being homeless a few times. He stated that he and a friend had slept under a bridge for two weeks about five or six years before. In this e-mail he explained how it felt when he was sleeping rough, how it was cold and lonely, but it could have been worse if his friend had not been with him and if he did not have his spirituality to help him. This meaning of homeless is not one that Tom wished to discuss when I asked him what homeless meant in the interview. As we saw above, when asked

what homeless is Tom explains his cultural and spiritual understanding of homelessness. He says that poverty is not poverty in the material things, but if you are not a nice person, you are poor in spirit; this means that you are not connected to the world or the relationship you have with the world is poor.

Tom mentions ‘Torngat’– meaning ‘Place of the Spirit’– in order to explain that, to him, nature is the home of the soul. If you are not a good person, you will not feel at home with nature and you will be homeless. He says that home is “real happiness in the heart” and the physical house in which he stays cannot be his home because that can be taken away from him. When Tom was sleeping rough, he considered himself homeless in the sense that he did not have physical shelter, but he did not feel bereft-of-home because home was his relationship with the world around him, and no matter where he is living he will have full control over that relationship.

#### *4.4.1 A Home of the Past*

Dave, John, Rob, and Marg all talk about a home of the past with regard to their family. For Dave, home is his mother’s house and he does not believe he will feel at *home* until he settles down with a woman. John says that he did not have a home because he was in foster care while growing up. Rob lost his home when he lost contact with his children. And Marg states that she lost her home and community when she left her abusive husband. This section examines the similarities and differences among these four

informants' experiences through specific events<sup>30</sup> in their lives and how *home* is and was family to them.

*Dave*

When I asked Dave what *home* was to him, his answer was not focused on physical shelter, but a particular place—his mother's house. The physical structure of this location is not what makes it *home* for Dave. It is the memories and feelings attached to his mother's house that makes him feel this way. Dave explains that *home* is the place where he grew up, a place that has history, and that there was a certain type of comfort associated with it. It is a place that is consistent and stays the same in his otherwise turbulent life.

In the first interview I had with Dave, he discussed his relationship with his mother and her house in a very positive light. However, in the second interview he told me that when he found himself with nowhere to live in 2009, his mother would not let him come back to live with her. This is when he slept rough, first on the street and then in a tent in downtown St. John's. This lasted one week and then Dave said that he could not handle it anymore and went to The Wiseman Centre. This is, I think, a very interesting point as Dave states that his mother's house is home and that it will always be there for him; however, when he needed her support, in this instance, she was unwilling to aid him. This is not to say she has never helped him, for when Dave came back from Alberta with

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<sup>30</sup> I am using events here as Jackson uses 'event', as mentioned in the Introduction, to refer to a happening when something important is taking place or when a memorable or momentous occasion has occurred where the "questions of right and wrongful conduct are felt to be matters of life and death" (Jackson 2005:xxix-xxx).

a cocaine addiction, and when his relationship broke down with the mother of his child, he moved back in with his mother for a period of time. Dave explains though that at these other points in his life he had some money, but when he was refused help he did not. Despite these facts, Dave still considers his mother's house *home* and a consistent place that will always be there for him.

**Dave:** Mom's  
that's home  
that's home sweet home.  
When I go out, when I gets to walk through Mom's door.  
I take a deep breath and  
relax. I knows I am home then, right.  
I knows I can go upstairs and that's my bed.  
That's where I  
that's where Mom caught me drinkin' many times and  
when I was growin' up right.  
...You grow up and that ye house.  
...Home is home  
where you grew up to.  
Right, you know?  
That's the only way I can say what home is  
right.  
I can't say an apartment in here or an apartment I had last week or an apartment I  
had last month or last year.  
Home is home. It is where you grow up...  
Home will always be Mom's house.  
**Nicole:** So is that the house that you grew up?  
Was the house that she has now is that  
**D:** No,  
but it was always be home to me right.  
...Mom is Mom right now, Dad is Dad but, you know, yeah.  
Mom's is home.  
...Go 'nd see Dad for a bit, but go home to Mom's right,  
You know.  
**N:** How about this new apartment you are in now? Would you consider that a  
home? Cause before you said that  
nowhere you have been in St. John's has been a home for you.  
**D:** The experience I had in the last year and a half Nicole has seriously, is  
turned me off of St. John's.  
Ah, I don't want to be here no more, ahum.  
But the place I got is

best place I've lived in the city.  
Right it's got, I'm comfortable there like.  
Everything I wants and needs is there right.  
It's just  
you know  
feels comfortable there right,  
it's my little sanctuary but it is not a home, it will never be home right.  
You know home is  
now home where you grew up to right.  
But regards to you home, y'er Mom's or home...where you grew up to right.

In the second part of this quotation, I ask Dave if he would consider the new apartment he is living in *home*. He states that the new place is great and comfortable and he feels like it is his "little sanctuary", but that this apartment is not home. Only his mom's house, or his hometown, will be home. It is clear that, for Dave, the connection or sense of belonging he has with his mother's house is what makes her house *home*. He states that his mother's current house is not the house he grew up in, yet he still considers that house his home, where he knows he can go upstairs and find his bed. It is this sense of belonging that Dave feels is home. He does not seem to get the same sense of belonging from where he is living, or anywhere he has lived in St. John's and I think this is because of his lack of connection with the space. He does not have a feeling of being-at-home-in-the-world (Jackson 1995). Jackson concludes that home is "a balanced reciprocity between the world beyond us and the world within which we move" (1995:154) and, for Dave, this balance is only complete at his mom's house, in the town he grew up in. There are no memories; there is no family in his apartment in St. John's. It is just him and he feels bereft-of-home in these places.

Dave said to me often that the only way he would feel at home within St. John's is if he settled down with a woman and they started a family. This makes me believe that



home, for Dave, is linked with family and a place where he feels he has a purpose and will always belong. Dave had been living with a woman, and they have a son. I believe by the way he discussed this relationship and his comments on finding a woman to live with, that he did feel at home with the mother of his child when they were living together. When this relationship broke down, it altered how Dave understood *home* and how easily he could lose this feeling.

In our discussions of homelessness, Dave states that he thinks an individual chooses to be homeless and he defines *homelessness* as not having shelter to sleep under. He says it is having “nothing over your head” and that it is “having to sleep under the stars or in a tent.” Dave also comments that *homelessness* is “no place to lay your head...you’re homeless when you got nowhere to go.” Although he himself did not choose to sleep rough, he does blame himself for why he spent time living in a tent and considered himself as having been homeless at that point. His views here are slightly “contradictory”. Dave has a home, his mother’s house, but he does not feel he lives in a home. The latter left him feeling bereft-of-home; he is missing his own home. He says that homelessness is a choice, but yet he did not choose to sleep rough and considered himself to be homeless. I think this contradiction stems from Dave’s blaming himself for when he had to sleep rough. He knows he did not choose to sleep rough, but blames himself for the decisions that he made that led up to that moment. Philippe Bourgois (2004) states, while discussing his research participants, that “they succumb to symbolic

violence<sup>31</sup> by not only failing to see the structural dynamics oppressing them, but by actually blaming themselves for their failure to achieve the American Dream.” (2004:307)

As in the case of Bourgois’ participants, Dave blamed only himself for the situation he was in and thought negatively of himself because he did not have the ideal home (or was not living a version of this same “American Dream” which affects Canadians also through mass media).

*John*

John also thinks of *homelessness* as generally resulting from choices that people make and he does not identify the period during which he slept in his car as being homeless. He says he was not homeless because he could turn to his family and that it was not completely his fault why things happened this way. John left his common-law partner<sup>32</sup> after his daughter passed away and lived in his car for three days while he looked for a place to live. This was a very difficult period in his life. Below, John and I discuss what he believes *home* to be and what it means to be homeless.

**Nicole:** So have you ever considered yourself homeless at any point in your life?

**John:** No.

**N:** No?

When you were sleeping in your car for three days you didn’t?

**J:** No jeez, I wasn’t homeless.

I could have went to any family members.

Yeah, I just don’t talk to my family. I don’t, well I was gave up for adoption. I don’t talk, I don’t associate myself with my family.

**N:** But you felt that you could have went to them if you had to?

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<sup>31</sup> Symbolic violence here is borrowed from Bourdieu and is “the violence that is often ‘mis-recognized’ for something else, usually something good” (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004:21) and “*the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity*” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004:272).

<sup>32</sup> John refers to her as his wife but they were not officially married.

**J:** Oh jeez, yes.  
They would have took me in open heart I guess.  
Yeah.

Yeah.  
I s'pose. I don't know.  
Never tried it.  
Right.  
It is usually them phoning me for something.  
**N:** How would you define homelessness?

**J:** Someone that chooses to stay on the street.  
Because the person doesn't want  
to be or has a lack or trust in other people, to be around other people in a room.  
So they deserve, they decide to stay out away from everybody. That's homeless.

Homeless is a choice, I think.

To a certain degree because The Wiseman Centre is down there.  
They can take ya in. I don't know what the place is like but apparently it is not too  
bad there, and now it got new renovations.  
And I mean you got, years ago yeah I can see it, but not this day and age.  
...I think that if you're homeless you brought it on yourself, to a certain degree.

Not that I don't pity people...cause I do...

**N:** So what does home mean to you?

**J:** I don't have a home.

**N:** You don't have a home?

**J:** I was brought into this world naked  
and I am sure I will go out of the world naked.

I don't, I don't.  
When you talk about family and stuff like that it is pretty much wrong.  
You can't even talk to me about that cause I never had a family. Like I said I had  
seven foster homes before I was eight to nine-ten-year-old, man.  
So as far as loving, someone loving me as a kid, nobody loved me as a kid. I was  
just passed around because somebody might have wanted a few extra bucks, you  
know take care of this kid, or whatever.  
I'm not a stupid person I knew when I was at a young age four-five-year-old that I  
didn't belong to anybody.  
You know what I mean....

**N:** ...Would you say that home would be family then? Is that kind of

**J:** Home is what you make of it, I think.

Home would have to have people in it yes.

No.

Home is where you can go lay your hat, just say "Yeah, okay, I am peaceful I am home."

...I not saying that home

home wouldn't

home is where you live,

not saying it not going to be lonely.

You know at first it wasn't for me and now that I am dealing with [my daughter's] death I find it lonely...

**N:** ...Would you consider where you are now home?

**J:** No.

Nope.

Cause I not content there. Not happy, you know what I mean?

I not safe.

I mean I safe as a man can be you know.

I mean but no.

Home is safe I guess.

Security.

You know what I mean.

It was like when I was with her.<sup>33</sup> Like,

you know, if I didn't have it, like you know, she, she had it. Like, she had it together, I had it together, like you know.

The house need to be clean, I was there to clean it, or she was there, it was her that done it.

That was the difference like right.

Most men won't have done that.

Most men go home, or go to work, come home

lie back let a fart out of 'em, slide back on the couch, and watch the news.

I wasn't like that right.

I couldn't very well do it anyway four youngsters running around.

---

<sup>33</sup> His ex-common law partner.

John discusses many things above. He speaks about *homelessness* as being a choice, and even though he slept in his car for three nights, he did not think of himself as homeless because he knew he could go to his family. Having the feeling that he could turn to family, though he did not, changed John's understanding of his situation. It is interesting that, later on, John states that he has no home and that his family had never really been there for him while he was growing up. I think that this is a good example of how structural violence is at work. John thinks of homelessness as a choice. The stigma and general understanding of how one becomes *homeless* are not how he views his own situation. While I think that John believes he chose to leave his partner and chose to sleep in his car over going to family (or to a shelter), I do not think that these choices were really *choices* as many external forces pushed him into the situation. These events and "choices" in his life are symptoms of structural violence.

We can see that there is a bit of contradiction in what John is saying; he chose to sleep in his car and thinks homelessness is a choice but yet does not see himself as homeless because he had other options that he did not take advantage of, such as going to family. These contradictions point to the internal struggle between one's lived experience and social expectations and assumptions about how one comes to struggle with housing.

In the above selected dialogue, John mentions that he was in foster and group homes while growing up. These "homes" were never a "private" place for John as "public" entities such as Child, Youth, and Family services were always part of the picture; the state's power did not stop at his door. He also never really had a stable environment growing up; he lived in precarious housing, as there was always a threat of his current living arrangement being lost in one way or another. John felt as though he

“didn’t belong to no one”. He had no sense of being-at-home-in-the-world while growing up and he lost this sense again when he left the home he built with his partner and their children.

In the middle of this interview, I asked John what *home* meant to him. John says that he does not have a home and, when I probed that statement, he immediately started to talk about how he did not have a family. I think what John is saying is that *home* is where the family that you make is and it is a safe place where you feel secure and have the ability to be yourself. While trying to explain home, John brings up the security in knowing that his ex-common law partner was there to help with bills, household chores, and raising their children. Without this security, John feels that he is lacking a home, he is bereft-of-home, but does not feel homeless in the traditional sense of the word.

Dave and John both bring up being homeless as a choice. Both men said that when others are homeless it is a choice and understand their own situations as a series of decisions, but not ones of choice. Dave decided to sleep in a tent for a week and then later decided to go to The Wiseman Centre. John decided to leave his partner and then decided to sleep in his car instead of going to family for help. Neither of the decisions made by these men were made with many other options. The difference between them is that Dave saw himself as being homeless and John did not. Dave felt he had no other choices but to sleep in the tent and then go to The Wiseman Centre. John, in contrast, felt he could still go to family if he wanted and therefore, he still had options; he did not feel as though he was trapped or forced into a sleeping rough like Dave was.

Another commonality between Dave and John is that when asked about *home*, both of them started to discuss family. Dave stated that home was his mother’s house and

John stated he did not have a home because he was passed around when he was a child and did not belong to anyone. Dave did not have the best childhood but he did, or does now, feel like he belongs at his mother's house. For John, however, he never had this feeling of belonging while growing up.

Neither of the men considers where they are living to be *home*. As mentioned above, Dave said that he would not feel as though where he is living is home until he settles down with a woman and gets married. For John, he comments on the security that he felt when living with his ex-partner as part of what home was for him; without that partnership, John feels bereft-of-home along with Dave. Rob also fits into this discussion, and as we will see below for Rob, family, his ex-wife and children, are his *home*.

#### *Rob*

Rob, like John and Dave, thinks of family as his *home* and when he lost connection with his family, he felt homeless despite having an apartment in St. John's. Rob struggles with his mental health and he has been diagnosed as having a bipolar disorder. After many years of marriage and three children, Rob's wife kicked him out of the house. Although Rob did not discuss many of the details that led up to that night or the night itself, he did state that the police were involved in this incident. It was at this point that Rob began to sleep rough and live precariously. At the time of interview, he had an apartment in St. John's. Below, Rob and I discuss his situation and what *home* is to him.

**Nicole:** How long did you feel that you were homeless?

**Rob:** I still feel homeless because, you know what it is a state of mind.

I try to explain to people, they don't understand is that once you lost your family

you know, that's that is home.

Family is home.

And so, if I'm living

in a dive of a room in Toronto, or my half decent apartment here, there is still a sense of being homeless because I've lost everything. I tell people

you know, I've lost my family and so

you sort of try and establish a sense of home but

when, when you've had a real home and family and you lose that...

**N:**...If you could just talk a little bit more about

or explain, what you mean when you say homeless?

**R:**...Well like, I said, I think I already, I sort of described it as

I mean, I would never patronize you, but I'm guessing you are in your mid 20s?

**N:** 26.

**R:** Okay.

And, so like I am 48. So you know, like I

I had

you know, your typical life, where you have a wife you have three kids. You do anything you can to support them.

And that's to me what home is.

...It's more than a physical place.

It's you know it's your family. It's people that you are driven to succeed for.

...Sure, I have a physical home up there on [Lowwater Drive], but

It gets mighty lonely when you stop in the middle of the night and you're all by yourself and you reflect.

And so, you know, yes

I've stuck some of my photos on the wall to give myself, "Yes Rob you belong in this

apartment".

And yet there is an emptiness.

You know, I think that is the best way to describe it.

No I'm not homeless

physically but

you know, like I say, for me it is like a state of mind.

...What does home mean?

Well home.

Is ah

a sense of routine.

A sense of security.

It ah,

I mean to me, home to me, has always been family.

And like I say I keep harping on that.

But,



that's, I mean, that's...  
still such a sense of loss in my life.  
Like, I know two years might sound like a long time  
...I met my wife in [the 1980s]...I was living with her in [in a large Canadian  
city] and so...  
you know a quarter of a century, pretty well  
I had a sense of home.  
You know, I was raising kids.  
I was doing my best providing for the family and  
you know, felt good about my life, despite struggling with mental illness.  
As I said every two to three years  
and ah  
it still feels, there is this sense that of emptiness, and that's why it's hard 'ta.  
Like, I say for me  
you know being  
basically  
say twice your age and  
you know, I had  
stability, I had something to,  
to work for everyday.  
I had children I loved dearly  
And ah,  
it still feels fresh, I mean I'm over the anger,  
this about the ex-spouse.  
But  
there's still such a sense of loss that, you know  
my children  
refuse to talk to their father.  
And so that's why  
no matter where I finally, if I buckle down and I say  
okay I am going to live in St. John's for say two or three years  
there will still be, you know a sense of emptiness.  
And so, for me that's what I mean by homelessness.  
Is  
you know, I can have a physical home but it won't really feel like a home. I don't  
know if you can understand  
...I feel homeless in that sense, that ah  
you know, I've lost  
the family  
that  
that security, that  
you know that sense of purpose in life.  
And, ahum  
maybe I'll  
I'll

illuminate and get over looking backwards  
and then  
you know find more inner peace  
and then  
things will fall into place.  
And maybe it won't take being in a relationship again to have a sense of home.  
Maybe I will  
reconcile myself to the fact that because I suffer from mental illness  
maybe I'm not doomed. But  
destined to never be in a relationship again because I may never find someone  
strong enough to,  
you know  
tolerate living with someone who every few years goes crazy.

For Rob, *home* is more than a physical place. It is a family. It is a sense of belonging, routine, security, and stability. To be *homeless*, Rob says, is a state of mind and for him it is closely linked with his loss of contact with his family. Rob said it is the feeling of emptiness, when in the middle of the night there is no one around, and the loss of importance when there is no one to take care of, or help provide for. The relationship he has with the world around him no longer provides the satisfaction and sense of purpose it once did. Rob no longer feels a "balanced reciprocity between the world beyond [him] and the world within which [he] move[s]" (Jackson 1995:154).

At one point in the above quotation, Rob says that he put pictures up in his apartment to make himself feel like he belongs there, but without his family he cannot consider this to be his home. This shows us that one can start the process of turning a physical place into a home, but without key factors one can still feel homeless. Rob states that he hopes one day he will be able to feel at home once more after time passes and he begins to become comfortable with the idea of being on his own. The phrase bereft-of-home works very well in Rob's situation as he states that being homeless is a mental state and feeling for him. Bereft-of-home gives us the ability to put words to these feelings

instead of having to qualify how he feels homeless while having an apartment. It is the emptiness of his house that causes Rob to feel bereft-of-home.

Parsell's (2012) notion that home is an ideal that individuals strive for in order to become part of mainstream society is also seen here in Rob's interview. Rob states that "I had, you know, your typical life, where you have a wife, you have three kids." Here he is telling me that his idea of home is linked to what he understands to be the mainstream idea of home. That he feels a man of his age *should* be married with children and all living under the same roof. Rob was of course mourning the loss of a connection with his family and the support around him. When this ideal *home* was taken away from him, we can see that it added to his anxiety and sadness. I would also put Dave and John into this category as they both were settled with families before their housing issues started and their ideas of *home* are related to what they think their positions in society should entail. Rob also states that "when you've had a real home and family" and lose this, one is bound to feel homeless. Here we can once again see the struggle Rob is having with his new position in life and what he thinks a home should be. In their discussions of *home*, both Connolly (2000) and Bhattacharjee (2006) show the problems with the "private sphere" or home being understood as a patriarchal family household; Rob provides another example of how these ideas play out in the events of one's life.

Structural violence theory helps us to remember that there are social, cultural, and economic forces that create the situations around and within these men's lives. Our social and cultural understandings about how we should live and what we should have as symbols of economic success left Rob, John, and Dave feeling that they fell short of their ideal notions of *home*.

*Marg*

*Home* for Marg is a safe place with her family; a place in which she feels loved. A big part of *home* for Marg is the ability to have her friends and family over whenever she wants. When living with her ex-husband, Marg could not do this and her family felt unwelcomed in her house.

**Nicole:** Well  
what does home  
mean to you?

**Marg:** Home means a place  
where you're loved.  
That's what, that's what it means to me.  
Cause growing up  
when I was, you know, as a child growing up

was a safe place.  
A place where you're

you feel safe.

And a place where I was loved

and ahum

where you're comfortable  
and where you're happy and contented.  
And ahum

and you feel

that you can have  
your friends and your family come to visit you and you're, you're happy to see  
'em, and you're, you're ah,

I didn't have that in my marital home now.  
my family ah

my family ah,

would come to visit  
but ahum

ah  
like my sisters and brothers and that, they'd never ever stayed overnight, like  
some of 'em ahum,  
weren't ah

my husband didn't want them  
right,  
he ahum

he ah well you know I guess he tired try to isolate me.  
And that's what abusive men do,  
they try to, to cut you off from your family and friends.

So ah

and of course being the miser that he was  
if anybody came  
and I use to love for  
you know 'ta, you know, you know, to have lunch, or whatever,  
it was all  
they were eating 'is food.  
So it was, I never had that.

And you know  
one of my sisters that I am really, really close to ah

she didn't feel that comfortable, she knew that he kind of didn't want her, right  
but she, it never stopped her from coming now.  
But ah

I never had that comfort.  
But now

I can welcome people and I am happy to have you know my family and friends visit,  
and  
and they know they're welcome  
and I  
I've  
I just ah, so happy that I, that I got the means that I can, I can go out and buy any food that I want.

And ah  
you know, I can have,  
you know maybe a bottle of wine in the cupboard or my brother, two of my brothers...likes the, a drop of whiskey when they come.  
So, I'm just so happy that I, I got the means to be able  
to, you know treat my family and friends.  
And have a place for 'em to stay overnight if, if they want to, or if they need to.  
So  
home 'as been

I guess home 'as always been

home and family  
has been the very most important things in my life  
home and family

you know.  
You know, I know you've got to have  
money and material things but they were never my priority, right.

Marg explains clearly that having the ability to share her residence with family and friends, inviting them over and having a place for them to spend the night if they need to, are important in making that place her *home*. Marg, as discussed below with Ann, Betty, Dorothy, Victoria, and Eliza, needs to feel as though she is in control of her surroundings and that she is welcome to do as she pleases in this space – to be able to call a dwelling her home. As discussed, Jackson states that a person's wellbeing is more than fitting into their cultural and natural surroundings, one must also be able to live “*decisively*, on one's own terms” (Jackson 2005:xii).

As Marg mentioned above, abusive men tend to isolate their victims from their communities, especially in situations of domestic violence. Bhattacharjee (2006) states:

Isolation is one of the most severe forms of abuse in the home by a man against a woman, contributing to a battered women's perception that her condition is uncommon and shameful. It is one of the primary ways in which a man makes sure that the woman's voice is never heard and that she remains dependent on him in every way. (2006:341)

In these situations, part of the abusive men's power is their ability to force the home into a completely "private" place, a place and situation no one is allowed to see, creating an isolated place in which they are in complete control. A place where their word is the law. The abusive males are able to deny the women's "public" identity and stop the "public" from entering their home. As Bhattacharjee (2006) states in her discussion of home and domestic violence in a South Asian immigrant community:

A man's control over his wife or an employer's control over the domestic worker in the home extends to controlling her recognition as a member of what constitutes the public – in this case, being a legal resident of a national community (in itself a private concept). This control is encouraged by the legal structures (such as immigration laws) of so-called public (but, in a crucial sense, private) space, the US nation. (2006:344)

Bhattacharjee (2006) here shows how intertwined the supposed distinctions between the "public" and "private" spheres are and she even questions the notions of such categories.

In the letter Marg read to me in her interview, presented at the beginning of this thesis, she discusses what being homeless meant to her and how it made her feel. She describes that she was scared, stressed, embarrassed, humiliated and degraded. A big part of this feeling was the loss of her home and her community. At the beginning of this letter Marg explains that she did not fit into the stereotypes of homeless, how these stereotypes coloured her ideas of what a shelter would be like, and how she felt shame in knowing

these ideas were held by others. *Homelessness*, for Marg, was staying in temporary institutional housing and being bereft-of-home. The loss of the home she built for her family and her community were what made her feel homeless.

