



The Experience of Homelessness: A Qualitative Study Using Podcast Data and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.

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ABSTRACT

Previous research concerning homelessness has mainly used quantitative methodology focusing on the presumed disease risks, survival needs and demographics of the homeless population. This study employed a qualitative approach using podcast data, to explore the subjective and lived experience of homelessness. Six participants (one female, five male) gave their accounts during semi-structured interviews conducted by Homeless Podcast and remain online within the public domain. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was carried out on subsequent transcripts, where four main themes emerged: A homeless identity; Existential tiredness; Hopelessness and helplessness; and Humbled outlook on life. The findings illustrate that homelessness is a complex process conveying severe and multiple losses that impart a destructive impact on identity, self-esteem and physical and psychological well-being. Participants also disclosed elements of positive emotional growth, adopting deeper meaning, humble outlook, and respect for life. The findings are discussed in relation to previous research with suggestions for future direction.

KEY WORDS:	THE EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS	IDENTITY	POSITIVE EMOTIONAL GROWTH	HOMELESS PODCAST	INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
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Introduction

A fundamental human need is shelter. Without it, people are unprotected, vulnerable, and powerless to satisfy other basic needs. Recent estimates of homelessness are staggering, with approximately 150 million people homeless and 1.6 billion people lacking sufficient housing worldwide (Chamie, 2017). Each year around 1.5 million people in the United States (US) stay in homeless shelters, with an additional unknown population of unsheltered homeless, whereby people live on the streets, in cars and other locations unsuitable for human habitation (Gardner and Emory, 2018). Furthermore, around 26% of 16-25-year-olds living in the United Kingdom (UK) will have slept rough at some point in their lives, with a further 35% having 'sofa-surfed' (Clarke, 2016). While homelessness has always been part of UK and US social fabrics, the early 1980s saw the issue begin to obtain widespread academic attention (Hombs, 1992). It is now well documented throughout literature that the homeless population represent an incredibly vulnerable group within society, having common prognosis of serious mental illnesses (Perry and Craig, 2015), high suicidal behaviours (Shaw et al., 2006), histories of substance abuse (Upshur et al., 2017) and a greater exposure to sexual and physical victimization (Wenzel et al., 2000). In order for services to provide adequate and meaningful resources to support not only the physical needs of the homeless, but also the psychological, it is essential that research explores homelessness holistically, observing the subjective, lived experience through a qualitative phenomenological lens.

Background

Homelessness, in a literal sense, refers to anyone without a home (Farrington and Robinson, 1999). Kelling (1991) explained homelessness represents much more than just 'rooflessness', but rather being homeless is characterised by deprivation of satisfactory, sheltered, and secure accommodation. This includes people who live on the streets, in temporary housing and those with shifting circumstances being housed by family or friends (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2017). Despite substantial efforts to reduce street counts, homeless populations

continue to grow in the UK and US every year (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016; Toro et al., 2007). The estimated number of individuals sleeping rough in the UK has risen 165% from 2010 to 2018; although charities speculate the true figures will be more than double this (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2019; House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2017). Moreover, national estimates of rough sleeping in the US rose by 2% from 2017 to 2018, with around 358,369 people in sheltered and 194,467 living in unsheltered locations (The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2018). What is clear, is that homelessness is multidimensional (Somerville, 2013), meaning that pathways into becoming homeless can be the result of individual, social and economic factors (Piat et al., 2015).

Between 2010 and 2016 the number of UK households recognised as homeless rose from around 40,000 to almost 60,000 (Fransham and Dorling, 2018). Some of the reasons these individuals lost their homes included: relatives or friends no longer being able (or willing) to provide accommodation; relationship breakdown with a partner; or due to mortgage and rent errors (Fransham and Dorling, 2018). Therefore, a person's decline into homelessness can be unpredictable, sudden and incredibly overwhelming. Such that understanding homelessness from a qualitative perspective behoves researchers to scrutinise what it means to have a home. Warnes et al. (2003) note that homes are not just confined to physical space. Home resonates a spatial metaphor, in that it is both a place and an idea (Giesecking et al., 2014). One's home resembles a phenomenological concept with several psychological underpinnings (Case, 1996). Homes are perceived subjectively and represent an extension of the self, as something designed as one's own (Cooper, 1974). It is perhaps due to the diverse, in-depth meanings attached to home, that there is yet to be a universally accepted definition of homelessness. A home is a place of emotional well-being, providing people with roots, a sense of belonging and identity; homeless people are deprived of these (Warnes et al., 2003).

