

HOMELESS UNACCOMPANIED MOTHERS AND AFFECTIVE INJUSTICES-

Why a relational framework for
social caring matters



SORCHA (NOT HER REAL NAME)

- Reflects on this image stating:
 - This picture now caught my eye, because of many struggles before. It would ... See the way he's on his own and he's walking. That would feel like me, being alone. And you know the way everything's blowing and all that, miserable...miserable and lost and lonely. That's why this one caught my eye straight away. But mainly, this would be like yeah, me, It would be like as if it was me after been gone out of home. And I'm on my own. I have no one. Telling myself I had no-one at the time, when I could have had help. I went the wrong way myself about it. But this one really stood out to me.



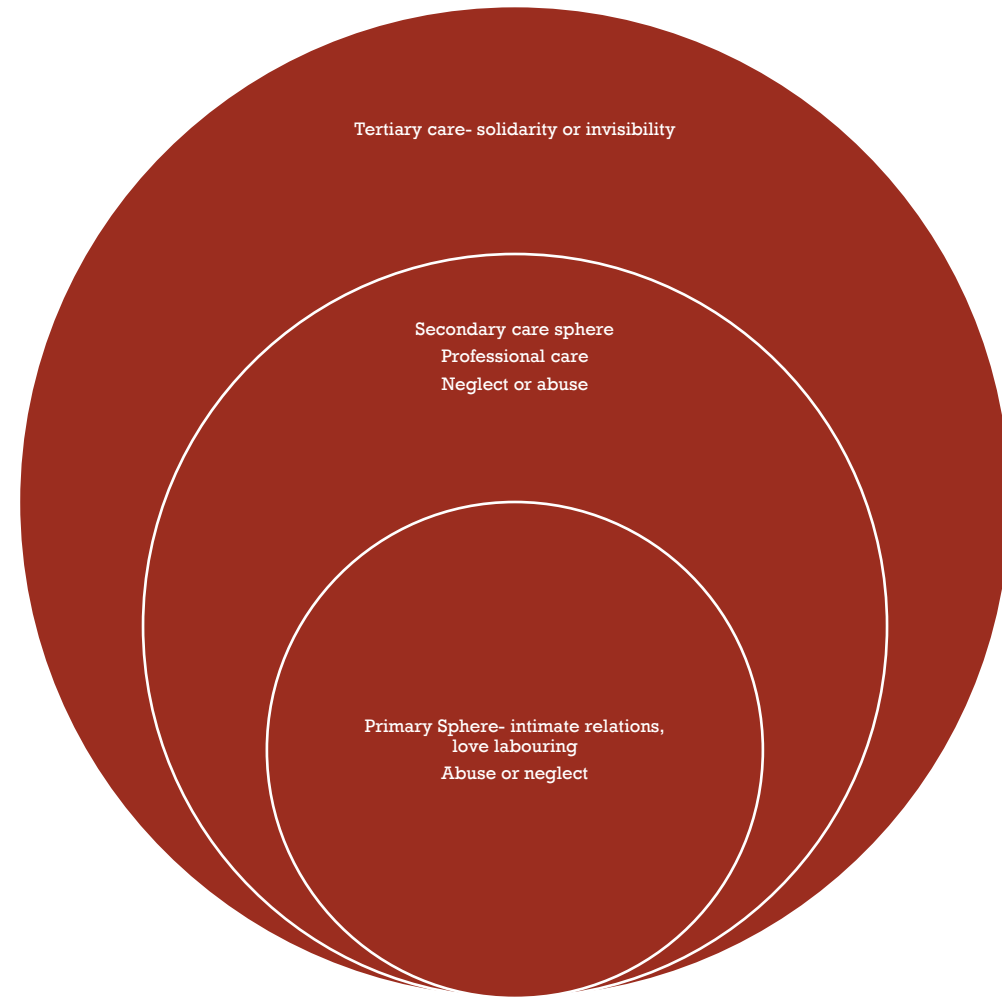
MAIN THEMES INFORMING TODAY'S DISCUSSION

