

Journal Article

**'A place to call our own': On the geographical and social marginalisation of homeless people**

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3 'A place to call our own': On the geographical and social marginalisation of homeless people  
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## 7 Introduction

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9 Homelessness has been defined by the United Nations as the absence of permanent shelter  
10 which requires individuals to carry their possessions with them and take shelter where they  
11 are able (UN 2004). However, elsewhere it has been argued that there is a continuum of  
12 homelessness, with rough sleeping at one extreme and being in possession of temporary,  
13 insecure or inadequate housing conditions on the other (Watson and Austerberry 1986).  
14 Recent statistics suggest that overall homelessness is increasing in England and there has  
15 been a sharp upward trend in the most visible form of homelessness – rough sleeping  
16 Estimating the numbers of people sleeping rough is notoriously difficult but data published in  
17 2016 suggested that the national total was up by 55% since 2010 (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2016). In  
18 November 2016 the Welsh Government conducted their second annual count of people  
19 sleeping rough across Wales and recorded a 72% rise compared to 2015 (Welsh  
20 Government 2017). Because Housing is now a devolved responsibility in the United  
21 Kingdom policies to address these issues are characterised by considerable diversity.  
22 Fitzpatrick *et al.* (2016) note, however, that there are common challenges associated with  
23 welfare reform, Housing Benefit caps and a reduction in the supply of affordable homes.  
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28 Parsell (2010) argues that considerable stigma is attached to homelessness. The notion that  
29 homelessness or rough sleeping is a result of moral weakness originates in pre-20<sup>th</sup> century  
30 understandings of poverty and exclusion (Pleace 2016). Devereux (2015), however, argues  
31 that the construction of the undeserving, street living 'tramp' or 'dosser' continues to be  
32 widespread in both the popular and political sphere. Thus, the personal traits of homeless  
33 people rather than structural issues, for example, shortage of housing or "wider experience  
34 of deep social exclusion" dominate accounts of homelessness (Dwyer *et al.*, 2014). The  
35 concept of citizenship is particularly important in the context of social exclusion brought on  
36 by homelessness. Carlen (1996) suggests an important issue for homeless people is not just  
37 being 'homeless', but the denial of citizenship rights that this entails. This binds with the  
38 concept of the 'other' and Bauman's (1998) contention that homeless people are classified  
39 as deviant and without purpose and along with groups as the 'underclass'.  
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44 Without losing sight of the effects of social structures or romanticising nomadism, it is  
45 important to recognise the agency homeless people possess (Hodgetts *et al.*, 2005; Shubin  
46 and Swanson, 2010). Jordan (2011) has examined how homeless people negotiate their  
47 sense of self as they struggle to carve out social spaces for themselves wherein they feel  
48 safe. In a similar vein Doherty *et al.* (2008) suggest homeless people rationally choose  
49 spaces that relate to their preferred identity within the possibilities attendant on  
50 homelessness. As Creswell (1996) argues, however, 'place' not only denotes the spatial, but  
51 relates to an individual's right of place. He suggests that meaning is not intrinsic to space but  
52 connects to ideology and perceptions about who has rights to place. Those who behave  
53 within the norms and ideals specified by those in power in a given context will be deemed to be  
54 'in place', whereas those who break those norms will be deemed to be 'out of place.'  
55 Creswell (1996) thus argues place and identity are closely connected and this is  