Traditional explanations of homelessness conventionally use either individualistic or structural approaches (Benjaminsen and Andrade, 2015; Burt et al., 2001; Calsyn and Rodes, 2006; Fisher and Breaky, 1991; Johnson et al., 2015). Thus, depicting homelessness to be the result of macro (structural; e.g. tough housing market, poverty and unemployment) and micro (individual; e.g. mental health issues, relationship breakdown and substance abuse) factors (Morrell-Bellai et al., 2000). However, these explanations are routinely criticised for holding connotations of culpability and blame, when many uncontrollable circumstances can leave an individual vulnerable to homelessness (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Therefore, this classic debate is out-dated (Nooe and Patterson, 2010). Recent acknowledgements throughout academic literature hence provide a facilitative step towards understanding the experience and psychological impact of being homeless. Homelessness is now often conceptualised as a 'process' as opposed to a 'situation' (Hodgetts et al., 2007; Martijn and Sharpe, 2006).

This shift triggered a plethora of research exploring different routes to becoming homeless, highlighting its complex nature (Clapham, 2003). Two main competing metaphors are used when referring to the process of homelessness, serving to identify some of the changes homeless people may face (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2013). Some researchers use the analogy of a 'homeless career' to consider the distinctive stages involved in becoming homeless (e.g. Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2006; Hutson and Liddiard, 1994; Snow and Anderson, 1993). Alternatively, researchers will look at a 'homeless pathway,' drawing attention to homelessness with regards to changes in both identity and material status (e.g. Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Clapham, 2003; Crane, 1999; Fitzpatrick, 2000). Explanations of homelessness need to incorporate a 'blended' approach, acknowledging risk factors to becoming homeless with regards to heightened vulnerability (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018). This will in turn illustrate that risk factors for homelessness are accumulative, interactive and can ultimately happen to anyone. From an ecological perspective, homelessness is conceptualised using an interplay of biopsychosocial risk factors (Nooe and Patterson, 2010). Risk factors can range from environmental

to socio-economic and individual (Toro et al., 1991). Therefore, people that are homeless represent a distinctly heterogeneous population as people often become homeless for numerous and complex reasons. This suggests that the required support and potential solutions to homelessness are also complex (Williams and Stickley, 2011). Thus, the subjective and lived experience of homelessness between individuals is expected to significantly vary (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000).

Despite the presumed subjectivity of homelessness, the majority of homeless literature, perhaps surprisingly, tends to employ quantitative methodology. Academic attention predominantly uses self-administered surveys and questionnaires that are preoccupied with the risks of disease (Rimawi et al., 2014), demographics (Maness et al., 2019), patterns of homeless shelter use (Rothwell et al., 2017), and survival needs of homeless individuals (Kim et al., 2010). Although this research undoubtedly provides valuable information that highlights factors which may contribute to causing, enduring and departing from homelessness, these methods limit the degree of information participants are able to reveal due to the predetermined nature of quantitative measures. Furthermore, quantitative approaches used to examine homelessness will inherently lack the in-depth meanings that participants might attach to their experiences, and therefore do not reveal insight into homeless individuals' personal and unique perspectives.

The homeless population represents perhaps the most socially excluded and vulnerable group within society (Johnstone et al., 2015). Not only do homeless people face physical health problems such as increased risk of skin (Bonilla et al., 2009), blood-borne (Beijer et al., 2012) and pulmonary (Plevneshi et al., 2009) infections, the mental health and well-being of homeless individuals is also significantly affected, having higher rates of both psychotic illness and personality disorders (Fazel et al., 2008). The gradual or sudden loss of one's home may act as a stressor of significant severity such that it can produce symptoms of psychological trauma (Goodman et al., 1991). Bhugra (2007) argued that once an individual

becomes homeless, mental illness is almost guaranteed. It is likely that the stigmatisation of homeless individuals serves to exacerbate declines in mental health and well-being (Sayce, 2000). Homeless people are often regarded as 'dirty,' 'smelly,' 'inferior' and 'unhappy' – becoming objects of avoidance (Hodgetts et al., 2008; Krajewska-Kułak et al., 2016; Williams and Stickley, 2011). Therefore, homelessness is disempowering, traumatic and isolating (Bently, 1997), and to be understood in its entirety, psychological research should endeavour to examine the experience of being homeless using qualitative and idiographic approaches.