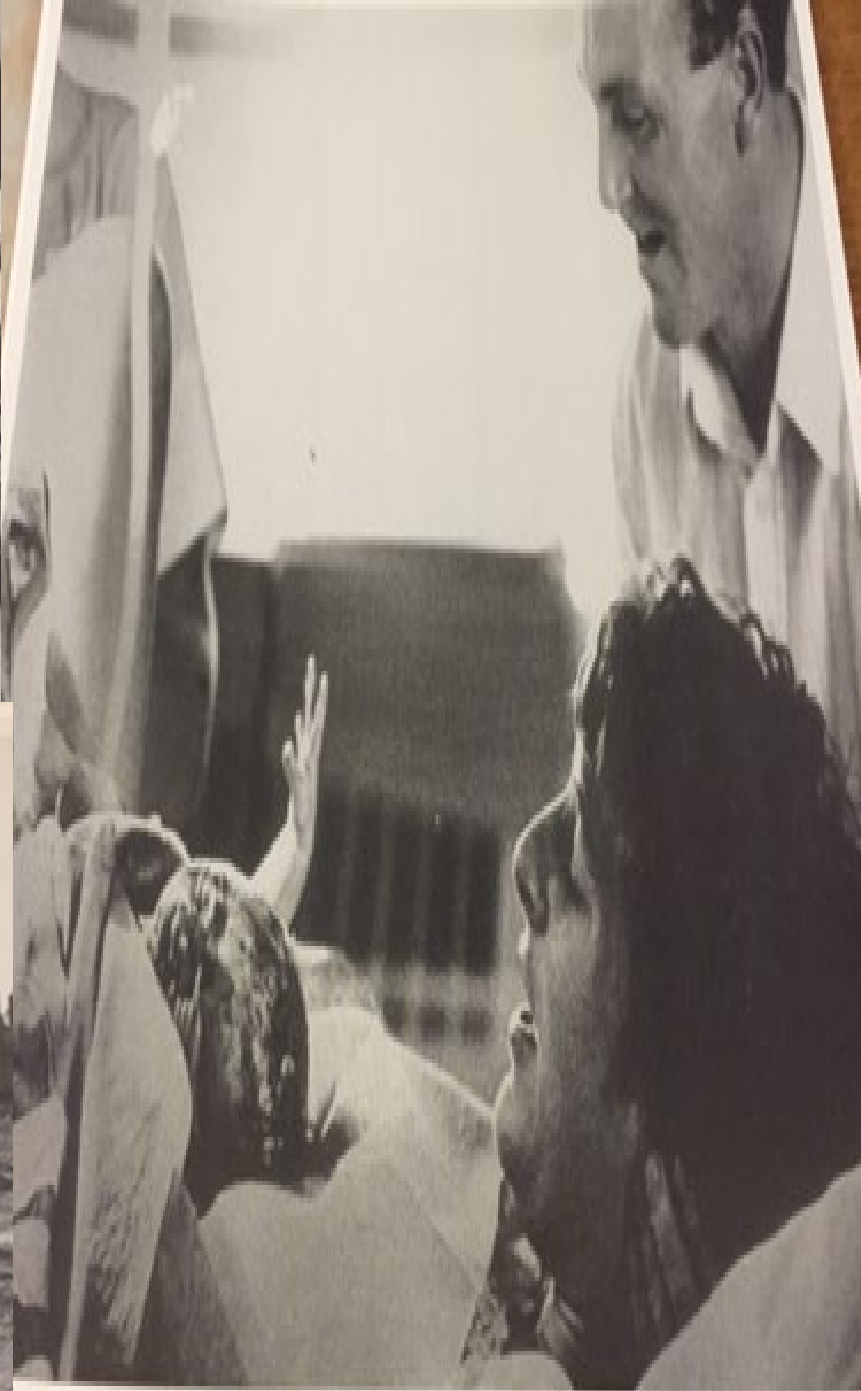
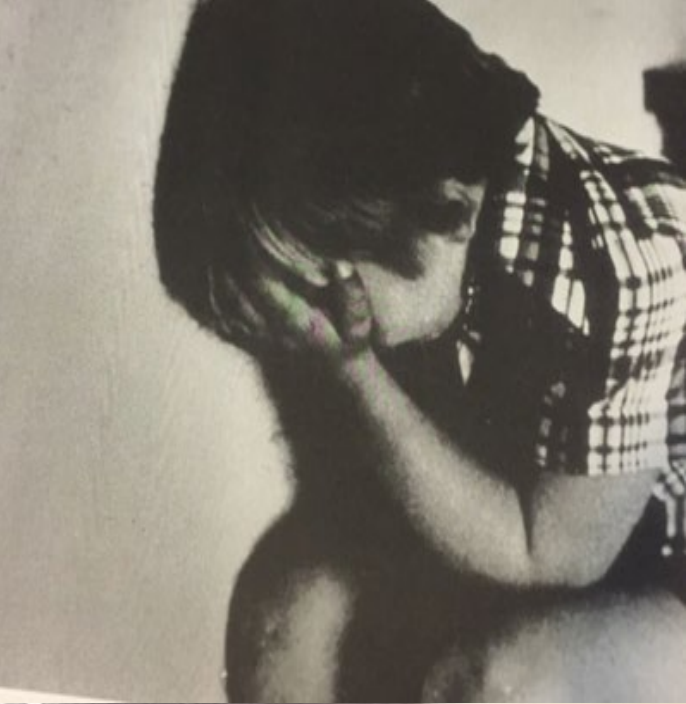
- The significance of the affective sphere to understanding, defining and responding to women's homelessness.
- Emotions and care are central to understanding human life and well-being because we are relational and interdependent beings as opposed to autonomous individuals (Lynch 2007).
- The Affective sphere exists as a separate micro-structural sphere producing relations of love, care and solidarity or relations of violence, abuse or neglect -it also intersects with the economic, political and cultural spheres to shape people's lives and outcomes.
- Where someone experiences an affective injustice, it has disabling effects.