56 problematic for the 'underclass' who can be considered psychologically and physically 'out of  
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3 place' in mainstream society (Douglas 1966: 39). That being said, as Cloke *et al.* (2000: 715)  
4 argue there is a longstanding and "seemingly instinctive" connection between homelessness  
5 and certain spaces/places most notably evoked by an imagining of homeless people  
6 sleeping in cities and shop doorways. Thus certain spaces may be legitimised or 'in place'  
7 for homeless people whilst others may not.  
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9  
10 Wakefield (2003) argues that spatial boundaries and the social control of the use of space  
11 create and maintain social groups. Stigmatised groups are either pushed into geographically  
12 marginal spaces or seek them out as a means of avoiding confrontation (Sibley 1981).  
13 Sibley describes this as 'spatial purification' which he purports is central to the organisation  
14 and control of social space (Sibley 1995:86). In increasingly controlled environments,  
15 'difference' becomes more manifest and equated with deviance. As such, space which has  
16 been 'purified' facilitates the identification and removal of those who are deviant, and hence  
17 induces conformity. For example, Smith (1996) examined responses to homeless people in  
18 New York during the 1980s and 1990s, noting that homeless people were removed from  
19 Tompkins Square Park by redefining what a park is for and arguing that it was not intended  
20 to be a place in which to sleep. Similarly, Smith (1996) reports that homeless people were  
21 removed from Grand Central station by arguing that a railway station was a place for travel  
22 and hence those not there for transportation purposes should be removed.  
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25  
26 Several authors have noted changes in the nature of public space linked to the rise of  
27 consumerism, the privatisation of public space and intensified regulation of this space  
28 (Johnsen *et al.* 2005; Muncie 2009). It has been argued that there has been a significant  
29 contraction of spaces deemed to be 'public'. More gated communities have emerged and  
30 malls and shopping centres have become semi-privatised employing security guards to deter  
31 and remove 'undesirables' and those who do not conform to images of the ideal consumer.  
32 Johnsen *et al.* (2005) highlighted how the introduction of manipulative architectural features  
33 for example, 'bum proof' bus seats and sprinkler systems aim to make it more difficult for  
34 some groups to occupy central city key spaces. The rising tide of rejection, whereby  
35 residents and businesses, particularly in affluent areas, oppose the siting of facilities for  
36 some groups in their vicinity on the basis that their presence undermines property values,  
37 personal safety and quality of life has been highlighted in the literature (Takahashi 1996,  
38 Lyon-Callo 2001).  
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43 Added to this, Beckett and Herbert (2008) and Stuart (2013) have argued that the police  
44 contain certain groups in order to reduce the perceived threat that they pose to a sense of  
45 public order. This is by means of curtailing their mobility and by reducing their public  
46 visibility. They suggest police practices combined with legal codes, which are passed to  
47 assuage public fears, work to severely restrict access to both public and private space. In  
48 England and Wales, the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2011 introduced  
49 Public Space Protection Orders which have been used to criminalise the street homeless  
50 (O'Brien 2016). This level of scrutiny guarantees some individuals and groups more contact  
51 with the police as a function of surveillance which in turn serves to make a ready association  
52 between them and criminality (Stuart 2013). Unsurprising then that a disproportionate  
53 number of homeless people experience victimisation or are arrested and prosecuted through  
54 the criminal justice system (Cooper 2017).  
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## Methods

