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Making home? Permitted and prohibited place-making in youth homeless accommodation

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Making home? Permitted and prohibited place-making in youth homeless accommodation

Abstract

Based on the premise that ‘home’ is more than bricks and mortar, a growing body of literature has considered how the concept might be applied to homelessness. Aligned with ‘home’, home-making refers to the construction of living spaces so that their sensory features and the practices that occur there create a pleasant environment that enhances wellbeing. However, the instability and structural constraints within which homeless people live can limit their ability to home-make. Hence, in this article, ‘place-making’ proved a useful alternative concept. This article draws on an ethnographic study in Scotland involving 22 young people and 27 staff who lived and worked respectively in a supported accommodation hostel. It demonstrates how the residents engaged in sensory practices within the tightly regulated confines of the hostel. A distinction is made between ‘permitted’ and ‘prohibited’ practices to argue that home-making is not a morally-neutral concept. Rather there are ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways for homeless people to personalise their living spaces.

Keywords: homelessness; home-making; hostel; material culture; decorate; youth

Introduction

‘Home’ has been described as a ‘significant type of place’ (Easthope, 2004, p.128) representing not just the roof over someone’s head but something more. Going beyond narrow ideas of ‘home as dwelling’, to be home-less can mean to be lacking in the ontological security, control, autonomy and positive identity work that much of the academic literature has highlighted as core features of home. However, while people experiencing homelessness (i.e. those without safe and secure accommodation) are structurally constrained in benefitting from the wellbeing effects of ‘home’, they are not without agency in constructing home-like environments.

Based on ethnographic research in a Scottish supported accommodation hostel for young people, this article makes four key arguments. First, in the context of a homeless hostel, people engage in practices aligned with existing evidence on home(-making). Second, home-making attempts are limited by the strict rules and surveillance activities in hostels. For people in

homeless accommodation who are under the gaze of managers and staff, there are ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to create pleasant living spaces. Third, the home-making literature predominantly focuses on socially accepted domestic activities whereas this paper also considers contested activities and argues that these can be conceived of as a form of home-making too. Fourth, ‘place-making’ is a more appropriate description for people’s efforts to personalise their living spaces when those spaces do not offer the full qualities of a home. Together, the findings demonstrate that ‘home-making’ is not an unproblematic and morally-neutral concept.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The literature review is divided into three sections to discuss respectively: the concept of home; the theoretical ideas of place-making and belonging; and their application to homelessness. The ethnographic methodology is then outlined. The findings section is also divided into three sub-sections. The rules and restrictions of the hostel are firstly outlined to provide context for the ideas of ‘permitted’ and ‘prohibited’ place-making which form the second and third sub-sections respectively. The conclusion draws together the findings and discusses their implications.

Home as a Significant Type of Place

‘Home’ is the subject of an abundance of research attempting to grasp the common features that make it so salient in the public imagination (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). This is reflected in the concept’s global reach across countries as diverse as Argentina (Múnoz, 2018), Cambodia (Graham & Brickell, 2019), Syria (Al Asali *et al*, 2019), China (Su *et al*, 2019) and the USA (Hadjiyanni, 2015). Although the nuances and meanings of home are culturally and contextually shaped, many of the core ideas of home feature across the international literature indicating just how significant this type of place is.

Home is associated with a long list of qualities including: emotional attachment, memories and storytelling (Neumark, 2013); self-formation, identity and reflection (Jacobs & Malpas, 2013); haven and refuge (Mallett, 2004); ontological security (Depuis & Thorns, 1996), autonomy, privacy and control (Saunders, 1989); security (Hulse & Milligan, 2014); familiarity (Fox, 2007) and a range of emotions (Soaita, 2015). Home, therefore, represents both ‘reality’ (how people experience home) and an ideal (a positive vision) (Somerville, 1992; Mallett, 2004) although the concept has received criticism for focusing more on the latter than the former.

Such criticism has evolved through the revelation of a darker side of home in which people are harmed, trapped or traumatised (Gurney, 1997; Wilson *et al*, 2012; McCarthy, 2018) or research indicating the stress and frustration that can occur when living in precarious circumstances (Hoolachan *et al*, 2017; Soaita & McKee, 2019). Feelings of isolation and mental ill health associated with home have become especially prominent in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic which has seen millions of people being confined to their homes (Gurney, 2020), or facing greater exposure to the virus if they are homeless (Culhane *et al*, 2020). Home is multi-faceted, subjective, fluid and experienced differently depending on a person's housing, social and financial circumstances.

Home is also multi-scalar in that people can feel 'at home' in non-house places such as a neighbourhood, city or nation (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Soaita, 2015). However, housing scholars have noted the importance of living in a physical dwelling (e.g. a house or flat) and having material security as essential for many people to feel at home and fully benefit from its positive qualities (Bratt, 2002; Parsell, 2012). Others have highlighted that a home consists of both meaning and physical use (Clapham, 2011), or an assemblage of materials meaning that 'there is no 'home' without the 'house', its contents and immediate context' (Soaita & McKee, 2019, p.148). Such work is helpful for the current study as it considers home at the scale of a dwelling – in this case, a homeless hostel – and focuses on the practices that occurred inside the dwelling as opposed to the explicit meanings that the residents placed on home and the hostel.

Place-making and Belonging

Home does not simply exist, but is made. Home is a process of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging. This process has both material and imaginative elements. Thus people create home through social and emotional relationships (Blunt & Dowling, 2006, p.23).