#### *4.4.2 Moving back in with Family*

The five women discussed below felt that their only choice was to move back in with family in order to find some stability in their housing situation. All of the women in this section mention feeling like they were intruding or imposing on someone else's space. Dorothy, Betty, Ann, Victoria, and Eliza felt as though they could not completely be themselves and spread their proverbial wings in the place they were living at the time of interview. They all also discussed the need to be in spaces in which they were in complete control. They wanted to be the ones who made the decisions for the household and ran the house in the manner that they thought was best. As Jackson (2005) states, an individual's contentedness involves more than fitting into the cultural and natural environment, "it involves endless experimentation in how the given world can be lived *decisively*, on one's own terms" (2005:xii).

The ideal *home* for these women is a safe place over which they have control and a place in which they can be alone (with the exception of Ann who includes her son in her ideal home); however, they all are living in examples of precarious housing. None of them felt that their situations were permanent; although they did not know how long the situations would last, they knew these were not permanent solution for their housing needs, nor do they want them to be.



*Dorothy*

Dorothy felt as though she was homeless despite having a place to live. At the time of interview, Dorothy was living with her mom after being released from the hospital where she was recovering from pneumonia. Her buddy, as she refers to him, was also living with them in the house. When asked to discuss what *homeless* meant, Dorothy explains what it entailed for her in her ill state.

**Nicole:** ...Would you have ever considered yourself homeless?

**Dorothy:** Yeah.

Yeah, I kind of do right now.

**N:** You do.

So what does homeless mean to you?

**D:** Umm.

It means ah that I could end up in a shelter.

With a disability that's making me really, really, really, scared.

Because I can't afford to live in a shelter with strangers watchin' me changing myself and I do cry.

Yeah.

And you don't know when I'm going to break down.

I don't know when I'm going to start crying.

I don't know when I'm going to start bawling.

And I mean I need the bathtub and the shower to get ready.

Yeah.

I have to get washed.

I has a shower or bath real quick every day.

Mostly because you know this sickness and illness, makes you feel like you're always dirty.

It makes.

It affects ya mentally, actually Nicole it can make it like almost like you are getting mentally sick.

When you're really sick with it.

For instance I can't get enough soap and water in showers and baths and that you gets baby powder like you get really disturbed with the loss of control in your clothes.

And you cannot control it, so really it is making you a bit mentally sick.

...You're not acting proper.

Scary.

You never know.

And it got Mom drove nuts.  
Which is why I need my own housing.  
She knows.  
I told her everything.  
She's after seeing me screechin' and bawlin' and screechin' and she's really good  
to me, Mom is.  
She's only a little baby right.  
To me a 70-year-old with cancer  
that needs love and  
she didn't need a daughter to come in on top of her this sick.

...

**N:** What does home mean to you?

**D:** A safe place that I can rest my head.

And I can umm  
you know, get ready for the day.  
Like, umm  
feel at home when I cook a meal or if I want to cook or not or have a bath or  
shower with privacy and not be so afraid all the time.  
Everything I do is afraid, fear my mom had to take me there, more fear.  
If I don't have fear, I'm afraid because right now I'm invading my mother's home.  
I'm invading her space.  
She's visiting with family right now today.  
She needs her privacy.  
She, ah  
is, ah woman sick with cancer.  
She is feeling a certain way.  
You know a lot of things. Can't be just taking over people's space.  
You need your own  
right.  
Anyway  
home to me got a lot to do with feeling safe right now.  
Because ah  
the crime rate is going high here and I'm already frightened out of my head.  
I don't know people here  
I'm really scared when I'm sick.

At the time of the interview Dorothy was struggling with a few different health issues, but one main one was giving her a lot of anxiety about her living arrangement and heightening her sense of fear and also her need for privacy. This health issue was an undiagnosed problem with her bowels. For Dorothy, she felt homeless because she did

not have her own space. She felt that she was invading her unwell mother's house and that she did not have the privacy she needed to properly take care of herself when she got sick. To Dorothy, being homeless meant living in a shelter without privacy and safety. The idea of being in temporary institutional housing without the amount of privacy and bathroom facilities that she needed had Dorothy very stressed out and worried about what she was going to do. Being in a shelter is not an option for her in her ill state.

*Home*, to Dorothy is the opposite of what she stated being *homeless* is. For her, *home* is a place of her own where she has the privacy she needs. She felt homeless because she felt that she was invading her mother's home and did not have as much privacy as she needed. Safety was also important in her idea of *home*. Throughout the interview, Dorothy was very preoccupied with the idea of safety and feeling safe within her house. She was worried about the increase of violent crimes in St. John's and was very nervous about living alone without being in a secure building (for Marg this was also a major issue). Another aspect of *home* for Dorothy is the ability to do what she wants (for example, to cook her own meals). This would be to have a space in which she could do what she wants when she wants and not feel like she was bothering anyone else (Ann, Betty and Victoria all mentioned this as part of what *home* was to them as well).

#### *Betty*

At the time of our interview, Betty was back living with her godparents in an attempt to save some money and spend time figuring out what she wanted to do in the next little while. Betty, similarly to Dorothy, felt that *home* was a place where she could be herself, cook when she wanted, come and go as she pleased, and not have to worry about disturbing others. She would also have the security of not having to worry about

being kicked out. Much like John, Betty did not consider herself as having been homeless at any point in her life because she always felt she had a place to go to. One reason Betty states that the place where she was living currently was not home was because it did not feel like it did when she was living with her ex-partner. For her, as with Dave, Rob, and John, the feeling of home was attached to the people missing in their lives – something they had had but later lost.

**Nicole:** What is your definition of homelessness?

**Betty:** ... Well to me homeless is just living on the street and being absolutely completely nowhere to go and the only thing is you suck it up and go to a shelter.

And that's it.

Well, ah

maybe I

I could say I felt trapped. Like, I feel

like by my own mistakes or whatever by not

pursuing my university properly when I had the chance. Not getting the job that I could of when I had the chance.

That I have limited myself. I know that and now I am kinda, I am stuck.

Okay, I chose, I fell in love with the wrong person.

And that's kind of, if this was a normal relationship then I am sure we wouldn't be having this conversation now.

Humm.

In that regard that but I have always I could go and knock on any number of people's doors and say "Okay please help. I'm just, I'm trapped I have nowhere to go."

**N:** ... You feel you would never have said that you are homeless cause homeless to you would be

**B:** On the street.

... At the end of the day, when I am going home

I don't feel like I am going home.

It feels like it is more it is a place to live. It will do really. Please let me get out there, anywhere on my own.

Like yesterday, would be lovely.

... There's no pressure to leave whatsoever. There's no real time limit. No need to pay any bills. No real requirements of me.

Nothing at all really asked of me in terms of mow the lawn do this, that, none of that.

...

Like it, it's all

I mean there are no real restrictions. There is no "You can't watch TV."

There are no rules.

I mean it is different now, being an adult now, versus when I was younger and living with them, and then there was rules. Now I'm, I can come home at three in the morning, I mean if you really want.

It is like, kinda like, "Let us know where you are."

And these things, but it is, just I get home  
and

I don't know. I don't really feel like cooking. I don't really feel, like I know I am hungry and I will probably just munch on crap.

But, I don't feel like I can go into the kitchen and actually start making what I want or

it just it feels awkward. It, cause if they're doing something, or if they're cooking something in the way, or if they're cleaning, or if they're doing something, okay whatever I want to do has to wait, or if they're in the bathroom getting ready then I am going to have to wait.

And it doesn't feel like home the way it did with [my ex-partner] and either I accept the fact and be single long enough  
do my thing and get out on my own.

Or if I was dating, or in a normal relationship, then I could get that home feeling back again...

**N:** ...How would you define home?

Like what is home to you?

**B:** Ohhummm.

Humm.

Home is a place

to go that

everything is just exactly as you want it.

...My home would be "I'm the king of the castle."

If I want to have company I can.

If I want to cook scrambled eggs at three in the morning, then that is perfectly acceptable, I don't have to worry. And it is just somewhere nice little retreat that you really you can invite people or not, as you please and kind, you get to rule what happens. That

if it is a mess for a week, really it is your fault and your issues, you deal with it.

And if it is, if you are both completely the opposite, it is just you're very anal and everything has to be in its place.

Home it's just

my place.

It's pretty much how I want everything laid out.

All under my control. That I don't have to worry about upsetting somebody because I have lit a candle, or I don't have to upset anybody because I am getting up at seven, or I don't have to worry about treading around someone else's issues. Obviously if I was living with someone else, boyfriend, parent, girlfriend, god knows whatever else then you do have to make those considerations for someone. For a relationship like that, okay yeah things change but now I realize what I really want is just, just my own place so I am not worried that this person is angry with me. So now I am getting kicked out or this thing has happened and now I am getting kicked out.

Betty did not feel at home where she was living, but she did not feel homeless either. For her, as for John, to be *homeless* meant living on the street and having nowhere else to go – being trapped. Betty felt that she was trapped in a way because her decisions have limited what she has been able to do in her life, much like Dave blaming himself for his situation. However, Betty felt she had places to go or doors to knock on when and if she needed to. For Betty, as well as Dorothy, *home* is a place in which she could be alone to do what she pleased and run the household the way she wanted. For Betty, that was making food late at night, or not making food at all and for Dorothy this was having the privacy to clean herself as often as she needed as well as the ability to cook. For these women, the spaces that they believe should be private are shared with others. This situation creates a “public” space within their “private” spaces, and this causes them to feel as if they are exposed and constrained from being able to feel “at home”. Below, we can see that Ann also feels that to be in control of her own space is important to feeling as though one has a home.

#### *Ann*

Similarly to Betty, Ann felt trapped and that led her to feel homeless while living with her parents. She felt that she could not leave her parents' house, that she had no

other options. She did not foresee that changing. This sense of permanency was important to her feeling homeless and it left Ann feeling like she had no options. She felt as though she was stuck; I believe this is part of being precariously housed. Precarious housing is not only unstable housing but also the sense that one is stuck in a less than ideal place or that one could lose the housing they have any day. Ann felt she had no other choice but to be where she was and this place was, at times, a very volatile environment in which she had little to no control.

For Ann, her feelings of homelessness came from the feeling that she was living out of a bag, did not have the space in which to complete her schoolwork, had little privacy, and was also sleeping on the floor. In Ann's discussion, she mentions the circumstances that created her feeling of homelessness, which was that her aunt and cousin were temporarily staying with Ann's parents while the aunt was looking for housing. This situation brings to our attention how the intersection of many lives affects how we each feel about our own situations, and how important social networks are when it comes to housing.

**Nicole:** Would you have ever considered yourself homeless at any point in your life?

**Ann:** Well

I think the only time I ever felt homeless was when I moved back to my parent's house two years ago.

I really felt like I had no other option, umm

I don't know how it fits into a definition. So, I can say is how I felt in the moment so, that's basically how'd I'd explain it.

And

that period of time, my parents it's that was when my aunt moved back from the States.

...I had already negotiated with my parents about moving back and paying a small bit of rent.

So I was set to go back but, umm  
before I moved back in  
my aunt showed up unexpectedly.  
[Her] marriage fell apart  
her and her daughter had been living in [the States] and they moved back and they  
wanted to stay with my mom.  
So in the two rooms that I was supposed to...move into  
they moved all of their stuff in  
while they looked for an apartment.  
And they didn't realize how bad it was looking for an apartment so they were  
there for

Jesus, two months.

There was a period of time that I was actually, like sleeping on the floor, or living  
out of like, a suitcase.

And that felt really homeless.

**N:** Even though you were technically home at your parents' house?

**A:** Yeah and like

the spare bedrooms well not spare bedroom it was the bedroom that was  
that [my son] was supposed to move into.

That was where the two of them were sleeping, and me and [my son] like  
[my son] would like sleep with my parents and I would sleep on the couch and  
nobody thought that was bad.

They all thought well it is just temporary, they'll be out soon.

Like

my life can't be on hold for this long. It felt horrible.

Yup that was really,

I was really disappointed because I felt like

I immediately regretted my decision to move back in with them, cause in that  
moment I felt like what was good for me and what I wanted didn't matter then  
'cause I felt like they were like ah its only [Ann].

She can sleep on the couch for a month  
no big deal.

You know.

...They were kind of okay with it. It was only when I when I freaked out  
like, one day I actually freaked out. I was like, "I can't find  
anything.

I can't do my schoolwork.

I

can't live like this.

Like, how do you think it is okay for me to sleep on, like a little foam pad, on the  
floor?"

...It was really inconsiderate and I guess.

That's what made me feel homeless.

...Cause I knew I didn't have the option to up and leave



again.

Like I felt like I had to be there and I was really trapped.

Other than that, there were times when I, you know, I had to leave that house that me and [my ex-partner] had.

And

different things like that.

There was times like I felt like I had no other choice but I knew it was temporary and this time felt really permanent.

Like

like, I didn't really know what my next step was and I still kinda don't.

I don't

I don't know when things are going to be okay for me to ah go again...

N: What does home mean to you?

A: hummm

I like that question.

Aahumm

home is

a

place for

privacy and quiet.

That is what I want.

Umm

to me home is a place that's

ummm

It's safe.

It's quiet.

You have your own privacy

though

it's clean

warm.

You don't have to worry about

you know

I don't want to be in a place that I have to worry about upkeep and things like that.

I don't want to have to deal with dampness and mould and mildew.

And that is basically what home is to me.

It is a lot about safety and stability and just having

space and quiet and a place you can get away from the chaos of life.

Basically it's

not a lot to ask for

but it is really hard to come by.

*Home*, for Ann, is a stable, private, clean place, in which she feels secure. In order for her to feel at home she needs to feel secure and have privacy. It is also a place that she could escape into from the “chaos of life”. The feeling of homelessness, being bereft-of-home, for, Ann was not a lack of roof, but a lack of ability to change her situation. She was bereft-of-home because she felt trapped in a situation she was not happy with. A situation that did not live up to her expectations and needs of what *home* should be. Peled and Muzicant (2008) point out that the runaway girls in their research felt homeless within their family home because there was no other home to go to and the ideal home, a sense of peace and protection from the world, did not exist. This is an excellent example of being bereft-of-home in a precarious housing situation as the young women, like Ann, felt that their family “home” was a place they needed to escape and to which they did not belong. They needed a home in which they felt protected from the world, not attacked by it. Eliza, who will be discussed in the section following this one, also brings up home as a place of protection from the world.

#### *Victoria*

Victoria’s first thought when I asked her about *home* was that it is the place where you sleep. Once she took a moment to think about it, however, she started to think about *home* in a different way.

**Nicole:** Have you ever considered yourself homeless?

**Victoria:** No.

**N:** Definitely not.

**V:** Definitely.

**N:** ...What do you consider home?

**V:** ...I guess just where you sleep at night, I think.

Like

No, I don’t.

Yeah, that's a hard one, hey?

...Having like jumped a lot of homes, like as a kid.

Just like  
my parents moving and  
having to visit them both  
in different places, in different times and  
different locations, and

across the country and all that kind of stuff.

...Where you're home is like, being where you're happy and where you're comfortable and where you're safe.

I think and it's not always  
where you're living.

Sometimes it can be with a different person that makes you feel that way, umm or

it can be, like, just like, if you're on your own

I've never lived on my own so I don't know  
but

I assume that if I were to  
that I would feel safe and happy and comfortable  
where I am.

I've always felt  
safe.

...I've never felt unsafe  
and I think that if I were to feel unsafe then  
like, wherever I was that maybe that would

make me feel homeless  
like, I didn't have a home.

**N:** ...Do you feel at home right now living with  
your current

**V:** Yeah like, I don't feel it's like my home, like  
like, my personality isn't there  
you know, but I definitely feel  
like, I say "I'm going home."

You know?

But, I say might, like, when I'm talking with my mom, I say "your house" a lot  
I don't say "mine."

Like, I don't call it home to her.

But I think that's just out of habit  
from talking with her before I lived there.

But umm no, I do consider it home.

Like

as of right now  
but I don't think I've lived anywhere that I've,  
haven't felt like it's temporary.  
You know, I've never, I just haven't reached the point in my life  
where  
I'm like looking to settle in a place for any period of time.  
Just being my age and  
having  
to go to school  
other places than  
my hometown  
then you just, I haven't felt like, this is where I've built my home or like I haven't  
thought of buying a house or  
renting in a long-term capacity.  
It's always been kind of temporary.  
So, I guess  
to answer that question yes I feel at home.

*Home*, for Victoria, is a place where she can be happy and feel safe and comfortable. She comments that this does not have to be the place in which you are living, but that it can also be a person that makes you feel at home. Victoria mentions that she has never felt unsafe in a place in which she has lived and she thought that perhaps if she felt unsafe, she would have felt homeless. She also said that she had not lived in a place that she has felt was permanent. Victoria knows that she was not stuck living with her parents and that she would soon be back out on her own, or living with roommates. This reason, plus her never having felt unsafe, I believe, is why Victoria says that she has never felt homeless.

Even though Victoria did not feel trapped, she did feel as though she did not have control over her living environment. Throughout Victoria's interview she discussed many times how she felt she was intruding on her parents' space, and how she would like to have a place of her own again so that she could feel that she is not bothering others while going about daily activities. Here we can see how the "public" and "private" mesh

together into indefinable categories. For Victoria, her parent's home was a public space in which she felt exposed and that she had little privacy or control over the area. She also felt as though she was intruding on her parent's private space. Our experiences and comfort level in a space changes how we perceive whether or not the place is a "public" or "private" place. Indeed this example shows how difficult it is to define what is "public" or "private".

Victoria wanted a place where she was able to express her personality and feel like she could make decisions about the household; it would be her place just as much as anyone else's. While living with her parents, she lost that ability and it was "their house" that she was staying in, and over which she had no control. The feeling that she did not have a claim on the space where she was living left her feeling that she did not belong there, and that she was a guest who was just visiting. Victoria did not feel as though she was being-at-home-in-the-world. She was left in a place in which she did not feel at home but was not homeless either, and her case is a perfect example of why we need to dissect the term *homeless* into different categories, such as being bereft-of-home. I believe that the phrase bereft-of-home would have given Victoria a better way to express her feelings.

**Nicole:** So how does it make you feel to be living back there?

**Victoria:** Awful.

Umm

yeah I didn't think it was going to be as degrading as it is

but it's really

well it's

and I don't know, a lot of kids moved back in with their parents.

Kids.

I'm 25 years old.

Young adults

move back in and then they feel like kids.

Like I was talking to, ah

my friend about this

and ah  
you know  
it's not  
he was asking if it felt like,  
like I was being a kid again.  
But it doesn't, it feels like I'm a guest.  
Because it's not my house  
I didn't grow up in that house.  
It's not like  
you know, like when you go back to your childhood home and you're  
and you still have your room, with your posters on your wall and it's still the  
colour that you painted it when you were in high school.  
That's one thing  
but this is, I am staying in the guest room  
you know like  
I did get to put some of my stuff up there but like  
I didn't  
I haven't hung anything on the walls it's not like my space.  
Umm  
and I feel so  
guilty  
that they've taken me on as a, like a burden, financially I guess.  
Even though I pay them 75 dollars a week, that doesn't, that kind of just covers  
what I eat.  
...I try really really hard not to be intrusive in anyway  
so  
not 'ta  
get in their way and not to get in their, like I don't make any demands for, like  
what I like to eat.  
Whatever they cook I'll eat I don't care.  
...I will just eat it because it's their life and I'm intruding on it.  
You know. So  
umm  
I just kind of keep my head down and  
mind my own business and try and like, keep out of their way as possible.  
Do my laundry in the middle of the night  
so that I don't get in their way when they are doing their laundry  
try to wash dishes as much as possible.  
Well everyday wash the dishes and like, don't watch TV or anything cause that's  
what they do.  
And  
not to go on their computer  
use their Internet  
as little as possible.  
I guess

just try to work my schedule around theirs cause theirs is already set.  
 It's their house they've worked really hard to be where they are, you know, and  
 my mom  
 has gone through a lot financially, so  
 she deserves it.  
 She deserves to live her life exactly the way she wants to.  
 She shouldn't have to change that because I can't pay my credit card.  
 ...So yeah I just try to stay out of their way as much as possible.  
**N:** So you find it a big change from when you were going to university and  
 coming back for the summer?  
**V:** Yeah for sure.  
 ...Then it was it was just temporary.  
 Like I know that this is temporary until I work it out but it's that I don't know  
 when it ends...  
 I was  
 achieving something then. I was going to school and it was understandable that I  
 was poor because I was paying thousands of dollars in tuition but now it's just  
 I'm a failure.  
 You know like  
 now I just can't afford it because I'm not good enough  
 at what I do or I'm not good enough to get a better paying job or  
 you know like, it's just  
 even though I know they don't think that, well they might but they would never  
 say it to me, and I know that I can tell myself over and over that that's not what is  
 happening but it is like in reality it is.  
 I just, I just can't do it the way that you're supposed to be able to do it, I guess.

These feelings, for Victoria, seem to be in contradiction with her stating that she  
 felt at home where she was living. She expresses her inability to completely relax at her  
 parents' house, but notes that she still does feel at home there. These seemingly  
 contradictory feelings, I believe, stem from Victoria not wanting to sound like she does  
 not appreciate her mother's support and thinking that she does not have the right to  
 complain about her situation, because she 'doesn't have it that bad' compared to others.  
 Ann also expresses these feelings and, throughout our interview, she says that she feels  
 like she is a 'snot' or an 'unappreciative bitch' for complaining about these issues while  
 she should be happy because she does have a place to live.

In a later conversation about homelessness Victoria had this to say:

**Victoria:** Defining homelessness is pretty hard  
it's obviously not as simple as not having a home or something.  
I think it's about being comfortable  
but not simply being physically comfortable.  
It's more of a lack of feeling vulnerable.  
So coming back to safety then I guess.  
So I would say that being homelessness must be a feeling of being unsafe and  
vulnerable to the world around you  
being without a place where you feel safe, where you feel like yourself.

Here we can again see that Victoria's emphasis on feeling safe is linked to her ideas surrounding *homelessness*. For her, a feeling of homelessness would arise from not feeling safe in her current living situation. However, in the last line here, she brings up the idea of *homelessness* being "without a place where you feel safe, where you feel like yourself". I really do believe that Victoria was living without this part of her definition of *homeless*, but that she was unwilling to say she felt homeless because she always felt safe and this was the major aspect of her definition. Therefore, I believe that Victoria was bereft-of-home to some extent while she was living with her parents. She was lacking the comfort to be herself and much, like Dorothy, Ann, and Betty, she was unable to live her life as she thought was best. Again, Victoria felt exposed and like she was in a "public" place but also that she was intruding on her parents' "private" place. As Jackson mentions, "home may evoke security in one context and seem confining in another" (1995:122-123). For the women discussed in this section, we see how confining going back to live in their family "homes" was for them.

*Eliza*

I put Eliza in this category even though she did not move back in with family and instead was staying with friends. Her situation was similar to the other women under this



heading in many ways and, for Eliza, her friends and her community are, as she stated many times throughout the interview, her ‘family’. Eliza felt homeless a few times during her life. She was never really ‘at home’ in her childhood house (like the runaway girls studied by Peled and Muzicant 2008) and, beginning in high school, she spent much of her time sleeping at friends’ houses; she felt as though she was “always on the run” and she never did have a feeling of being-at-home-in-the-world while growing up. It is important to remember that *home* may not be a single location for individuals. When we naturalize *home* “as a stable and fixed place, [it] can produce experiences of loss, dislocation, and marginality for some women” (Frohlick 1999:86) as I believe it did for Eliza. While Eliza was growing up, she found *home* in the households of her friends and not that of her own family, but she felt bereft-of-home because her notion of *home* did not correspond with her real life experiences.

Eliza felt homeless for a second time while she temporarily lived with friends on John Avenue, after having lived on Park Street with her close friend Jane for a while. Park Street is home to her. It was a place where she felt she belonged and never questioned her presence there. There are three main reasons why Eliza said she felt homeless while staying with friends. The first is that it felt like a halfway house in that she did not feel as though she could spend her days relaxing in the house. Their home for her was a very “public” place. The second, which Ann discussed, is having to live out of a bag and not being able to find, or get at, proper clothing and other material possessions. The third was that her home, Jane and the house on Park Street, were not who and where she lived any more. Eliza had a deep connection with her housemate; at one point she stated that Jane was her home and her family. While Eliza did not move back in with her

family she was living precariously with friends, and she, like the women discussed in the section above, felt she did not have a claim to the space in which she was living, creating a sense of being bereft-of-home. As Frohlick (1999) comments, the women in her research had to “deal with the practices of home on an everyday basis, yet on terms not of their own making” (1999:88). This, I think, applies very well to Eliza, Ann, Betty, Dorothy, and Victoria as they all were dealing with the “practices of home” and their family homes but in ways that they found uncomfortable. Below, Eliza discusses times when she felt homeless.

**Nicole:** Have you ever considered yourself as homeless?

**Eliza:** Yeah when I was staying [on John Ave.], I considered myself homeless yeah.

I, cause I spent, it was really weird, cause I  
yeah, I mean I was staying there, umm  
I guess by the end of it, I was much more comfortable, but I use to get  
it was like a halfway house, is how I felt. I would get up every morning and I'd  
leave the house all day.

