Interactional barriers to exiting homelessness:

An ethnographic study of a homeless hostel

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Abstract

This thesis advances our understanding as to why some people become stuck in ‘this place’ (a homeless hostel) and places like it. Whilst the existing literature highlights ‘barriers’ to ‘exiting’ homelessness, these are often oversimplified and dichotomised as being either structural (e.g., a lack of affordable housing) or individual (e.g., addiction). Instead, this thesis illustrates how the barriers to exiting homeless hostels are rooted within the interaction order of institutions (Goffman, 1961; 1983). It achieves this by taking an ethnographic approach to life at Holbrook House – the English homeless hostel upon which this thesis is based – and by observing how deeply-rooted barriers play out in day-to-day interactions. Fieldwork took place between January 2020 and November 2022 and involved participant observation, online semi-structured interviews, online timeline interviews, and in person unstructured interviews.

This research finds that homeless hostels are one point amidst a broader ‘institutional web,’ a series of institutions which are interactionally interconnected by members of the hostel. Residents at Holbrook House just happen to reside at ‘this place’ at this time, though often bounce between an array of other institutions, including prisons and detox facilities. Whilst ‘this place’ (or these places) may aim to normalise those who enter, ‘hyper inclusion’ i.e., forcible inclusion within an array of bureaucracies, solidifies their relative abnormality when a normative frame is employed. By encapsulating the viewpoints of both staff and resident teams, the polyphonic voice within this thesis demonstrates how all hostel members must contend with interactional challenges, and must therefore learn to play the institutional game. For instance, when faced with a series of ordinary institutional troubles, the staff practice ‘learning *not* to see.’ In contrast to the dominant 'pathways' perspective, getting out of the hostel in a ‘positive’ way, or being stuck in 'this place,’ are both shown be interactional accomplishments.

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Prologue: Getting in

Fists bang against the glass front door. Staff press the buzzer – 'does that make you feel powerful?' A chant floats through reception, 'I need a Rizla, Rizla, Rizla.' Residents chase down the corridors. Women in overalls and gloves carry bright yellow sharps boxes, whilst men in hard hats survey the ceiling. Lincoln bursts out of the telephone room, wiping sweat from his forehead, 'trying to sort out my bank' he shrugs and collapses onto a chair. Across reception, Allen thrusts his wrists at Cali, 'I feel like harming myself.' 'Are your razor blades still behind reception?' 'Yeah.' 'That's good. Why don't you do some jobs?' 'I don't feel like doing anything,' his voice grows louder with each syllable. Cali points at the cigarette in his hand with a smile, 'have a smoke and get some fresh air.' She walks away and pulls a frown.

And then he is there. He stands with his back inches from the wall, hands in balls, a plastic JD bag slung over one shoulder. He shuffles from left foot to right, flinching slightly each time the lift pings open. He sneaks occasional glances towards the staff reception area, which runs parallel to the main reception.

Polly is Duty Manager today. She emerges from staff reception, walkie talkie in one hand, clipboard in the other. Her glance lifts from the clipboard to the man, 'Nick, is it?' 'Yeah.' 'Do you mind if Fiona observes, she's a PhD student?' 'No.' Polly guides us towards the chapel and closes the door. We pull blue chairs into a triangle formation. A large cross and a painting of Jesus watch over us.

Polly shuffles her papers and asks, 'have you stayed in a hostel before?' 'No.' 'Do you know anything about the hostel? Or the housing pathway?' 'No.' 'There are four levels in the pathway, Holbrook House is at the bottom, so it's manned 24/7 and offers the highest level of support. Then they try to get you up to levels two, three, and four, and then into your own place. Sometimes people go up, sometimes people go down. But the aim is to get your own place if you want to.' He whispers in agreement. 'All temporary accommodation is around nine months. Oh, and you only get one reasonable offer to move on unless an area is categorically out of the question for you.' He nods.