THE AFFECTIVE SPHERE AND THE PRODUCTION OF NURTURING CAPITAL





AFFECTIVE INEQUALITIES OCCUR

- where people are deprived of access to nurturing capital, or intimate loving relations and bonds of care, and instead experience abuse, violence or inequality, at any stage across the life course (Lynch et al. 2009).
- Affective inequalities also occur when love and care work, carried out by people is not acknowledged politically, socially or economically (Lynch 2010, p.2).
- This is because:
 - The world of care is not an isolated and autonomous sphere. It is deeply interwoven with economic, political and cultural relations, and inequalities in the latter can undermine the capacities and resources to do love, care and solidarity work. (Baker et al. as cited in Lynch and Walsh 2009, p.41)





METHODOLOGY AND STUDY FOCUS

- Using a critical feminist qualitative methodology, the study consisted of two phases of field work with in-depth interviews with 7 unaccompanied Mothers and 12 professionals, a total of 24 semi-structured interviews.
- Photo-elicitation and critical conversations, using extracts from women's stories to determine whether professionals have taken due account of the affective inequalities in women's lives
- The study focused on the affective caring relations in the lives of the mothers in the study, in terms of their primary (intimate), secondary (professionals services) and tertiary (state-related) care relations (Lynch 2007).
- It also considered the role of social class and disability in the development of homelessness.
- It primarily examined the way three intersecting circles of nurturing (or lack of nurturing) interpellate within the economic, political and cultural relations (Lynch 2007) in women's lives.
- The findings discussed today emerged from phase one which involved 12 semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews with 7 unaccompanied homeless mothers.



BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

- Growing awareness in research of the frequency of lone mothers as part of the family homelessness population, and amongst lone women presenting as homeless also (Van den Dries et al. 2016; Sheridan and Hoey 2017; Walsh and Harvey 2017; Grotti et al. 2018; Russell et al. 2021).
- Prevalence of homeless mothers unaccompanied by their children amongst the general homelessness population and within research also (Reeve et al. 2006; Mayock and Sheridan 2012; Hutchinson et al. 2014; Mayock et al. 2015a; 2015b; Bretherton et al. 2016; Van den Dries et al. 2016).
- However, because large numbers of homeless women are amongst the hidden homelessness population, the actual numbers of homeless unaccompanied mothers, and the realities of their lived experiences as lone and unaccompanied mothers are not widely understood (Bretherton et al. 2016; Lofstrand and Quilgars 2016; Mayock and Bretherton 2016; Pleace 2016; Savage 2016).
- Frameworks used to respond to women's homelessness tend to define women's status according to normative family models, which position mothers as primarily responsible for their children's care. The provision of welfare services to mothers who are unaccompanied by their children can be conditional on their caring status as mothers (Reeve et al. 2007; Hutchinson et al. 2014; Mayock et al. 2015), and mothers can be blamed when they cannot take care of their children (Reeve et al. 2006; 2007; Virokannas 2011; Hutchinson et al. 2014; Hughes et al. 2016).
- Within women's homelessness journeys, mother-child separations appear to occur for a variety of different reasons including: a loss of accommodation; the placing of children with family members for stability because of homelessness; removal of children by social workers due to child welfare or protection concerns, voluntary placement of children in care and domestic abuse (Reeve et al. 2007; Barrow and Lawinski 2008; Mayock and Sheridan 2012; Hutchinson et al. 2014; Mayock et al. 2015a; 2015b). Mothers can experience considerable barriers to reunification also (Savage 2019; Bimpson et al. 2020).
- Growing awareness in research of the significance of gender to understanding women's experiences of homelessness (Mayock and Sheridan 2012; Mayock and Bretherton 2016; Bretherton 2017; Sheridan 2017b; Hearne and Murphy 2018; Reeve 2018; Bimpson et al. 2020; Mayock and Sheridan 2020); but dearth of frameworks which adequately capture how women's experiences differ to men & amongst women also.