As this quote describes, home is made, constructed or built (Baxter and Brickell, 2014; Harris *et al*, 2020). Home-making involves a wide range of activities that engage with the aesthetics of a physical space (e.g. decorating, furnishing and accessorising) (Hurdley, 2013; Neumark, 2013), domestic chores (Pink, 2005), social interactions (Parsell *et al*, 2015), or solitary

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3 relaxation (Mallett, 2004). These, in turn, are linked to a broader understanding of home-
4 making which encompasses the senses.
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8 This sensory construction of home was advocated by Wilson *et al* (2012) whose
9 conceptualisation of ‘place-making’, along with May’s (2011) theory of belonging, proved
10 useful for the analysis in this article. Wilson *et al*’s (2012) research focused on young people
11 affected by parental substance misuse. The young participants had unpredictable living
12 circumstances, sometimes felt unsafe, and lacked control over their use of domestic space,
13 compromising their sense of home. When living with parents who were actively using drugs
14 or alcohol, the young people described their domestic spaces as dirty, smelly, sticky and noisy.
15 These sensory aspects were experienced negatively and described as ‘unhomey’. In response,
16 the young people engaged in, what the authors referred to as, ‘place-making’ – practices that
17 had the goal of creating a safer, more pleasant living space which helped the young people to
18 feel in control and cope with their difficult situations. Examples included watching TV,
19 listening to music, reading and drawing. Such practices occurred in the young people’s
20 bedrooms, as these were the only part of the house that offered privacy and an opportunity to
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34 The distinction between ‘place-making’ and ‘home-making’ is subtle since they both capture
35 the social and material practices that occur to make a space more desirable. Elwood *et al* (2015,
36 p.125) defined place-making as ‘...the cultural, discursive, and material practices through
37 which people imagine and transform places’. This is similar to Baxter and Brickell’s (2014,
38 p.134) definition of home-making as ‘...the suturing of social relationships, identities, and
39 materialities into a place called home’. It is the ‘something more’ feature of home that
40 distinguishes it from other places and thus which distinguishes home-making from place-
41 making. ‘Place’, in the context of domestic life¹, is more commonly used when considering the
42 darker side of home as exemplified by Wilson *et al*’s (2012) study above (see also Rennels &
43 Purnell, 2017). When the ideal of home is compromised, ‘place’ offers a useful substitute; it
44 indicates that an element of home has been lost or perhaps did not exist at all.
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55 In this article, the term ‘place-making’ is used instead of ‘home-making’. Here, the intention
56 is to retain a focus on people’s efforts to make, build and construct a pleasant and personalised
57 living space which may reflect something home-like but within a space, such as a hostel, that
58 is structurally unable to provide the full qualities of the ideal home. Focusing on what people
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do is not the same as saying that they *feel* ‘at home’ in homeless spaces; I have argued elsewhere that homeless people often express ambivalence about whether a hostel is their ‘home’ or not (Author, forthcoming). Irrespective of whether someone feels at home in a homeless space, if they lay a blanket on the ground or hang a picture on the wall of their hostel bedsit this can be conceived of as an *attempt* to make the space home-like. In other words, such activities can be interpreted as people’s attempts to claim control, autonomy, self-expression, comfort etc. (i.e. the qualities of home) in spaces that do not easily allow for these qualities. However, it remains the case that when a dwelling is lacking entirely or is unsafe, precarious or strictly controlled, the full ideal of home is severely limited if not impossible. Thus, the use of ‘place’ rather than ‘home’ is helpful for reflecting these structural constraints whilst still enabling an analysis of how people ‘make’ their living spaces subjectively pleasant.

The theoretical framework for this article which complements home/place-making, is May’s (2011; 2013) phenomenological account of belonging. May defined belonging as ‘a sense of ease with oneself and one’s surroundings’ (2011, p.268) and used the concept to theorise the relationships between self and society. In doing so, she distinguished between cultural, relational and sensory belonging. Cultural belonging refers to feeling an affinity with a culture be it in relation to nationality, religion or those on a smaller scale characterised by shared practices, symbols and traditions. Relational belonging refers to a person’s social networks and a feeling of belonging to friends, family and communities. Sensory belonging involves feeling an affinity with the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and the overall ‘feel’ of a place which coalesce and enable someone to attribute meanings to their associated places. Practices of home/place-making can be viewed as not only attempts to create a safe and pleasant living space but they also help people to feel a greater sense of belonging and ease within a given place.

Home(lessness)

These ideas are applied, in this article, to youth homelessness. Whilst most research has examined ‘home’ in relation to those with stable accommodation, some have started to consider how home-making might apply to homelessness. For street homelessness, ‘home-making’ has been understood in relation to territoriality in which people demarcate their personal spaces in public through the placement of possessions such as blankets on a patch of ground or bench (Rennels & Purnell, 2017), in the make-shift shelters they create (Snow & Mulcahy, 2001) or in ‘tent cities’ that are found in the USA (Sparks, 2017). This body of research has also drawn

attention to the importance of other homeless people in helping (or hindering) feelings of safety and belonging. For example, Rennels & Purnell (2017) noted the significance of homeless men looking out for one another and sharing information about charitable food services.

Some attention has also been given to home(-making) within hostels. Hostels for homeless populations vary greatly in relation to their size, facilities, providers and level of support (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007). The structure and support provided typically determines how an individual can access hostel accommodation and who can access them (see Watts *et al*, 2018 for more detail about hostels in Scotland). Therefore, attempts at place-making in hostel accommodation are influenced by these characteristics.