The ways in which people cope with stressful or traumatic situations is a complex process. Folkman and Lazarus' (1980, 1985) Process-Centred Theory of stress and coping identifies two cognitively oriented ways in which individuals can cope: problem-focused and emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping refers to an 'approach' strategy in which people make efforts to change the stress inducing problem or situation (e.g. actively looking for housing or employment opportunities). Whereas, emotion-focused coping is perhaps an 'avoidant' strategy, whereby an individual will not seek to change the situation, but instead find ways to manage and reduce emotional distress (e.g. withdrawing from the situation by using drugs and alcohol). Folkman and Lazarus (1985) describe stress as a disturbed relationship between person and environment, with coping being the act of change. The use of illicit substances can be used as a way to suppress psychological pain (Williams and Stickley, 2011). However, this emotion-focused coping mechanism is regularly emphasised by quantitative research as maladaptive within the homeless population (Fisher and Breaky, 1991; Goering et al., 2002).

Homelessness can have a profound effect on people's identity and sense of self (Williams and Stickley, 2011). Some researchers argue that being homeless equates to a loss of these, reflecting one's loss of work, relationships, permanent address and a place to call one's own (Boydell et al., 2000). Goodman et al. (1991) reported homeless persons are likely to exhibit a depletion of existential meaning and self-

worth due to the lack of growth-encouraging social networks and support available to unhoused individuals. Focusing on the mental health and identity claims of eight homeless participants, Williams and Stickley (2011) conducted a narrative research study using interviews and thematic analysis to examine how people talked about their experiences of homelessness. Their results were grouped into themes to illustrate that homelessness had a profoundly negative, destructive effect on participants' sense of identity. Both personally and socially, identities had to be renegotiated as they became 'spoiled' from intense discrimination and rejection by society. Gieseeking et al. (2014) note how place and identity are intricately intertwined with one another. Therefore, homeless individuals are 'spatially marginalised' with devalued identities due to their lack of a place to call home (Laurenson and Collins, 2014; Reutter et al., 2009). However, the primary analysis employed in William and Stickley's (2011) study was to search for elements directly relating to mental health and identity, therefore themes did not instinctively 'emerge' throughout the data, rendering the analysis devoid of meaning. If there is to be a focus on subjective meaning and sense-making of homeless participants, then researchers must adopt more holistic interpretive phenomenological approaches.

Present study

In light of the aforementioned research literature, this study aims to advance the current understanding in psychology concerning the complex and unpredictable life of people living on the streets. Further exploring how homeless individuals make sense of their social and personal worlds. Previous research has created the foundations for future insight into homelessness (e.g. Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018; Hodgetts et al., 2008; Nooe and Patterson, 2010; Williams and Stickley, 2011). Thus, from the previously mentioned multifaceted nature of homelessness, this qualitative study aims to deliver a contemporary account of six homeless individuals' subjective, lived experience using interview data from the podcast series, Homeless Podcast (Homeless Podcast, 2015:app). An interpretive phenomenological analysis is a sufficient analytic strategy that will effectively respond to the research aims (Smith et al., 2009). This additional

knowledge of the impact of homelessness at an individual level, will be able to inform psychological provisions and interventions related to both preventing, enduring and exiting homelessness. The following research questions will be explored:

- 1) What is the experiential perspective of a homeless person?
- 2) How does homelessness impact a person's identity?
- 3) How do homeless people make sense of being homeless?
- 4) How do homeless people construe a sense of self?

Methodology

Philosophical underpinnings

To discover rich, insightful data concerning individual experience, a qualitative idiographic approach was selected for this research study (Kaiser, 2009). The use of qualitative techniques enables researchers to consider each participants' attitude and perception towards the world around them through a subjective lens (Lyons and Coyle, 2007). Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is committed to the immense examination of how people make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). As well as the study of the individual, IPA seeks to explore specific situations or events at an idiographic and phenomenological level (Larkin et al, 2006). In terms of methodology, this translates to the extensively detailed and intense analysis of a comparatively small number of participants (Smith et al., 2009). Derived from phenomenology, the lifeworld existentialism of temporality, spatiality, intersubjectivity and embodiment, are used as heuristics, and guide researchers in the search for themes (Husserl, 1970). These elements of the lifeworld are referred to as double hermeneutics (Smith and Osborn, 2003) whereby both researcher and participant are involved in a process of deep exploration, attempting to make sense of participant experiences and the constructed meanings of the world as they see it (Shinebourne and Smith, 2009). This empowers researchers to offer interpretations of accounts, exceeding participants' own understandings of experience, making inferences to psychological phenomena (Larkin et al., 2006). Ontologically, this study is concerned with how homeless individuals construct the world around them, and the meanings they might attach to their experiences. Thus, the epistemological position is phenomenological. With this in mind, IPA is a fitting approach for this study, as it allows the researcher to produce an in-depth analysis of the data and develop a comprehensive understanding of how individuals make sense of being homeless. The researcher also adopts an empathetic stance to appreciate what-it-is-like to be homeless (Smith, 2004).