Then I'd come back.

And it wasn't cause they made me feel like that, but it was just  
how I was feeling at the time. Like I shouldn't  
be a vagrant.

But yeah like, I'd get up every morning and yeah  
and be out of the house by like  
by around ten o'clock and I mean it was September. It was beautiful in September  
and October, so

yeah  
and so yeah, I walked around all day long and ah  
did whatever I could. And read books and sit wherever and do that kind of stuff  
but like

I was outside all day long. I didn't you know  
so I really did feel homeless totally.

I was actually sitting outside most of the day...

**N:** So how would you define that feeling of homeless?

**E:** Umm I didn't have anything as well. Like I didn't  
...I didn't have anything with me. I didn't have anything, right.

I had

Ah

I ah my chef's knife and ahum

Um that was it.  
Like I didn't,  
I had my, I had a bag full of clothes  
and

you know  
soap and ah  
a toothbrush.

And ah

like you know, I think I had,  
I had a pair of rubber boots and a pair of sneakers. And so it was like, you take  
everything you have and you put it in boxes and then you just don't have it. And  
that was, I think that, was a big part, to like access  
we are very materialist but  
but we have to be, we need to be dressed for the weather, and the things you're  
doing and all of our things and so I didn't have any of my things  
and ah  
ah.

I think that was probably number one.

But, you know not, not having  
cause it is ridiculous, but not having your shoes is probably  
the biggest one because you're like, "Okay right."

...I didn't have a dress with me, I didn't have anything, you know.

I had some like some hoodies  
and some like clothes or whatever but like  
it was kind of like living out of a bag.

And

not having my  
stuff.

But I kind of purposely went that way. So I couldn't do a lot of things because you  
didn't have the appropriate attire.

And ah

not that, that really bothers me but

it kind of plays on your mind when,  
I think that's probably the biggest one and I think more homeless in,  
and I could have stayed in there all day long and I kind of felt homeless in my  
heart, my home was gone.

You know what I mean?

It was like an empty feeling.

Like ah home is a feeling of safety, you know.  
...Like you don't

You don't think about it because  
...home is the feeling when all the thoughts are off.  
You're just totally relaxed, there is nothing else.  
...The comfortable release of being home, you like 'mah' home.  
Like that is what it is there is no more thought about it. It just 100 percent  
vulnerability you're totally fine.  
You're like, everything's cool  
and sitting down on your couch with no clothes on everything is grand, you know  
what I mean, like

it's your, like little sanctuary.  
...I kind of felt homeless when I was in high school too.  
Yeah I was ah.  
Shit fell apart really bad in my family and ah.

Like craziness.  
And ah  
...two of my sisters, went back and fourth  
to Mom and Dad's for a long time.  
...I was 15  
ah,  
mom left and ah I haven't seen her since  
but like two of my sisters did. My other one  
didn't until a couple of years ago  
and ah

yeah, so I was, just like, always on the run.  
I was always  
even like in high school, which is kind of weird.  
Then  
then I was staying at my friends' houses,  
you know, at least three or four nights a week and  
all a bunch of different places so I had a lot of  
I have a lot of my friends' parents who  
give me Christmas gifts and birthday gifts and all like I'm part of the family  
because yeah I didn't have my own.  
So that feeling of homelessness is something I have always kind of dealt with...

I don't feel like very many things are stable  
you know.  
Like there is not very much.

Like it's  
it will be ripped away from you.  
It's fine, so,  
so I've kind of just been able to do that pretty easy but I'm at a point where

yeah, I have to look  
beyond that kind of, where I want this stuff.  
I want  
I want to be in a place where I have my things and it is  
it is mine  
you know and I'm safe here and everything is cool.

**N:**...How would you define? You would define home as  
safety? You sort of said that but

**E:** Yeah.

Umm.

**N:** And stability

**E:** Sanctuary.

...No even less than that.

Cause it's not good or bad. To me home is like, to me is, like ah if you, if you put  
it on a,  
on a wave of good things and bad things  
it's like the median. It's like nothing  
you know what I mean?

It's like zero.

...I mean there are good things about it but it's not good or bad. It's not um  
it's yeah, it's the median. It is the point from which all other things are judged.  
Does that make sense?

**N:** Yeah. Sort of where you would start from?

**E:** Yeah start from.

The origin.

...So it's like the good things and the bad things are the places that you go and  
everything but home is the, the things in the middle. You'll come back to it.

And it's not particularly good or bad. It's not far or near. It's

...the point from which you judge all other things  
is home.

**N:** ...So what would

**E:** Home be for me?

**N:** Yeah.

**E:** Ah,

Park Street.

...Park Street was the first time that I was like whoa home.

You know where I was totally chill to be there, I didn't want to be anywhere else.  
Like  
you know, of course we had our issues but it was  
it was home.  
You know we work through everything and everything was going to be okay.  
It was home.  
It was the point to which, to judge all other things by.  
... We never questioned anything. I never questioned once in my life that I would,  
that I would be asked to leave  
that  
house.  
You know what I mean? That wasn't anything other than mine.  
I felt, I felt stable, I felt ahum

like  
it was it was just like exhale you didn't question it.  
... But yeah, the given was that, that home was not going to be taken away from  
me for any reason.  
Like or it wasn't going to change or  
we didn't,  
jeez, you know me and [Jane] could have had a vicious ol' fight about something  
but like  
you know, but not really. We normally didn't have fights we would just calmly go  
to each other and like " 'Listen now',  
'Okay yeah.' 'Thank you, I needed to be called out on that.'  
'Yes you did'.  
'Okay let's have a bowl of ice cream.' " You know what I mean? It was just very  
functional.

At the beginning of this quote Eliza mentions how, when staying on John Street, she would spend a lot of time walking around and in parks reading and hanging out. For Eliza Bhattacharjee's (2006:352) statement that spaces seen as the opposite of home can display characteristics of home and vice versa rings true. Eliza's use of "public" places such as parks is similar to ways in which an individual would use their "private" home, and she did this because where she was living felt like a very "public" place."

What *home* means to Eliza is the base; it is zero. It is the place that your life, or day, starts and ends with; the place that everything else is based around. The place in which

you do not have to think about anything because you feel safe and comfortable. It is a sanctuary. Much like for Ann, it is a place from which to escape the world and should not be a place of conflict or stress.

This ideal *home* was not the feeling that Eliza grew up with. Eliza said that she felt homeless while growing up because she did not have this place, this zero in which she could relax and be comfortable. Growing up, her family “home” was an uncomfortable place that she avoided by staying with friends, often for days at a time.

The five women in this section express their difficulties with *home* and *homelessness*. Some, like Eliza, Ann, and Dorothy stated that they had felt homeless and others like Victoria and Betty said they had not felt homeless. All of these women struggled with the difference between what the reality of their *home* was and what they wanted and felt like it should be, leaving them with a feeling of being bereft-of-home. In Frohlick’s (1999) study, discussed above, she examines *home* in the world of single mothers. She states that the women in her study struggled with *home* because it was not an “easy space for the women to occupy” (Frohlick 1999:88). This point is also related to the discussion of the “public/private” dichotomy as the notions of what a home should or should not be are linked with what we understand by “public” and “private”. As the women in Frohlick’s (1999), Peled and Muzicant’s (2008), and Bhattacharjee’s (2006) research, the women discussed in this section learned to associate *home* as a place of discrimination and oppression. These women had to negotiate the physical aspects (such as Ann and Eliza’s living out of a bag or Dorothy’s need for privacy) as well as *home* as a place in their mind and feeling bereft-of-home which is discussed more below.

#### 4.4.3 Back Home and Bereft-of-Home

Both Lori and Renee differentiate between *having a home* and *home* in their interviews. *Home* is the place in which they grew up, much like Dave, and *having a home* was living in a safe and secure place with their children. *Home* for Lori, when she was living in another Atlantic Canadian province, was Newfoundland and *home* for Renee is Toronto, even though she has not lived there in years and her family has also moved on. There is an important difference for both of them between these two ideas of *home* and *having a home*.

We also see in the sections below that Lori and Renee also have another thing in common and that is that they do not consider themselves homeless and do not feel bereft-of-home.

##### *Lori*

Lori says that *homelessness*, to her, is not having a place of your own. It is not having a place to live, living on the streets, or being forced to live with family. When I asked Lori about what *home* meant to her she says that, when she was living in another province, home to her was Newfoundland. After a moment, she said that *having a home* is different than *home*: *having a home* means her children, and a safe place to live where she does not have to fear eviction, and *home* means Newfoundland.

**Nicole:** Would you have ever considered yourself homeless?

**Lori:** No, but damn close.

I mean if Newfoundland and Labrador Housing hadn't come through, the only alternative was one of these places that take in families that have no place to live. But you can't stay there forever you know. They are just kind of a halfway house.

...It was pretty scary  
cause I grew up



middle class, you know. My father was a bank manager, we were very comfortable.

So this, for me has been a huge pride

you know, I'm not use' to it.

You know, once my husband died, he didn't leave any insurance...

And ever since then, it has just been a constant struggle. There was times in [another province] when we had no heat in the winter.

I couldn't, they won't deliver, everything over there is oil heat, very little is electric, and they, they would not deliver less than half a tank.

I simply did not have the money, so apparently you can use diesel oil in place of it so

I didn't have a car, again I would get someone to drive me down with my gas can fill it up with diesel, and put it in my oil tank, and it would last a couple of days and then you would wake up in the morning and there would be no heat, and you would freeze.

It was horrible.

Just been a horrible 10 years.

So I know, I guess it is better now cause I know I have a place to live and they are not going to kick me out, or anything. I'm there as long as I want to be there, pretty much.

...

**N:** Well I would like to know what, how you would define homelessness. What do you think?

**L:** Oh I don't know. It seems pretty simple, you just don't have a place to live. Live on the streets, I guess. I don't know, you see people downtown and you assume they're homeless but you know, you don't know where they sleep, you have no idea.

If there's ah

like, you see on TV, or read about, shelters where they can go spend the nights. I don't know

if there is even stuff like that. If, if people are actually sleeping in alleys and...

or if you are forced to live with family even.

Yeah, that is not always the best option.

Not having a place of your own basically.

**N:** ...What does home mean to you?

**L:** What does home mean to me?

Hum,

when I came here home meant Newfoundland you know.

Ahum

but having a home  
yeah that's a hard one to answer, it really is.

I have a home now, you know, I got my kids and I got a place a safe place to live  
that I'm not going to get evicted from.

That's probably what home means, somewhere that you are safe.

That's a good answer, isn't it?

**N:** Yeah.

**L:** Yeah somewhere that you can be safe and  
and comfortable.

Not be afraid that someone is going to knock on the door and say "Get the hell  
out."

Or "We're here to cut off your electricity."

Hopefully that will never happen.

When I moved here, I swore that would never happen to me again.

But, cause I thought we were going to have a better life. But it didn't turn out like  
that  
yet.

*Homelessness* to Lori means sleeping rough, and after a moment of thought she brings in being precariously housed, stating that sometimes being forced to live with family is not always the best situation. As mentioned above, we know that living with family is not the best option for everyone and it does sometime cause one to feel as if they are homeless. For Lori, the inability to have your own place, where you can raise your children or live alone, is part of being *homeless*. The experiences of Ann, Betty, Dorothy, and Victoria show this to be true. Lori has never considered herself homeless because she has not been forced to live with family where she is no longer the head of the household, or in shelters, or to sleep on the street. Lori has been able, with great struggle, to avoid all of these 'homeless' situations. However, she has lived precariously; she was often unable to afford rent, food, heat and lights for herself and her family after her husband passed away. Fortunately, Lori was able to secure housing from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and had been living in that house for almost a year at the time of interview.

Lori is one of two participants that I do not believe was bereft-of-home as with Renee discussed below. While her housing situation caused her a great deal of stress and anxiety, she was living in her own space with her children. She was comfortable, to a certain degree, in her ability to manage the household how she wanted and was in control of what happened inside the house. What Lori lacked in her definition of *home* was the security of housing; to not be threatened with eviction. She was evicted from one place because she could not afford to pay the rent and was able to hang on long enough in that apartment in order to secure her current house with NL Housing. She is still very nervous about being evicted from her current house, not because she could not afford the rent, but because she was worried about inspections and whether or not they would move her once her children moved out.

Lori's situation here is a good example of the spectrum of housing issues that can fall under precarious housing and be examples of structural violence. Lori and her children were, in the strict definition of the term, squatters<sup>34</sup> in the apartment after Lori could no longer pay the rent. This was a temporary situation and not one of choice by Lori; she in fact tried everything she could in order to avoid the situation and felt very guilty when she could no longer pay rent:

**Lori:** I would go over to the supermarket and the landlord could see me coming and going to the supermarket from the window. And I thinks she's probably thinking "Where did she get the money to buy those groceries? And she can't afford to pay me."

...

I always felt really guilty about buying groceries

---

<sup>34</sup> A squatter, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is "an unauthorized occupant of land" (2013). Lori would never use the term squatter for herself and her family; I do hesitate to use it here to reference her situation for that reason.

when I couldn't afford to pay the rent but if I couldn't afford it I couldn't afford it.  
Yeah  
it was a very  
very  
stressful time  
and you know  
everything was stressful for me back then anyway but this was  
unreal.  
'Cause there was no where else to go, you know I had looked into the  
women's shelters and different places and stuff but I had a houseful of  
crappy furniture but furniture.  
What was I going to do with that if I had to go some place like that? I had nobody  
that could store it I couldn't afford to put it in storage, you know?  
I had no idea what we would do with it, where we would end up living, where the  
kids would go to school.  
It was horrible.

The situation that brought Lori to this place was a long process and started with her separation from her husband and later her husband's death. Her anxiety and mental health struggles, as well as some physical issues, kept her from steady employment. Once she was no longer employed, she applied to receive her employment insurance benefits. But because of the delay in the application process and receiving money, she ended up falling behind on her bills. This led her to apply for social assistance. Once she received her social assistance, the money she received was not enough to cover her monthly bills and certainly not enough to catch up on bills that she owed. It was at this point that Lori and her family were evicted from their apartment and she finally received help from NL Housing. It is clear in this event how structural violence is at work and how the current bureaucratic system sometimes hinders more than it helps people struggling with housing. Lori fell prey to bureaucratic processes that are based around the preconceived social and cultural notions of how one ends up struggling with housing needs.

*Renee*

Renee never considered herself homeless because she has always been able to find a place to stay. Like John, Betty, Gordon and Lori, Renee knew she had options. She discussed the many different aspects of *homelessness* and how complicated the concept is, especially if we are talking about the choice to be homeless or not. Renee states that *homelessness* can be a chosen way of life; she has known people who chose this lifestyle as a way to escape social norms and live outside 'The System'. Renee brings to light the broad nature of *homelessness* and how it affects a range of people including "street kids", those suffering from mental illness, and women fleeing from abusive relationships.

**Nicole:** What's your definition of homelessness?

**Renee:** Umm.

Hummm.

Ah.

Not having a home.

Umm

that's a hard one

to define.

I know I don't consider myself ever

having

been

homeless.

Umm

because I've always had or

found somewhere

umm

to put my stuff and to live and to feel um

you know secure in.

And I've never been, um  
well I have been  
I have been, at certain point in my life not able to afford anything but  
I've had either friend, or well  
friends actually  
umm

You know, who have been able to help me through it.  
So,

so that's why I wouldn't have ever consider myself ever been in that position.

And um  
I don't know  
I mean there are all sorts of different types of homelessness.  
And there are some of choice, there's some not through of choice, through  
ah  
mental disabilities, there's some through choice of  
ah,  
I don't know.  
I knew, I knew quite a few people in Montreal who were homeless.  
And they were  
and there were quite a few people who were by choice, kind of just squatters  
anywhere.  
And umm  
like a whole crusty punk cogency and  
and a whole dumpster-diver, which was like a community, so it was homeless but  
it was in a community  
that was very supportive.  
...But I also knew quite a few, umm  
homeless people who it was kind of by choice and they had...varying levels of  
  
and I don't really want to say  
I don't think it is fair to say mental disability...  
or medicinal problems, or but ah  
um

that went against the norm, or society, or whatever  
and were choosing not to

adhere to any of those sort of social systems that would make them not or I don't know  
not homeless. So, you know, didn't want to be on welfare.  
Didn't want to stay at  
at um,

at um,

I forgotten the name for um,

**N:** A shelter?

**R:** Yes and you know  
didn't want any of that.  
But I don't really know

um

people here like that

um

or as well as I did in Montreal.

But um

ah

and then there's like

I don't know homelessness is like there is a huge gamut.

There is like

abused women, you know

like people who are leaving, they have no choice

they just have to get out of a situation and

you know they end up

in, you know, hopefully

not out in the cold and, or

but so I don't know.

I think

I think the definition of homelessness is really broad.

There is like all sorts of different types, you know.

...

**N:** What does home mean to you?

**R:** Mm

Well the first word that came to mind was nesting.

It's like somewhere, where ah

somewhere where I feel comfortable.

And where I want to make it  
my own.

And I want to invest in it  
to make it my own.

...I going to have to stop thinking like this but home is always like for the last 21  
years

home has been where my kids are.

Like when the family, we like, that is the family unit that I've  
the constant family unit that I've had

been lucky to have for the last 21 years. So

that's changing too, so my home

that kind of idea of home is

and

and ah

home also

kind of means

I think of my childhood homes, like where

I lived when

like, I still say "back home" but

I have no

like, it's not like

the family home is still there and all my family lives where, there or anything

actually my

ahum

Dad doesn't live even in Toronto anymore so it isn't even, Toronto is not my  
home but it still is kind of

and I don't even know Toronto anymore the way that I use' to.

And then Montreal is kind of home too cause it is super familiar and I spent pretty

formulative, really important years there and raising my kids and stuff and

I don't know it's an interesting,

I'll go back to nesting.

Like Lori, *home* for Renee is where her children are. It is a place in which she can  
"nest". Throughout the rest of her answer we come to understand exactly what it is she  
meant by this. Nesting is considered to be the act of making one's own space comfortable  
and safe. Renee states that *home*, for her, would be a place that she can make her own –



place where she feels she can invest her time and money into putting her personality into the space. She wants control over her lived relationship with the world she moves within. This idea of making a space your own came up with many other participants and the ability to be comfortable by whatever means is a defining feature of *home*.

Renee also brings to our attention the idea of *home* being a city or province, as did Lori and Dave. Renee discusses how where she has lived with her family in the past is also home. As we have seen above, Victoria questions *home* as an abstract idea or the feeling of being home. For Renee, being home is nesting with her children in their house and the abstract idea of *home* is where she has lived throughout her life with her parents and later her children.

Renee, as with Lori, is the only other person in this research that I believe did not feel bereft-of-home. Like Lori, through great struggle Renee has been able to keep and find an affordable safe place for her children and herself. Renee has managed to stay in control of how her house is run, and continued to have a feeling of belonging-at-home-in-the-world; I think that, for Renee, this has kept her from feeling bereft-of-home. The relationship that both Renee and Lori have been able to establish and keep once having their children is that their acts have meaning and an impact on their surroundings. As Jackson (1995) says, being-at-home-in-the-world suggests “a sense of existential control and connectedness— the way we feel when what we say or do seems to matter, and there is a balanced reciprocity between the world beyond us and the world within which we move” (1995:154). This balance and connection between action and result was missing for many of the participants.

#### 4.4.4 Staying in Temporary Institutional Housing but not 'Homeless'

Both Gordon and Gail have spent time in shelters. Gordon states he has on two separate occasions stayed at The Wiseman Centre while trying to find an apartment, and Gail lived at The Catherine Booth Women's shelter for three months while trying to organize herself and find a permanent place to live. Through the excerpts below we will see that, despite the time that both spent in shelters, they never considered themselves to be *homeless*. Like John and Betty, Gordon felt he had options outside of the shelter, claiming that he always had some place to go. Gail says that she was never technically homeless because she made people help her, keeping her off the street.

*Gordon*

Gordon did not feel homeless despite having spent time in a shelter. He did not consider himself homeless because he felt as though he had options with respect to places where he could go to live. Both John and Betty mention that, because they felt they had places to go, they did not feel homeless. In contrast, Ann and Eliza felt homeless because of their perceived lack of options. Similar to what other participants such as Dave and John stated above, Gordon also thinks of *homelessness* as sleeping rough. Below he says that being homeless means to not pay one's rent, therefore leading to not having a roof over one's head. Gordon said that he always pays his rent, proving he is not at risk of becoming homeless. He explains that, when he was staying at a shelter, he did not feel homeless; however, he did feel that it was a temporary situation and not his home.

**Nicole:** Would you have ever considered yourself homeless at any point in your life?

**Gordon:** No.

Homeless

I got a place to go to all the time...

**N:** ...What does homeless mean to you?

**G:** Don't pay the rent.

If you don't pay the rent, then you, you're basically homeless because you're not going to have a roof over your head.

But I always pay my rent  
right.

What does homeless mean to me?

**N:** Yeah what does that word mean to you?

What to you picture in your mind when someone says that?

**G:** Ah well.

A person that can't afford living arrangements  
like you know  
can't afford rent  
living on the streets.

...

**N:** So when you said you always have somewhere to go...  
you never felt homeless because you always had somewhere to go?

**G:** Yeah.

**N:** ...When you were at The Wiseman Centre you felt like that was your home?

**G:** No.

**N:** No?

But you felt

**G:** Temporary.

...I got friends to go to.

Like, like what I mean

like, I got friends.

...I would never be stuck for a place to go  
right...

**N:** What does home mean to you?

**G:** What, what does ah  
home mean?

Somewhere where I could relax.

Ahum.

Some, somewhere where there's  
is ah

comfortable zone  
right.  
...It's a hard question.

Yeah.  
What does home mean to me?  
...I don't know  
what home mean to me?

After a hard day's work  
a place to lie

you know.  
That's about it.  
Watch TV.  
Comfortable.  
In, in a comfort zone, like I said, right.  
That's all I got to say about that.  
**N:** So what would your ideal home be?

What would be perfect home for you?  
Is that what you have now?

**G:** Yeah

...  
Not to share the  
bathroom.  
I don't like sharing bathrooms  
...because you don't know  
like you, don't know who's been sitting on the toilet or whatever.  
You don't know what  
person used it last right.  
...My own bathroom, my own kitchen.  
My own  
pots and pans, you know.  
And

I forgot the question what's the question?  
**N:** What's your ideal home?  
What's the best house or home you could have?  
**G:** Oh, oh what's the best  
home or house I could have?  
**N:** Yeah.  
What would you want?

**G:** Well the best home and home I could have is

is one that I'd be able to build myself.

Yeah

that sounds good.

Yeah,

something I could build myself.

Yeah,

and then I'd be able to build it the way I like it  
wha'.

Put the rooms and the bathroom and the kitchen.

in the way

I feels best.

*Home*, for Gordon, is a place where he can relax and be in his comfort zone without having to share common areas, such as the bathroom, that he thinks should be private. As discussed, many of the participants have linked *home* and comfort together; having the privacy of the bathroom and the ability to cook in the kitchen are important factors in having that comfort which makes a place a *home*. Throughout our interviews, Gordon brought up sharing a bathroom with others a few times. For him, having to share this “private” space with others was one of the ways that made places he has lived in the past not his own space, not his home. John and Dorothy mention the privacy of the bathroom as being key points to feeling comfortable in their house.

Gordon's and John's living situations had forced the bathroom from being a “private” place into a “public” one, as they had to share with their housemates. This caused both of them to have a great deal of discomfort; just the idea of having to share a bathroom for Dorothy made her upset. The communal spaces in a household shared with friends, family members, or even strangers changes how “private” or “public” these spaces feel to those using them. These are further examples of how making distinctions

between what are a “private” and “public” space is difficult, as there are many variables that change with each individual’s circumstances.

Because *homelessness* to Gordon was strictly sleeping rough, which he never did, he never considered himself to be homeless even when he was living in the shelter and a few different rooming houses. However, he did not consider those places to have been his home. The shelter and rooming houses did not provide him with the feelings of comfort, privacy, and permanency that Gordon wanted in his home.

*Gail*

Gail did not consider herself to be “technically homeless”, despite her lengthy stay in a shelter. While Gail did not explain to me exactly what she considers to be homeless in our interview, I inferred based on our discussion that for her to be homeless meant to sleep rough. She mentioned at times being “almost homelessness” when she was thrown out on the street, but said that she was never homeless because she “made people” help her.

**Nicole:** Would you have ever considered yourself homeless?

**Gail:** Aah,  
well god, technically, I wasn’t, even 20 years ago I was three months in Catharine Booth.

Three months.

And that may seem a long time  
my mom said you’re not havin’ flop houses. They’re not havin’ flop houses.  
This is just before I was thrown in the street...

**N:** What does home mean to you?

**G:** Humm.

Ah, oh god.

A place where you could stay...