Polly skims a page and relays the 'house rules.' As a resident you must: engage with your support worker weekly; be on benefits and provide details of those benefits; pay a weekly service charge (or 'top up') of £18.65; tell staff if you plan on staying elsewhere; and, spend no more than two nights away from the hostel each week. He concedes to each rule in turn and questions his ability to leave the building. Polly smiles, 'there's an open-door policy, it's not a prison,' with the caveat, 'if you're not using your room, we'll give it to someone else.' The other rules are contained within the licence agreement which he signs but does not read.

'Right, we need to establish your financial situation, are you on Universal Credit?' He was on ESA and PIP[1]. She collects details about these payments: a rough amount, payment dates, frequency, and outstanding debts.

'Do you have any physical health or mental health problems?' 'Anxiety and depression. And my hand.' Polly looks up. 'I was stabbed in the hand by a machete.' 'Does it hurt?' 'It's mainly in my head.'

Shouting sneaks in from the front garden and we all look up. Polly knocks on the window, though it continues, 'sorry, he'll be moving out soon,' she says and closes the window. 'So, what medication are you on for your anxiety and depression?' He pulls out a paper 'script' (prescription), 'Mirtazapine.' 'That one's supposed to be good, my son's on it,' says Polly. 'Do you self-harm or have suicidal thoughts?' 'No.' 'Violent behaviour?' 'No.' 'Good man. Religious or cultural beliefs?' 'Muslim.' 'Do you use drugs or alcohol?' 'No.' 'Do you have any questions?' 'No.'

Polly assesses Nick based of how he is 'presenting' and fills in several paper forms, before offering him a place at Holbrook. 'Are you OK to sign to say this is what we've discussed?' He reaches for the paper. 'My colleague Chrissy will go through some more paperwork with you

[1] Employment Support Allowance (or ESA) is a welfare benefit available to people who are unable to work, to support them with the cost of living. Personal Independence Payments (or PIP) provide extra financial support to those who suffer from a long-term physical or mental health condition or disability.

and put you onto the system. Welcome to Holbrook House.' She takes the sheet and makes a swift exit, Duty Manager responsibilities call.

I take the opportunity to tell Nick about my research. He says, 'I wasn't told about the assessment until this morning. I told them I had a busy day, but they said, if you don't go, you'll be out of the system.' It was lucky that his sister could drive him over. 'What if you couldn't make it? You wouldn't have anywhere to stay?' 'Exactly.'

Chrissy arrives and leads us to the small booking in room, located beyond a door which is accessible only by a staff fob. She sits at the computer desk and logs on, Nick sits to her side, at a 90-degree angle, like a doctor's patient. I sit in the corner, out of their immediate gaze, and free to scribble down notes.

The questioning starts afresh as Chrissy opens multiple systems, 'are you from the area?' 'Yeah.' She taps at the keyboard, 'if there are any questions you don't want to answer that's fine.' He remains silent, feet bouncing on their balls. 'Were you staying with your sister?' 'Yeah.' Click, click, click as she confirms his details: date of birth, National Insurance number, phone number. A new screen flashes up, 'it asks a lot of questions and some of them you can't ignore.' Nick leans in, eyes fixed on the screen.

'Physical or mental health problems?' 'Anxiety, depression, and my hand.' 'Need any reasonable adjustments?' 'No.' 'You haven't stayed here before?' 'No.' 'Anywhere similar?' 'No.' 'Any other support needs?' 'No.' 'Do you want to move to a closer GP?' 'Yes.' 'Do you have any medication at the moment?' 'Not on me.' 'What are you taking?' 'Mirtazapine.' 'Any allergies?' 'No.' 'Dietary requirements?' 'I don't eat pork.' 'Are you white British?' 'Yeah.' 'Do you know if you're related to anyone here?' 'No.' 'What's your sexuality?' 'What does that mean?' 'Are you straight or gay?' 'Straight.' 'Are you transgender?' 'No.' 'What's your religion?' 'Muslim.' 'Are you English?' 'Yeah.' 'A contact for emergency?' 'My sister's number.' 'How long were you at your last address?' 'I didn't go there, it was too far.' 'Were you living with family?' 'Yeah.' 'Have you ever slept rough?' 'No, but I've sofa surfed and things like that.' 'You're on ESA and PIP?' 'Yeah.' 'When's your next payment day?' '19th September.' 'Is that monthly?' 'Yeah.' 'Do you get housing benefit?' 'Don't know.' 'And you don't have any other income?' 'No.' 'Are your benefits subject to sanctions?' 'No.' 'Have