The paper draws selectively on data gathered as part of a PhD study focussing on the experience of homelessness and the response to it in one urban area of Wales. The case study area is a market town later developed as an industrial centre but more recently effected by the decline of heavy industry. The population of the area is approximately 130,000 and while the town includes pockets of high deprivation, in other areas, poverty is not widespread. The supply of affordable housing in the area, however, does not meet need, and the rough sleepers' rate is amongst the highest in Wales (Welsh Government, 2017)

In order to capture the experiences of different 'types' of homelessness a purposive sampling strategy was adopted for the PhD. Service providers were recruited directly into the study and then acted as gatekeepers to contexts where recruitment of homeless people could take place. Service provider respondents and recruitment contexts included a night shelter, hostels, young person's projects, drug and alcohol agencies and drop in services for homeless people. The contexts were identified to ensure that the range of respondents recruited into the study would be as diverse as possible consonant with the understanding that homeless people are a hard to reach group.

Service providers were provided with an information sheet about the project to discuss with potential respondents. Homeless respondents were only interviewed after it was assessed that they had the capacity to consent or refuse to take part in the study. This was considered at two points. Service providers screened out those they were aware had problems with capacity e.g. as a result of mental health difficulties. Thereafter, the researcher assessed capacity at the beginning of the research interview by exploring understanding of the project. Respondents were informed in the information sheet and at the beginning of the interviews that they were free to decide what information they wished to share and that they should feel under no pressure or obligation to discuss matters that they did not wish to. They were informed that the interview data would be kept anonymous unless issues of risk of harm to others or personal vulnerability came to light which required the researcher to involve another person in order to address. Finally respondents were told they could withdraw from the study at any point without giving a reason. At the close of the interview, the respondents were given a £10 supermarket voucher in appreciation of their time. Ethical approval for the study was granted by Glyndŵr University Research Ethics Committee (GREC).

The final 'service user' sample was made up of seventeen homeless men and six women. The age range was between 16 and 57 years. Eight were street homeless (seven men and one woman), whilst others were accessing homeless provision in the town and either sofa surfing (n=2), living in temporary/unsuitable accommodation (n=4), supported accommodation (n=1) or hostels (n=8). The rest of the female respondents were living in hostels.

Interviews took place in contexts accessed by the homeless respondents with workers on hand to support with any difficulties identified. The interviews focused on respondent biographies; experiences of homelessness including rough sleeping, 'sofa surfing' and temporary accommodation; facilitators of and barriers to services, gaps in service provision

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3 and risks associated with homelessness. All service user interviews were digitally audio  
4 recorded with respondent permission. All audio recordings were fully transcribed. Qualitative  
5 data interviews were analysed using a constant comparative approach. Accordingly  
6 transcripts were read and an analytic framework developed and applied based on emergent  
7 themes.  
8

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10 Here, we focus on a subset of the data which illuminates how homelessness was  
11 experienced. We draw on the experiences of respondents across the study sample, but  
12 present extended extracts only from selected accounts. These narratives did not differ from  
13 those in the wider sample but they were generally better articulated and more clearly  
14 presented than was the case for some other respondents. All accounts are presented  
15 through pseudonyms.  
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## 18 Findings

### 19 In and out of place

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25 Street homeless people taking part in the study made most reference to the negotiation of  
26 public spaces, including both outside and inside public spaces. This respondent group had  
27 little access to private spaces, including 'home' contexts and other (inside/outside) private  
28 spaces. Limited access to private space appeared to render street homeless respondents 'at  
29 a loose end', in that they lacked legitimacy of purpose. For example, study participants who  
30 used the night shelter, like Rob, described how as a consequence of the requirement to  
31 leave the facility at eight am, and having "nowhere to go", meant that there were "12 hours to  
32 stroll the streets". Many street homeless respondents described how they "just usually walk  
33 round" (Nathan) because "there is really nothing much else to do" (Tom). In these  
34 circumstances, respondents like Keith talked about spending time, for example, sitting in  
35 various locations e.g. the bus station from which eviction was possible if the normative  
36 legitimate reason/purpose for being there was transgressed.  
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40 That inside or private spaces were largely not accessible to homeless people, also meant  
41 that some activities normally associated with being inside, were conducted in outside public  
42 spaces. For example, it was evidenced in respondent accounts how some services,  
43 including the provision of meals by means of food vans, were delivered in public outside  
44 space in the town. Hence, respondents described how they obtained and consumed meals  
45 outside at "the soup vans, in the car park" (Dennis), and at the "butty van and that, goes  
46 behind the old (supermarket) in town" (Nathan).  
47  
48

49 Aside from some 'indoor' homeless service provision, legitimate entry to 'inside' spaces was,  
50 according to respondents, who noted "where can you go all day?", limited. The answer to  
51 the rhetorical question was for many respondents, public contexts, and here it was evident  
52 that the public library played an important role for several study participants. Thus asked  
53 where homeless people go during the day Nathan stated:  
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56 *You've got like a library that's it, like, there is nowhere else to go...if*  
57 *you fall asleep like, they kick you out and things like that.*  
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4 Here, Nathan talked about sitting in the library but his account highlighted how his legitimacy  
5 in that context was fragile. Continued access was dependent upon compliance with a code  
6 of conduct or expectations. Hence, for example, Nathan noted how "*if you fall asleep like,*  
7 *they kick you out and things like that*". While it is acknowledged that expectations of  
8 appropriate behaviour in public spaces apply to most individuals, and not just homeless  
9 people, the consequences are more pertinent for street homeless people who have little or  
10 no access to alternative indoor contexts. Moreover, it may be more difficult for homeless  
11 people to observe codes of conduct such as staying awake, and when codes are  
12 contravened homeless people may be more visible than others, and result in negative  
13 responses. .  
14  
15