Where you don’t have to move around like a nomad, like you know, I was there 12 years that was security.

It means security, right, you know?

It means a place where you can put down roots and feel comfortable.

After three and half years, I've been a bit comfortable there, right.  
Despite everything, you know?  
And I've had to uproot myself and try and move again, you know?  
It means security. It means not  
freezing on the street.  
It means being able to eat  
being able to cook, right.  
And like, like I say,  
I was never on the street cause I made sure somebody helped me, right  
but  
they tried and make sure I was  
you know, the system, right.  
So ah

it's a necessity, it's survival.  
...It means survival, you can't survive without a home  
in the Western world, you know.

As with Lori, *home* for Gail is linked to having the security that she would not be kicked out or asked to move. Gail says that *home* is "a necessity to survival" (meaning in this case shelter specifically) and that security and safety are important in the creation of a feeling of home. Gail also brings to our attention, as many participants did, that being comfortable and having the ability to put down roots in one's house is what creates that feeling of home.

Gail points out that there are external forces being acted on her and trying to push her onto the street. This is a good example of how structural violence can be brought to the surface of one's idea about how they are where they are. Gail, as well as Ann, Victoria, and Renee, see how the socio-economic environment we live in contributes to their housing struggles. This does not mean they do not put a heavy portion of the blame on themselves and their decisions (as Betty did with saying she could have tried harder to get the job, or Victoria did with saying she was "doing it wrong") but that they could see that there were also external factors that played a role in their housing issues.

## 4.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has examined the ideas of *homeless* and *home* in relation to each other and how an individual's personal experiences can alter the meaning of these terms to them. This research shows that *homelessness* and the feeling of being homeless constitute much more than the lack of a roof over one's head. It has also shown, as in Watson and Austerberry's (1986) study, that just because a person has no secure sleeping arrangements does not always mean they think of themselves as homeless; in contrast, those who have shelter sometimes think of themselves as homeless or without a home.

In section 4.2, I also deconstruct the concept of being *homeless* and discuss research that has examined the problems with this term being used to describe the experiences of those struggling with a variety of different housing situations. Glasser and Bridgman (1999) mention the problems with how broad the term *homeless* is and note that it does not distinguish between those who are living on the street, the "literally homeless" (Rossi in Glasser and Bridgman 1999:2), and those who have temporary or less conventional housing, the precariously housed. In order to properly discuss and put in place policies that will aid each group we must be able to differentiate between them and not lump these experiences together.

Hulchanski's (2012) review of the term *homeless* points to the confusion surrounding the ideas of a *house* and a *home* and demonstrates that, in order to eliminate problems with accessing housing, we must be able to clearly define what we are truly seeking to change. As discussed, this is why I propose that we look at housing issues as a spectrum and use the terms *sleeping rough* (living on the street, in tents, cars, etc.), *temporary institutional housing* (staying in shelters and other emergency housing



structures), and *precarious housing* (living arrangements that are outside of institutional housing, such as squatting, staying with friends and family and housing that is unstable and/or in poor condition).

Section 4.3 looks at *home* and how in three studies the participants understood *home* through their life experiences. Parsell's (2012) article looks at home through the eyes of 20 people sleeping rough in Brisbane, Australia. Two main themes were found in his research: physical shelter was important to participants' idea of *home*, and the idea of *home* is a strong concept that many people focus on even if they did not have a 'good home' while growing up. Kellett and Moore (2003) discuss what *home* meant for homeless youth in two locations – Dublin, Ireland and London, England – comparing and contrasting those experiences together and also with informal dwellers in Santa Marta, Colombia. Kellett and Moore (2003) state that to understand the experience of homelessness we must understand the experiences of home. In order to do this they look at the purposes and process of home-making in each of the locations studied. They conclude that *home* can provide a path to a feeling of belonging; depending on the location, these paths take different forms. Those who feel the lack of a home can indicate social exclusion, and working towards a home can be a path back into mainstream society (Kellett and Moore 2003:137). As Jackson (1995) states, *home* is a relationship between a person and the world. It is a tension between the two that is continually shifting and taking the place of the other (Jackson 1995:122-123). Jackson's name for this lived relationship being-at-home-in-the-world works very well with Kellett and Moore's (2003) findings.

The last article I look at in this section is Peled and Muzicant's (2008) research on

what *home* means to Israeli girls who have run away from home. *Home* in the article was looked at in two ways: each girl's home and the idea of *home* held in the general sense. For these young women, the act of running away is understood as an attempt to find better homes and to decrease the gap between their idea of *home* and what *home* was for them (Peled and Muzicant 2008:443).

It has been shown that *home* is considered as being something more than shelter, it is a relationship between oneself and the world, and that *homelessness* is usually equated strictly with the lack of shelter. The difference between these two ideas and meanings allow for confusion around what issues are being discussed and the best course of action for each individual case. This is why we need to have another phrase, *bereft-of-home*, to refer to the emotional and mental aspects of the need for housing; the feeling that one is home-less. This phrase will help individuals express the feelings that they do not have a home but without having to identify as homeless; *homeless* has many negative stereotypes and connotations which individuals may wish not to identify with; they are not like *them*.

The examples in section 4.4 show us that, while a lack of shelter plays a large part in people feeling homeless, it is also linked with a feeling that can be created by the loss of family or friends and a place where we can feel safe, secure, and comfortable enough to be ourselves. These interviews have shown that the idea of being *homeless*, when not talking about oneself, is discussed as sleeping rough. When asked if they would consider themselves to have been homeless at any point in their lives, most participants stuck with the idea of sleeping rough, but this feeling was also linked with whether they felt they had any options other than their current living situation. The feeling of being homeless was often discussed in terms of whether or not the individual felt they had a place to go to. For

example, John, Betty and Gordon said they did not consider themselves homeless because they could go to a number of friends or family for help, while Ann felt homeless because she felt trapped in her current living situation.

Along the lines of the research discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the participants of this research also see *home* as a path to feeling one belongs, a relationship between themselves and the world or being-at-home-in-the-world. The goal of the ideal *home* was something each participant wanted and was trying to achieve. This ideal *home* may alter slightly from person to person, depending on the individual's situation. However, the overall idea was a safe place in which they felt they could be themselves; they wanted to belong-at-home-in-the-world. As Marg states in her interview, she wants a place that she felt she had the "comfort to be me."

## **Chapter Five: Living in St. John's. The Specifics**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I examine the participants' experiences with housing and the related obstacles of living on a low income in St. John's. Those who are in need of cheaper housing have to manage an array of problems while trying to find and keep housing. This is important since being well informed about the personal experiences of individuals, and the resources they have used, is key to reaching certain demographics, making the best use of government programs around the creation of affordable housing. This chapter is divided into four sections. In section 5.2, I discuss the use of the idea of hidden homelessness in the literature and how it relates to one of the three categories I propose which is precarious housing. Hidden homelessness and precarious housing speak to the same population of people as they both refer to housing issues that are outside of sleeping rough and/or temporary institutional housing. Section 5.3 discusses how the participants went about locating a place to live in St. John's. The following section (5.4) focuses on the difficulties that the participants had in trying to maintain housing. Section 5.5 is an examination of the conditions of the apartments that participants have lived in. We see in this section that there is an obvious correlation between the cost of rent and a rental property's condition. The last section (5.6) then looks at how important the location of housing and availability of public transportation are to those who have housing constraints. The ability to move around within our community is something one can at

times take for granted. When the ability to do simple and daily errands has been taken away, it greatly affects one's life.

I have tried to keep the focus of each section as self-contained as possible.

However, because so many of these issues are closely linked, some of the quotations from my interviews cited earlier in the chapter do bring up points also made later.

## **5.2 Hidden Homelessness in St. John's**

In October of 2012, I attended the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and Homelessness Network conference. In Iain De Jong's keynote speech at this conference, he stated that 'if you think your community is unique you are just like everybody else'. I think this statement rings true in many ways, but not completely. We do tend to forget that, despite the similarities between different localities, provinces, or regions, and the parallel struggles faced by their inhabitants, the way to prevent or eliminate poverty and housing struggles may be slightly different in each due to its historical and contemporary circumstances. As in each individual case of housing struggles, the reasons behind a person being in this situation can be diverse; however, it is also the case that we can find patterns within the larger picture. I think that this is very true on a population basis as well. Within St. John's, and the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, housing issues do not fit the stereotypical idea many have of homelessness, but may share aspects in common with other Canadian cities and provinces of similar sizes.

At the conference mentioned above, I spoke with a Housing Support Worker from a small Newfoundland town, and he commented that before he got this position, his idea of homelessness was very narrow. He did not think his town, or the surrounding area, had

a homeless problem. After being on the job for a year and a half, his understanding of homelessness had drastically changed. He now knows just how much of the issue was, and still is, hidden and how many people are staying with friends and family, or couch-surfing until they are able to find suitable housing.

As I discuss in the introduction of this thesis, within St. John's (and in the rest of the province), housing struggles are best understood as hidden homelessness or cases of precarious housing. Those who are struggling with housing are "forced to live in unsafe, unsuitable housing" (Growing Homes: 2012). These houses and apartments are often more than the occupant can afford, leading to a cycle of unstable housing, including a continuous threat of eviction and couch-surfing from place to place (Growing Homes: 2012).

This hidden group of people are, for many reasons, left off of the statistics compiled about the number of people who are homeless, "some hidden homeless are not on the streets and are by historical and contemporary definitions not roofless" (Erickson 2007:58). Another reason is that some of the precariously housed (or hidden homeless) remain uncounted is the individuals' unwillingness to think of themselves as homeless. The "reluctance to believe that they are homeless and that they are at risk of becoming shelterless and so fail to register with formal social service agencies as homeless" (Erickson 2007:59). This lack of self-identification of being homeless is linked to precarious housing, as a part "of being a good family member or a good friend; rarely do people name the situation as one of homelessness. To admit to a lack of housing is to admit to a lack of rural goodness and wholesomeness where needs are met" (Erickson 2007:59). This, I think, is very much the case for St. John's and not only rural areas in

Newfoundland and Labrador. To reiterate this, here is a quote from the interview that I conducted with Eliza.

**Nicole:** ... Whenever I say what I am studying people always say “We don’t have any homeless people in St. John’s”.

**Eliza:** So many homeless people.

Well there’re homeless people,  
homeless people, and people who sleep on the street are two different things the  
definition of home,  
the definition of home is:  
these are my things  
this is my house  
this is where I cook  
this is where I sleep  
you know.

It’s,  
it is my sanctuary.  
There’s so many homeless people.

My god.  
Sure half my friends are homeless  
I think  
pretty much.  
Lots of wanderers  
you know.  
Lots of couch surfers, for years, and years and years  
it’s just like  
you know  
still working out of their parents’ home in  
East End or wherever  
goes home once a month  
you know  
and they’re 30.  
So  
that’s homelessness  
I guess.  
...I think a lot of people who appear homeless have a place  
like they have somewhere to sleep.  
...To you that would still  
they’re still  
that you are still  
calling that homelessness I would assume.

Here Eliza states that many of her friends are couch surfers. From my experience, this is very common in St. John's with our age group and lifestyle. A group of roommates, or one person, may have a constant flow of people staying with them for many different reasons, such as fights with those they are living with, the inability to continue living where they were for some reason, travel, or simply due to the convenience of the location of the host's house.

Many researchers have focused on precarious housing or hidden homelessness, completing many different research projects on this type of homelessness. In the *Homelessness Handbook* there is a small section called "The Homeless We Don't See". The author of this section, Victoria Lee Erickson (2007), states that the way we have come to understand homelessness, hidden homelessness, and the personal struggles that come with these life circumstances are based on "our ways of 'seeing' each other" (Erickson 2007:58). She goes on to say that "how we see shapes how we talk about and then how we act on social problems" (Erickson 2007:58). As argued in the previous chapter, it is because of this that we must look into how we define and perceive homelessness so we can correctly address specific community and individual circumstances.

One thesis I came across about hidden homelessness was from Revelstoke, British Columbia, a small town of about 7,230 people (Jameson 2009:4). This research project was completed as part of a Master of Arts program in Professional Communication. Within this article Jameson discussed how, in a rural town, homelessness is much more hidden than it is in an urban setting and how this changes how people understand homelessness in their community. Jameson (2009) asked her participants what their



definition of *homelessness* was and received a variety of answers from absolute homelessness (living on the street or sleeping rough) to being at-risk of homelessness. These answers provided show how stereotypes and a narrow definition of *homelessness* could create the idea that *homelessness* does not exist in a specific location. If what we see does not fit within our understanding of the issue, it is easy to think that homelessness does not exist, or at least not to any great extent. While St. John's is not as small as Revelstoke, there are similarities in terms of the ways in which a range of housing struggles are understood and ignored because they are so well hidden, as we will see in the following sections.

### **5.3 Finding a Place to Live in St. John's**

This section begins with a quotation from Eliza's interview. She gives a well-rounded overview of the problems in her personal experience and her understanding about what people on a low budget (a minimum wage of \$9.50 per hour at time of interview), or fixed income (2010s income support average for single adults was \$516.67 per month<sup>35</sup>), have to deal with when trying to find an apartment in downtown St. John's.

**Eliza:** We're also lucky now, 'cause the rentals were really insane about two years ago.

They're back down a little bit now like there seems to be a little less.

**Nicole:** You've noticed a difference?

**E:** I haven't, well

I mean

just because everyone talks to me about their stuff too right.

So it's like

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<sup>35</sup>Please refer to pages 10-12 for the original discussion of this data.

not 'cause I'm looking for places to live but  
 as it being the result of the person flowing through...  
 I've helped lots of people find apartments  
 and, and you know  
 tell a lot of people how it is. Or like, you know  
 taking note of places that are for rent and giving numbers and  
 all of a sudden I'm compiling numbers. And I really wanted to live by myself  
 which I've never done before  
 and ah  
 which would just be entirely impossible.  
 ...Well it is kind of entirely impossible for most people cause it's like  
 well downtown for sure  
 like  
 I'd say  
 the average of what I've heard  
 which would be you know places that  
 people  
 20  
 ...to 35 are going to live  
 'er maybe  
 Downtown St. John's people are different than other people so like  
 you know 20 to 60.  
 If you're going to be a downtowner, which is you spent most of your time on the  
 street.<sup>36</sup>  
 ...A cheap place, for like a one bedroom was like  
 about you know, you want to be a in clean above ground  
 place it was easy \$725 pay own utilities  
 you know what I mean.  
 Yeah a friend  
 I know  
 like one of my girlfriends  
 ...she moved out on her own  
 like by herself last year and she's been in two places  
 and the first place  
 ...was 750 and the second place is 825.  
 And still pay own utilities  
 and that's like  
 that's  
 that's crazy  
 and like they're still just like  
 little apartments

---

<sup>36</sup> Meaning partying in George Street, not sleeping on the street.

in downtown St. John's with  
 cold windows and like  
 mildew in the bathroom  
 like it's still  
 it is  
 it is just  
 outta hand and so  
 originally when I was  
 when a place came my way  
 I was actually, I was kind of back and fourth house-sitting at my cousin's place for  
 ah  
 a little while over the summer too because he  
 he's away a lot.  
 And ahum  
 but  
 yeah, and then, he was not away anymore so that was kind of not an option  
 anymore and  
 and we're really good friends but...it just wasn't something that I was going to go  
 stay at my cousin's...place  
 like it wasn't an option for me.  
 But like ah  
 so he aah  
 he just told me that there was this apartment that ah  
 was 575  
 all in  
 on [Lumber Road] which is there in the West End.  
 ...It was a bloody dive  
 but I saw  
 I can see potential in anything right a lick of paint and a beautiful things that you  
 own, it's lovely  
 you know.  
 But it was like up over three flights of stairs but the  
 the  
 landlord really fucked me around...  
 I was like if I have to pay 575 a month for this apartment  
 I ah  
 plus a five hundred damage deposit which was fine  
 I was like okay I got to do this.  
**N:** Five hundred dollar damage deposit?  
**E:** ...Well yeah like the first and last months is what she wanted  
 which you're not actually allowed to do  
 you're only allow three-quarters of it right?  
**N:** Right.  
**E:** I know.  
 ...But they do, a lot of people do first and last month

instead of damage deposit.

**N:** They're not allowed.

**E:** I know.

Oh and it's, it's everywhere because I keep hearing it  
and I kept telling people 'cause I help people with their housing finds  
I'm like they're not allowed to do that, but  
I mean at the same time you're looking for an apartment it's  
...the vacancy rate is what  
less than one percent.

Well I don't think it is right now.

**N:** I think it still is.

**E:** It still is okay.

...there is a lot more flow now than there was about a year ago which was like ...  
complete stagnation and everybody was like, there is actually nowhere to live.

Like, I'm going to be on the street  
and um

yeah

so I was, like yeah at that

you don't want to piss off the

you're like "Okay I just really want this house.

Look I'm, I'm desperate. I got three days to find an apartment

I got to move out of my other place it's hell on earth for whatever reason." And  
so

you're

you don't say to your landlord "Listen

I got issues with this

this carpet is disgusting

you got to replace it

I will live here."

And um

"You're only allowed to charge me  
three quarters of the  
rent."

Which nobody is going to do because you really want the apartment and they  
don't need, to deal with your shit and they're not like  
and none of the landlords aren't like real  
following tenants' acts or anything.

They're not like registered

like you know what I mean?

Like none of that is going on.

Yeah, everybody is just kind of screwed.

...I've been listening to this crap for about four years I suppose.

Now it's kind of

nobody's

really into it

unless, you know  
but then  
the more  
expensive apartments  
so, so you know you're trying to get  
you'd probably be alright  
if you  
were going to buy a get a eight or nine hundred a month one bedroom  
or something like that.  
Like they're a little bit more  
respectful because it's  
it's a nicer space and they want someone who is going to be there for a couple of  
years and they don't want to mess around with it and they know it is just one  
person.  
They're like okay this is a student  
with a job  
they don't smoke, they don't have pets and everything is perfect and that  
and that kind of back and forth.  
But when you're talking about lower income  
and like  
cheap-ass apartments  
... you're going to buy you own paint for your  
filthy bathroom and you're going to do whatever.  
And you're going to try to just  
keep the peace  
so that they don't  
have issues with your presence there.  
And so ah  
oh yeah, and we're back to the story which is about the landlord on [Lumber  
Road]  
... I met her  
and she was super nice  
and I felt like  
a girl I kind of know lived there before and had no trouble with her or whatever.  
There was like a condemned  
fire escape out the back so like  
they're  
they're filling in that door so there was no more fire escape.  
And they're, which was like kinda crazy because it was on the third floor and you  
had to come up three flights of stairs, so there was no way to get out  
of there  
which was fine because to me they were like "Well you can get a rope ladder out  
your window."  
That's totally fire code  
whatever happens in St. John's

but nobody follows those things in the city  
it lik-  
like nothing is fire code in St. John's.  
...They were doing some work. They tore up some flooring on the  
on the stairs leading up because it was stately  
and ah  
they said they were going to redo the bathroom by Christmas 'cause it was the  
worst thing you've ever seen in your life.  
But like there was, there was charm to the place and I was like  
this can totally be my  
own spot  
it will be all me  
and I was really excited about it and ah  
I was like  
... "I want to paint the place cause it's gross."  
and so  
she was like "Yeah you can totally pick out the colours.  
I'll buy the paint."  
She had a friend at the paint shop and she you know got a bit of a discount and  
you know she was totally delighted  
and so it was a really good back and forth, I mean I can hold my own in a  
conversation.  
...So that was fine  
...she was like "You know it will be about two weeks before we are done what we  
are doing here."  
I'm like "Perfect."  
I was just like "You just let me know  
I'd, I'd like to know a date." "I'll give you a week  
just let, let me know a date when you want to move in."  
And I was like "But I'd also really like to come in and do the paint and stuff  
before I get to move in  
like if that's cool."  
and she was like "Yeah." Totally into it.  
Everything's cool.  
And she left me hanging for about 15 or 16 days and like I didn't hear anything  
from her  
...it was to the point you know  
I had, I had to get  
I didn't have to get  
out of [John Ave] but I did need to go.  
Like the boys were coming home eventually, and I  
I needed to go.  
...I called her a bunch of times but she wasn't getting back to me  
and just really

...About three weeks later she was like "Ah yeah I bought, I got some primer there you wanted to do the whatever." and I was like it was like 18-19 days later and I was like "I just don't think this was a good start to like to a tenant landlord relationship here." So I was just I felt off about it where originally I felt really good about it that I didn't feel okay about so I didn't do it. And so really if I was going you know and paying that I would have only

I would have had to live on

...for me on a very on a very fixed income. The ah the utilities included was really important to me because it was ...I knew what money I was going to have, you know what I mean and so that's that was really important so I was like "Okay cool." Umm so yeah so 575 that's you know, I was going to have like 150 bucks to live on a month like 150 which is ...pennies. ...I don't buy coffee, you know what I mean. I might have a coffee at a coffee shop three or four times a year like that I don't, I don't buy drinks at ah at a convenience store or I don't do any of that and I haven't for a really long time. So I don't, I don't have that like constant kind of cash flow issue anyway but I'm like \$150 is not groceries for me for a month ...I don't know who could live on that.

Eliza discusses several important topics in this portion of her interview. She addresses the vacancy rate, conditions of apartments in the downtown area, how much rent is, landlords not following regulations for damage deposits and how tenants have very little power when the vacancy rate is so low, the correlation between rent and how the landlord treats the property and the tenants, the importance of having utilities included when living on a fixed income, what she would have left to live on out of her social assistance cheque if she paid \$575 in rent, and a personal story of trying to rent a specific apartment. Other participants discussed many of these topics and I believe that many people have experienced what she has described here. This quote also provides good examples of structural violence. Two of Eliza's points mention what we can consider as structural violence, the first is how landlords ask for the first and last month's rent or a damage deposit that is more than three-quarters of the rent, both of which are against the Newfoundland and Labrador Residential Tenancies Act. Because of the low vacancy rate during this time landlords were, and they still do try, to get away with asking for more money upfront than they are legally allowed making it even more difficult to low income renters find suitable housing. The second example of structural violence Eliza mentions is how landlords do not follow fire codes. As Eliza says, even if renters knows their rights and the regulations that should be followed by the landlord, they feel powerless as they do not feel they can stand up for their rights and still be able to find a place to live. If tenants are in a desperate situation to find a place to live, they sometimes do not have much choice about the standard of the apartment they agree to live in; forces situations such as this can create more issues for the renter down the road.



As Eliza notes, finding a place to live in St. John's seems to be a matter of who you know. In the next part of this section, I examine how Eliza, Renee, and Victoria went about finding housing. Each of these women expressed the importance of social networks when looking for and finding housing. In Carol Stack's ethnography *All Our Kin* (1974) she examines the strategies used by those living in The Flats, a low-income black community in the USA. Stack explains how important social networks are to the daily survival of those living within this community and how without these networks it would be near impossible for those living in this community to survive. The participants in my research also suggest that reliance on social networks and kin is a primary route to survival.

Houses in St. John's, at least in the downtown area, tend to stay in circles of friends and when the vacancy rate is low, which it was at the time of this research, contacting someone on Kijiji, or through the local newspaper, is often futile because the apartment is gone, or as I have experienced myself, the landlord will not return your phone call. This creates a very interesting situation in St. John's. It seems that, once a group of friends, or a network of people, get a hold on a house they only let go when they, and all of the people they know, have 'moved on'. This is excellent when you know a lot of people living in St. John's and have the contacts to know where the good and bad places are, what landlords are good and will fix things that happen, or who will let the house fall apart and try and blame it on you. Newspaper and other listings work best when you are looking at the higher end of things, which has a smaller market of people looking and tends to have landlords who follow rules and regulations.

In the following quotation, Eliza talks about how a house can stay within the grasp of a group of friends for a while and how she feels St. John's works with regards to finding a place to live:

**Nicole:** Have you used any other ways of finding apartments? Like you said you helped a lot of other people find apartments.

How did you go about that?

**Eliza:** ... Well mostly the Internet... funny cause you need the Internet to, now to find a house.

Which is really interesting 'cause how can you have the Internet if you don't have a house? I mean like most people don't have computers especially like lower income people.

... A lot of stuff doesn't go to the newspaper.

Like I remember talking to the landlord on [Lumber Street] and she was like "You know I'm not going to post this if you're going to take it."

...

Most of the houses, I have friends who live on [Audrey Street]. I have friends who live on, well not anymore, on [Shorts Hill].

People on, so our place on [Park Street].

Ahum

my sister's old place on [Park Street]

[Fall Street], so I can think of

... six without any thought places that have just been passed through my personal friends.

We had a place on [Shorts Hill] like

well I wasn't there, but for

five and half years and you know like four or five different groups of people moved in and out of it and that is

that's a big, that's how people get houses in St. John's.

"So and so is moving out." "I'm taking it, send me to your landlord."

"Okay we are done."

That is really

that is number one. That is definitely number one on how you find that kind of stuff and because I talk to a lot of people and get those things in and out.