In a recent study involving women living in temporary accommodation, McCarthy (2019) noted the significance of displaying objects like photographs, candles and posters, and of being able to rearrange furniture, in creating feelings of home. Objects can hold enormous significance for people who have been displaced because their meanings are typically associated with positive memories, they might be the only item(s) that a person has carried with them as they have moved around, or a newly acquired object might be symbolic of a new beginning (Hurdley, 2013; Neumark, 2013). Similarly, Harris *et al* (2020) described how the use of objects can be a form of resistance against overly strict rules about what people in temporary accommodation are permitted to display; in this case tenants who were not allowed to hang pictures used wall stickers instead.

Yet, other studies have focused on the limitations of home for those who are homeless. Parsell (2012) described how rough sleepers' inability to cook or use the bathroom without relying on services, their fear of falling asleep on the streets, and a lack of safety, security and a place to relax all contributed to feelings of unhomeliness. Harris *et al* (2020) described how tenants in temporary social housing were not allowed to have a lock on their door, compromising their privacy. Additionally, Stevenson & Neale (2012) documented the difficulties that hostel residents had in spending time with their partners since hostels often do not allow residents to have visitors, nor do homeless couples in hostels have much privacy. Evidence such as this supports the claim that place-making is a more appropriate phrase to use when the home ideal is compromised.

‘Housing readiness’ debates also provide insights into home-making limitations for those living in hostels. Housing Ready models refer to a process in which people living in temporary accommodation are required to prove that they are ready to live independently before being provided with more stable housing. One contradiction of this model is the need for homeless people to prove that they can home-make, yet they cannot benefit from the full value of home and are limited in their home-making capacities until they are deemed ‘ready’. In one Scotland-based study, formerly homeless young people described being assessed on their abilities to cook, budget, clean, shop, keep their living spaces tidy and not be noisy. The conditionality of these practices, ironically, compromised their sense of home as they could not fully relax or maintain their space as they would have liked (Stewart, 2019). Similarly, a study of transitional housing in Germany documented how social workers interpreted tenants’ housing readiness based on the ‘look and feel’ of their living spaces and their creation of a ‘cozy and personal atmosphere’ dependent on furnishing and accessorising (Marquardt, 2016). This led to the conclusion that:

While clients are encouraged to feel at home, their leverage to make an actual claim to the space of the transitional apartments remains restricted – not only because of the time-limited nature of accommodation, but also because of social workers’ attempts to foster socially acceptable forms of claiming space. (p.34)

Such discussions are relevant for debates around the ethics and morals intertwined with social control and support measures involving homeless people (Parsell, 2016; Johnsen, *et al*, 2018). This article contributes to these debates by following geographers such as Harris *et al* (2020) in arguing that home and home-making are not morally- or politically-neutral concepts. This further addresses a significant gap in the home-making literature which predominantly focuses on socially accepted domestic activities rather than considering the relationships between more contested activities and ideas of home.

Methodology

The data informing this article come from a Doctoral project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council which received institutional ethical approval. The project employed ethnography to explore the substance use of young people living in a supported accommodation hostel in Scotland. The hostel – named Kelldale² – contained a reception area, staff office,

communal lounge, several meeting rooms and 14 self-contained bedsits all under one roof. Each bedsit contained a single bed, table and chairs, kitchen worktop with a hob, microwave and kettle, a wardrobe and set of drawers, and an en-suite bathroom. Kelldale was intended as a short-stay hostel in that, on paper, an individual could live there for a maximum of 10 weeks before being moved into settled accommodation. However, in reality the residents lived there for much longer due to a shortage of appropriate move-on accommodation. The support offered in Kelldale involved teaching the residents how to cook, budget and keep their bedsits tidy as well as signposting them to external services such as mental health teams. If residents did not engage with this support, their move into social rented housing could be compromised.

Over seven months in 2013, I visited Kelldale on 64 occasions consisting of 3-4 visits per week for 4-8 hours at a time. I engaged 22 residents (aged 16-21 years old) and 27 members of staff in the study; the focus in this article is skewed towards the residents. Sixteen of the residents were male, 6 were female. Nineteen residents were White and born in the UK, one young man identified as British-Pakistani, and two young men had migrated to the UK from Eastern Europe and Asia respectively. Involvement in the study ranged from 3-28 weeks. None of the residents had lived with their families directly before moving into Kelldale meaning they had not had a stable home for a while, if at all. Most had come from another hostel. The older residents had been homeless for several years characterised by a revolving door of hostel-living, couch surfing and temporarily living with their families, although at least three had, at one time, lived in their own socially rented flats. Two residents had previously spent time in local authority care and two others had slept rough.

Ethnography is underpinned by a research philosophy of interpretivism and naturalism; the goal is to learn about people's lives by carrying out fieldwork in the places they spend their time (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Participant-observation was the primary method used to gather data and I adopted a 'participant-as-observer' role (Junker, 1960) meaning that I documented the residents' movements in the hostel, conversations, physical appearances, activities and their reactions to events or news. This enabled me not only to capture what they said, but to witness their lives in practice. Sometimes I observed from a distance but mostly I was an active participant in conversations, activities and 'hanging out'. These encounters were written up in fieldnotes at opportune times during a visit and then more fully later. During the latter stages of fieldwork, I conducted semi-structured interviews with six residents and a focus group with six residents, only one of whom had also completed an interview. The purpose of

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these was to gain further information about certain themes that were emerging through the early stages of analysis.