### 16 17 18 **Access restrictions**

19  
20 Respondent accounts indicated how the town centre, incorporating retail premises and  
21 public services, featured as an important space in which homeless people spent time. Here,  
22 however, it was noted how access to 'inside' public facilities/amenities was prescribed by  
23 time, which defined and constrained usage of these spaces. The daily structure of life for  
24 (particularly street) homeless people, was understood as different from (and out of sync with)  
25 the lives of non-homeless others, for whom most facilities catered. Here, homeless  
26 respondents themselves noted how, for example, most public 'inside' contexts were not  
27 accessible at eight a.m., the time at which users were required to leave the night shelter:  
28  
29

30 *It wouldn't be so bad if you didn't have to be out until nine [from*  
31 *shelter] ...at least then the town is open, you know what I mean, then*  
32 *you have got somewhere to go. (Nathan)*  
33  
34

35 Not only was the structure of daily life perceived as unsympathetic to the needs of homeless  
36 people, but also distinctions between days of the week, such as Bank holidays and  
37 weekends variously rendered premises in the town inaccessible. Accordingly for Jason:  
38  
39

40 *Sundays are the worst days man, nothing open in town, can't go to*  
41 *the library or nothing.*  
42

43 The most legitimate 'inside' contexts accessible to homeless people, according to  
44 respondents, were those provided by homeless services. Of key importance, in relation to  
45 these contexts was a perception of being welcomed in such spaces, by the people that  
46 volunteer in the places who were described in positive terms, for example, "*Good people and*  
47 *they're nice*" (Leon). This was in contrast to most other public spaces where homeless  
48 people could claim legitimate access, but where their presence was understood as  
49 'tolerated' rather than wholly accepted.  
50  
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52 While a different set of time restrictions applied to contexts providing homeless services,  
53 access to contexts offering these services were also demarked by time and thus limited.  
54 The local night shelter only accommodated users at night, and likewise specific food  
55 provision services were also prescribed by time as indicated by Dennis:  
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3           *You can come here [drop-in] on a Monday and a Wednesday and a*  
4           *Friday, the [name] on a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning,*  
5           *go to the [name] on the Tuesday...you get something to eat every*  
6           *day like no, except for a Thursday, Thursday morning you've got*  
7           *breakfast, there's nothing at night time.*  
8

9  
10       In addition, notwithstanding that spaces in which services operated were those which  
11       homeless people experienced as most legitimately occupying, this legitimacy often indexed  
12       the service provision rather than the space *per se*. That is, on the one hand some services  
13       were designated for use by homeless people, other homeless services, for example those  
14       providing food, utilised public space on a temporary basis rather than constituting a space  
15       designated for use by homeless people. That the space is temporary, arguably renders it  
16       somewhat different to other spaces, such as libraries, because it is in a sense borrowed  
17       space which renders otherwise 'public space' legitimate only within specific constraints.  
18

19  
20       Irrespective of whether services operated in their own or borrowed contexts, constraints on  
21       provision left large parts of the day in which there was no access for homeless people to  
22       designated space. Hence, respondents highlighted how outside of prescribed times there  
23       was no designated space for them to occupy. This issue was expressed succinctly by Tom,  
24       who asked "*where is everyone going to go?*" and Nathan who suggested that outside of a  
25       few designated hours: "*the rest of the week, you're just like walking round, nothing to do*"  
26       (Nathan).  
27

28  
29       It is perhaps not surprising therefore that respondents highlighted a specific need for  
30       dedicated space during the day time. Moreover how descriptions of such a space could be  
31       associated with certain ordinariness as in the following extracts:  
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34           *A building where people can just go and sit and have a brew and*  
35           *watch telly. (Connor)*  
36