Ahum

number two would be access to the Internet, ah Craig's list and... Kijiji and all that kind of stuff. They last there for 30 seconds and they're gone.

Ahum

stuff very rarely goes to the paper.

So like the tried and true methods of finding housing are totally different so people, ah I think a lot of people are confused too because they think there is

nothing out there and a lot of people, especially in downtown, don't post anywhere and just put a sign in their window.

'Cause people are going to see and, and people are going to call.

You know? So it's about being

it's about being out there. It's about talking to people and that's the biggest one that's you're hearing people "Oh so and so is moving out of a one bedroom I know someone who wants it." People say that to me at least once a week.

It's like "I'm looking for a place." It's like "Alright".

And we all say it to each other because the more you say it the more it is out there and it will come back to you, you know.

But if people are not around people I don't know really what they do.

I guess they are sitting on Craig's List hoping for the best, 24 hours a day.

Eliza feels very strongly about the fact that the way to find a place in St. John's is through social contacts. She has also spent the majority of her life in St. John's and surrounding areas so Eliza has a very strong social network on which to rely to help her find a place to live.

How do community organizations help people in need if the only resources they have are newspaper and Internet ads? What issues does this bring with it? What worries me about this situation is that individuals or organizations that are charged with helping those in need of proper housing cannot have all of the available resources at their fingertips. Social workers and community organizations may not have the social networks with groups of people who move in the circles of lower rental properties.

What does this mean for people who do not have many connections, or want space from the connections they do have within St. John's? It could mean that individuals get stuck in a cycle; once they befriend a group of people, finding a place to live outside of that group can be difficult. When someone is trying to change their life around but continues to live with people who have similar habits, it can become very difficult to break out of those habits. Finding a new place to live away from these situations becomes

impossible especially if you have a limited income. Eliza also addresses this problem in her interview quoted above.

Renee also gives a good insight into why social networks are important when looking for a place to live:

**Renee:** ...When you're not able to pay for  
to afford...  
whatever the norm on the market at that point in time is  
like, if you can do that then you can look for whatever you want right.  
But when you're trying to find  
you know  
something below that  
then you need to find deals.  
...Normally they aren't advertised and if they are advertised they're gone  
immediately or they go.  
It's just  
people do rent to people  
to friends of friends because they can trust them

...I think, but my whole life has been like that trying to find places the best way.

I think  
to go about it is by word of mouth.  
...Specially here where everybody owns houses and a lot of people own properties  
...If you'd consider it one generation of above me...  
Ten years or 20 years  
older than me  
like they all own property...the people that I know.  
...I think you'll get a more honest, like it is really hard when you're answering  
ads.  
And then you go, you think it sounds great and then you go and  
"Ohh"  
or  
you go and the guy has forgotten that you had a meeting and so you know.  
...And sometimes the places that you move into, like where I am now, loads of  
people have lived there before right.  
Like it's one of those places where lots of people, lots of musicians, lots of people  
have lived there so  
they kind of know the ins and outs of the house.  
So you kind of get, the you know  
...you know the weak points and the good points and  
...you know what to expect about um

you know how quickly your landlords do respond to things and  
and um  
where trouble points are to make sure that you know  
you deal with them.  
I don't know I think that ahum

I think listings are

I shy away from um  
from companies that run rentals

like housing, I don't know what they are called like housing  
**Nicole:** Property management.

**R:** Yeah.

I shy away from that. I find that though I had one of the best deals ever in  
Montreal

...I shy away from that. I don't know I think that if an individual is renting  
even if they have numerous properties, I don't know it's just think they care more  
about, I don't know, maybe it's, maybe I'm wrong.

I just get a

I just find it impersonal going through property management

...then it is just like a big business kind of thing.

And it's just

they don't care

and I

it seems like it would be

kind of

like, how long it takes stuff to get fixed at the building where [I work] is you're  
just on a list of stuff, of priorities and they'll get to you at some point depending  
on

and I've only heard horror stories really about a lot of  
so I just I don't know.

**N:** No especially the companies that are around town, it doesn't seem like there is  
really

any good ones.

In my personal dealings with them has just been  
they're a business but they don't act very professional.

**R:** Or ethical.

I think there is a lot,

you know it's interesting 'cause I

um

but maybe I'll balance your interviews because, because I do feel very, very privileged.

...I lived in three different houses with three different landlords who were good people cared about their properties.

...Still difficult when you're renting and you don't own the house I mean you're trying, I mean you don't have a lot of extra money to, to do things and you're dependant on somebody else 'ta fix things and 'ta, and you'll always feel like you are wearing down someone else's house. Like you're using someone else's house even though you know it's just daily wear and tear.

I mean it's not your house.

It's a tricky thing when even if you have really good landlords just because it's

...I don't know. Maybe I feel badly all the time about stuff like that but I've been really, really lucky because I've been in three different places.

But

I've found them only after pulling all my hair out and from friends of friends of friends.

Not through any other kind of, nothing else was effective.

Like I couldn't find anything

and I

that's all I did

...I called every single place that was for rent and that was for and even places that were way above what I could afford just to go and see.

We can see here the importance of social networks for Renee when she was looking for "a deal," which was a suitable house for her and her children. When an individual is looking for a place to rent that is below the market average but is in need of a certain size, relying on the trust built with friends and family, such as Renee has stated, seems to be the way to find housing. Renee provides an interesting view of the idea that who one knows could determine the type of housing one lives in and the side of the spectrum of precious housing they are in. Renee comments that since most people she knows, or the generation above her, all own houses, this plays a factor in the types of housing she has secured. She knows the landlords instead of the tenants, which is the opposite situation for many of the other participants, such as Dave, Eliza, and Victoria

who have mentioned finding housing through friends who are moving out of the place they are renting.

Next is a segment from Victoria's interview, in which she discusses how she has found apartments in the past, and her struggles with that process.

**Victoria:** That's all just networking, like social networking, like putting it up on Facebook and saying like "I need a place to live" and someone being like "We need roommates" and I guess people pulling together in circles of friends. That's how we got that one.

...The second one we found in the newspaper.

The basement apartment.

**Nicole:** *The Telegram*?

**V:** *The Telegram* yes.

...And then

it was a friend

[Betty]

needed roommates.

And we did that

and then it was through Facebook the last time.

**N:** What was the process like when you were trying to I guess [go from] the place with five people to the basement apartment, to find that in the paper?

**V:** That was good.

...You know like, you kind of have to be really on the ball.

My mom helped out a lot.

She's very like go get 'er in those situations, so she was like very like "Get the Saturday paper

at the crack of dawn, circle all the ones you want, call them up immediately

and try and be the first one in the door every time and the first one to make an offer." So it was pretty much

we went to see a bunch of houses

myself and my mom

and

umm

cause [Will] was working most of the time

and me and my mom would go see them and

...most of them were pretty awful

smelled like cat pee and gross stuff like that.

And then when we found that apartment, it wasn't even fully finished  
they were still, like laying the floor a little bit.  
Umm but we walked in and it was new and it didn't smell bad  
and it was bright and  
as soon as I walked in the door I wanted it.  
Because it was like liveable.  
And so it was just a matter of  
being incredibly charming  
to the landlady  
and

I think that I put on a little air of desperation towards her, like  
I'm pretty sure I said the words "I will do anything to have this apartment" um  
and then  
calling her back and borderline harassing her  
borderline.  
And just making  
like I think it's like with her  
the only, like that particular landlady  
was the only one that I had to make a personal connection with and  
like in every other situation, I wasn't involved with the landladies at all.  
And yes they were all ladies  
almost all of them  
except for I guess [Betty] I guess it was both her parents.  
But um  
but yeah, the women were always in charge.  
And  
she was the only one, and I made a very personal connection with her.  
You know, and like  
could call her up at any time and all that kind of stuff.  
So it was pretty  
it was good though, I think we only looked at  
maybe three or four places before we looked at that one.

**N:** Yeah.

And what were those places like?

**V:** Bad.

They were all basement apartments and they were all mm  
pretty terrible conditions.

There was a bunch that had

lots with an like I think all three of them had  
animals

that were extremely unsanitary.

That was the main thing and [Will] is

so severely allergic

that we couldn't be in a place that had an animal in it before.



They all had carpet, they were all  
covered in cat or dog pee  
and fur  
everywhere.  
And just like ripped up walls and it was just, like  
there was a couple that were just, like  
and it didn't seem like the tenants themselves

cared or  
were involved at all in wanting to move.  
So it was like their stuff was everywhere and the places were filthy.  
And like  
there was no attempt to clean it or to organize it or too  
like  
try to  
sell it at all.  
Except for the, ah place that we got.  
'Cause nobody lived in it before  
well she had a really bad  
bad time with her previous tenants and they had children and  
a dog that ruined all the flooring.  
And all that stuff, so they had to rip all that up and redo it.  
And that was the only reason why we got such a good place  
was because she was forced to  
renovate because of her last tenants or whatever.

N: Yeah

and they were all in the same price range? These other places and the one you got?

V: Yeah.

N: What price range was that? Do you remember?

V: It would be between

I don't think we would have gone any higher than \$700 a month.

They would have to be between six and seven

...plus utilities, pay your own utilities...

N: And that's two bedrooms right?

V: Yeah.

Victoria discusses a couple of things above but mainly the process of finding an apartment. She states that three out of four times she found an apartment by using her social networks and once through the local newspaper, *The Telegram*. Victoria also gives us a glimpse of the condition of some of the apartments she was looking at in her price

range, leading her to act as though she was desperate with her future landlord when finding a clean, newly renovated basement apartment that was, as she said, “liveable”. The conditions of apartments for rent, which Victoria brings up, are another form of structural violence. Victoria’s use of the word “liveable” to describe the apartment that she ended up renting is an important indicator of the conditions of the other apartments that she saw and how the rental system allows subpar housing to be rented to those with limited incomes.

Most people who participated in this research said that they would use their personal networks or social media, such as Facebook, as their first resource to finding a new place to live. After that they used the newspaper (*The Telegram*) and websites, such as Kijiji and Craig’s list. People would also turn to the resources provided by community centres such as The Wiseman Centre, The Native Friendship Centre, The Seniors Resource Centre, New Hope Community Centre and Iris Kirby House. Some participants would turn to these community resources before trying anything else if they had used them before. Others would only turn here as a last resort, if at all. Dorothy would even search different bulletin boards around town, such as at the Health Sciences Centre and grocery stores, to find posters for apartments. To help them find a place, both Eddy and Eliza took note of ‘For Rent’ signs while they walked around downtown.

Discrimination is a problem that those dealing with housing constraints come up against and can prevent them from obtaining housing. Dave, Ann, and Lori brought up occasions in which they felt they were being discriminated against while they were searching for housing. Dave spoke about his experience while living at The Wiseman Centre and trying to find a new place to live.

**Dave:** I spent  
an hour on the phone calling all these, they has the listing  
right?  
Apartments for rent and in different parts of the city.  
And one of them for bedsitting rooms like, right?  
So that is where I started calling 'cause it is cheaper.  
So I called a few of them a lot of them were gone  
one of 'em hung up on me.  
Because he must of seen the number on the phone that said Wiseman Centre  
you know.  
A lot of people turn ye away because of it, right?  
And you say  
tell someone you're at The Wiseman Centre and they think, you know  
"Why you 'dere?" "You a paedophile?" or yeah, you know  
...some people don't recognize it as a place to go  
when you need it, right?

With this type of discrimination from landlords who hold such stereotypes, one can understand why people only choose to use the resources of The Wiseman Centre and other community agencies as a last option for finding a place to live.

Ann and I discuss how she went about finding a place to live in the past and how she would go about it now. She also mention the discrimination that she has experienced while looking for an apartment and how, when she felt the most desperate, she was not sure of what resources were available to her, but she would only go to the community centres she did know of as a last resort.

**Ann:** Well then I didn't have a whole lot of knowledge of things like Kijiji and stuff like that but umm not really like a techie person like than umm  
I am not really  
I really hate fussing around with paper ads.  
'Cause with a lot of those places it's like a huge pain to get in touch with people and they are usually junky.  
Umm  
but if I were to look for a place now knowing what I know, I think I would probably ask around amongst friends  
cause they would be able to tell me what is good and what is not.  
And then after that I think it would be

through like a property management place cause you know they are usually kept in fairly good repair and then probably like a Kijiji kinda place rather than the paper.

That would be my methods.

The paper is good, I mean it's open to a lot of people but I'd don't know.

...The whole prospect of looking for an apartment is just really overwhelming to me 'cause it really umm time consuming and

I don't know.

...The last place I looked for, one of the reasons why I went for the [Heavy Bay Road] apartment was that I had phoned other places in the paper and a lot of people were like you know "No pets or children" or like why are kids put in the same category as a dog?

Like they are not going to shit on the floor,

I don't understand it. So that is really frustrating and that cuts down on a lot of choices.

N: ...Do you also find that people will [discriminate] because you are a student...?

A: Yeah there is a bit of discrimination there I guess from people especially when I was on social assistance.

Some people would say well "What do you do? Where do you get your money?"

I'd be like well I get a student loan and I get some social assistance right now and

N: ...They would ask you right up front?

A: Some people would.

Some places if you go through like an application process they'll kind of like want proof of your income.

...And I had looked into ah you know putting applications with city housing and stuff but from what people tell me the waiting list is two years long so yeah so it's weird.

N: ...Have you ever, well besides the city housing, have you ever used a community centre or any of the programs that the city has on the go for housing, to find housing?

A: I am not really aware of any

I'd, I

how do I explain that?

I guess when I was feeling most desperate I didn't know where to even go and ask about it.

Like umm

it was usually from word of mouth from other people. Like I have an aunt that umm her marriage ended in the States and she came back here. She wasn't making a lot of money but she applied for some sort of city housing where they they basically adjust your rent based on your income you know those programs.

And she was hooked up with a place like that and I called them and they were like, "You got to make like \$20,000", and I was like "I don't so sorry okay".

**N:** ...They didn't offer any other

**A:** Not really.

They were like you should call like Newfoundland Housing

...Newfoundland Housing they are not really great to deal with there I mean they must get thousands of phone calls and they've got so many people on wait lists and

so I never really know where to go for that and I called the umm

Single Parents Association and they said basically there is City Housing or Newfoundland Housing.

Ann reinforces that finding an apartment in the paper or on a personals ad website, such as Kijiji, would not be her first step. She, like many of the others I have discussed, would go to her friends first. Ann also mentions how overwhelming and stressful she finds the process of locating an apartment. Many participants report that they have been stressed out and overwhelmed while trying to find a place to live. In the last part of Ann's comments on this topic, she clearly states five contributing factors to her struggle to find and keep housing. They are financial, location (close to school and other amenities as to avoid long travels on public transportation), the condition and up-keep of the apartment, not having the ability to have a roommate (or being single), and control of her parents. These are very common issues for many of the participants, with the exception of the control Ann's parents have over her situation, which was unique to her in this study.

Ann stated that she was not really aware of housing assistance programs and found it difficult to learn about the programs she did find. She mentioned that she was not eligible for the program for which her aunt was because she did not make enough money and the City Housing waitlist was much too long. Ann briefly mentioned her dealings with NL Housing stating, "They are not really great to deal with there. I mean they must get thousands of phone calls and they've got so many people on waitlists." Both of these

situations described by Ann are examples of structural violence, as they show us the social processes in which lead Ann into a situation in which she was vulnerable to housing struggles. Lori also discussed her dealings with calling NL Housing as having been a negative experience:

**Lori:** You know supposedly they are there to help people but they don't act like it. Some of them are fine I'm sure but I mean right from the beginning I had a ...horrible bitchy women every time I called and it's like "I'm evicted" you know "Have you got me anything yet?" And she just get right snippy with me and you know as if you're not good enough for me to talk to. I make a lot of money and you know. ...And they treat people like that like, they expect people to be not so bright and you know worn down and trodden so they treat people like that. They probably just all, a vicious circle, if people are going to treat you like that eventually you are going to start feeling like it.

Discrimination as mentioned by Ann, Dave, and Lori can be a barrier to finding housing as it is a form of structural violence that can greatly harm one's sense of self. To be told that because of one's life circumstances they do not deserve to live in a certain place can make it even more difficult for an individual to get to a point in which they can change those life circumstances. When a person is worried and stressed out about being evicted, or trying to find a new place to live, the last thing they need is to be treated poorly by those who are supposedly there to help and be part of the support system an individual is supposed to rely on. This discrimination and poor treatment of people struggling with housing issues by government agencies and landlords is a very clear example of structural violence. Structural violence in this case consists of those political, cultural, and economic processes that prevent a person from keeping or finding suitable housing; discrimination towards those struggling with housing issues is a good example of this.

In this section I have discussed how the participants of this research went about finding apartments and houses. Most participants indicate that social networks are the most important when it comes to finding a place to live. This could be knowing landlords and/or tenants and being in contact with them by word of mouth or social networking sites such as Facebook. Having a personal connection, as with many aspects of life, helps a person to obtain a place to live. If the landlord knows you or if the landlord has a good relationship with the current tenant and this tenant suggests an individual, it is much more likely the landlord will rent the apartment to that person. Landlords will take a recommendation from someone with whom they have a personal connection and have established some sort of trusting relationship already. This also works in favour of the tenant; knowing the landlord or knowing someone who has dealt with her or him already is comforting knowledge to have because you know what to expect from this person and how they will deal with potential problems. This is the downfall of relying on postings on websites such as Kijiji and Craig's List, or on bulletin boards, for these landlords you are just another person who has responded to their ad and it can be difficult to get one's foot in the door. The next section will look at the issues the participants had with keeping their foot inside the door once it was there.

#### **5.4 Keeping Housing**

Keeping a place to live is closely related to the section above on finding a place to live. Many of the reasons that forced participants to leave where they were living are the same reasons why they had trouble finding a place to begin with. Such reasons can be financial (the rent is increased, loss of income, etc.), problems with roommates, eviction

by a landlord (because the tenant did not pay rent, the landlord needed or wanted to complete renovations, etc.), and lastly the conditions of the rental property, which will be discussed in the next section. In this section, I explore some issues that relate specifically to keeping housing. I begin with a discussion of Jane's experiences.

Jane was living in an apartment building that did not allow the consumption of alcohol; in her interview, Jane stated that her consumption of alcohol has been a contributing factor to her struggles with finding and keeping housing. At the time of our interview, Jane was getting evicted because she had a beer in the hallway of her apartment building and fell down. She said that her landlord was supposed to give her two notices for alcohol consumption before eviction, but she only received one in writing. Jane could not remember when the notice was issued. Unfortunately, the circumstances surrounding Jane's living conditions are very vague as we only had one short interview. I was unable to get into contact with her after the first initial interview. For Jane, it seems that she has struggled with alcoholism for some time and, as she stated, it had contributed to her housing struggles. She was living in a supposedly alcohol-free environment; however, she said that many of the tenants were consuming alcohol on the property. She was unable to continue living there due to her own alcohol consumption. For this research, Jane's case was a rarity, as she was the only participant who stated that she was evicted because of her inability to control her consumption of alcohol in order to adhere to the rules of the building.

Dave also discusses the reasons why he has had to move out of his apartments. He sheds light on a few of the challenges of keeping housing when dealing with lower end and cheaper rentals.



**Dave:** The ah place I was ah living to [in Tree Hills] missus took me rent cheque one day and next day she told me I had to get out because welfare found out...that she was renting a room to me and she was getting welfare right

and she didn't want to lose her welfare.

So then I looked at a place on [Hamlet Circle]

and that was in August. I paid me rent and last week of August before me rent, a week before me rent was due again for September.

Buddy comes in one Sunday morning and says "Ah you got to be out next Sunday."

"One week to get out."

Right.

I said "Right on."

I don't know what the problem was with him he was just renting the room.

So that was alright so then I ended up...on the street in September.

That was September 2009.

...

For [Short Street] my issue for leaving, there was slumlord.

Aah

he was gettin' direct deposit.

Welfare 'er HLRE was paying he directly

and I requested to get the ceiling fix. Aah

I ask it

was two days a steady flow of water going through my apartment right from upstairs

and

I requested to have it cleaned up and he never cleaned it up right.

It just aah

as long as his money was coming in to him all he cared for aah

over here [Caitlyn Street] was just, aah the only issue I had there was, aah a tenant got all control over the house and that landlord don't live there so she can't

see and know

know what's on the go.

She can only believe aah

the person that's

been there all this time

and

you know.

But that's it with that place

and the only issue with the other place [Prince Ave.] was bedbugs, right?

Other than that I would have

would have been still in either one of the places.

I would have liked to stay 'dere [Caitlyn Street] cause it's a clean place and right.

But that's it.

As we can see, for Dave, the relationships that have been built around the landlord/tenant arrangement have been lacking in honesty and continually left him feeling bereft-of-home. This includes the landlord's ability to make a living within the confinements of the law while on social assistance and is an example of the social and economic processes that make one vulnerable to housing struggles. Dave's lack of notice of eviction in the Tree Hills apartment was one of the leading steps to him finding himself sleeping rough in September 2009. If his landlord in Tree Hills was able to rent her apartment and still receive her social assistance, then Dave's downward spiral of events may not have taken place. As I am not sure of the agreement Dave had with some of his landlords I cannot state that the rules and regulations with regard to the Residential Tenancies Act (House of Assembly, Newfoundland and Labrador 2000)<sup>37</sup> and termination notices were not followed in the situations described but, because of Dave's surprise and lack of knowledge as to why he was evicted, it is most likely that some regulations were not been followed. Dave states that he did not want to move out of most of these apartments but was forced out because of external factors (forms of structural violence) or relationship problems with others living within the rental property.

Betty discusses how one problem that affected her ability to retain housing was being able to find appropriate roommates. She comments a couple of times on the 'type' of people who are still living in shared housing after a certain age.

**Betty:** It seems most things that I am looking at in shared housing either it still seems out of the price range somehow it is kind of still like 4-5 hundred by the time you figure out add on the bills

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<sup>37</sup> [www.servicenl.gov.nl.ca/landlord/term\\_notice.html](http://www.servicenl.gov.nl.ca/landlord/term_notice.html)

and you add on everything else.

The other thing is I am finding like, a lot of, there is it is a lot of dirty houses. A lot of these things and getting that right person and I guess even interests to match concerning how much you want to clean.

And that chances are that if you get to a certain age and you are still that you have to share a house not to be funny but okay call centres fine, if that's the way you are working and you are supporting yourself and you are taking care of yourself okay great.

But it's living with those girls [her former roommates] and they just it seemed like, okay they were working to survive and that was it, they really they didn't have anything about them that they wanted to get out and actually explore their city.

Or kind of make themselves better.

Just they want to survive and that's it

And I guess part of like being

is if you can find the friends to live with that's okay.

And keeping it

okay well they [her former roommates] didn't think too much of my lifestyle choices

and I guess I'm sure they're not the only ones who would disagree with my lifestyle choices so

I guess it's either

I change my way or they change their ways.

And it's, it's living with anybody you're always going to struggle that there's going to be things that your routine that you like to eat peanut butter toast upside down

while drinking milk through the other hand.

Stupid things

that you're always going to struggle with, that in shared housing

and keeping it, I guess.

I don't know I am always looking for better.

I guess maybe part of, there is always a part of me thinking

there is something more, always looking for the grass being greener on the other side. When actually

when you start to look around sometimes it just comes to the point that

okay if you finally met that one person, you finally got that job that actually does it for you that sort of pays the bills and gives you with a little bit left over

I guess it is just being happy with yourself.

So

maybe it's just me as opposed to everybody else

it's hard work and that's

I mean I  
I remember talking to [a friend] here she was, she gave up everything to go travelling.  
The apartment the job the car everything else and now she's come back and here she's  
I don't know late 30s or something and okay I am living at home now  
so same position as me and she's like "Well I can't have company if I want to never mind boys girls whatever."  
Just because you are living with your parents' house.  
So it's I mean you can be rude to them, they are being nice  
they're nice enough to let you stay there  
so you can't really  
have that  
and it's these things with the housing issues 'nd  
you don't know if you wants to be on your own but the thought okay  
well living with someone that's  
like complete strangers. It's hard just to strike that balance well okay friendly  
enough but not so friendly that  
you start realizing that actually I don't like this person that much and I don't really  
think much of this person.  
And I mean after a certain point you, usually most people by you know late 20s  
you've bought your house and you can afford everything so that the type of people  
not to be rude or whatever, it seems the type of people that are still in shared  
housing to be honest beyond a certain age  
they just they don't want to do any better, that they are just happy living like that.