Method

Procedure

This study conducted internet-mediated research (IMR). IMR refers to 'research involving the remote acquisition of data from or about human participants using the internet and its associated technologies' (The British Psychological Society, 2017:3). Data collection began by searching keywords and phrases related to homelessness using an Apple Podcast application on a smartphone device (Apple, 2018:app). Keywords included: 'the experience of homelessness,' 'homeless,' 'lived experience,' and 'life on the streets.' Subsequently, the Homeless Podcast series (See APPX.3; Homeless Podcast, 2015:app) containing six recorded episodes, was downloaded and saved onto a Windows laptop. Each episode contains a semi-structured interview with a homeless individual living in the United States.

Interviews by Homeless Podcast represent a primary data source, meaning that the current researcher did not directly collect the data. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, the accounts shared have received no prior analysis. The purpose of Homeless Podcast was to raise awareness of the innumerable, complex issues surrounding homelessness by sharing real-life experiences. Due to the nature of this research project, IMR was deemed the most appropriate method to obtain rich, elaborate and meaningful accounts of the experience of homelessness.

Primary data collection traversed across a period of two years (2015-2017) and interviews vary from approximately one to two hours long. Once ethical approval was granted (See APPX.1), the researcher carefully listened to each interview and recorded field notes containing relevant reflections and observations (Smith and Osborn, 2003). This was later used to aid the analysis, supporting interpretations of the data (Gadamer, 1989). Interviews were individually transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Word (See APPX.2 for example extract).

Participants

Homeless Podcast interviewed six individuals currently enduring a period of homelessness. Small sample sizes are paramount in IPA research in order to capture experience from analysis (Eatough and Smith, 2008). In this case, Homeless Podcast represents a homogenous purposive sample. Purposive sampling maximises the effectiveness of limited time, allowing for the selection and identification of participants with specific experience most relevant to the present study (Patton, 2002). Inclusion criteria consisted of public interviews with homeless people aged eighteen or above. Cooper et al. (2012) recommended six was an appropriate number of participants to conduct IPA. Table 1 displays further relevant participant information.

Table 1
Participant Information

PARTICIPANT	GENDER	AGE	PLACE OF BIRTH	LENGTH OF PODCAST EPISODE (HOUR: MINUTES: SECONDS)
Erica	Female	43	Minneapolis, Minnesota	1:13:21
Michael	Male	36	San Jose, California	1:50:54
Cooper	Male	43	Minneapolis, Minnesota	1:28:36
Daniel	Male	56	Chicago, Illinois	1:43:12
Isaac	Male	23	Burnsville, Minnesota	1:13:35
Howard	Male	44	Saint Paul, Minnesota	1:55:00

Qualitative Interviewing

Six semi-structured interviews were sourced from Homeless Podcast (Homeless Podcast, 2015:app) for the purpose of this study. Semi-structured interviewing is a popular technique commonly used within qualitative research (Adams, 2010). Through combining a flexible structure with suitable guidance from the interviewer, this method often elicits rich, insightful data from participants (Eatough and Smith, 2008). Furthermore, with a pliable framework in place, semi-structured interviews ensure a serendipitous flow throughout the course of the interview, with questions of both a planned and spontaneous nature (Smith, 1995). Therefore, despite an often-predetermined topic of conversation, questions can easily be abandoned in light of pursuing more interesting topics (Jamshed, 2014). Semi-structured interviews resemble an empowering tool for both interviewer and interviewee, as they support one another in a shared journey of understanding and sense-making (Rabionet, 2011). In turn, this provides the participant with a sense of freedom, to which the dimensions of the interview depend on topics they wish to explore. Moreover, semi-structured interviewing adheres to the theoretical framework of the chosen method of analysis: IPA (Smith et al, 1999).