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38           *You could go there, watch telly, table tennis, pool or whatever.*  
39           *(Nathan)*  
40

41  
42       While it has been noted that homeless people in this study have legitimate access to some  
43       public spaces, perceptions of their reception in public places varied according to different  
44       contexts and the expectations surrounding them. It has been noted previously that dedicated  
45       services were perceived as positive, in part because they were, in contrast to many public  
46       spaces, welcoming to homeless people. Generally, however, respondent accounts  
47       highlighted a perception that they were unwelcome in many spaces because their presence  
48       was deemed unacceptable by gatekeepers of these settings. In the following account, Terry  
49       described how, when he was street homeless, he was barred from using a hospital canteen:  
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51  
52           *I used to go to the hospital for my dinners because you could get a*  
53           *dinner and a pudding for two pounds fifteen. It was very cheap...and*  
54           *after the security got on to me, you know "we don't want you coming*  
55           *up here, it's not for people to come off the streets and it's for people*  
56           *that are based in the hospital"...but the ladies in the canteen were*  
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3                   saying like "we don't give a damn if you come up here", it was just  
4                   the security guys.  
5

6  
7                   While the role of a hospital canteen is to provide a service for those who are  
8                   visiting/attending the hospital, arguably the above account suggests that the narrator was  
9                   discriminated against in a way which other members of the public (who similarly may have  
10                  had no legitimate reason to access the canteen) may not have been. The account also  
11                  suggests that the discrimination was rendered possible because the respondent was visible  
12                  as a homeless person either because he was known to the security guard or because of his  
13                  appearance.  
14

15  
16                  Another way in which homeless respondents understood themselves to be unwelcome in  
17                  some public spaces is a function of the way in which usage of facilities is perceived to  
18                  contravene their intended 'purpose'. Here, an example was provided by Stuart in his account  
19                  of using the washing facilities at a public swimming pool:  
20

21                                 *I used to go to the baths and get washed there, if you go there at the*  
22                                 *right time there's nobody there, when it first opened at 8 o' clock in*  
23                                 *the morning...you could go there and have a good strip wash there,*  
24                                 *like they did used to tell me to keep out but that's it - they never took*  
25                                 *it any further than that.*  
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28  
29                  How Stuart's experience differs from Terry's, is while in the former account Terry was  
30                  excluded from the hospital canteen, Stuart, was threatened with exclusion, but this was  
31                  never operationalised. These contrasting experiences arguably illustrate that the boundaries  
32                  which demarcate acceptability and non-acceptability in specific spaces are not always  
33                  clearly understood by participants.  
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35  
36                  While, ostensibly, homeless people have the same rights of access to 'outside' public  
37                  spaces as non-homeless others, some respondents reported that street homeless people  
38                  were viewed by the public as transgressing the rules of public space. Certainly, respondent  
39                  accounts suggested how legitimacy of access to public spaces by homeless people may be  
40                  constrained in a number of ways, indicating that 'outside' public spaces generally were  
41                  problematic for them for different reasons. Central to this understanding was that homeless  
42                  people when occupying public spaces were perceived by others and came to perceive  
43                  themselves, as being out of place, or misplaced. This perception of misplacement was  
44                  evident in respondent accounts about how they were perceived by non-homeless others as  
45                  occupying outside spaces without legitimate purpose.  
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48                                 *People do look at you like a piece of shit, they do, they do. Sitting on*  
49                                 *benches, just to pass the time away and everyone looks at you,*  
50                                 *everyone, everyone. (Rob).*  
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53                  Some respondents argued that being in public space during the day, without a 'legitimate'  
54                  purpose led to negative evaluations from the public. Thus Stuart described  
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*I have had people starting on me.... just people drunk, coming out of the pub...saying, 'get a job and stop scrounging'.*

Accounts portrayed homeless people as the targets for/and victims of assault, and here it is noted how inhabiting the 'wrong' space, or being out of place might, according to homeless respondents, be used by perpetrators as justification for these actions.