While I do not agree with Betty that people past a certain age living in shared housing are  
always happy with the situation of their lives, considering she herself is not happy living  
in such arrangements, in Betty's understanding of her experiences this is true. She  
mentions that the women she was sharing a house with "Just want to survive", she then  
goes on to state that if you can find a group of friends to live with that is okay. For Betty,  
in this particular case, she felt she did not fit in with the women with whom she was  
living and felt very much like an outsider. She felt very bereft-of-home in this particular  
situation. This of course would make for an uncomfortable living situation, but what I  
think Betty overlooks is that perhaps, like her, right now wanting to survive and pay the  
bills on time is really as far ahead as those young women could look (Victoria points in

this out in a quotation provided further below where she refers to her lack of plan or ability to plan).

Betty talks about how keeping housing for her was problematic because she is always looking for something better, she has yet to be happy with where she has been living because she has yet to find a place where she can truly be herself and feel that she is living life the way she should be. Betty has yet to find the situation in which her relationship with a housing location seems to be a balanced and reciprocal relationship in which she feels a sense of being-at-home-in-the-world. The exception to this is when she was spending most of her time at her ex-boyfriend's house helping him move in and setting up the home before his wife and kids arrived in town. This constant feeling of needing something better, I think, has a lot to do with what Betty, and her parents, expect of her. It has to do with how Betty understands what a successful life is supposed to be – go to school, get a job, get married, and buy a house. This feeling of not living up to the standards of society, for Betty, caused her to continuously move and look for that perfect place where she would be happy; as she said, she is always looking at the greener grass on the other side. I think this also contributed to her feelings of inadequacy. These feelings also come out in Victoria's comments below and, I believe, were also a major factor in leading her to move around as well.

**Nicole:** So one thing you just said then was  
you don't think  
you can do it the way you're supposed to do it.  
...Do you know what you meant by "supposed to do it"?

**Victoria:** ... Well you know.

There is this whole mentality that people graduate high school you go get a degree  
you like pick a career. You  
make money at it.  
You meet a person you buy a house.

You get engaged you have kids like it's just like, you know, like ah, that's what you're supposed to do and like Western, I don't know if it's Western, but the society that we are currently in.

...I know a lot of people who are 25 and have it worked out.

Like

they have houses and they've got their relationship and they've got plans and they've got 5-year plans and they've got 10-year plans and they've got 15-year plans...

I don't have a 5-month plan.

I don't have a 3-month plan.

I don't have a plan like

I'm trying to make it to the next pay day and that's as much as I got going on right now.

Here we can see that societal pressures have caused Victoria to feel that her path in life is not the "correct" one. This could lead to feeling the need to escape or continuously look for a better place as Betty was. In a discussion of poverty and downward mobility

Catherine Kingfisher's (2001) reviews Katherine S. Newman's book *Falling from Grace:*

*Downward Mobility in the Age of Affluence* noting that, in this work, Newman shows

how:

Those at the top of the economic ladder are subject to greater assaults on identity and self-regard than those further down the economic hierarchy...middle-class [people]...view their falls from grace as manifestations of personal shortcomings. Thus, it is those who benefit the most from claims that people at the top are there because they deserve to be who suffer the most from events that seem to indicate that they are falling because they are somehow unworthy. The result, in effect, is that they other themselves. Those lower on the hierarchy, in contrast, have different and less personally damaging cultural resources with which to buttress the psychological effects of downward mobility. (Kingfisher 2008:825)

From this understanding of downward mobility we can see that Betty and Victoria's searching for something better and their feelings of not living life "correctly" are linked to their "fall from grace" or downward mobility. That, because of their "choices", they are somehow unworthy of stable living arrangements.

Betty's comment above on people over a certain age living in shared housing and being okay with their shared living arrangement leaves out the feeling that a person can get when they become comfortable in a spot. Once we have become comfortable in a house, or even job, town, or relationship, it becomes more difficult to leave that place or situation. We may not be totally satisfied with the situation but leaving it and stepping outside of one's comfort zone is a difficult choice to make (Gail touches on this in the following section when she mentions her discontentment with her current living situation but her apprehension about leaving).

Betty also does not take into account the creation of a family from friends and roommates. Betty felt like an outsider in the examples that she provided, stating that her roommates did not approve of her lifestyle and she did not of theirs. Betty moved into this house, and a few others, after the original people had been there and set up already. She was walking into situations in which the households were already set up and she was unable to create her own space within them.

Among the research participants for this project, the number of clear-cut evictions was relatively low, with only four (Dave, Jane, Lori and Gail) out of the 15 interviewed saying they had been being evicted. Gail's eviction was because of the need to renovate the apartment that she had been living in for twelve years. I bring attention to this because I think that one of the stereotypes of those who are dealing with housing struggles is that they are typically the "difficult to house" tenants who are "dirty and irresponsible." This research has not sustained that idea. But this research would also not support that the main issue is that landlords are not keeping their apartments up to liveable conditions. With only three (Dorothy, Dave, and Ann) out of the 15 people interviewed stating that

they moved because they simply could not live within the physical conditions of their apartment any more. This is not to say that other participants did not have concerns about the condition of apartments, it is just that the final factor that pushed the tenants out in Dorothy's, Dave's, and Ann's cases were the physical conditions. The following section examines statements about the conditions of the apartments that came up often during these interviews.

### **5.5 Conditions of Apartments**

In St. John's, as in many cities, the condition of the apartments and houses vary greatly and conditions of rentals are reflected in the amount of the rent requested. As one would think, the more expensive a rental is, the nicer it is and people who seem to care more about their property usually own it. Through my own experiences as a renter in St. John's, I have noticed that the more expensive a rental is, the quality of the transaction that happens between the landlord is much higher. Eliza has also noticed this and mentions it in her comments in the beginning of this chapter. As I have interviewed people who are struggling with housing issues, their budgets tend to be on the low side. I present five accounts here as a basic overview of the stories I have heard regarding the conditions of apartments within St. John's. These stories of course are not the only ones I heard while doing my research. In addition, I have heard similar accounts outside of this research, as a resident of St. John's, and as someone who has been a low-income renter. As with much of this thesis, I let the participants' words and stories speak for themselves while I draw connections between participants' interviews. Hearing each story and



knowing the people's frustrations expressed in their own words helps us to really see how devastating these problems can be.

I begin with Ann who starts off discussing the state of the apartment and the landlord of that place she moved into after leaving her parents' house once the relationship with the father of her son broke down. At the end of this selection, Ann discusses the difference between living with her parents and living elsewhere and the difficulties that arose when the condition of the house was not suitable.

**Ann:** ...I left in a bit of a hurry so I went home for a couple of months...  
I went home to reorganize myself and then I got an apartment.  
And  
that place was aaaa shit-hole.  
It was full of mould and  
aah  
it was on hot air heat and the people upstairs were smokers and  
you know, one of those places where I would scrub down the walls and they would be covered in  
brown mould again.  
It was horrible.  
So I left there and I went to another place that was a fair bit more expensive and I had a really hard time affording that all the time.  
**Nicole:** ...How long were you in the first place?  
**A:** First place after the house?  
**N:** Yes sorry  
after your parents.  
**A:** ...I struggled cause that place was cheap and it was close to my parents.  
Ahum.  
I struggled with leaving that place for a while.  
I would say I was there for  
God it was probably a year and a half.  
...  
I guess I was in a bit of a rush to get out [of my parents' house].  
And places were really a lot more expensive than I remember from even like a year before.  
They had gone up a lot and  
basically came across that one at my price

range.

And then I remember the day I went to move in there it was like it was horrible.

With all the furniture moved you could see how filthy it was.

I spent a week cleaning that place everyday.

I repainted walls. I paid for my own paint.

Like

that's how desperate I was to move out [of my parents' house].

It was horrible.

And I had like the carpets cleaned she [the landlord] didn't offer to do any of that...

She was an alcoholic.

She's an alcoholic, two of her sons are, one of them is for lack of better word a complete delinquent.

He's been

in and out of, I am pretty sure jail and rehab.

He is a crackhead.

And umm I didn't really know all of this before I moved in obviously.

And the other one used to hold drugs for people.

He would,

shortly like,

shortly before I moved out,

umm,

you would hear, like some people come storming in the house upstairs at like two o'clock in the morning and go into a room and you would hear hammers and stuff at floor boards they'd hammer it back up and leave again.

There was one day a squad car showed up with one of the sons in it and I was like, and that is when I started looking, and then what

this sounds really stupid compared to all of that but what really put the nail in the coffin for me was like one day I had [my son] in the bath he got out

I came back a couple hours later cause I forgot to take the bath water out and picked up my facecloth and there was a bug like that long on it.

...

When we lived in the apartment building as I mentioned that was

umm there was a

superintendant on the premise, so that was very different.

Like

if you wanted anything done it kinda got done cause that was his job.

But again it was really expensive and stuff

we never had any issues there.

But on

I mean, I guess that is the thing you pay more for an apartment building and you moved into a house and everything can be neglected.

You know?

Umm she [the landlord] was a bit of a nut

Like I said she was a bit of an alcoholic.

Here's an example.

There was one time she broke her leg while she was drunk.

She was out somewhere and broke her leg and she use to call down

To [my partner] and I, and ask us to go to the liquor store for her cause she couldn't drive.

Yeah and

if like our side of the driveway needed to be shovelled out cause I use' to

borrow a car of my parents to get around

I didn't have it all the time

...Yeah like if our driveway needed to be shovelled out or whatever

her son would come down knocking on the door, I would be like "Yeah I don't have money on me right now. Like maybe when [my partner] gets home I can get him to go to the bank for you."

...It was really weird. It was hard and

there was a lot of things, like if I turned the heat on downstairs it was really cold down there cause it was so damp.

Ummm sometimes she would call and say "turn your bleeping heat off it is too hot up here." blah blah blah

I just had to bundle up and

she'd you know

if I were to get a shower and she was like running water upstairs it would be freezing cold and

if I wanted to use the washer sometimes I would be out there and like I would say to her "Okay I am going to do my laundry on Wednesdays. One day of the week can I have the laundry room free?" Sometimes I would go out and like my laundry is out on the floor of the laundry room because she needed the machine.

Like she wasn't fun.

And it was really damp downstairs and I complained to her about it a couple of times and asked if she could get a dehumidifier.

They are not that expensive.

Like a few hundred dollars and like

anyway she wouldn't get one so I borrowed an old really loud really old one from a friend and she would complain about the noise and yeah.

...That was sort of the biggest issues. Like if we had a lot of rainfall err snow or whatever it seemed like it would

kinda seep up.

...Everything was sort of done half assed about the place.

Like there was linoleum tile underneath the carpets.

With like no underlay especially in my bedroom.

...the carpet wasn't actually attached in corners like you'd go and vacuum and it would come up.

...When I moved in I just pointed out mould on the baseboards in places 'nd there was never any offer to aah repair anything and I would just be like well things need to be touched up with paint and things.  
"I will buy it, you foot the bill" and she would be like  
"Okay." And then I would come back and give her the bill and she would be like  
"That is too expensive. I am only giving you this much."  
Kinda thing.

...  
Then I moved from there into a place on [Red Bay Drive].  
That also happened to be renovated so it was really clean and and stuff  
but more expensive and I was there for about two years  
I think, yup.

...  
[The] landlord [of the Red Bay Drive] like I said they were a young couple and the husband,  
the ah, wife was a hairdresser she was on the go a lot really loud and loved to party so she had parties all the time and the rec-room was attached to my bedroom. At one point they just covered in the wall.<sup>38</sup>  
Yeah so really loud and noisy.  
I had a lot of problems with noise there.  
There were times that like [my son] was sick and he would be woken up with craziness and she would come home from downtown and would be locked out of the house and  
come down and bang on my apartment door to get in so she could use the phone and stuff like that kind of drama.  
And he was a contractor. He did like painting and plastering and stuff so he was really handy but it was like really hard to get him to look at anything.  
Yeah I remember I had a leaky hot water tap like scalding hot water use to like slowing stream out of it and I was always afraid that [my son] would get burned.  
Or like  
he would be complaining because like the furnace oil was so expensive and I was like probably because of the tap.  
There was a couple of times too that like the thermostat would like stop working and I didn't have any heat.

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<sup>38</sup> Meaning they built a wall in order to make the larger rec-room into part of the apartment.

And you know he was usually pretty diligent with stuff but it took him  
took 'em  
a bit of time to look at stuff.  
Yeah that time when the thermostats went though  
he ah  
he brought down electric heaters for me to take around from room to room so it  
was nice of him but  
it just sort of took him a little while to actually fix the  
actual problem...

**N:** How

I guess living with your parents  
differs from other places that you have lived?...

**A:** I think it is a little worse actually.

In some ways yeah, like

I guess like, I still pay my parents a bit of money for rent like I give them  
like a hundred, a hundred and fifty or two hundred bucks a month like  
to kind of like contribute to the utilities used and stuff.

And umm

I guess they take it for granted cause I am family they don't take it very seriously  
like if I

if something wasn't working properly, like my tap in my bathroom downstairs  
doesn't like, it just sprays.

Like it needs a new washer like something as simple as that  
that broke like a year ago.

It's still not fixed so.

My toilet was broken

fooooooooooooo over 6 months.

They only just put in a new one

I offered to buy it.

I have like black mould in my bathroom.

I've tried to help them like I have said like "I will buy a cabinet you can pay me  
back like even half."

And that's not going to get done so  
it, some ways it is, just it's a different,  
a different like relationship dynamic err.

Things

I guess like if I was dissatisfied with something it would be harder to bring it up to  
them.

And

even when it is brought up, I'm just look  
I look like a snivelling snot instead of ah  
like I'm paying for rent.

I need a place to live  
kinda thing.

Yeah,  
there is a lot of like well your room is not clean  
so I am not doing it for you  
you know.

Next Dave discusses his experiences with a couple of places in town but mainly the place on Prince Ave. where there was an infestation of bed bugs. At the end, he discusses the fire safety and conditions of an apartment that he rented in a neighbourhood adjacent to downtown.

**Dave:** [The place on Caitlyn Street] was ah  
380 dollars no damage deposit, no nothing, right?  
And no, no signing no lease, no lease on [Short Street] neither.  
And then down on  
[Prince Ave.]  
Aah he wanted me to pay 390 plus 250 damage deposit and ah  
the room was already damaged.  
The walls were suppose be blue and they black, right?  
There's that much dirt there, right?  
And bedbugs falling everywhere.  
Even 'da old fellow that was there before that  
had, had all he stuff right left there.  
I pushed all that in the corner, right,  
just to make a bed for meself.  
Once ah  
I realized how  
how bad it was, I couldn't lie down right.  
I was even thinking about putting me hood up lying down putting me cap on lying  
down.  
I said no they be able to crawl in every little hole you got, right?  
so one bit me on the hand here and I said that's enough  
right...  
Ever take aah, aah, years ago you take, aah lift up a rock and see all the carpenters  
and everything running around.  
Well it,  
imagine like aah,  
a million rocks you are lifting up.  
You count the stars in the night sky before you be able to count all these bedbugs,  
seriously...  
**N:** How about the other place on [Short Street]?  
How was that conditions wise? You said  
that it was getting pretty bad.

**D:** It's aah, I,  
there's no fire extinguishers, smoke, the smoke detectors were aah electric ones  
that had to be wired in  
were not wired in.  
There's no fire escape.  
Aah,  
door you had, aah to go down like 15-16 steps in order to get down to the  
apartment,  
right.  
And the rooms are in there, no windows in your room to escape if there's a fire in  
the house.  
There was only one little window,  
right.  
And you couldn't open that, right.  
Because the crowd upstairs were pissing outside their balcony and where you're  
on ground level, there the window is on ground level, piss right down by your  
window.  
So you know you get that smell you know, right.

...Hard to heat though.  
High heat there  
...where the heater was located main heater located  
it just  
you know, you on the ground it is all-concrete around ya, right?  
I think that was the reason why  
all the heat was just going up through the floor.

The examples provided by Dorothy and Gail bring attention to the mould problem that each had to deal with. Both women have suffered poor health impacts that resulted from living in mouldy apartments. Dorothy had to be hospitalized due to the amount of fluid and infection in her lungs. Unlike most other participants in this research, Dorothy did not live downtown nor had she ever. The two apartments that caused her a great deal of problems were in Mount Pearl and Cowan Heights.

**Dorothy:** I was just in hospital from ah, ah, ahum, an apartment I had in Mount Pearl a three bedroom.  
And it turned into complete mould.  
The whole apartment  
went black the bedrooms.

I went to my landlord in a very nice polite way and asked her if she could please come over and look at it she said when she came over it is your fault [Dorothy], ah you don't have the dehumidifier on.

And it's definitely, definitely all your fault so she kept it up and kept it up and she told me to get buckets of Javex and start scrubbin'

I started getting pains in my chest and my lung on this side.

To the point that I took an emergency taxi to the hospital and got checked.

When I went in and got it checked he pressed in on it and said I was in danger, he said it was full of fluid.

And bronchitis and seriously infected and I'm in danger and to get my things out of the apartment and get out of there as soon as I can and to tell my buddy to go on too.

To get his gear and come on

and that's hard for him on a construction site.

So

we got out of there.

And I went in hospital for a month and half and they promised they'd help me find housing cause I was so deathly ill.

I took all my belongings and put it in Mom's garage against my wishes

and the doctors kept pressing my chest x-ray, x-ray, x-ray, x-rays, x-rays, blood work, urine and on and on it went.

And checking out all these

new medications that are really expensive to see if I'm getting any better and if I was coming along.

I kept listening and listen and they kept saying "Don't worry 'da missus will find ya out there in the office your housing. She'll help you out with that" or whatever. Every time I went to speak to her.

And I was really sick, she goes, she's on her way to a meeting right now.

"Don't be worrying about your housing. You don't have to go back to that mouldy apartment. Don't be worrying about the mouldy apartment. Get your belongings out of there. Don't worry about your housing."

Now I'm at my mom's house.

...

**N:** Where did you live before that?

**D:** In another apartment in [Cowan Heights] that got condemned, another basement apartment that actually got condemned by the government

by an inspector.

And I got the slip written up by Community

Health and, yeah, I can prove to you that that was another racket up there [in Cowan Heights].

**N:** How long were you at [that] one?

**D:** Ahmm,



almost a year and the mould started creeping in.

...

Ah if you ever want to know about mould, soon as you start feeling nauseous a lot and headaches

And you're

going like this wanting, a lot of water to drink and that it means that there's mould.

There's mould in it and stuff going on.

You know so that's what, that's exactly what was going on.

...

And buddy did an inspection

from ah

not even from Eastern Health but umm

government inspector

he came right out he wrote up a full report to me and my friend and told me that the con

the apartment is totally condemned with mould.

And to get out

get your gear out and get going.

Yup.

Definitely.

Dorothy also had a lot of issues with the landlord of this apartment. Not only did the landlord blame Dorothy for the mould, she would also constantly knock on Dorothy's door checking on her and the apartment, asking Dorothy lots of questions. Dorothy found this to be very intrusive, especially because she was so sick and needed to spend so much time in the bathroom. Once again, we can see how the lines between what is "public" and "private" are blurred. The landlord thought she had a right to be there checking on Dorothy and seeing what was happening with the apartment as it was her "private" property but Dorothy saw this an invasion of her "private" space. When the landlord was checking on her and the apartment all the time it created a seemingly "public" space for Dorothy, leaving her to feel bereft-of-home. In this quote we also get a glimpse of the social processes (forms of structural violence) at work that left Dorothy in a vulnerable

position in the face of housing struggles. Dorothy felt that while at the hospital the staff there kept reassuring her that they would help her find housing when she was ready to leave the hospital but in the end they did not and she was forced to move back in with her mother.

Gail discusses the place where she was living at the time of the interview and the state of that apartment. She talks about how sick she felt as a result of the mould in her apartment and how she had to keep the windows open all the time in order to breathe properly. Gail also mentions that she would like to move because of the conditions but she is hesitant about moving for numerous reasons. She has been there for three years and considers this place to be her home. She knows how difficult it would be to find a new place to live that she could afford.

**Gail:** ...It is the only slum landlord building  
in St. John's...  
There's mould, there's mould and fungus covering half the carpet  
by my bed, right.  
And  
...there is mould and fungus covering half the carpet right by the bed.  
I am having asthma attacks even though I don't have asthma.  
Due to, entirely due to the mould.  
Had to open the window  
when it's cold.  
You know what I am saying, right?  
I am just lucky the winters aren't as brutal, just lucky right.

I am like a homeless person checking how high the winds are going to be.  
Just really lucky the winters have gotten progressively milder.  
You know because the first winter there was cold because I only got single  
windows when everybody else got double.  
And I be shivering in bed but each winter has got progressively milder.  
You know, so it's like the gods are smiling at me in that way because I am in such  
a brutal situation and I am only lucky for that. I have to push harder to get out of  
there maybe.  
I'm already trying to push hard enough.

I got a G.P. note they said it is not good enough, so I got a shrink note from somebody I saw 20 years ago.  
So I am going to get that now.  
Yeah I am,  
I am ambivalent about moving because I have been there three and half years. It's quiet. Fairly quiet.  
Missus up over me screams her head off when I'm trying to sleep that don't even bother me no more. It would have drove me crazy before, you know.  
But the walls aren't really thin like some other places I might have lived.

Gail continues on about the appliances in the apartment and how they do not work properly.

**Gail:** The oven works five minutes at a time it is a fire hazard.

...

The washer tears your clothes up so I do it in the sink.

Umm

the toilet tank doesn't fit so it is a mouldy top all over it.

You know I haven't even bothered to ask him to change it you know

I'm just so fed up right.

You know,

umm

the burners half work, you know.

But the worst thing is the mould, you know because that's the thing that can affect my health and

you know, where the winters aren't as brutal and there's almost March I'm saying oh god, I'm ambivalent about moving but I know that for my

and I'm paranoid I got to say cause I am in the middle life crisis you know.

...And here I got rashy skin and puff eyes due to,

due to, just due to the allergic reactions to the mould you know, need that especially when you're confused and in a mid-life.

I said, you know I got a cold constantly cause I always got the window open.

Course your nose is always stuffed up anyway because that's, that's the reaction from the mould even.

Plus cold, you know even know which it is you know.

It's deplorable the conditions that people are forced to live in and that's 550. You know

what I am saying, right?

550.

Above, Gail mentions the state of her apartment that includes broken appliances and mould. Gail brings to our attention how she is living and what she is dealing with but is still hesitant to move because she is worried about how difficult it will be to find a new place. Another reason she is hesitant to move is that she does feel at home in this apartment despite all of the problems. This is an important thing to keep in mind when discussing these issues. Gail's desire and need to move is counter-balanced with anxiety about moving and the loss of the home she has built over the last three and a half years.

Renee also mentions mould in her interview. She discusses the situation of a couple of her friends in housing operated by the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation:

**Renee:** I know people who are living in government housing and they have huge mould problems and like it's an on going problem and it's ridiculous and it's been for years and years and years and they just keep on not treating it properly. And what can you do? It's kind of like a I get up, I get up and I'm like "Dude. You know complain..." You know? But I can understand you know it's not complacency it's kind of like you're in a situation where you can't lose this housing... In numerous housing situations you don't feel like you have the right to be dissatisfied and to ask for something to be just normal like just, just healthy. Like you don't feel like you have that right. You feel like you're always in a position where you're fighting for something that should be a basic human right. Like you know? It's just you know? There should just not be mould in government housing. You know what's the point in having this this system in place if you're going to make people ill.

Renee brings up many good points in this part of our interview. She explains that her friends are not happy with their current living conditions but are afraid that if they

complain they will be evicted. This is a common feeling and one that was raised many times in my discussions with the participants of this research and outside of this research in my personal life. It is not that the tenants do not care about their living conditions but they feel incapable and powerless to better them. The participants indicated that, at times, criticizing the conditions of an apartment is too much to deal with. The worry that one may be evicted because of these complaints makes the tenants less likely to go to the landlord about problems. The participants feel that they could be blamed for issues that occur within the house while they are living there if they complain and could be evicted for these problems. This is where the tenants have to know their rights well enough to stand up for themselves and learning these rights can be a challenge in and of itself.

A personal experience that roommates and I have had with being blamed for regular problems that occur in downtown housing was when we moved into a house in July and by the fall we noticed that we had mice. I e-mailed the landlord saying that we noticed we had mice in the house. It was my understanding at the time that a landlord is responsible for supplying the means to take care of any rodents that are on their property but in fact all it says in the residential tenancy act is that the landlord must “maintain the premises in a good state of repair and fit for habitation during the tenancy and shall comply with a law respecting health, safety or housing” (House of Assembly, Newfoundland and Labrador 2000; cR-14.1 s8). This line is up for interpretation and leaves it to the landlord or tenant to prove that rodents were or were not in existence before the tenants moved in. In this case the landlord blamed us, stating that the previous tenants did not have a mice problem and we would have to take care of it ourselves. She did not threaten to throw us out and she was a very reasonable landlord to deal with. My

roommates and I were financially stable enough to buy mousetraps, and later poison to deal with the issue. If this had happened to some of the participants of this research, they would not have been able to afford to buy the traps and the problem would have worsened. If tenants are unable to purchase traps, this common problem may have gotten out of control and could have caused damage to the house and possible health problems for the tenants.