Data analysis

IPA generates an immense exploration of participant experiences, considering how they perceive and make sense of their surrounding worlds (Smith and Osborn, 2015). Therefore, this method is highly relevant to the research aims. Participants attribute meanings to their experiences and the researcher is tasked with unveiling them through a laborious process of interpretation (Smith et al, 2009). Due to its phenomenological nature, researchers are able to seize understandings and explore what-it-is-like to experience different phenomena (Larkin et al, 2006). Through a deep examination of lived experience, IPA bestows a detailed and unique account of each participant, prior to considering patterns of convergence and divergence across a dataset (Smith and Eatough, 2017).

The process of data analysis fulfilled the requirements of IPA as set out by Smith and Osborne (2015). The researcher began by becoming familiar with the dataset, reading each interview transcript multiple times. After much reflection, the data was revisited, and comments were added beside particularly significant or noteworthy observations. It was vital that an interpretive persona was adopted to link participant experience to psychological concepts that would, in turn, uncover meaning (Smith and Osborne, 2015). Subsequently, themes emerged that were convergent across each account (Smith et al, 2009).

Throughout the analysis of the data, an assortment of non-ideological commitments was required by the researcher. Of which included embeddedness, openness and reflexivity. Embedding oneself within the dataset was crucial to drawing out abundant levels of meaning attached to participants' experiences. This required openness to new concepts as well as adopting a reflexive continuum that allowed the researcher to continuously review the nature of their own interpretations. Hence, it was vital the researcher maintained an open-minded, non-judgemental standpoint.

Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the Manchester Metropolitan Ethics Committee (See APPX.1). This research also adhered to the ethical guidelines for IMR, as set out by The British Psychological Society (2017). Some key ethical issues to consider within IMR include: the distinction between the public-private online domain; obtaining valid consent; and privacy and confidentiality (The British Psychological Society, 2017). After careful consideration from the researcher concerning the ambiguity that surrounds the degree to which data can be disclosed as 'public,' the use of Homeless Podcast data was deemed ethically sound. Homeless Podcast exists within a public online space which is readily accessible to anyone, thus valid consent is reasonably justified due to interviews residing 'in the public domain' (The British Psychological Society, 2017:9). Further, all participants interviewed by Homeless Podcast were over the age of eighteen. To certify privacy and

confidentiality, interpretations and analysis of the data were stored in a labelled file on a password-protected laptop. Moreover, the names used in the analysis section are pseudonyms to ensure a level of participant anonymity.

Analysis and Discussion

Through conducting an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, four main themes emerged from the data: A homeless identity; Existential tiredness; Hopelessness and helplessness; and Humbled outlook on life. Within each participant account, there was strong reference to perplexed intersubjectivity, wherein participants are stripped of their former and given a new 'homeless' identity. The subsequent impact and indignity of homelessness with reference to spatial and temporal dimensions is then discussed, followed by accounts of self-effacing, humble views of the world. Themes are explicated with supporting quotations, alongside interpretation.

A homeless identity

Despite the indisputably idiosyncratic nature of participants' former lifestyles, both explicitly and indirectly, all six accounts featured reference to how 'a homeless identity' has been endorsed by others. In becoming homeless, participants were not only faced with inevitable challenges to their previous self, but a 'homeless' label has altered participants' perceptions of self-worth, having a discernible impact on identity and self-esteem:

Isaac: "They say all, like all homeless people are drug addicts, you know that's not true. They say everybody holding a sign up is, they're just doing so that they can get dope or whatever, you know that's not true either."

Erica: "They judge us, without even knowing us. We could be really nice people and they don't know... so sometimes on my signs I'll write you know 'I'm not asking for money, a smile is free, a wave is free.'"

Daniel: "Well they sure think that we're bad people like, they look down on us like we're trash, and it hurts your feelings I mean we're still human we still have feelings. And people ride by and they look at us and shake their head or they make comments, or they swear or call us names... We're still human, just like them."