The perception of not being welcome in public places was illustrated by several respondents, like Rob, who found that some public contexts rendered them too visible. Rob suggested that rendering homeless people less visible might help to reduce the level of public antagonism directed at them:

*People don't like - what do they call us, tramps- don't like seeing it do they? ...if you had somewhere to go they wouldn't mind seeing us every day, bits and bits they would get on with us better... They would see us in a different way... because like not hanging around the streets.*

### Boundary maintenance

Public places, as all spaces, are demarcated by boundaries, and the importance and strength of these boundaries was evident in the way in which respondents talked about how they were maintained and policed. Here, as noted previously, respondents talked about the way in which some behaviours were deemed inappropriate in public spaces, by non-homeless others, and how transgression of normative expectations indexing public spaces evoked social approbation.

Respondents in the study reported here referred to violence being used to regulate their presence in public spaces. Here, respondents understood their vulnerability to violence to be a function of their stigmatised/marginalised status, but also arising from their presence 'in the wrong place at the wrong time'. An illustration of this was provided by Dennis, in his description of a potentially life threatening experience when sleeping outside:

*Someone booted me while I was on the floor and set fire to my quilt, it started to go on fire and I woke up... I got told afterwards someone was taking pictures of it while I was asleep, you know what I mean? On like a, I don't know what he was doing, putting it on Facebook most probably, innit? And standing there laughing.*

Accounts of assaults and threatening behaviours were evident in many respondent accounts. What was interesting about Dennis's account is the social approval that is imagined for the violent actions upon publicising them on social media networks.

Equally, the police were acknowledged by respondents as maintainers and defenders of the boundaries of public space, which they kept under surveillance. Hence respondents, like Dennis, talked about being moved on, or evicted when, for example, rough sleeping, by the

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2  
3 police. Likewise, respondents talked about the application of sanctions for transgressing the  
4 rules of space, including the issue of fines for "drinking in a free zone area", and  
5 incarceration in police custody "six hours to keep me in the cells - six hours" (Rob).  
6

7  
8 The data also highlighted how respondents perceived themselves as having limited rights of  
9 occupancy in semi-public indoor contexts, which were often policed similarly to public  
10 spaces. In terms of retail premises, for example, it was noted by Matt that:

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12 *People look at you in the shop and say 'sorry you're not coming in*  
13 *here'.*  
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16 Here, respondents, like Patrick, highlighted the role of in-store security guards in 'policing'  
17 access such spaces, reporting how he had been banned from a few shops. Notably, one  
18 respondent, Terry, suggested how homeless people were targeted and tailed by security  
19 guards, in that:

20  
21 *They're all connected over radio, they've all got your name and*  
22 *they're all looking out for you.*  
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25  
26 In such accounts homeless respondents described themselves as subject to observation  
27 and/or exclusion from retail premises because of their perceived inability to pay. In other  
28 words, access to shops is dependent on perceived ability to shop or purchase goods. Those  
29 perceived as unable to meet this expectation forgo their right to occupy such spaces.  
30 Hence, homeless people, who are perceived, and may perceive themselves, as being  
31 without means to pay, may be deemed out of place in commercial premises.  
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34 Another noteworthy point emerging from accounts of homeless people around public space  
35 was acknowledgement of rights of occupancy. Arguably, this informed responses to the  
36 policing of public spaces in which homeless people were perceived as having precarious  
37 rights. For example, in the following account, Rob describes adopting an acquiescent  
38 manner when apprehended by the police:  
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40  
41 *When you're homeless right, you've got a choice to either walk away,*  
42 *stand there, or go into cells. Alright then, whatever. Take me, let's go,*  
43 *I'm not arsed, I am not bothered ...because police are pretty petty,*  
44 *you know what I mean? I don't scream at the coppers or shout at*  
45 *them, alright I go.*  
46

47  
48 The data suggest that homeless people understand the precarious nature of their rights to  
49 occupy public spaces, and how this constrains their choices affecting what they do, and in  
50 what contexts.  
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## 52 53 Discussion