Problems with the physical conditions of houses and apartments are not an uncommon occurrence in St. John's. I am certain that there are both much worse and much better conditions than the ones discussed here. I have heard many similar stories outside of this research about housing situations from friends, and the friends of friends, and on social media websites. There have also been many news stories on the conditions of housing in St. John's. A story reported by CBC on October 10<sup>th</sup> 2012 was about an apartment building infested with bed bugs, so much so that the tenants had to throw out the majority of their furniture and belongings (CBC 2012a) and on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014 CBC ran a story about 'Slum landlords' being sent rent payments directly from the government in cases of tenants being in receipt of Income Support (Social Assistance) but not keeping apartments in liveable conditions (CBC 2014a). Walsh (1986) comments on this as well, stating that the amount of money the boarders in his research received from the government in the form of income support was so low that

the only living accommodation available to them is so far below the normal standards of society that according to the St. John's city by-laws, many of the places where they live are not supposed to exist at all. On the other hand, the Department of Social Services, which is charged with the responsibility of supporting them, cooperates with the owners and operators of the substandard accommodations. Thus the city government defines their

environments as illegal, while the provincial government finances their illegal existence. (1986:89)

Another story reported by CBC and *The Telegram* (the local daily newspaper), was on the expansion of the Convention Centre in downtown St. John's; the expansion was to take over a couple of apartment buildings (*The Telegram* 2012). Some of people living in these apartments explained that they were not sure where they were going to go because of their limited incomes. Two of the tenants living in the same apartment gave a walk through of their apartment (the video of which can be found on the CBC website) showing the conditions of their apartment where there was water damage, duct tape to fix problems, and only a subfloor with no proper flooring on top (CBC 2012b).

There are many reasons as to why individuals feel like they cannot move out of poor living conditions and these are usually forms of structural violence. The next section will show transportation can be one of these factors.

## **5.6 Transportation**

Getting around town to do simple everyday tasks, such as getting groceries and going to doctor's appointments, can be very difficult in St. John's when you do not have a car of your own. Many participants discussed this as a problem but Lori in particular discussed this at great length. At the time of our interview, the drivers of Metrobus, the local and only bus company, were on strike. This had a huge effect on her daily life. Here, Lori discusses the expense of having a car and the issues created by her not having a car, or the bus available to her.

**Lori:** I was there [Mount Pearl] a little over two years.

**Nicole:** Two years. So you got pretty use' to being in that part of town?

**L:** Yeah and I was, was right across the street from Wal-Mart, Dominion everything.

There

not as much as, I like downtown

you know

it's a bit of a hike to Sobeys and anywhere else, Wal-Mart and stuff.

Especially with the bus strike on.

Big problem.

**N:** Definitely

and you don't have a car right? That's what you said?

**L:** Couldn't possibly afford.

I had to let my driver's licence lapse cause I couldn't afford the 100 dollars.

There is no way I could pay

even the gas for a car.

Even, let alone fixing it and reregistering it and driving it.

Couldn't do it.

Would love to, my son is going to try and get a job now cause he is only nine months from being able to get his permit so,

so he wants to get a car

that I can drive until he turns 17.

Then it would be his car.

So I'm hoping that will happen.

...[My daughter] had to let her license lapse too. We couldn't afford the 100 and tax.

Yeah so it's rough.

...

You know I could have stayed in Mount Pearl although I am happy where I am now.

But it was so convenient in Mount Pearl everything was right across the street everything.

Yeah

and my doctor is still there so right now I can't get to him. I can't get to my psychiatric at The Waterford with the buses down.

So the only bad thing about living in Mount Pearl is getting out

'cause you got to

always got to take two buses.

One to The Village and then one from there to wherever you are going or three buses.

So I'm a little more centralized where I am now

but it's still a hassle to go to Wal-Mart or something.

You know 'er

any of the big box stores.

It is usually a two-bus trip wherever you are going.



And then there is nowhere to sit at most bus stops.

Good god.

You know you are exhausted, you go to a supermarket and like I go to go to Dominion when they have better sales and Sobeys I would go down there and then you're standing at the bus stop and you got all these bags and there is nowhere to sit.

I even wrote the city. I am a great one for writing people that stuff.

I write to the city "You need more bus stops or more benches" but I think what it is the homeless people are going to end up being on the benches all the time maybe sleeping there. I don't know they probably don't want that.

I'm guessing that's why they don't have a lot.

They say it is financing but

...if there is a bus stop with a bench I know where it is.

I even bought myself a chair one of those camp chairs.

It has a little strap but because my legs were so bad and I couldn't stand for so long I started taking it with me wherever I go.

I haven't used it for a while now

but I use' to take it with me and if I, like I said I got to a bus stop I'd unfold it and I would sit down...

People thought I was a little strange but  
yeah

but sometimes I would have to stop not near a bus stop and, and sit in it and people were probably thinking "Well why are people sitting in on the sidewalk there?" You know.

Sign: "Sore legs. Sore legs."

...Another thing I overheard, I get my drugs at Sobeys 'cause it is really the only drug store that is in walking distance and I wasn't looking forward to that and in the winter have to make a special trip  
you know

up to Sobeys and I happen to overhear them talking about deliveries. They deliver and she said "Well yeah sometimes."

...But you don't know what other things, so you know it is all these little things that would be nice to know.

That help make your life a little easier.

...And people that do don't even think about people that don't [have cars].

Like most of the people I,

I'll call them friends but the people that I went to high school with and we reconnected through ah, a reunion we had a couple of years ago. Now where everyone is on

Facebook like I got 80 people from my high school.

But to actually

see any of them doesn't really happen. So they're, you know Facebook friends.

But they have no comprehension of, one or two of them know a bit about my life.

But I see them and they're in Mexico and going to Australia and just ah

ohhhrrggg.

I can't even go to Carbonear.

And I would like to say to them sometimes "Pretend for one week that you don't have a car. Think about it for five minutes what you would do for the next week without a car or without any money to buy anything more than you have right now."

But I don't really want them to know what my life is really like.

...

The only person I have to drive me around really is my stepfather occasionally. He's elderly. He's ill, just found out he got cancer he still drives a school bus 'cause he can't make ends meet.

So he's only available

...in the morning for a few hours cause once school ends he goes and has a few drinks.

So occasionally he will drive me around.

...But I got little things you need to do even if buses are running it takes me all day to do little things.

And the bus system sucks

so and right now they are all piling up, all these little things.

...

I think even if I had my license my stepfather wouldn't loan me his car 'cause it's all he's got.

And if the car goes he's stranded.

He's just worried that the car has x amount of hours or days left in it and if I use it more it's that much more closer to dying and once it dies he can't afford to replace it.

And it's a big car too and I'm not,

I haven't driven in so long

...I haven't had a license for over two years.

I think I drove, the day I drove his car I didn't have a license

And I didn't even think about it.

I didn't have a car so it wasn't something I thought about much and but

before that

the van that we drove here was a piece of crap. How we got here I don't know.

...So that's been hard not having a car.

God it is so hard.

For Lori transportation is a huge issue, as you can see in her detailed discussion. I have included such a long quotation from Lori on this matter because she was so passionate and aggravated by her transportation difficulties. This problem just added to the stress and frustration of her situation. At the time we completed the interview Lori was getting ready

for Christmas. She states at the end that she was unsure if she was going to be able to get her children's Christmas gifts because transportation to the stores would be so time-consuming and expensive.

The next short excerpt is from Dave. He discusses his commute to and from work:

**Dave:** I use' to walk out of [Tree Hills]...twenty after five every morning to walk over by Cornwall Place by the Scotia Centre Cornwall...Ave. Catch the bus for six and go all the way up Mount Pearl be there be to work for seven and then I got off at night. I work double shifts 'cause hours. More money in my pocket, right? So I worked double shifts and I get dropped off on the bus at bottom of [Tree Hills] ...and about 10:36 I get dropped off and five after eleven I be home in [Tree Hills] And get up again 4:30 the next morning and leave the house at twenty after five. Done that for eight weeks. Rain, snow, shine whatever it was, right?

Dave went on to say that, when he found out he was being evicted from his apartment in Tree Hills, because of his work and commuting schedule he did not have any time to look for a new place to live. He barely had enough time to eat and sleep before starting the next day and doing it all over again. This lack of time to put into looking for housing put him in a very desperate situation leading him to move into an undesirable situation which a few weeks later forced him to live a tent downtown and then into The Wiseman Centre.

Ann discusses the need for transportation for her and her child and how that affected her decisions about where to move. Here, she is referring to a developer's program in which the company will rent a portion of their newly built houses for lower rates for families with low incomes. This is part of an incentive program the city has in which it will give developers a break on taxes if they create a certain percentage of "affordable houses."

**Ann:** ...And when I called the guy he was like “Man I have got a waitlist. I don’t have any homes to offer you and there, there may be some available in like Airport Heights, Mount Pearl and somewhere else.” So they’re usually in the subdivision areas not like, not around like the centre of the city like where most people are looking for houses. ...So basically, like I called him and I was like “Well do you have anything available?” and he said “Airport Heights” and I was thinking okay there are bus routes but it will take me an hour. Do I have enough money that I can even get like a thousand dollar shit-box? Maybe. I don’t know.

Ann also told me about when she first moved out of her parents’ house when she was pregnant and how she would ‘hobble’ down to the grocery store.

**Ann:** It was a bit tough though I mean when we first moved out I, we didn’t have a car or, we lived up by the mall and you know I remember going down to, remember when the Sobeys use to be in the mall? ...We use’ to have to go down and get groceries and pregnant and hobbling back up over that stupid hill ...to get to the apartment and oh my it wasn’t, it wasn’t fun but I guess it was a bit of peace and mind that I was on my own.

Ann spoke about how her mother used transportation as leverage to pressure her to continue living with them or close to their house.

**Ann:** So my mom will say stupid things like “Well if you are living in that part of town you can’t take the car. You won’t be able to have the car down there. I’m not going to be picking you up for.” Blah blah blah. Just really controlling. Like doesn’t want me to do it and you know just stupid stuff like that.

When I asked Ann to use one word to describe her overall feelings about dealing with housing in St. John's, the importance of having adequate transportation came up.

**Ann:** ...It's probably somewhere around struggle.  
Or frustration or something.  
Something like that 'cause it always just felt like  
there's  
you know  
seemed, like it always felt to me like there had to be something  
pretty big sacrificed in order to have it.  
Or to  
to not have it was always  
you know, I could never have everything. I couldn't have it all like

wasn't always worth it. Like you know what I mean? Just, ah  
an added stress that went on top of everything else.  
You know?  
In order 'ta  
to have ah  
my own living arrangements. Basically have to have car and all this stuff so  
it was really dependant on everything else.  
So  
ahum  
even if I had the piece of mind of independence it's still free space and peace and  
quite and  
still have the struggle of buses, cabs, borrowing a car  
spending triple the time getting places and making arrangements that way and  
worrying about child care and all that stuff so  
you know, it's just, ah  
I guess yeah  
yeah struggle and

just never felt easy put it that way.

Ann's discussion of transportation shows how the lack of access to private transportation, and the problems with accessing efficient public transportation, narrows one's ability to finding housing. A family member, as in the case of Ann's mother, can also use transportation to leverage what they want and possibly control the decisions and behaviour of the person without transportation.

Dorothy had a very specific experience with transportation and the difficulties of being reliant on social assistance. As with Lori, Dorothy had to let her licence expire because she could not afford to renew it.

**Dorothy:** Figure this one

I got a cab approved for me for certain appointments, cancer stuff.

Like this Friday.

I only used it once on the 27<sup>th</sup> they took me from Mom's house to the Avalon Mall.

And when the proceedings were finished at the Health Sciences I just asked 'em to take me back as far as the Health Sciences to the Avalon Mall instead of all the way home to [Mom's], right?

'Cause I had to go in and get an expensive medication that was all I used it for. Until I'm going to need it this Friday at 1:30 this Friday.

Someone took my name and forged up a 160 dollars of taxi fares.

And found out that Eastern Health and all my big shot crowd that's working with me with my health care business and found out all my business and forged up [The Taxi company] 160 dollars worth of taxis that I never used.

I snapped in the head started screeching and bawling and took a bus so far to Mount Pearl Square and then on out to Topsail Road to try to get to where to HLRE and the big shots are that has all the meetings. That's what's approved for people like me and all this and I

went in the room like say you were him and I started crying and screeching and bawling to him tellin' him

"I didn't use those taxis mister so and so."

Ah I was only there on the 27<sup>th</sup> but anyway I shouldn't have had to do none of that.

Ah, Nicole

someone found out my personal private business

just like that and I'm on the psychiatric ward with the big shots. I mean people are really knowing my business now with this medically problem and they already took that like that and ran with it with a taxi and forged up 160 dollars a taxi in my, my health care business.

...Who in the hell knew

that I got a disability and the cabs are being used for me and would have the guts to forge my name?<sup>39</sup>

In a disability way 'cause I am a client right.

---

<sup>39</sup> Dorothy is not implying that it was the medical personnel who have used her name to charge taxis. She is making a general comment as to who would have to nerve to do that.

To use my taxis for a cancer clinics.  
Cancer clinics! I'm going on to Friday  
this is what they're at out there now  
I'm rippin'. I'm rippin'.

...

And now I'm in trouble with ah driving the car.  
And running around town doing what I did with no stickers, license out-a-date  
insurance and registration I got fines.  
For trying to get myself to emergency and to the health units and  
no brothers or sisters, sick mom ah,  
not enough money on me to get cabs cause I'm off work and run down  
and run down and  
can't work cause the cancer clinics are tying me up again.

For Dorothy the fact that someone could, and did, invade her privacy and used her name to charge taxi rides to Human Resources, Labour and Employment was a very upsetting ordeal. She gives unique example of how a problem with accessing transportation can cause extra stress and complications to daily tasks.

These four experiences show how simple daily tasks can become overwhelming struggles to those who live in precarious housing and are without proper transportation. Public transportation, or the lack there of, and the location of rental units are components that have led to the struggles discussed above. The problems caused by the lack of personal transportation are not only caused by the location of rental units but by the incredibly large sprawl of the City of St. John's and the surround municipalities. This is exacerbated by the lack of both efficient public transportation and a community-orientated city planning.

## **5.7 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I look at the specific problems that arose for the participants of this research with finding and keeping housing in St. John's. First, I examine the idea of

hidden homelessness and how that relates to precarious housing. This topic is related to how homelessness in St. John's does not fit with the stereotypical idea of homelessness because so much of it happens off the streets. This leads to the point that how we see homelessness shapes how we understand and react to those problems. Because of this, I argue that we must define homelessness in a way that discusses the issues affecting not only St. John's but also elsewhere in the world, using the terms sleeping rough, temporary institutional housing, precarious housing, and bereft-of-home.

The focus of the second section (5.3) is on how the participants went about finding a place to live in St. John's. In this section, I show that most participants used their social networks to find housing. If an individual has a personal connection with a landlord or previous tenant, it is much easier for them to obtain housing. Participants also used websites, such as Kijiji and Craig's List, newspapers, and community bulletin boards to search for housing. The least used resources seemed to be those at shelters and other community resource centres; these amenities were only used when one was very desperate and they were used hesitantly because of the stigma attached to being associated with such community resources.

The third section (5.4) in this chapter examines the ability to keep housing and showed that there are many reasons for being unable to retain one's current housing. These barriers could be financial restraints, such as rent increases and loss of income, problems with roommates, evictions and the physical condition of the housing. Out of the fifteen participants, the number of clear-cut evictions was low, with only four (Dave, Jane, Lori, and Gail) having been evicted. This is important to know because it goes against the stereotype that those who are struggling with housing are those who are



“difficult to house.” Another important finding is that although there are many apartments that have horrendous conditions, only three out of the fifteen (Dorothy, Dave, and Ann) moved strictly because of the physical conditions of an apartment. This number does not include those like Gail who were not happy with the conditions of the apartment they were living in but were struggling very much with the idea of moving and the stresses that come with looking for a new place to live.

The fourth section (5.5) looks at the living conditions in the housing that the participants had. As in most places, the physical conditions of apartments and houses in St. John’s and surrounding areas range in terms of their liveability. The five accounts this chapter discusses give a general overview of some of the possible living conditions those living on low incomes have to deal with, including mould, leaks, bed bugs, broken appliances, and draughty buildings.

The final section (5.6) is on the problems of transportation. St. John’s is a very vehicle-oriented city and it is difficult to function without owning or having access to your own vehicle, especially when on a limited income. At the time of this research, the drivers of the local bus company, MetroBus, were on strike having a huge impact on some of the participants. Lori talks about this at length in her interview. A discussion around the location of housing options occurs at many points throughout multiple interviews; if transportation is not available to get one from home to work, or to do daily errands, certain housing options become inaccessible. Dave’s account shows that, because of transportation and work schedules, one can be left with little time to search for new housing, and Dorothy explains how someone took advantage of the taxi vouchers she was given by HRLE. Both Lori and Dorothy explain how they had to let their driver’s licences

lapse because they could not afford the \$100 to renew them and also how expensive it was to keep their cars running. Ann discusses how her mom used transportation as a way of controlling her. She also recounts the difficulty of getting around the city without a car and how that limited her housing options.

Being aware of these experiences is important knowledge to have in order to understand how those struggling with housing approach their own situations and what resources they use. This knowledge should help the development and implementation of government programs surrounding housing struggles. It also helps to further my wish to look at housing issues on a spectrum and to incorporate the terminology sleeping rough, temporary instructional housing, precarious housing, and bereft-of-home into our discussions of housing struggles. These experiences give the reader an overview of how housing struggles affect the daily lives of those who are in housing need and portray how flat the term *homeless* is when we are discussing these problems.

## **Chapter Six: Possible Solutions**

### **6.1 Participants' Thoughts about Eliminating Housing Struggles in St. John's**

One of the last questions I asked in some<sup>40</sup> of the interviews was: “How would you change or eliminate housing issues in St. John’s?” (Appendix C question 19). The aim of this question was to create a dialogue about what the participants themselves thought the city, and other agencies, should focus on in order to eradicate the problems they have dealt with. The term “issues” is understood colloquially by my participants to be problems. The answers that I received were varied, but what was most noticeable, and probably should have been anticipated, was how closely the participants answered with solutions to their own problems, or things they wished they would have had or could have now. They spoke about how society in general, government programs, and capitalist system in general have let them down. These answers were also very closely related to what they saw as the reasons for why individuals struggle with housing and poverty. In this section, I provide an overview of what the participants thought could be done to eliminate housing struggles. In the second section, I propose actions that I think would help to reduce or eliminate housing struggles.

The main ideas put forward in order to eliminate housing struggles by the participants were to have more houses that are affordable for the people in a lower income bracket (including single renters and those who do not qualify for social

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<sup>40</sup> I only asked in some of the interviews as I was completing semi-structured interviews and some of the interviews did not naturally lead into this type of question or we discussed similar ideas in other ways.

assistance); revamp, and increase, income support and housing supplements; increased aid with education costs and student loan payments; and a greater number of well-paying jobs and career opportunities. Betty, Dave, and Eliza have some interesting ideas on how to get rid of housing struggles.

Betty puts an emphasis on having more affordable living spaces for single people working minimum wage jobs. She also says that perhaps instead of building new places, older buildings could be upgraded.

**Betty:** We need something more.  
We need to work on more,

ah,

I guess readily affordable that a single person working a nonsense job they can actually afford everything on their own.

Okay, I know we can't now, though on the other hand Susan goes out and gets a job and is making a million dollars a year and now she can buy her \$500 000 house and it is okay for her and that's fine she is doing great.

So why and at the same time, why should she be punished for the other one while [all] she could manage to do is go to Wal-Mart and work there or whatever sort of nonsense job. So just kind of balance that you would like to see more low-income housing.

Maybe just take what we have rather than build new stuff just renovating just tidying things up just trying to, I guess it is all about the education.

And sort of getting people to realize that because you are living in a place like this it doesn't mean that you are useless and educating the lower classes so they don't feel so lower class. They don't feel such a third rate.

Betty is getting at a few important points here. She is pointing to the need for a greater number of superior social supports and also the link between stereotypes, and stigma, and one's feelings of self-worth. Betty mentions how we should remind people that because they are living in a "less than perfect place" that does not mean that is all they are worth. In *Good Places to Live: Poverty and Public Housing in Canada* (2011) Jim Silver frequently mentions the negative stereotypes social housing areas have and

how this affects the people living in these areas. He states that once an area has a negative reputation, “the people who live there typically come to be blamed for these circumstances; some come to accept the blame, to internalize it, and as a result to engage in forms of behaviour that reinforce and fuel the stigmatization and the blame” (Silver 2011:16).

Dave, along with Betty, thinks that social supports are the most important way of eliminating homelessness and poverty. He says that we need to rethink the Income Support Program stating that these rates are based on data from the 1970s and 1980s but the cost of living has increased so these rates should increase as well. Dave goes on to say that if he won the lottery he would buy an old building downtown and turn it into a community centre.

**Dave:** If I won a pile of money. If I  
like if, I won 30 million dollars or something like that  
I'd buy one of these old buildings  
And I'd turn it into aah, aah,  
Like you got to pay 20 dollars a month.  
Out of the 20 dollars a month you pay,  
right, it get you in and you could learn how to play pool  
get a meal everyday  
like The Gathering Place.  
But there'd be programs set up inside so that  
like aah,  
a computer program  
right okay.  
If you wants to come here if you wants to pay 20 dollars to come here or 10  
dollars or whatever you want to charge come here you got to take part in one of  
these programs  
right.  
Like, aah, almost like a rehabilitation program.  
You know what I am saying?  
If I had,  
if I had money that's what I'd do.

Or even stuff like aah,

a place like boxing.  
I'd get people off the street and like you know  
teach them how to box 'er  
teach 'em how to do something right.  
If you can  
if you can come up with five dollars to aah, go and buy a bottle of beer you can  
definitely come up with five dollars to you know better yourself.

For Dave, having a place where one feels they belong and that place being a location in which residents can better themselves is crucial to eliminating poverty issues. Throughout my discussions with Dave, I noticed that he feels very isolated by his poverty and living situation, something that many of the participants seemed to have felt. Dave does not feel at home where he is living, and this leads to him feeling isolated. For those who have struggled with addictions in the past, finding a place to hang out where there is no alcohol or other drug consumption is very difficult in St. John's, especially if you are on a limited budget. It is my opinion that this is another reason why Dave would suggest a community centre attached to housing units as a way to eliminate housing issues. Community centres, where the patrons feel they have a right to be and also over which they have a sense of ownership, help them to feel part of a community and they have more resources for self-improvement, two important factors when struggling with poverty and the issues that come along with poverty<sup>41</sup>.

Eliza's idea of how to eliminate homelessness is more about changing the way we view and understand society and what we value as being important than adding more social supports. She would like to put in place a "Homeless Tax", where people who want

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<sup>41</sup> There are some community centres that do fulfil this role in St. John's such as The Gathering Place, The Native Friendship Centre, For the Love of Learning, Froude Ave Community Centre, etc.

to purchase items that Eliza deems unnecessary and extravagant would have to pay an extra fee that would go to end homelessness.

**Eliza:** What would I do?

I would abolish the sale of umm

...anybody who owns ah a Hummer or a vehicle, a vehicle that cost \$100 000 would be charged a large Homeless Tax.

Umm there would be no such thing as a flat screen television.

You know people need to learn that their money should be going be like really ah you own a \$3000 television and ahum there are people starving everywhere I just think people are really fucked up.

We need to break it down and start again but you're not going to break people down if there was an answer to this question it would be not an issue.

People just have greed. They just don't see outside themselves cause they don't have to.

You know they don't see each other. They don't know what people are like. They have no idea of the world they are just happy to go home to their hardwood floors and leather couches and their flat screen TV two or three of them small one in the kitchen and everything.

And their whatever bullshit lives and I don't know.

They think that is what happiness and contentment is but I guess maybe those people are happier than people who think about things.

Eliza does not believe that this "Homeless Tax" would ever be implemented but her point is that individuals need to be more aware of the struggles of others and instead of spending money on extravagant material objects, the money used to purchase these objects could be put to much better uses, such as eliminating homelessness and helping those who need extra support with housing and daily life.

Ann comes up with many ideas that could contribute to the goal of eliminating homelessness. For her, general financial aid and the creation of lower priced housing are the biggest factors that need to be addressed. Within the category of financial aid, Ann would like to see greater assistance with education costs such as grants, bursaries, and ways to help students in debt, to assist them with paying off their student loans. Both,

Victoria and Renee state that financial aid with student loans would help them a great deal; it would free up large chunks of their income for things such as housing and food. Ann, like Betty, comments on the conditions of the housing stock already available. She states that perhaps these houses could be renovated in order to create cleaner and safer affordable living spaces.

**Ann:** We definitely need more housing that's accessible to the lower income bracket.

Need it period. There is no other way around it.