they been in the last five years?' 'No.' 'What is the amount roughly?' 'Don't know.' 'You're not working at the moment?' 'No.' 'Have you been to prison before?' 'Yeah.' 'How many times?' 'I'm not sure.' 'Roughly?' 'Since I was about 13.' 'So four or five times?' 'About 10.' 'Have you been in the last year?' 'Yeah, I was recalled on licence.' 'December 2020 to May?' 'Yeah.' 'Are you on licence or probation?' 'I've finished everything.' 'Are you involved with social services?' 'No.' 'Secondary mental health?' 'No.' 'Drug intervention?' 'No.' 'Probation.' 'No.' 'Army?' 'No.' 'Were you a child in care?' 'Yeah, I was in care.' 'Are you considered to be a care leaver?' 'Yeah.'

'Well, that's the computer stuff done, there are a few actual bits of paper that need signing,' says Chrissy as she produces a bundle of papers, 'do you have any questions or anything?' 'Not at the moment.' 'You might have already been told, housing benefit is paid directly to us as rent and service charge is £18.65 per week, you can either set up a direct debit or pay cash at reception.' 'Yeah.' He signs to confirm.

She hands him a leaflet titled 'multiagency work.' Then he signs another form, 'you can read it, but the long and short of it is, the information we have about you will be stored on file, do you want to read it?' 'No thank you,' he says with a nervous laugh. This form enables staff to disclose confidential information about residents.

She produces a licence agreement, 'I recommend having a little look over this when you get a chance, it's information regarding your licence and all that kind of stuff. If you can just sign on that one.' She hands him a second copy to sign, 'you can keep that one.' 'Thank you.' 'I'll take you up to your room in a second and check that everything's there.' Two further pieces of paper contain a breakdown of rent and mealtimes. He asks, 'can't you cook here?' 'There are two kitchens per floor, to be honest not a lot of the people here cook, so you'll have the kitchen to yourself.'

The final sheet requires confirmation of medication, 'if you can just keep us up to date so we can update it on the system, just in case. Keep it safe, don't sell to other people. Mirtazapine?' 'Yeah.' 'Dosage?' '30.' 'Daily?' 'Yeah.' He signs where she tells him to. 'Cool. That's all to sign here. I just need to take a photo for our system.' 'Shall I stand up?' 'No, it's

just your face,' she says, then holds the camera at arm's length. There's a flash and Chrissy smiles, 'worked first time.'

'Let's go and have a look at your room and get you your key.' We walk back to reception in single file: Chrissy, then Nick, then me. Chrissy disappears into staff reception. 'Still can't get through, man' huffs Lincoln from the same chair. Chrissy reappears, 'there's no key I'm afraid,' though she offers to show him around anyway.

Chrissy points out the laundry room, IT room, and dining room, before entering the stairwell at the end of a corridor, 'it's a bit of a maze.' Chrissy unlocks Nick's bedroom door with a master key, it is covered in small cuts. She holds the heavy door open with her foot and Nick inches inside, peering around. A vandalised piece of chipboard replaces the bottom half of the window, and whilst the top half is open as far as the restrictors will allow, fresh air cannot mask the lingering smell of sick. Pale blue paint has been scrubbed away from one wall, in an attempt to remove the stubborn graffiti. A Bible sits on top of the wardrobe. Chrissy ticks her clipboard, 'curtains, yeah. Bin, yeah. Safe, yeah.' I ask, 'what happened to the window?' 'The last resident,' says Chrissy without looking up, 'kettle, yeah. Fridge, yeah.' Welcome to Holbrook House.