54  
55 Previous research has suggested how those perceived to be in the wrong place, without  
56 purpose, may be verbally berated as scroungers or burdens on society, with their status vis-  
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3 à-vis paid work as the focus of attention rather than their physical hardships as a function of  
4 their visibility in public spaces (Wachholz 2005). Conversely our research indicates the  
5 existence of mechanisms through which homeless people are made and remade as  
6 homeless and identifies a need for dedicated spaces for homeless people.  
7

8  
9 Respondent accounts highlighted constraints on access to public and semi-public spaces.  
10 These constraints, which were often a function of expectations surrounding use of space,  
11 were sometimes normatively informed and in other instances backed by sanction. In  
12 combination, the force of social disapprobation, surveillance and sanction served to fuel  
13 respondent understanding that their claims of rightful occupancy regarding public space  
14 were often tenuous and precarious. Spaces in which homeless people had acknowledged  
15 rights were those dedicated to provision of homeless services. Even within such spaces,  
16 however, legitimate occupancy was not guaranteed. That is, the satisfaction of a range of  
17 criteria was necessary to secure individual rights of access. In this respect services, and the  
18 spaces which they occupied, were also bounded.  
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22 Respondents experienced homelessness in the context of permitted and unpermitted  
23 spaces, rights of access and perceived legitimate purpose. Homeless people when  
24 occupying public spaces understood themselves as perceived by others (and came to  
25 perceive themselves), as being out of place, or misplaced. Overall, homeless respondents  
26 understood themselves as 'out of place' in spaces predominately occupied by the non-  
27 homeless, and experienced these places as bounded spaces. Public places, as all spaces,  
28 are demarked by boundaries, and the importance and strength of these boundaries was  
29 evident in the way in which respondents talked about how these were maintained, policed  
30 and upheld through public disapprobation, surveillance and legal sanction.  
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34 The most legitimate 'inside' contexts accessible to homeless people were those provided by  
35 homeless services. This was in contrast to most other public spaces where homeless people  
36 could claim legitimate access, but where their presence was understood as 'tolerated' rather  
37 than accepted. Of key importance, in relation to service contexts was a perception of being  
38 accepted and welcomed in such spaces, by the workers and/or volunteers who were  
39 described by homeless study participants in positive terms. However, limited access to  
40 private space rendered street homeless respondents 'at a loose end' during the day in that  
41 they lacked legitimacy of purpose. While, ostensibly having the same rights of access to  
42 semi-public and public spaces as non-homeless others, respondents understood themselves  
43 as transgressing the rules of public space. For example, those using 'inside' commercial  
44 facilities/amenities such as shops reported being subject to observation and/or exclusion,  
45 which they linked in part to the perception of their inability to pay for merchandise. It has  
46 been argued that those perceived as unable to meet this expectation implicitly forgo their  
47 right to occupy such space (Smith 1996).  
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51 Study respondents utilised a range of public contexts including the public library as both a  
52 means to accessing indoor space and occupying time. While the library was understood to  
53 be accessible to homeless people, legitimacy was perceived as fragile with continued  
54 access being dependent upon their compliance with codes of conduct, and normative  
55 expectations. While it is acknowledged that expectations of appropriate behaviour in public  
56 spaces apply to most individuals, and not just to homeless people, arguably the  
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3 consequences are more pertinent for street homeless people who have little or no access to  
4 alternative indoor contexts. Moreover, the physical toll associated with homelessness may  
5 make it more difficult for homeless people to observe codes of conduct.  
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8 Relevant here is a consideration of the consequences for homeless people of increased  
9 restrictions on the availability and use of public space in England and Wales. The  
10 privatisation of public parks and the involvement of the private sector in urban development  
11 projects that would once have been the purview of the crown e.g. King's Cross in London,  
12 restrict access to public spaces for homeless people. In turn cuts to local government  
13 expenditure over the last ten years have impacted on the availability of services deemed at  
14 the local level to be 'non-essential' (Meegan *et al.* 2014). Data compiled through a Freedom  
15 of Information request suggests 343 library closures in the ten years leading up to March  
16 2016 across England and Wales. Signs outside offices that proclaim 'private property/no  
17 loitering' may not overtly target specific groups. However, they create a climate that restricts  
18 the movement of homeless people (Mautner, 2015) and promote a climate so hostile to their  
19 needs that it is unsurprising studies reveal they are disproportionately represented as victims  
20 of crime (Cooper 2017).  
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24 In this context, space becomes of greater concern but for homeless respondents in this  
25 study, a socially legitimised private space did not exist during the daytime. That inside or  
26 private spaces were largely not accessible to homeless people in general can mean that  
27 some activities normally associated with inside, are conducted in outside public spaces, with  
28 sleeping outside as the most notable example. Mitchell (1995) noted how private activities  
29 such as sleeping drinking and sex, while legitimate in the home, are not legitimate in public  
30 spaces. Extensive public exposure trespasses on normative expectations of space, and its  
31 usage, making individuals highly vulnerable (Wardhaugh 1996). That is because behaviours  
32 which are experienced as safe and domestic when conducted in private become dangerous  
33 and polluting when exposed to public view. Here the danger does not arise because these  
34 activities are intrinsically dangerous but because of the moral ambiguity surrounding them  
35 when carried out in the wrong place. Moreover the sense of difference which this evokes  
36 produces and reproduces the stigma associated with homeless people (Takahashi 1996).  
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40 The provision of dedicated spaces and places for homeless people in the study area to  
41 occupy during the daytime could serve to disrupt the processes whereby the homeless are  
42 made and remade. That said, while public perceptions of homeless people which reflect and  
43 exacerbate exclusion may be changed by the provision of such spaces and places, the  
44 practise of removing homeless people from public could be viewed as problematic. This is  
45 because it may inadvertently collude with the hegemonic imperative to remove homeless  
46 people from the public gaze. Support for shelters away from town centres, and the location  
47 of food provision services away from public areas, or at least outside times of most public  
48 usage, could serve to reinforce the understanding among non-homeless and homeless alike  
49 that the public existence of this group is not socially acceptable. While such provision may  
50 protect homeless people from negative social attitudes and behaviours, keeping them  
51 hidden away renders unchallenged the social disapprobation which produces and  
52 reproduces a social context which makes their use of space problematic. This also  
53 resonates with the argument that the increase in numbers of UK emergency shelters is not  
54 incompatible with the imperative of containment and control (May *et al.* 2005). That is,  
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3 shelters may provide an effective way of shifting homeless people off the street, thus  
4 rendering the problems of homelessness less visible.  
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### 7 Conclusions