I don't care how they do it

they need to do something about it and ahum

ahum,

I don't know what the best route is. I really like this Donovan homes project that they did but I mean it's a lot of that in just donation.

Do-gooder kind of thing that they are building the homes they got these subsidized home programs but ahum.

Yeah I think they do need to do that and I think that there's probably a lot more that can be done on the shelter end of things not that, that is ideal or anything but I think that has a lot to do with the affordable homes thing.

...

Student loans are a big pain in my butt and debt and all that stuff

I think there is ah

I'm sure there is some areas of improvement in that, ah,

in that area of things.

I don't know. I mean the city-housing thing too.

I mean there is a lots of

the Newfoundland Housing and City Housing both of them I,

as I understand are different and there's a lot of

really dilapidated homes that they

really should be fixing up and

putting money,

more money into those things.

...I feel like I could think of a thousand things but



they ah,  
I don't know how well informed they would be.  
I think,  
I think, I think the affordable housing is definitely the  
the biggest thing but  
I mean there also has to be more,  
more work for people and you know lots of other supports in order for people to  
be able to stand on their own two feet,  
right?  
The job market is not that great right now and  
It's hard for people to buy homes and  
let alone rent and I don't know.  
Yeah.

**N:** ...Your big thing would be actually more, physically more homes that are  
added at an affordable rate?

**A:** Yeah.

Yeah,  
definitely.  
Well I mean  
I could afford to move out  
but not for the cost of anything around here.  
To have like a normal lifestyle  
...not that I want to be like  
going out to dinner every week and  
...wearing designer clothes but I mean I just,  
I think there is, just I think there is a middle road that they,  
that they could be  
helping to fill in. It doesn't have to be like these falling apart houses that people  
have to apply or get subsidized or whatever or have to be on income support to  
qualify for 'cause it, there is a whole lot of other people that don't qualify for  
income support that still don't have enough to  
make ends meet. And I feel,  
well it's because I'm in it that I feel is the area that they should focus on  
but  
no I know there is a lot  
a lot more people that are in a worse off place than I am so  
I'm not going to be completely ignorant and say that.  
You know what I mean?  
...Yeah, so if they had more rental properties I mean when I called the guy for  
Donovan homes I asked him about it and he said "I have got a waitlist  
they are all full and  
we are building more and I can't keep up with it.  
So

I've got nothing to tell you now" so I was like "Great.  
Thank you for your time."  
And that's what it is whenever I call anybody.

Here we can see that Ann places importance on the fact that there are no living spaces that she can afford. She cannot afford these places because of her student loan debt and inability to find a job that pays enough money to support herself and her son. As has been stated, Ann would like there to be more aid with the financial aspect of getting an education, more higher paying jobs, and an increase in the affordable housing stock, through both renovating old places and building new ones, such as in the Donovan's project.

In this section, I have discussed various ways that four participants would eliminate housing struggles in St. John's. Betty and Dave both believe that we need to change the social support programs available. Betty and Ann think we need to renovate the existing housing stock to create cleaner and safer living spaces at affordable rates for those who work minimum wage jobs and have student loans. Eliza states that we need to change our understanding of money and how we spend money on others and ourselves. She wishes that there would be a "Homeless Tax" implemented to force those buying extravagant material objects to help those who are dealing with poverty in St. John's. Ann wishes there would be a greater quantity of better paying jobs and better help for those who have incurred debt while receiving their education; a sentiment that both Victoria and Renee share with Ann.

## **6.2 Recommendations for Action**

In this section I outline the recommendations I have that I believe could greatly help people struggling with housing issues in St. John's. I begin with the need for a Housing Office to which people can go to in order to receive help with multiple housing problems. Then, I turn to a discussion of the desirability of there being a mandatory registration of all rentals, more wrap-around services, higher income support, walkable communities, and more efficient public transportation.

My number one recommendation is for the creation of a place where individuals and families can go to when they are in need of housing, having trouble finding new housing, and/or having difficulties with their landlords. This would be a place where anyone, with any budget, could go to learn about their rights as a tenant, or as a landlord, but focussing on those with limited incomes for help with finding proper housing. It would be a place where one could find out information on all the housing programs, emergency shelters, and to aid in the process of applying for current housing supports such as Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (which includes housing in Mount Pearl and other municipalities surrounding St. John's) and the City of St. John's Non-Profit Housing Division. The housing office I propose would be somewhere a person could go and speak to another person about their issues and get the best answers and help. The housing office would be along the lines of Memorial University's Off-Campus Housing Office but be for everyone living in the greater St. John's area. The university's

Off-Campus Housing Office and the Home Share NL<sup>42</sup> program are excellent resources for students and help the community in many ways. As Ann discusses in her interview, when she was most desperate for housing she was unaware of where she could go for help. This would be one of the most important features of this housing office, that people would know where to turn for help with their housing struggles. In Lori's interview she discusses how demeaning she felt her dealings with the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation were. Therefore, this central housing office would have to be a well-funded and well-staffed place in order to avoid the possibility of continuing demeaning interactions. The most important thing that this housing office would have to offer is the ability to build a personal relationship with someone who is well-trained and has an understanding of the issues and struggles one comes up against when dealing with housing constraints.

To go along with the housing office, I think that there must be a better system put in place for landlords to register with the city/province/federal government in order for the governing body to do random inspections of all rental units. There of course would be people who would work around this and not register as there is now. Despite this, I believe it is of great importance to have a more systematic and regulatory body to control rentals of all kinds (right now boarding homes are not required to register at all).<sup>43</sup>

Knowing where, how much rent, and the number of rentals in the city is essential to helping people find housing as well as controlling living conditions. This would also help

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<sup>42</sup> HomeShare NL is a program that helps to match students with homeowners aged 50 plus who live in their houses. This program helps to alleviate the pressures of low vacancy rates, create affordable housing options and helps to keep homeowners in their homes. [www.homesharenl.ca](http://www.homesharenl.ca)

<sup>43</sup> For more information, please see: [www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/reho/yogureho/fash/fash\\_005.cfm](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/co/reho/yogureho/fash/fash_005.cfm) and [www.stjohns.ca/living-st-johns/building-renovation-and-repairs/getting-permit/adding-apartment#3](http://www.stjohns.ca/living-st-johns/building-renovation-and-repairs/getting-permit/adding-apartment#3).

to enforce the Residential Tenancies Act and make sure that both the tenant's and landlord's rights are not being overlooked and/or abused. This would also help the centralized housing office to aid people in finding suitable housing.

The next idea is again closely linked to the top two suggestions. I believe that there should be more wrap-around services and supportive housing for individuals. Sometimes the best answer is to not just to drop a person in a new living environment and hope for the best. Many people who are struggling with housing issues are dealing with multiple other stressors in their lives. As we can see from the research above, there are many paths that lead one to housing difficulties, which means there are many solutions and many points that need to be tackled in order to allow a person to be and feel stable in a new environment. This research has found that those whose social support systems have broken apart for one reason or the other usually end up in worse positions than those with social supports to lean on. With the creation of more wrap-around services (like the housing office, job search help, and better mental and physical health services), once a person has exhausted or has lost their social supports they will have another place to turn. I also believe that income support should be increased and updated on a more regular basis to keep up with the increasing cost of living.

The transportation issues discussed in Chapter Five point to the importance of having walkable communities within the larger city of St. John's. Having access to stores and other amenities like doctors' offices and small clinics for routine tasks, such as blood tests, would help those who cannot afford or do not wish to have a car. Amenities that are in walking distances from housing developments and a part of housing developments are also better for the creation of a social community. People are out more around their area

and get to know one another. This can be a big help in getting those support systems in place which, as I have discussed before, are needed to find housing in St. John's. This could also help because once residents start to feel like they belong in a certain area and feel as if they have the right to be there, they will start to take pride and feel a sense of ownership over the area. This, I believe, and as Sliver (2011) has discussed, leads to a better community for everyone.

In addition, better public transportation is a necessity; this would not have helped Dorothy as much as Lori, Dave, and Ann but little things such as more regular routes, and benches at bus stops, would have created a big difference for Lori and the others' daily lives. A third way to help alleviate this problem is to look into license renewal and car registration rates for those who are on social assistance; helping with those payments would make a big difference to those struggling to keep their cars, which could mean keeping their jobs, continuing education, and getting cheaper groceries and other household items.

Overall, I think that if everyone were to respect each other and give individuals the chance to explain themselves and why they are in the difficult situation instead of making assumptions, more effective and long lasting solutions to housing struggles can be found.

### **6.3 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter first examines what the participants thought were some of the best ways to eliminate housing struggles. Then, in the second section of this chapter are my

additions to the participants' lists of ways to help eliminate these struggles as well as preventing them from reoccurring.

The participants suggest more affordable housing especially for those who are in lower income brackets, but do not qualify for social assistance, as well as for those relying on social assistance. An increase and revamping of social assistance is important to make sure individuals and families are receiving enough money for obtaining suitable housing. An increase in aid with the cost of education and the paying down of educational debt would be a big help to those in Ann and Victoria's situations. Job creation in multiple different fields would be very helpful so people could be employed with liveable wages.

I believe that the creation of a general housing office to which people could go to learn their rights as tenants and landlords, get help with problems with landlords and vice versa, and also help with finding housing would be a key asset in changing and dealing with current housing struggles. It is my belief that, with such an office, people would become more educated about housing, would have the knowledge and tools to help themselves if they are in difficult housing situations and therefore be less likely to end up sleeping rough. Another recommendation I make is for the improvement or an amendment to the existing Residential Tenancies Act that makes mandatory registration of landlords with the City of St. John's or another governing unit better regulated and enforced. This would not only be in the case of registering self-contained units but also for landlords' own homes when they share with a tenant. This will help with the enforcement of the Residential Tenancies Act and statistics surrounding housing.

The last two suggestions I have made are for more wrap-around services and supportive housing. Sometimes people simply need more help to get themselves on or back on their feet and to stay standing. With the creation of more supportive housing and wrap-around services (like the housing office) individuals will be more equipped to take on and overcome the stressors that surround the housing issues outlined in this thesis.

Lastly, I discuss the need for walkable communities and better public transportation as I believe that one's ability to access the city and its resources are very important in overcoming not only housing issues but a plethora of other problems that arise while living with a low income.



## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

Being bereft-of-home, sleeping rough, staying in temporary institutional housing and being precariously housed are deeply personal, and both physically and emotionally stressful life circumstances. Throughout this thesis I have placed an emphasis on the narratives and experiences of each participant in order to express the individual aspect of a common theme, showing how housing struggles have affected the lives of 15 people living in St. John's. I wanted to make sure that the participants' personal experiences were not lost under theory and discussions of abstract ideas but were examined in a way that made the situations real to the reader. I did not want the human aspect of these situations to be lost.

I looked at individual experiences with housing struggles, which can help to put into place better policies that address the current problems facing the people of St. John's and surrounding areas. Examining these experiences can also help to demonstrate the spectrum of housing needs, and therefore hopefully contribute toward the development of different programs that prevent people from experiencing a range of housing constraints.

In the Introduction, I mention that when the fieldwork portion of this research began in July 2010, the most common inquisitive statement I was asked when stating what I was researching was that we do not have homeless people in St. John's. While this is still a common reaction, local news outlets and non-profit organizations have brought the issue of precariously housed individuals and homelessness much more to the forefront of public knowledge. Despite this, much more needs to be done to break down

stereotypes and the culturally-embedded, hegemonic ideas as to why one struggles with housing. We need to look more at the structural violence that occurs, steering away from blaming individuals for their precarious housing situations.

As discussed in the Introduction, and also in Chapter Four, the way people understand the word *homeless* changes how we think about the problem and the ways to eliminate it. The stereotypical image of homelessness, a dirty alcoholic male sleeping on the street, is not the image that is typically visible in St. John's, nor do the participants of this research fit that standard. This has led many residents of St. John's to believe that housing struggles are not a problem in St. John's and that we do not have many people in such situations. In St. John's, and throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, those dealing with housing issues are hidden from public view. These hidden homeless are the precariously housed which means that they are living in unsuitable and/or unsafe housing, staying with friends and family (doubling-up), or living outside of their economic means, creating a cycle of unstable housing (Growing Homes: 2012).

These precariously housed individuals are left out of statistics because they are difficult to see, as they do not fit stereotypical ideas or understandings of what it means to be homeless, i.e. they are not sleeping rough. Another reason the hidden homeless are hidden is that they do not necessarily think of themselves as homeless. As the discussion in Chapter Four shows, many individuals in situations that one might assume are examples of homelessness do not consider themselves as being homeless and sometimes those who we would assume are not homeless consider themselves to be as homeless. As Erickson (2007), commented, "how we see shapes how we talk about and then how we act on social problems" (Erickson 2007:58). This is why I have proposed, following the

lead of Watson and Austerberry (1986), that we use a spectrum to discuss and understand what homelessness is. If we use the terms *sleeping rough*, *temporary institutional housing*, *precarious housing* and *bereft-of-home*, in tandem with other structural and political changes, we can not only better understand “homelessness” but also bring hidden homelessness out from the shadows. These terms will facilitate individuals’ discussing their situation in more specific terms, allowing them to distance themselves from the negative connotations that come with saying one is *homeless*.

With this, I believe that the term *homeless* is missing the weight of the connections that being-at-home-in-the-world (Jackson 1995; the connections between oneself and the world) and bereft-of-home (the loss of connections between oneself and what one considers to be home) express. As shown by Parsell (2012), Kellett and Moore (2003), Peled and Muzicant (2008), discussed in Chapter Four, the definitions of *home* and *homeless* come from our lived experiences. The general idea of *home* is important, but how each one of us feels at-home-in-the-world changes based our social context and lived experience. In the Introduction and in Chapter Four, I show how the concepts of *homeless* and *home* relate to each other and how the individuals of this research have come to understand both terms through their lived experiences.

Bhattacharjee’s (2006) research on domestic violence shows through her examination of the “private” and “public” dichotomy that *home* can be thought of in many ways. Spaces that are considered to be “public”, or opposite of the “private” home can have characteristics of *home* for an individual; for example, we saw this with Eliza’s use of parks and other spaces when living with friends. Spaces that are “public” can be

spaces in which a person feeling bereft-of-home can feel at home or a space where they feel they belong.

This is also seen in Peled and Muzicant's (2008) study on young women who wanted to escape their family "homes" in order to find the ideal place in which they could feel at home. I have shown that *home* was considered by all participants as something more than a shelter and that *homelessness* was usually equated strictly with the lack of shelter (see the cases of Dave, John, Gail and Gordon discussed above). The difference between these two ideas and meanings permit confusion around what issues are being discussed and the best course of action for each individual case. This is why we need to have another phrase, *bereft-of-home*, to refer to the emotional and mental aspects of housing need; the feeling that one is home-less.

In the life experiences of those who have participated in this research, feeling homeless has been linked with more than just a lack of shelter and has been equated with the loss of family or friends and a place where one can feel safe, secure, and comfortable enough to be oneself. Hulchanski's (2012) discussion of *homeless* comments that this catch-all term creates confusion because it does not distinguish between a *house* and a *home* and that it helps to blame the individual for the problems instead of emphasizing the real issues at hand.

Structural violence theory helps us to understand that there are social processes that lead to an individual's vulnerability to having problems accessing housing, among other life circumstances. As Farmer states:

Structural violence is violence exerted systematically—that is, indirectly—by everyone who belongs to a certain social order...The concept of structural violence is intended to inform the study of social machinery of oppression.

Oppression is a result of many conditions, not the least of which reside in consciousness. (2004:307)

It is important to recognize that the choices people make, or are forced to make through circumstances, are an outcome of the social processes and context that individuals must contend with.

Lyon-Callo (2004) explains that one of the major problems with the discourse surrounding homelessness is that homelessness has become individualized and that the structural violence and social processes behind the scenes have been forgotten. The individualization of homelessness has meant that there has been a lack of discussion around the factors and social processes (i.e. structural violence) that bring a person into such a situation.

As mentioned, Chapter Four discusses how the ideas of *home* and *homeless* relate to each other and how individual experiences can change the meaning of both *home* and *homeless*. In section 4.4, I recount what the participants of this research had to say about when they felt homeless and what home meant to them, looking at how these two ideas worked together. The participants describe home as a place of comfort (using terms such as safety, security, and stability), privacy, a sense of belonging, and the presence of people (family and/or friends). The feeling of being homeless is usually attached to missing family, having no options, feeling trapped, and a lack of belonging (i.e. bereft-of-home). In my analysis, I look at these experiences through my proposed terms sleeping rough, temporary institutional housing, precarious housing, and bereft-of-home. In order to organize this section of the thesis, I group the participants' experiences together based on different reoccurring themes, such as losing the home they once had, moving back in

with family, feeling bereft-of-home, and staying in temporary institutional housing but not considering oneself as homeless. These themes help to thread individual events together and show that, while all the research participants did have a personal and specific experience with their housing struggle, there are commonalties between these individual histories.

The participants saw *home* as a path to feeling that one has a place in the world, turning the relationship they have with the world around them into one of reciprocity and meaning, creating a feeling of being-at-home-in-the-world. The ideal home is an aspiration for each participant and sometime causes a great deal of stress and anxiety around their seeming inability to achieve this goal, as mentioned in Frohlick's (1999) research. This ideal home differs slightly from person to person; however, the overall idea of the ideal home is a safe place in which the participants felt they could be themselves.

Chapter Five goes over the participants' experiences with housing and related issues with living on a low income in St. John's. As mentioned above, this chapter examines the idea of hidden homelessness, how it relates to precarious housing and how this shapes our view of housing struggles in St. John's. This chapter also looks at how the participants went about finding housing in St. John's and the difficulties they came across trying to keep this housing. I also look at the conditions of housing that the participants lived in and how problems in accessing transportation affect their ability to not only complete daily tasks but also be able to keep and find suitable housing. The experiences discussed in Chapter Five are important knowledge to have to make sure that we understand how those struggling with housing approach their situation and what resources they use and how they use these resources.

This thesis shows that the stereotypical idea and image of *homelessness* is not the only type of housing struggle and it is certainly not the type most prevalent in St. John's. As we see by the stories that have been relayed above, housing struggles can affect anyone from a range of social economic backgrounds and most often it has a longer duration when an individual does not have any social supports to rely on, or they have exhausted those social supports.

This is why one of my main suggestions in Chapter Six is for the creation of a central Housing Office which individuals can visit, or call, to discuss the issues they are coming up against in regards to their housing. St. John's needs a more accessible place to which anyone, with any budget, can go to learn about their rights as a tenant, or a landlord, focusing on those with limited incomes who may need help with finding proper housing. This should be a place where one can feel safe about discussing housing problems and not fear that they may lose the housing they do have because they spoke out about the problems.

As this thesis shows, social supports, at a variety of levels, are one of the key factors in helping those who are struggling with housing constraints and we, as a community, need to put in place more comprehensive wrap-around services and social supports for those who need more than what their family and friends can help with. Eliminating what is usually thought about as homelessness, or what I prefer to discuss in terms of *sleeping-rough*, *temporary institutional housing*, and *precarious housing*, is not just about making sure everyone has shelter. We must try to ensure that no one feels *bereft-of-home*. Everyone needs, and deserves, a place in which they are comfortable and safe enough to be themselves. A place in which they can feel-at-home-in-the-world.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: First Poster used to Recruit Participants

# Homeless?

## Struggling to find or keep housing?

## Staying with Friends or Family temporarily?

I am completing a study on women's experiences with housing issues and homelessness in St. John's. I am interested in hearing your story.

How women experience housing issues is important information in gaining knowledge about these issues. In order to get this knowledge, I am speaking with women, asking them to tell me their experiences, their story.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please contact me, Nicole, at 709-689-0225 or [nwilson@mun.ca](mailto:nwilson@mun.ca). I will also be at Hava Java on Water Street from 8-11pm every Sunday (until December 2010), wearing a bright yellow scarf. Please drop by.

*This research is being conducted for a master's degree at Memorial University. Nicole Wilson is a master's candidate at MUN and is the principal investigator for this research. Dr. Sharon Roseman from the Department of Anthropology at MUN is her thesis supervisor.*

*The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at [Icehr@mun.ca](mailto:Icehr@mun.ca) or by telephone at (709) 864-2861.*

Housing Research  
Nicole: 689-0225 [nwilson@mun.ca](mailto:nwilson@mun.ca)

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Housing Research  
Nicole: 689-0225 [nwilson@mun.ca](mailto:nwilson@mun.ca)



## Appendix B: Second Draft of Poster Used to Recruit Participants

# *Homeless?*

## *Struggling to find or keep housing?*

I am looking to talk with **men and women**  
about their housing struggles.

Your story is important to understanding the housing crisis  
in St John's.

If you are interested in telling me your story, please contact  
me, **Nicole**, at **709-689-0225** or **nwilson@mun.ca** to set  
up an interview time.

If you can not contact me by phone or e-mail I volunteer at The Gathering Place  
(170 Military Road) on Mondays. The Gathering Place is in no way involved  
with this research.

*This research is being conducted for a master's degree at Memorial University. Nicole Wilson is a master's candidate at MUN  
and is the principal investigator for this research. Dr. Sharon Roseman from the Department of Anthropology at MUN is her  
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## Appendix C: Schedule for Semi-structured Interviews

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) Do you have children?
  - a. How many?
  - b. How old are they?
- 3) Do you have a partner at the moment?
  - a. Do you live with this person?
  - b. Do they contribute financially to your living expenses?
- 4) Where was your place of Birth?
- 5) Where did you grow up?
  - a. When did you come to St. John's?
- 6) What is your current employment situation?
  - a. If have children, who looks after your children while you are at work?
- 7) Where do you sleep? (e.g. Sharing, Shelter, On the Street, Renting, Own)
  - a. How long do you think you will continue to stay there?
  - b. Do you have different plans for the winter?

### If staying or living in an apartment, Sharing, house:

- a) How long have you lived in this location?
  - b) How did you come to live at this particular location?
  - c) Could you describe where you are staying now?
  - d) How does this location differ from other places you have lived? How is it similar?
  - e) Are you renting or do you own your current house or apartment?
    - i) Could you tell me about the interactions that you have had with your current or past landlord?
- 8) Please tell me about your day yesterday?
    - a. Would you say that is a typical or average day for you?
  - 9) Have you ever sought help from relatives, friends or acquaintances to aid in your search for housing?
    - a. Could you tell me about your experiences with asking them to help you?
  - 10) Did you seek help from the city or any community centres to aid in your search for housing?
    - a. Could you tell me what dealing with such agencies was or is like?
  - 11) Have you ever considered yourself homeless at any point in your life?
    - a. Please describe this period of your life.
  - 12) Have you ever stayed with friends or relatives while looking for housing?
  - 13) Have you ever worried that you might find it difficult to find a place to stay?
    - a. Please describe the situation in which this feeling arose.
  - 14) What particular issues have you had trying to find and keep housing in St. John's?
  - 15) If a group of people who were having issues with housing got together, what type of questions would they ask each other?
    - a. What issues would they talk about?

- 16) What does 'home' mean to you?
- 17) What do you think are the leading causes of homelessness in St. John's?
  - a. Do you think this differs from the rest of Canada or globally?
- 18) One thing I have noticed is the number of men using soup kitchens and visibly panhandling on the street is higher than the number of women doing the same thing. Would you agree with this? If so, why do you think that is?
- 19) How would you change or eliminate housing issues in St. John's?
- 20) What would you say the best word to describe your overall feeling about trying to find and keep housing in St. John's is?

Other possible Topics

- 1) If Sharing a house with others:
  - a. How is your relationship with your current housemates?
  - b. What about past housemates?
  - c. How did you work food?
    - i. Did you buy it separately? Have special areas for food?
- 2) When moving who do you rely on to help you move?
  - a. Hire people?
  - b. Family?
  - c. Friends?
- 3) How do you feel leading up your last move?

#### **Appendix D: Interview Schedule for Life Stories**

- 1) Is there anything you would like to discuss that has happened since we last spoke?
  - a) Any change in your housing situation?
- 2) Could you please tell me about your family?
- 3) Could you describe your childhood home or homes?
- 4) Did you stay in the same house while growing up?
- 5) Who lived in your house with you while growing up?
- 6) What is your current relationship with your parents?
  - a) Has this relationship changed since you were younger?
- 7) What is your current relationship with your siblings?
  - a) Has this changed since you were younger?
- 8) Do you remember discussions about housing issues between those who you were living with while growing up?
  - a) What sort of issues would they discuss?
- 9) Please tell me about when you first moved out of your family home?
  - a) Were you employed?
  - b) Moving in with a person whom you were involved in a romantic relationship?
  - c) Moving in with friends?
- 10) In the last interview we discussed a little about your current employment situation. Could you tell me about your past employment? (When you were a teenager, etc.)
- 11) Do you think that anything about being a man/woman has affected your housing situation?
  - a) If so, in what ways?
- 12) Could you tell me about your experience with finding housing in St. John's?