It is apparent from the above accounts that participants experience a substantial burden of stereotypes and assumptions surrounding homelessness. Often participants find that others place unwarranted judgement on them, being viewed as especially 'bad people' or 'drug addicts.' Participants crave acknowledgement. This is clear within both Erica and Daniel's account; Erica explains how even a smile or a wave from another person is enough to make her feel recognised and accepted by others, later recalling it, "Makes you feel better, and don't make you feel like garbage." Moreover, Daniel's claim, 'we're still human, just like them' signifies there is a clear divide between the homeless and non-homeless which disempowers, dehumanises and isolates participants (Bently, 1997). These ideas resonate with Reutter et al. (2009), who describe a 'devalued identity' amongst people who are homeless, as participants' former selves are regularly minimised and challenged by others.

Accounts were indicative of how homelessness has resulted in participants' self-worth to be intrinsically threatened. Isaac describe how people may result to, "Yelling things at you, throwing things at you." This abhorrent 'homeless identity' has clearly had a profound negative effect. Isaac's account provides an example of how this serves to belittle participants and diminish self-esteem:

Isaac: "I see myself as you know the, the worst thing ever basically... I mean I kind of am the scum of the earth, aren't I? I mean I'm not even working a job, I'm not, I, I don't contribute to society in any way. You know, I don't know I just... you almost feel like you know just a low life I guess."

Here, it is clear that homelessness has caused an evident deviation from Isaac's expectation of what his life should look like. He sees himself as 'the worst thing ever' and a 'low life' who does not contribute to society. This suggests that his identity and self-worth are quantifiable to his lack of life achievements induced by homelessness, as he later recalls, "You feel like you're not even worth anything." Isaac perceives

himself as a failure and this imposes a significant threat to his identity. This account provides an example of how each participant, to varying degrees, experience 'a homeless identity' that serves to negate and undermine the achievement and maintenance of self-esteem (Williams and Stickley, 2011). This loosely links to how homeless people exhibit feelings of abandonment, stigma and low self-esteem due to poor quality, destructive social relationships (Renedo and Jovchelovitch, 2007).

Existential tiredness

The theme 'Existential tiredness' elucidates not only the embodied psychological exhaustion, but also the physical bodily strain caused by homelessness. Howards account, "I'm kind of drained a lot, mentally and physically" well demonstrates this idea. Physically, being homeless has negatively affected the health of participants due to frequent, raw exposure to the unforgiving outdoor elements, coupled with insufficient shelter and accommodation. In turn, homelessness has produced a state of mental fatigue, damaging participants' motivation to improve their physical health. Therefore, a vicious cyclical effect is at play.

Isaac: "That's another thing you know is, is the damage I've done to my back from you know, my... shoulders and arms even, just from sleeping on the ground for so many years, you know?"

Michael: "I have chronic pain... and then being homeless, and not being able to sleep in a comfortable bed too has... taken a toll on me and my chronic health problems."

From these accounts, it is clear that on a superficial level, sleeping rough is detrimental to participants' physical wellbeing. Michael and Isaac's health have been damaged by a deprivation of basic needs such as being able to sleep in a comfortable bed at night. However, Isaac describes the damage to his back, shoulders and arms almost as if this has been self-induced. Recalling the damage

'I've' done. This hints towards the previously mentioned cyclical effect. Isaac's mental fatigue induced by homelessness has perhaps led him to resign to sleeping rough as opposed to seeking out temporary accommodation, where in doing so, he has experienced further physical deterioration.

This is reiterated when Isaac later explains "I don't want to live in a... place where I have to live around ten, fifteen other people with all their other problems and drama because I just don't... don't have the energy." Not having the mental capacity to tolerate living in homeless shelters has pushed Isaac to sleep elsewhere, where he is left to endure the consequences of declining physical health. Participants must spend the vast majority of their daily lives attempting to meet basic survival needs; Cooper explains, "You made sure survival was number one." Therefore, participants may experience a diminution of time and energy to partake in other activities, such as seeking out sufficient help (Norman et al., 2015).

Participant accounts suggest towards how homelessness causes the body to age at a rapid rate, with common reference to feeling 'worn out' and 'drained'. It is apparent that participants are aware of this change in their body, as they too are aware that being homeless is the cause. This is captured in the following excerpts:

Howard: "I feel like twenty years older than I am. I really do... I mean that's just homelessness; it'll do that to you."

Erica: "I don't want to move, my body's getting old I can feel it."

Isaac: "Yeah you know just being homeless and out on the streets for so many years, it takes a toll on your body... Definitely."