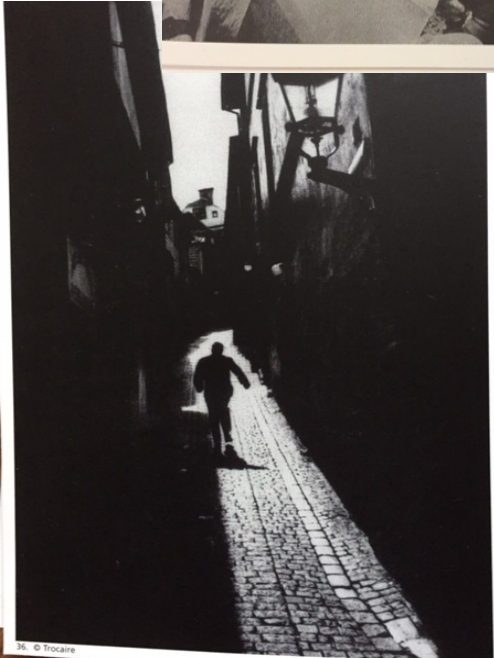
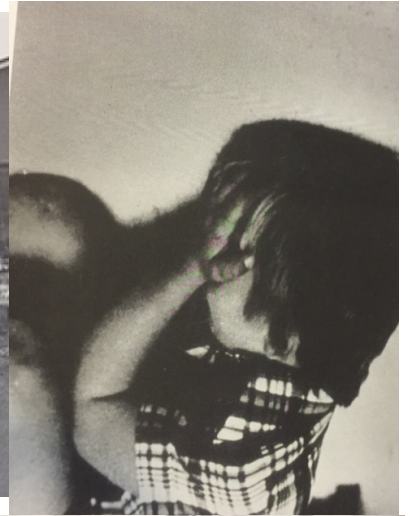
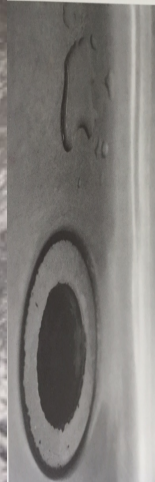
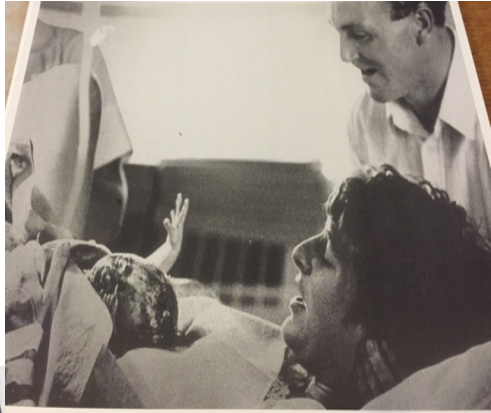




