

# Homeless women, material objects and home (un)making

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## Introduction and context

Based on **2015 PhD study: *(Re)Negotiating the Self: Homeless Women's Constructions of Home, Homelessness and Identity***

1. What does 'home' mean to women who have become homeless?
2. How does a loss of home impact on identity?
3. How do women respond to and/or resist the stigma associated with homelessness?
4. How do women construct their identities within and beyond their homelessness?

# The meaning(s) of 'home'



*Carl Larsson's kitchen scene 19<sup>th</sup> Century*

*Rachel Whiteread, House (1993)*



# The materiality of home and homelessness

- The role of the physical components of dwellings in the experience of home and homelessness is under-researched.
- Some exceptions of work focusing on the nexus between home, material culture and identity amongst diverse groups of people (Hill 1991; Moore et al. 1995; Parkin 1999; Marcoux 2001; Hurdley 2013)

# Material culture and home: a theoretical approach

- **'Relational material culture'**: *"just as objects have an impact on our lives even when unrecognised and unnoticed [...] so too is the working out of self in and through the materiality of the home."* (Jacobs & Malpas 2013: 285).
- **'Home unmaking'**: *"the precarious process by which material and/or imaginary components of home are unintentionally or deliberately, temporarily or permanently, divested, damaged or even destroyed."* (Baxter and Brickell 2014: 134)

## This study: research aims and rationale

**Aim:** to explore how homeless women, at the very margins of private and public space, relate to, engage with, and use material culture (objects, possessions, the physical dwelling) and simultaneously 'make' and 'unmake' home.

1. To provide a new empirical focus (marginalised groups)
2. Contemporary relevance
3. To build on and adapt theory

## Researching the salience of things

- "a second glance at that which might otherwise be overlooked [...] photography offers this opportunity, to confront in isolation elements of lived experience, made strange by their sudden removal from the continuum of day-to-day living" (Martin 1999: [online]).

# Methods

- With **twelve women** accessing housing (and related support) services (including hostels, supported housing projects, and a women's centre)
- Not an attempt to claim representativeness but to understand each woman's biography **in-depth**
- In-depth **'life history' interviews**, **participant-led photography** and follow-up **photo elicitation interviews**



## | 1. Anchoring

*Since time and space are intangible and dauntingly infinite, we cling [...] emotionally to our experiences and memories of the material world that is so reassuringly solid (Adams et al. 2001: xiii).*

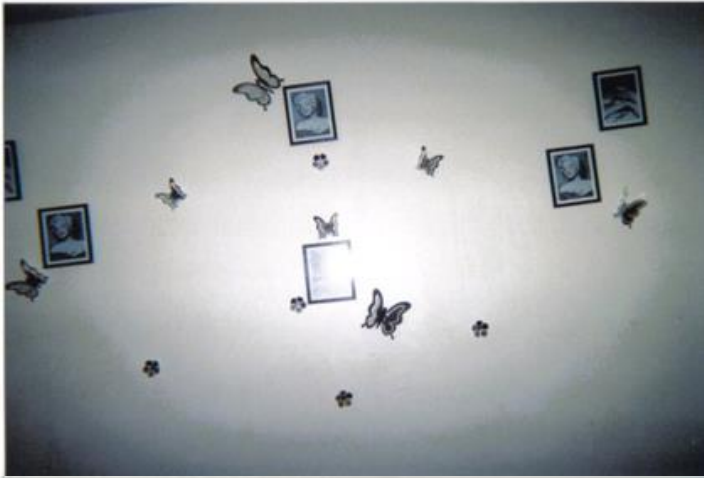
## Lost possessions / lost selves

- Homelessness as absence and loss across a range of dimensions (Somerville, 1992)
- Leaving things behind: *"I'd just leave everything behind. Start again... every time... that's what messes me up"* (Tori)
- *"I can reminisce now without getting upset about the homes that I used to have when I was married. And I think, well, it was nice but obviously you have to re-build your life and move on, don't you?"* (Frankie)



## 2. Salvaging

'Salvaging the self' is a term coined by Snow and Anderson (1993) to refer to the attempt made to hold on to core aspects of being that are placed at risk due to the adversity of homelessness



# Conclusions

- Homeless women use material culture in an attempt to make home
- Home is a process and practice rather than a static entity
- Close relationship between home, homelessness and materiality
- Future studies to continue investigating processes of assembling and dwelling in home in different and changing situations of housing precarity