The data were analysed using Becker’s (1970) sequential approach which involved four stages of analysis corresponding to identifying phenomena, checking their frequency, building a picture of themes and checking their accuracy. NVivo10 software was used to store and sort the data. As is often the case in ethnographic research, the intensity and length of data collection meant that many phenomena were captured that were not aligned with the original focus of the study. Yet, when this happens, the methodology requires the focus to change rather than for these phenomena to be disregarded. The initial focus of the study was on the residents’ substance use, and this did remain at the centre of the final analysis, but place-making practices emerged as an unexpected prominent theme.

Most of the data presented below are in the form of fieldnotes that describe my observations of the residents’ activities. Where possible, I captured direct quotes from the young people within these fieldnotes. Although this is typical of an ethnographic study, collecting data in this way is limited in that much relies on the researcher’s memory as the notes were not written in real-time but after the events had occurred. Two steps were taken to mitigate inaccuracies. First, I took opportunities to retreat to a quiet space in the hostel in between observations and interactions to write my notes which reduced the lapsed time. Second, if I was unsure about the accuracy of my fieldnotes, I asked the participants to check them and make amendments where needed, although mostly they agreed my recollection of events was in line with their own. An additional limitation of ethnography is its specificity to the fieldwork site. As with all qualitative research, generalisability cannot be claimed, nor is it the purpose of such an approach. However, qualitative research can allow for theoretical generalisations and insights (Mason, 2002). In this case, although the data cannot be replicated, the conceptual ideas of place-making and belonging in relation to how they are used in the analysis can be used to inform our understandings of similar practices in hostels as well as future research.

Findings

Kelldale’s Home-making Constraints

Kelldale was situated on the outskirts of a Scottish city centre. From the outside, the six-year old building was unremarkable, with no outward sign of its purpose other than the rhythm of young people exiting and entering through the front door. Like many homeless hostels, Kelldale used an array of mechanisms to monitor and control the movements and actions of the residents. Passing through the external and internal doors required a member of staff to use an electronic fob to open them. Often the staff would prohibit someone from entering if they were believed to pose a risk to those inside. For instance, if someone was drunk, the staff would step outside onto the street and assess them to decide whether they could enter. Once inside, residents faced further locked doors and so they relied upon the willingness of staff to give them access to different parts of the building including the communal lounge and the corridor leading to the bedsits.

A range of rules further characterised life in Kelldale. Non-resident friends and family members were not allowed inside the building. There was a curfew in place whereby residents had to be inside the building no later than 11pm and had to be in their own bedsit by midnight. Throughout the day, 'room checks' were carried out. This involved a member of staff visiting each bedsit, knocking on the door and entering even if nobody answered. Once inside a bedsit, the staff member would spend a few minutes looking around the room, checking for health and safety risks, chatting to whoever may be in the room and ensuring that no residents were consuming alcohol or drugs as these activities were prohibited. Room checks took place every four hours but could occur more frequently, especially if residents were suspected of using substances in the building.

If a resident behaved aggressively, if they refused to follow a rule, or if they used alcohol or drugs in the building the staff reacted by instructing a resident to "take a walk". This involved being forced to leave the building for an hour before they could return. In more serious cases, if the staff believed that a resident would not "calm down" or "behave" upon returning, they would help the resident to find somewhere else to spend the night, usually by telephoning a friend or family member. As a last resort, the police would be called to either resolve the situation or remove the individual(s) from the premises.

Although there were health and safety, legal and wellbeing reasons for this raft of rules and regulations, these are not the focus of this article. Rather, this was the context within which a group of young people were living. The description depicts Kelldale as an unhomely space

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since those living there were substantially constrained in being afforded privacy and in their abilities to exercise control, autonomy or engage in identity work. In comparison to mainstream ideals, Kelldale was not the young people’s home nor did it explicitly claim to be. Yet, Kelldale was their living space, albeit one that was temporary, and despite the highly regulated environment, the residents exercised agency through a range of place-making practices.

Permitted Place-making

Practices such as doing laundry, socialising and displaying certain objects were permitted in Kelldale and are unpacked below. Although these are common examples of home-making practices, the phrase ‘permitted place-making’ is used here to deliberately emphasise the regulations and constraints that characterised the environment within which they happened.

Doing Laundry

Located next to the staff office, the lounge was a communal area for the residents to socialise in. It was a large, bright space furnished with couches, a TV, a table-football game and dining table. Two smaller rooms – a kitchen and laundry room – adjoined the lounge. Residents could only socialise there after 5pm on weekdays and all day at weekends. This was because of management’s concern that the presence of residents in the lounge during standard office hours would disrupt their work in the office given the proximity of the two rooms. The Kelldale residents frequently expressed their frustration at the lounge being restricted in several ways including: persistently asking to access the lounge even when they knew it was off-limits; loudly complaining and swearing when they were refused access; and trying to sneak into the lounge without detection. Such protestations acted as reminders that Kelldale was not their home despite the lounge being designed (at least in appearance) as home-like with the young residents in mind.