THE AFFECTIVE LOGIC OF CAPITALISM

- A central position relating to this study is that successive models of capitalism have produced different variations of an affective logic of capitalism, whereby care is feminised and devalued as a social practice- this occurs across all 3 spheres of the affective system-
- Women (mothers) remain primarily responsible for unpaid care work, while also expected to adhere to the adult worker model of welfare (Fraser 2016). There is a gendered moral imperative to care on women-this is particularly burdensome for those without access to the economic, emotional and nurturing resources to support care-giving (O'Brien 2007; Lynch et al. 2009). We see this played out in the recent research by the IHREC&ERSI -53% of homeless families lone parents (86% are women).
- Report by Russell et al. (2021)- Monitoring Adequate Housing in Ireland-profound barriers to accessing housing for lone parents, among other groups. The author Helen Russell (2021) wrote how *“Adequate housing is essential to quality of life. Inadequate housing is associated with poor physical and mental health and restricts people’s ability to participate in education, employment and the community”*- But what about family life and care relations- how are these shaped and reshaped by insecure and inadequate housing?
- Mothers are blamed when they cannot take care of their children; or enough responsibility for them or sacrificing enough for them (Tronto 2013), regardless of the resource-poor conditions they are caring in (Featherstone et al. 2015; 2016).
- In the secondary and tertiary spheres, there is an ethic of self-responsibilisation that undermines values of care and solidarity (Frericks 2010;2014)- the promotion of self-regulating citizens-evident in the rise of punitive and conditional policies in the homelessness and welfare sectors, exclude those who fail to conform or take responsibility for themselves, preventing access to the resources needed to produce love and care relations (housing).
- There is a silencing of love and care needs at a political level (Crean 2018), producing a normative order of care which excludes resource-poor women, producing affective injustices (O'Brien 2007; Crean 2018).







AN OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS FROM THE WOMEN'S NARRATIVES REVEAL THE INTERGENERATIONAL BASIS TO THEIR CLASSED SELVES

The centrality of unequal gender, class and affective relations to the construction of women's subjectivities

Women's narratives revealed the affective sphere to be the primary site through which women experience exploitation

- 4/7 women's narratives reveal how they experienced contradictions of the class system and how consciousness of class inequalities evolve not just through economic relations that produce their class position, but also through affective relations that frame their lives (Crean 2018, p.5).
- 4 of the 7 women spoke of how their mothers were unpaid caregivers in the home. This afforded them less power than their husbands under the current affective logic of capitalism. 3 were living in domestically abusive conditions and one was themselves an abuser who was alcohol-addicted- all 4 were unsupported in their caregiving. This impacted on the emotional, nurturing and economic capital needed to support love and care work, producing affective injustices.
- Owing to the gendered moral imperative to care, and the privatised nature of care work, all 4 mothers were compelled to care for their daughters regardless of whether they had the resources or capacity to do so. All 4 women inherited their mother's exploitative classed position.



MELANIE EXEMPLIFIES THIS THROUGH THIS IMAGE AND HER ASSOCIATED REFLECTION ON IT

Melanie discusses how family life was emotionally destructive as her father “drank all of the money, womanised and then came home and mistreated his family”.

Melanie chose the image of a building site to reflect her experiences growing up and the centrality of emotions and affective deprivations to understanding her early childhood experiences: “And I picked up a picture of a building site because again, it’s quite symbolic. That’s how me life was, with all the mayhem, a building site, living in a building site. Just ... not physically, but emotionally, just everything wrecked, destroyed”.



USING THE IMAGE BELOW, MELANIE DISCUSSES THE EFFECTS OF LIVING IN DOMESTICALLY ABUSIVE RELATIONS AND POVERTY UNSUPPORTED AND HOW THIS EFFECTED THE EMOTIONAL RESOURCES HER MOTHER HAD TO CARE FOR HER:

- I picked up this picture of a woman pushing a pram. It just reminds me of my mother, with a little girl. Going about her business, trying ... There's a load of rubble by the side of the road which is quite – what's the word?...Symbolic, that's how my life was, a load of rubble, but yeah, me mother's walking straight on...



CONTRADICTORY NATURE OF THE AFFECTIVE SPHERE

- “And because my mother and father’s relationship was quite destructive, because of alcohol, my mother was always trying to keep it normal, so she’d ... I mean, we’d have to stay in hostels, or bed and breakfasts, so she’d always try and keep our lives normal. So she used to bring us down to the pond in [...] and feed the swans and-...” (Melanie)



- Nurturing practices performed by Melanie’s mother reveal insights into how the affective sphere ‘occupies a discrete space between mother and child in which they perform affective roles and relations intrinsically linked to their desire to exist, belong and feel love and care...’. (moral motherhood) But also, these relations of love and care can exist alongside relations of abuse and neglect (Crean 2018, p.3) producing affective injustices, which was revealed in the cases of all the women.