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10 The study findings illustrate how street homeless people understand the precarious nature of  
11 their rights to occupy public spaces, and how this constrains their choices affecting what  
12 they do, and in what contexts. Respondent preference for a dedicated space for daytime use  
13 was underpinned by a stated need for a space in which they could claim legitimate  
14 occupancy. Such a space would also serve to render homeless people invisible by removing  
15 them from public space and, related to this, the unfriendly gaze of non-homeless others.  
16 However, it is arguable that dedicated space may also serve to enable interaction between  
17 homeless people who understand the exigencies of being without permanent  
18 accommodation and who are unaccepted by mainstream society. In other words, it is not  
19 simply the avoidance of censure that could underpin daytime service provision, but the  
20 opportunities for acceptance without discrimination among peers. Here Johnsen *et al.*  
21 (2005) have likewise noted that such dedicated space offers a refuge from stigma, and a  
22 place of safety for homeless individuals, over and above the other physical needs such as  
23 warmth and shelter because in these contexts homeless status, which is designated the  
24 'other' in most settings, is the norm.  
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29 Attendant on this justifiable concern around the possible ghettoization of homeless people  
30 are concerns around perpetuating a cycle of homelessness because shelters and specialist  
31 centres arguably socialise individuals into institutional settings (Wright 1997). However,  
32 dedicated spaces may lead to a temporary exit from the streets, a provide space to explore  
33 more sustainable solutions to homelessness which will depend upon a package of measures  
34 not least of all involving the supply of affordable housing to be increased (Johnsen *et al.*  
35 2005).  
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