However, one way of legitimating their presence in the lounge during office hours was to carry out domestic duties such as doing laundry. Laundry was an example of a place-making activity that held significance in terms of identity work, resistance and autonomy. For instance, Danielle – who proudly kept her bedsit clean and tidy – would appear at reception and request to access the lounge to do laundry. The importance of this was highlighted on one occasion when these efforts were disrupted by another resident:

Danielle entered the lounge and went into the laundry room to take her washing out of the drier. She realised that Craig had already taken her clothes out and dumped them on the worktop so that he could use the drier. Danielle's clothes were still damp and she started yelling at Craig. At first, Craig ignored her but when Danielle got louder and walked towards him, he started shouting back, claiming that he didn't know her clothes were still wet. Danielle continued to yell that Craig was being disrespectful, she was clearly very angry. She stormed off, leaving her damp clothes on the worktop.

Doing laundry was an important part of Danielle's weekly routine and signified a desire to look after herself and her living space. It was also a means of exercising control and autonomy. Danielle would regularly request to do her laundry shortly after returning from an enforced 'walk' (because she had broken a rule) even if she had only done laundry the previous day or sometimes earlier in the same day. This indicated an attempt to reassert her visibility and belonging within the hostel and could be viewed as an act of resistance after temporarily being displaced (Harris et al, 2020).

Pink (2005) has illustrated the sensory pleasure that people can gain from washing their clothes and the therapeutic value this can have. She demonstrated that the care people put into doing laundry is indicative of how the smell, look and feel of their clothes form important features of their identities and how they present themselves to the world. Danielle's reaction to Craig's interference with her place-making routine can be read as a disruption to her identity work which created stress. However, it can also be interpreted as Craig breaching Danielle's intimacy and belonging by highlighting that an act which is normally private – washing one's clothes (including their underwear) – remains semi-public in the context of a hostel. As Valentine and Hughes (2011) indicate, in family homes there is a tension between individuals' identities and practices and the experience of living with other people. Maintaining boundaries between the personal and the social happens in all cases of shared living, but in Kelldale such breaches of boundaries took on an additional layer since the people living together were strangers forced together, through circumstance, without choice.

During a later conversation between Danielle, Tom and I, the connection between wellbeing and domestic chores was reinforced, this time by Tom:

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Tom said that when he lived in his own flat, he enjoyed having his routine of doing housework in the morning and then watching TV for the rest of the day. He explained that he doesn't like the fact that the hostel provides things like laundry tablets and toilet rolls. When he first moved in, he bought a big box of laundry powder because that's what he did when previously living in his own flat. The staff told him not to buy these things because they were provided for him. Tom remarked: "I got slated for it! It's taking away things you've already learned."

Although being provided with basic household items was done with good intentions, some of the residents felt that the autonomy and skills involved in place-making were compromised as a result. Thus, although domestic chores were encouraged and facilitated, a basic domestic activity like laundry in Kelldale was constrained by the nature of the hostel, compromising some of the qualities associated with home(-making).

Socialising in the Bedsits

The bedsits were the only parts of the building that offered a degree of privacy as they did not contain CCTV cameras (which were present throughout the rest of the building) and they were located further away from the staff office than the lounge was. Place-making was most often concentrated in the bedsits for these reasons yet the bedsits were not exempt from staff surveillance due to the room checks described earlier. Acts of playfulness, relaxation and autonomy were heightened in these spaces because the residents socialised in each other's bedsits as well as spending time there alone. This played out in different ways. Some happily shared their space with the entire group, some were more selective and others chose to hang out in other people's bedsits so they could reserve their own for being alone. When those in the latter two positions ended up with unwanted guests, it could lead to frustration:

Andy became irritated by the number of people in his room and set about tidying up – picking discarded tobacco pouches and pieces of litter off the floor and arranging everyone's shoes in a neat line in front of the drawers. In general Andy's room was very clean and tidy and he has told me before that he doesn't tend to let other people hang out in his room.

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3 Andy, along with Cara and Nathan, all preferred to keep their personal and socialising spaces
4 separate so that they could use their bedsits for times when they wished to be alone, away from
5 the noise and busyness of the rest of the hostel. This is similar to the findings reported by
6 Wilson *et al* (2012) that young people retreat to their bedrooms to get away from stressful or
7 unpleasant events, reinforcing the importance of people having their 'own' place that they can
8 exert control over.
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15 In contrast, Tom, Danielle, Ryan and Stephanie frequently invited people into their rooms
16 where they would hang out, chat, watch TV and videos on their mobile phones, listen to music
17 and smoke. Rolling and smoking tobacco formed an important ritual in the bedsits because
18 they were the only location in the hostel that they were permitted to smoke. The residents
19 usually set about rolling as soon as they entered a bedsit:
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26 Ryan asked Matt to roll a cigarette and Ryan also rolled one...After they rolled, Matt
27 stood up and smoked out the window. Ryan sat on the armchair and smoked. Amanda,
28 who was sitting on Ryan's bed, looked at the two boys and said "who's gonnae save
29 me a draw of that? Matt gonnae save me some of that when you're done." Matt passed
30 his roll-up to Amanda when he had had enough.
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36 This extract was typical of the smoking patterns that were observed in the bedsits which
37 involved sharing tobacco along with competing for certain positions in the room. The armchair
38 and bed were the prime spots for sitting, followed by one of two wooden chairs and lastly
39 leaning against the worktop. It was an implicit rule that the occupier of the bedsit could sit
40 where they wished and that whoever ended up sitting closest to the door had to get up to let
41 someone in if there was a knock. The residents demonstrated their familiarity and belonging
42 in a bedsit, even when it was not their own, by claiming their preferred seat without waiting to
43 be invited to sit down. This included sprawling out on another person's bed.
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51 *Displaying Objects*