The above extracts illustrate the heavy burden of being homeless. Enduring homelessness serves to inhibit growth, resulting in existential bodily aging. Howard

alludes to a level of acceptance towards his current situation – ‘that’s just homelessness’ – perhaps attributed to the sheer amount of time Howard has been living on the streets as he earlier recalled, “I’ve been doing this for so long... so long.”

Hopelessness and helplessness

Participants consistently made reference to the negative emotions they experience during homelessness. These feelings are encapsulated within the theme, ‘Hopelessness and helplessness’ – where all six participants embody an overwhelming sense of disconnection, depression and an inability to cope with, or move past, their current state of homelessness.

Michael: “People say, ‘move forward’ and I say, ‘move forward to what?’ Because I just don’t have enough resources to live.”

Erica: “Depression hurts, in a lot of different ways and, yeah I should be applying for social security... but I just haven’t done it yet... It’s just that I’m having a hard time right now.”

Isaac: “I’m just so, just upset and confused with the world.”

Michael: “The disappointment, disappointment, disappointment and then, feeling like I’m getting nowhere... it’s a waste of energy now.”

The above accounts exemplify participants’ feelings of undeniable hopelessness. Michael describes how he lacks a sense of direction, feels lost and is unsure what his future may hold. Participants’ efforts to depart from homelessness are met with continual disappointment, as Michael explains, ‘I’m getting nowhere,’ ‘it’s a waste of energy now.’ Erica’s account encompasses an indirect sense of disconnection to reality induced by depression. Where she realises what she *should* be doing to

relieve her homelessness, yet her motivation is currently surpassed by an intense, overwhelming sense of hopelessness (Norman et al., 2015).

Michael's account provides a coherent example of the extensive and diminishing impact homelessness bestows upon the lives of participants. Reflecting elements of disempowerment over being able to 'get out' or 'move forward.' Thus, highlighting how helpless and trapped he feels:

Michael: "You feel like you're at the bottom of a well and you don't have any option to get out... that's the image that I've had in my mind for the last few years. And I'm just like well, I am unable to climb up right now so... I have accepted my situation a little bit, but part of it is I haven't."

Here, Michael likens his experience of homelessness to feeling like he is at the 'bottom of a well' with no option to 'get out.' This spatial metaphor signifies that Michael not only feels at the very bottom of society, but also, he feels trapped, defeated and secluded by homelessness. This resonates with the idea that Michael is 'spatially marginalised' (Laurenson and Collins, 2014) to the degree where he feels like he is at the bottom of a large pit full of water, drowning in homelessness, with no sign of a ladder to climb out. In saying he is unable to climb up 'right now', this suggests Michael is aware there *is* a way out, however he lacks the appropriate direction, motivation and will to even begin to attempt this journey. Michael's account depicts an element of conflict over recognising this. He recalls a level of acceptance towards his situation, followed by immediate contradiction: 'but part of it is I haven't.' Suggesting towards an element of learned helplessness, where Michael has given up trying to climb up out of the well.

Humbled outlook on life

The final theme to be identified was 'Humbled outlook on life.' Thus far, the emergent themes have been a testament to the negative aspects that dominate homelessness. However, an element of positive emotional growth was hinted to towards the latter stages of the interviews, with homelessness eliciting a newfound respect for life. The following extracts illustrate participant accounts of inferred humble outlook:

Isaac: "The way it's changed me too you know how grateful I am for the smallest things these days."

Erica: "If I ever do ever have a private bathroom or something in the future, I'll never take things like that for granted at, at all."

Daniel: "Yeah, I mean, once, once you have nothing, you know you really do appreciate the small things."

Here, it is clear that from enduring homelessness, participants have experienced deprivation to a meaningful degree, in that this state of deprivation provides room for emotional growth. Daniel's account captures this idea well; 'once you have nothing,' 'you really do appreciate the small things.' Participants encounter an undeniable appreciation for 'the smallest things,' wherein they are explicit that, if they became housed again, they would 'never take things like that for granted at all.' Isaac recalls positive emotions of growth, recognition, and gratitude, where his experience of homelessness has been meaningful to a degree where it has 'changed' him for the better.

Participant accounts were indicative of the sinister realities that transpire throughout homelessness, as 'not everybody wakes up.' Thus, echoing a necessary re-evaluation of how they view their world. Isaac's account provides an example of how

each participant, to varying degrees, have adopted an ominous, albeit humble, outlook on the world:

Isaac: “So, so I always just got to try to be happy with the fact that hey at least you’re still alive you know? Because you could be dead, not everybody wakes up... Just you know be, be happy to be alive really, you know? And the, and the kindness of other people too helps... Just people that have helped me.”