THE CONSEQUENCES FOR MELANIE OF THESE AFFECTIVE INJUSTICES AND DEPRIVATIONS IN CHILDHOOD ARE REVEALED IN HER EXTRACT BELOW

- The consequences for Melanie of growing up in a resource-poor and domestically abusive household are evident in Melanie's reflections on her subsequent misuse of alcohol and drugs and homelessness journey. Melanie reflects on the extent of the emotional pain that she was experiencing in early adulthood. She spoke of the ontological motivation behind her relationships with her first child's father. This was based on her need to feel loved, accepted and valued:
- "I got the money for our drug habit, because I was trying to buy his love for me. I'd do anything when I have, to feel accepted. So, it goes back to me father, because I was always looking for a father figure. And when you're a young girl, you're meant to be treated, well, like a princess and all, you're the business and you're this, and you're that. But because he was ... I mean, my father had a very traumatic life himself, so ... very traumatic. He's probably got post-traumatic stress syndrome. But he's got a heart of gold".



AFFECTIVE INJUSTICES INTERSECT WITH DOMINANT GENDERED IDEOLOGIES

- to reproduce the normalcy of violence and relations of power and control within the affective sphere.
- Unequal relations have material consequences. They are lived out through all four women's 'choices' of abusive men in adulthood and are also performed by each of the women as, either addiction (Sorcha, Melanie), or disability (mental illness- Annie, Sorcha and Roisin) and their subsequent journeys into homelessness.
- All four women spoke in one way or another about rejecting the subject positions occupied by their mothers. However, without access to the requisite capitals to take up and practice alternative subject positions, they occupied the exploited positions of their mothers.
- Therefore, these findings demonstrate how, under the affective logic of capitalism, the affective sphere is the primary site through which women experience exploitation and inequality.
- These findings build on the work of O'Brien (2007-2009), Lynch et al. (2009) and Crean (2018), to show how the women experience the contradictions and a consciousness of the class system through exclusions and deprivations (emotional, nurturing, economic capital) across the economic, cultural (good mother) and affective systems. This produces a normative order of caring that is gendered, classed and ableist, and has disabling outcomes for the women.



THE DISABLING EFFECTS OF THESE INTERSECTING INEQUALITIES

- The narratives of all unaccompanied mothers reveal the deeply disabling effects that affective injustices have within the intimate sphere of nurturing relations; but also, within and across the other three systems as well.
- , Of the six women who experienced domestic abuse as children (under the age of eighteen), all six experienced abusive relationships in their adult lives, and the seventh Freya, who did not discuss her early childhood experiences, also experienced abuse as a young adult. These abusive relations played a central role in their journeys into homelessness.
- In adulthood, the low-income working-class position of women was further consolidated by their educational and employment experiences. Only one of the women completed her leaving certificate –Annie. Three others –Sorcha, Freya and Maggie– all spoke of experiencing educational disadvantage: with Sorcha and Maggie completing their Junior certificate outside of mainstream school.
- All the women have been long-term unemployed, except Annie. Yet, Annie, still struggles to access housing independently as she works part-time in low paid work while she attends college. Two of the women have been in prison (Annie and Melanie). Five of the seven women are in receipt of disability allowance, while two of the other women were in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance.
- Three of the women –Melanie, Sorcha and Annie– have all experienced long-term repeat homelessness. Melanie, Sorcha, Annie and Roisin all spoke of needing housing, both for themselves and so that they could seek reunification with their children. Yet they have experienced significant barriers to achieving this. Freya, Maggie and Tara all had access to accommodation at different stages of the interview process. However, all faced threats of eviction owing to the actions of others at different stages of their tenancies, which would lead them to return to homelessness once more if this happened.
- All women were separated from one or more children during their lives, with some experiencing significant barriers to reunification.



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AFFECTIVE SPHERE TO UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF HOMELESS WOMEN-

- because the affective sphere intersects with the political, economic and cultural system it allows for a deep analysis of the experiences of homeless women.
- It expands the categories of analysis beyond gender alone, to examine the effects of gendered class relations, and their interaction with affective injustices, such as domestic abuse.
- Furthermore, because the affective system exists as an autonomous sphere (Lynch et al. 2009; Crean 2018), it supports micro-level analysis of actions, while not losing sight of the structural forces and power relations shaping these actions as well.
- Owing to the invisibility of women's experiences and needs within policy and practice responses to homeless women, need to include the affective domain as a fourth sphere for defining and understanding women's experiences of homelessness.



LIMITATIONS

- Small sample and findings not generalizable- however, this was never a goal!
- The research was positioned in larger studies on women's homelessness and in feminist and egalitarian research on class and care inequalities.