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55 Place-making was also evident in the photographs that the residents stuck to their bedsit walls.
56 These were usually pictures of a resident alongside their family members, partner, friends and
57 pets that had been taken prior to arriving in Kelldale. Some of the residents were young parents
58 but, at the time of fieldwork, none had access to their children. For them, it was important to
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display the photographs they had of their children so that they could continue to feel connected to them. Objects such as photographs can hold enormous significance for displaced people as they can 'anchor' individuals to feelings of home and provide relief during difficult times (McCarthy, 2019). The staff helped the residents to display photographs by allowing them to print them from the computer so they had a tangible object to display:

Nathan came down to reception and asked the staff if he could print off some photos. I went with him to the computer room. He brought up a photo on the computer of him and his mum standing outside a house and dressed up to go to a wedding. In the photo he looked quite young and I asked him how old he was when it was taken. After pausing to think, he said he must have been 15-years old because there was a Vauxhall Corsa in the background of the photo and his mum had got the Corsa shortly before he became homeless.

It is worth highlighting that whilst the residents were encouraged to display photos of their loved ones, they were not permitted visits from them in the hostel. If they wanted to see a friend or relative, they had to visit them somewhere else. There were mixed responses to this rule. Some residents greatly valued having a space that put distance between them and their relatives, some did not like the rule but understood it was in place to keep everyone safe, while others described the rule simply as "shite" as it was perceived as yet another social practice they were prohibited from. Thus, photos symbolised efforts to maintain relational belonging with loved ones in the context of being unable to accept visitors into their living space, yet another indication of the limits of Kelldale in being a home.

Other objects were also used to personalise bedsits. Ryan displayed posters of naked women torn from men's magazines next to his bed. Callum hung a large football flag from his ceiling. Tom had a small wire figurine in the shape of a lizard, that he had named Toby, which sat on his floor beside the door and which he referred to as his "guard dog". Danielle had stuck Buckfast³ labels to her wall in the shape of her name. Stephanie had a poem about friendship on her wall that Cara had given her. Some residents displayed painted canvases which they had created with the help of an arts-based outreach service. Although the level of decoration varied, every bedsit had some form of personalisation which gave the space meaning through sensory engagement. Each object also linked to relational and cultural belonging (May, 2011). Relational belonging was most apparent in the content of the photographs and Stephanie's

poem. Cultural belonging was symbolised by Callum's flag and Danielle's Buckfast labels. Overall, displaying objects enabled residents to form connections between their self-identities and the physical space (Neumark, 2013).

Prohibited Place-making

The activities described above were all permitted in that they were within the limits of Kelldale's rules and were encouraged by the staff, although the example of laundry demonstrates how the context of the hostel still limited the residents' control over such practices. The analysis now turns to activities that were prohibited, some of which were illegal. Like permitted practices, prohibited practices offered the residents ways of expressing autonomy, control, identity and of facilitating belonging. They include cannabis use, graffiti and vandalism.

The intention here is not to take a stance on whether these practices *should* have been permitted in Kelldale or anywhere else. Instead, the aim is to argue that place-making – and by extension home-making – is not morally-neutral by drawing attention to contentious practices that are typically understood as deviant, disrespectful, anti-social or chaotic but which might be reimagined as attempts to construct a sense of 'home'.

Using Cannabis in the Bedsits

Cannabis was the most frequently used illicit drug in Kelldale. It was a daily occurrence for residents to return to the hostel visibly stoned. The staff generally tolerated the use of cannabis so long as it did not happen inside the building due to its illegality. Yet the residents regularly broke this rule typically by using cannabis in their bedsits which offered the most privacy and least chance of being caught. The room checks, though, compromised this privacy so the residents devised tactics for concealing their use. For example, they used cannabis in the ensuite bathrooms rather than out in the open because the bathrooms contained air vents which the residents believed reduced the smoke and smell inside. They also closed the bathroom door meaning the staff could not instantly detect what the person in the bathroom was doing if a room check was conducted:

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3 I asked Nathan if he smokes cannabis a lot and he replied: “I hate the smell of green...I
4 prefer sitting in Danielle’s (room) ‘cause then she’ll just disappear into the toilet to do
5 it.” I asked why people go into the bathroom and Nathan explained “cause that’s where
6 the bucket is...nobody in here smokes drugs really (they inhale instead), and doing
7 buckets in the toilet is the best way not to get caught because it’s basically got its own
8 vent system and the full room isn’t stinking.”
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15 A ‘bucket’ was a homemade device for inhaling cannabis (similar to a bong) made with a
16 plastic bottle placed inside a larger glass bottle, tinfoil, a wrench socket and water. Just as
17 people attribute significant meaning, attachment and pride to the objects they display in their
18 home (Hurdley, 2013), so too did the residents with their buckets and bongs. However, drug
19 paraphernalia, such as buckets, would be confiscated during room checks if they were visible:
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26 Ryan suddenly said, “want to see my new bucket?”. He became excited as he showed
27 me into his bathroom, removed the top of the toilet cistern and pulled out his new
28 bucket. He reached up to where a vent in the ceiling had been displaced and pulled out
29 a black socket. He seemed very proud of this hiding place and bragged that the staff
30 would never find it: “they won’t take any more buckets off me!”
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36 I asked Jordan how he thought he might feel when he moved out of Kelldale. He replied,
37 “I’d actually get on quite well. Like, when I get my own place...once I get it furnished
38 and all that, then I’ll have a home-warming party, have a couple of people up” I joked
39 that if he has a house-warming party then it means people need to bring presents. He
40 laughed and said “I want a double leather suite! A new toaster, a new shower head,
41 maybe a nice double bed with a new mattress as well, that might help as well! A couple
42 of bongs for the decoration, you know, obviously they have to be decorative though!”
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50 It is proposed that the two phenomena described here – the use of cannabis in en-suite
51 bathrooms and the value placed on buckets and bongs – were forms of place-making in
52 Kelldale. Buckets and bongs were treated as valued possessions with indications that the
53 residents would, if they had been allowed, have displayed them in the same way as people
54 accessorise their homes with ornaments (Hurdley, 2013). These practices were linked to the
55 residents’ preferred ways of using their living spaces. For some, cannabis was used as a way
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of relaxing and relieving boredom but to engage in this activity they had to use evasive tactics due to being under the staff gaze. Several residents told me that they would prefer to use cannabis in their living spaces rather than outside because the relaxing effects of the drug were more conducive to ‘chilling out’ which involved being indoors:

“[Cannabis] just relaxes you more. The feeling you get, just mellows you out. Sit down and chill...I’d prefer to smoke in the building aye, I don’t really like going out...it doesn’t bother me smoking cannabis outside but it’s better inside cause I hate walking about when I’m stoned, I prefer to just sit and chill.” (Amanda).

Amanda, as well as Ryan, also told me that they feel unsafe walking around outside when they are intoxicated because they are vulnerable to being harmed by others. In other words, of the limited places available to the residents, the bedsits offered the most comfort, privacy and safety for using cannabis.

Graffiti and Vandalism

Like ideas of territorial marking by rough sleepers (Rennels & Purnell, 2017), graffiti and acts of vandalism are sometimes used to physically identify symbolic ownership of a space (Robinson, 2009). Residents graffitied the furniture in their bedsits. This was usually done on the inside of wardrobe doors as it could be hidden from the staff. The graffiti typically consisted of “menshies”⁴: signatures written in a style unique to the individual. Some residents “menshied” their own wardrobe doors as well as those in other bedsits. This was discussed during the focus group:

Callum: “My room’s fuckin, [Tom’s] name’s fuckin menshied on ma cupboard”

Matt: “Garry’s name is on my cupboard”

Danielle: “Aye Garry did it on a few of them”

Callum: “Aye and Stephanie”

As well as representing a physical reminder that an individual had been connected to the space, menshies preserved the memories of past residents. Matt had moved into Garry’s bedsit after Garry had moved out of Kelldale, meaning the two residents had never met. The presence of

Garry's name etched into the wardrobe door in Matt's bedsit, however, symbolised that they had a shared belonging to the space, albeit at different times.

During a residents' meeting, a member of staff – Suzanne – read out a list of acts of vandalism that had occurred in the weeks prior which the staff had compiled:

Cigarettes being stubbed out on corridor walls, door hinges being broken due to people swinging on them, litter being thrown out of bedsit windows, drinks being spilled in communal areas and not cleaned up, one of the panes of glass in the front door being cracked, and one of the 'fire exit' signs being ripped off the wall.

The reading aloud of this list was followed up by Suzanne emphasising that Kelldale was their "home" and, therefore, they should treat it better. Becoming exasperated, she argued that:

"You wouldn't stub out a fag⁵ on your own living room wall if you had your own place so why do it here?"

Suzanne was met with a mixture of silence and murmurs of agreement by residents that this was "bad" but without anyone owning up to it. Whilst I did not ask any residents about their motives for these specific incidents, in other instances of vandalism the residents explained that they were either "mad wie it" (intoxicated), bored or had been playing. For example, due to boredom, some residents had devised a game that involved tying someone up, shoving them into the shower and turning the water on. In the process of this physical game, walls had been scratched and doors had been damaged. This game was also challenged during the same meeting as staff were not only concerned about the property damage but that the game was abusive. The residents involved were adamant that the game was consented to by all and angrily claimed that if life in Kelldale was not so boring then it would not have happened. Stanley Cohen (1973), renowned for his theoretical contributions to the sociology of deviance, indicates boredom, playfulness and frustration as three reasons for young people to vandalise property. These emotions were frequently visible among Kelldale's residents.

During the project, I did not ask the residents about the condition of their previous homes but gleaned insights from stories that related to them. As mentioned, most had experience of living in other hostels; Kelldale was unanimously viewed as being safer, calmer and 'better' than

these other places. Danielle and Andy had both been forced to relinquish their previous council flats due to them becoming trashed from having parties. Jack had lost his previous flat because he had ripped out the boiler and TV to sell. Whilst there was no evidence of such extreme forms of destruction in Kelldale, it was possible that residents' vandalism acts were reflective of how they and others had treated their dwellings in the past. It had been a long time since the residents had lived in a conventional 'home' and it is possible that they had never lived in homes that conformed to socially acceptable standards of repair, cleanliness and tidiness. Therefore, to flip ideals of home-making on their head, it is possible that what the staff conceived of as vandalism may have actually provided a degree of familiarity and sensory belonging for residents (May, 2013). Furthermore, in one situation there was evidence that a residents' vandalism was actually an attempt to improve the sensory features of the space he was in. Ryan later confessed to staff that he was the one who had broken the 'fire exit' sign. He explained that the electric sign had been malfunctioning and making a beeping noise. Becoming irritated by the noise, Ryan had ripped the sign off the wall to make it stop. Thus, in line with Cohen (1973) and other deviancy theorists' position, the meanings that lie behind acts of property destruction are varied and vandalism is defined as such according to the relative expectations set by those in more powerful positions.