Chapter one: Constructing the 'problem'

> On a really practical level, these people have to be housed somewhere and they are usually housed in hotels, often out of the way, sometimes in very deprived areas, and they are very, very controversial locally perhaps for understandable reasons (The News Agents, 2023)

136 children were kidnapped in 18 months, between 2021 and 2023 (Townsend, 2023a). They were all taken from the same place, yet this was not front-page news, there were no widespread search parties, and there was no mass public outcry for their safe return. And why? Because these were not just any children, and they were not being taken from just any place. These were 'child asylum seekers,' taken from a 'Home Office Hotel' in Brighton. There were fears of trafficking and exploitation following the disappearances (Ioffe, 2023). At the local level, these abductions were 'common knowledge' and a normalised aspect of life at the Home Office Hotel (Townsend, 2023b). The police warned against putting so many vulnerable children in one place, as they would surely be targeted by criminal gangs (Zakir-Hussain, 2023). Moreover, whistle-blowers reported threats and abuse from within the hotel, as dangerous gangs preyed on those who stepped outside (Townsend, 2023b). Yet the government continued to use these hotels – which originated as a 'temporary' spatial solution – for years (Ioffe, 2023). Whilst long periods of time spent in any form of 'contingency accommodation' is detrimental to those they contain, Home Office Hotels presented particular safeguarding concerns (Stevens and Sivasathiaseelan, 2022: 1).

This thesis is not about child asylum seekers or 'Home Office Hotels,' rather as the Prologue suggests, it is about people experiencing homelessness and homeless hostels. However, this comparison has been made early on, to draw the reader's attention to the broader application of this research, to populations conceived of as 'problematic' and the places subsequently used to contain them. When society constructs certain populations as problematic on the basis of their visibility, the proposed solution is often spatial, as by containing them within an institution, they are rendered less visible to wider society. In this way, the problem – those aspects associated with their visibility at least – is solved. Yet once caught up in this 'institutional web' (a concept developed herein), individuals may find it

difficult to escape. This thesis therefore seeks to provide an understanding of, and social commentary on, how we as a society manage people on the margins, particularly through spatial segregation, which finds them stored in institutions – such as asylum centres, prisons, mental health hospitals, or homeless hostels – and the implication thereof, particularly their propensity to become stuck in the web. Most notably, it examines the interaction order of a homeless hostel in order to illustrate how barriers to exiting institutions exist at the level of interaction.

This research will step behind the concrete veil of one institution which is used to render people less visible. It will make this place visible by shining a light on day-to-day life on this inside, through the study of situated interactions and a focus on the interaction order of the homeless hostel. The value of making these invisible places visible is considered further below. Given that a multitude of institutions aim to contain and conceal, the findings set out in this thesis are applicable to the broader 'institutional web.' Whilst this form of containment may intend to 'solve' problems, it actually perpetuates them in multiple ways, including the individual's inability to escape the institutions which contain them. As such, this thesis seeks to answer the following question: are the barriers, which prevent individuals from getting out of these kinds of places, built into the interaction orders of institutions?