Here, it is clear that Isaac is both enduring and finding positive meaning from his current state of homelessness, recalling, ‘I always just got to try to be happy,’ and telling himself, ‘at least you’re still alive.’ This signifies that in the convolution of society, people often lose sight of the distinction between *need* and *want*. Isaac has been stripped of any form of luxury, making him realise the value and privilege of being able to satisfy basic needs. As well as this, Isaac recognises the ‘kindness of other people,’ denoting its significance as he earlier recalled, “It’s just almost filled that hole of abandonment.” Therefore, an element of hope is present, directly relating to the idea that homelessness gives people a deeper understanding of the meaning of life (Boydell et al., 2000).

Summary and Implications for Future Research

Overall, findings from this study indicate that homelessness is an experience of multiple losses, imparting a destructive impact on individuals' spatial, relational, temporal, and psychological dimensions. The capacity to embody elements of positive emotional growth, adopting deeper meaning, humble outlook, and respect for life are also evident. One of the fundamental losses affirmed by participants was the intrinsic threat posed by homelessness to their former identities and sense of self (Williams and Stickley, 2011). It became clear that participants' identities were inextricably tied to how others perceived and treated them (Renedo and Jovchelovitch, 2007; Reutter et al., 2009). The innumerable adverse effects that homelessness encompasses, demonstrate it is paramount that support services are informed by psychological research, to be sensitive and responsive to the complex needs of the homeless. Therefore, this study provides a platform to consider the necessary support and intervention services that homeless people may require.

Building on the existing body of homeless literature, this study provides vital insight into the experience of homelessness. However, the findings from the current study contribute slight in the way of unexplored new insight, albeit this study compliments previous interpretations (Boydell et al., 2000; Reutter et al., 2009; Williams and Stickley, 2011). Another potential limitation to this study is the limited demographic profile of participants living in the United States, as certain cultural diversities and discourses surrounding homelessness may mean that the experience is different from that of other parts of the world. A further limitation was the use of podcast data in this study, as this hindered the researcher's ability to control the flow of conversation and topics discussed during interviews.

Avenues for potential future insight may come from the study of homeless families, homeless youth and homeless women, whereby the experience of identity threat, intersubjectivity and emotional growth may vary considerably. Given the paucity of current qualitative literature, it is indisputably warranted that future research

facilitates the understanding of the homeless experience and gives voice to this frequently overlooked, vulnerable population.

Reflexive analysis

As this research adopted a qualitative approach, it was crucial for the researcher to recognise how their own subjectivity can influence the analysis of the data (Finlay, 2002). Reflexivity is imperative within qualitative research. With an emphasis on the importance of personal reflexivity since prior assumptions and beliefs can inherently mould the data analysis (Enosh and Ben-Ari, 2016). Throughout the entirety of this research project, I endorsed Willig's (2013) model of reflexivity as a framework, considering my personal and epistemological reflexive standpoint, as both a person and researcher respectively.

In terms of personal reflexivity, this refers to the initial reasons for wanting to study this subject area. From living and studying in a large city environment (Manchester, England) for three years, I often encounter several homeless people every day. I believe I am an empathetic person, and I have frequently wondered what it would be like if I were 'in their shoes' so to speak. It had also occurred to me that many homeless people are denied the opportunity to voice their opinions and outlook on the world. It is plausible that participants were already granted this through means of the podcast series. However, this research project went beyond the surface level of conversation and provided homeless individuals with a voice from a theoretical and psychological perspective. As I had no previous first-hand experience interacting with homeless people, I believe I acted as an impartial yet effective researcher.

With reference to epistemological reflexivity, my views as a researcher align with those of Smith and Osborne (2003), who suppose that participants are experts of their experiences. Prior to listening to the podcast series, I held the assumption that accounts of homelessness were going to be entirely negative, allowing no occasion for positivity. This was especially re-enforced after reviewing the existing body of homeless literature. Notwithstanding its immense destructive features, certain elements of homelessness embraced room for positive experience, producing a

newly humble outlook and respect for life. Nevertheless, as a novice researcher and due to the phenomenological epistemological approach of this research, findings are only true to the present participants and my interpretations of their sense-making, and therefore cannot be generalised.

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