Conclusion

This article has explored the place-making practices of a group of young people living in a supported accommodation hostel in Scotland. 'Place-making' was distinguished from 'home-making' to highlight the difficulties in referring to a hostel as 'home'. Both concepts describe people's attempts at carving out pleasant places for themselves to enhance their wellbeing. In doing so, they can exercise a level of control and autonomy, obtain some privacy, engage in identity work and feel a sense of belonging. Although the concepts of place- and home-making are not new, this article is original in using them to (1) examine the limitations of 'home' in a homeless context, (2) argue that place-making is a more suitable descriptor than home-making when someone's 'making' practices occur without shelter or in a living space which is temporary, precarious, restricted or lacking in the ideals of home and (3) make explicit that home/place-making practices are not morally-neutral.

Permitted place-making referred to those activities that were tolerated or encouraged by the staff in the hostel, whereas prohibited practices were those that were illegal, against the rules

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or not tolerated. Examples of permitted practices included doing laundry, socialising in bedsits and displaying objects, and examples of prohibited practices were using cannabis, graffiti and vandalism. Despite the disparate nature of these practices, they each offered the residents a means to shape their living spaces in their preferred ways.

Doing laundry was a measure of keeping oneself and one’s space feeling, smelling and looking pleasant, as well as exercising resistance and autonomy. The importance of smell was also hinted at by Nathan when he mentioned that an added benefit of residents using cannabis in the en-suite bathrooms was that it kept the smell away from the main part of the bedsit. This not only reduced the likelihood of being caught but also minimised having to socialise in a space that smelled of cannabis which, for Nathan, was experienced as unpleasant. Keeping people out or letting people socialise in a bedsit enabled the residents to exercise control not only of who could and could not enter their space but also what went on in those spaces. Smoking tobacco was an important social activity that occurred in the bedsits and the use of cannabis was no different. Displaying objects such as photographs was a means of personalising the bedsits, as well as preserving memories and relationships. The same can be said for the desire to display cannabis buckets and bongs and to carve ‘menshies’ into wardrobe doors. These too, were methods of personalisation. Finally, acts of vandalism require scrutiny beyond a view that they are senseless because they may offer familiarity, belonging or, in some cases, a means of improving the sensory features of a space.

In outlining these practices, the article also described the constraints placed upon the residents which limited their control, privacy and autonomy. Room checks were felt as intrusive and the prohibition of cannabis inside the hostel influenced the ways in which the residents went about their place-making. As mentioned in the earlier literature review, these arguments are entangled in debates over whether the rules and regulations in hostels are an unfair or unethical means of social control or whether they are a necessary form of support as they help to ensure that hostels are safe for everyone (Parsell *et al*, 2015) and that residents are equipped with the skills to become ‘housing ready’ (Stewart, 2019). This article contributes to these debates by arguing that home/place-making practices are not morally-neutral. The concepts of permitted and prohibited place-making allow us to interrogate the fact that there is a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ way to construct a home-space according to social norms. People who live in owner-occupied and, to a lesser extent, rented housing are offered more privacy and control over their living space in comparison to those experiencing homelessness⁶. This means that, in comparison to

homeless people, they have a greater capacity to home-make in ways that suit their preferences, away from the gaze of others, even if these preferences are constructed by wider society as harmful or immoral.

These ideas require further unpacking as they raise several implications. Hostel accommodation is diverse in terms of its size, formation and the support provided (Busch-Geertsema & Sahlin, 2007; Watts *et al*, 2018) and there is only a small body of literature that has examined place-making practices within these settings. More research is required to understand how these practices differ for those living in homeless accommodation in comparison to more conventional homes both in terms of the nature of these practices and their meanings. Moreover, a greater understanding is required of the rules and regulations implemented in hostels and how these can facilitate or constrain place-making. Such knowledge would help researchers and practitioners to further examine the role of hostels in relation to place-making. Specifically, it would be useful to tease out the messy tensions created by subjective ideas of what a ‘pleasant’ place is, objective measures of housing readiness and broader ideas of the moral and ethical dilemmas underpinning the social control-support debates surrounding homelessness (see for example Johnsen *et al*, 2018; and Stewart, 2019).

Finally, these arguments have been situated within predominantly Westernised ideas of home and home-making, and within a Scottish context. Although home and homelessness are global phenomena, their interpretations, meanings and manifestations have cultural and country-specific nuances which need to be accounted for in unpacking how people experiencing homelessness engage in place-making. As described earlier, much of this work is already taking place across the world and whilst this predominantly uses the language of ‘home’ and ‘home-making’, there is strong overlap with the arguments made here about the constraints many people face in making a home when living in precarious circumstances. A global examination of these structural constraints serves to strengthen the call for the importance of eradicating homelessness and providing people with *homes* rather than places to live.

¹ This is in contrast to the more common usage of ‘place-making’ in the discipline of planning and urban development in which ‘place’ is typically used at the scale of a neighbourhood or city.

² The hostel and all participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

³ Buckfast is a brand of wine that is popular in Scotland

⁴ In other English-speaking countries, ‘menshies’ are the equivalent to ‘tags’.

⁵ A ‘fag’ is a slang word for a cigarette.

⁶ It is recognised that not all people (children for example) in owner-occupied or rental housing are able to have full privacy and control but arguably these tenures offer these qualities more than homeless situations do.

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