Constructing 'problem' populations on the basis of visibility

> 'If you seek safety in our city centre, if you seek prosperity for local businesses, if you seek a better image for Cardiff… come to Queen Street. Cllr Thomas, tear down these tents'
>
> 'If these people had nowhere else to go my comments would be horrible and heartless! But they do have somewhere to go. There are more than enough hostel beds available in Cardiff. I want them in rooms, not in tents'
>
> 'I know there are enough spaces in hostels for these people and it is a failure of policy that they are allowed to live in tents instead of using services' – Kathryn Kelloway (The Guardian, 2019)

All categories of people have, at one point or another, effectively been 'made up' (Hacking, 1986: 186). For example, 'the pervert' did not exist until understandings of perversion came about in the late nineteenth century, prior to which they were simply 'odd people.' According to Hacking (1986), social changes lead to the creation of new categories of people, which in turn facilitates their enumeration, and new ways for people to be. In this way, categorisation ensures that populations become '"knowable" and actionable for governments' (Hoffman and Coffey, 2008: 210). For example, new migration categories came into being alongside changes in UK laws, which effectively discerned 'undesirable' forms of immigrant, including the categories of 'asylum seeker' and 'illegal immigrants,' from desirable forms, such as 'tourist' or 'expat' (Bashford and McAdam, 2014). Movements are moralised on both a local and global scale, 'the tourists travel because they want to; the vagabonds because they have no other bearable choice' (Bauman, 1998: 93). Unlike the movements of travellers, the iterant and uncertain movements of 'the homeless' (locally) and immigrants (globally) may therefore be equated with the 'peculiar condition of placelessness' (Kawash, 1998: 327; Wardhaugh, 2000). Representations of 'the homeless' tend to align with one of several popular constructions, in which they are positioned as threatening or dangerous, personally culpable, or non-productive (Takahashi, 1997; Rosenthal, 2000; DeVerteuil et al, 2009; Belcher and DeForge, 2012; Kinsella, 2012).

The visibility of certain populations can be problematic in and of itself. For Blau, visibility is the 'most significant attribute of homelessness' because 'visible poverty disrupts the ordinary rhythms of public life' (1992: 4). When 'the housed' see 'the homeless,' they may be reminded that they too could become homeless (Belcher and DeForge, 2012), even if the perception that we are all only 'two pay cheques away from homelessness' is untrue (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018: 96). When populations are seen as threating in this way, they are often othered and positioned as 'outsiders' who are somehow fundamentally different from 'us' (Becker, 1953; Hodgetts et al, 2011; Meanwell, 2012).

Tyler (2020) argues that labels and rhetoric lie at the heart of responses to undesirable, stigmatised groups, conceiving of stigma as a form of power, which is used to exploit, control, and exclude entire groups of people. She explores how stigma finds its roots in discourse, which relies on certain narratives and rhetoric. In the context of the 2015 refugee

crisis, she notes how the comparison of refugees to 'cockroaches' invokes the language used by Nazi Germany, thereby purposely inciting racial hatred. More recently, the former Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, is criticised for employing similar, far right, 'inflammatory' rhetoric in response to those arriving on 'small boats' (Forrest, 2023). Politicians have previously described 'the homeless' as 'drunkards' who choose not to work, as 'queue jumpers, rent dodgers, scroungers, and scrimshankers' (Pleace et al, 1997: 2). More recently, MPs have highlighted the 'choice' and 'responsibility' to cast homelessness as an individual problem rather than state responsibility, constructing 'the homeless' as both a 'risk population' and 'responsible citizens' (Bevan, 2021). Distinctions are often made between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' (Katz, 1990; Hodgetts et al, 2005), such as divisions between 'Slackers' (lazy, irresponsible, drug users), 'Lackers' (poor souls who need charity), and 'Unwilling Victims' (victims of circumstance) (Rosenthal, 2000: 11). Deservingness is reflected in the model of the 'ideal migrant,' which represents those individuals who require minimal state funds and try to make themselves hireable (Volckmar-Eeg and Vassenden, 2020). Asylum seekers and those experiencing homelessness are not so different, as both groups are othered through constructions which centre on their non-productivity, differentness, and danger (Pruitt, 2019). Both are constructed as deviants, aliens, or outsiders, because their 'out-of-placeness,' visibility and immoral movements, which pose a threat to mainstream society (Adams and Bloch, 2023). They are local and global 'exiles' due to displacement and forced migration (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007; Zill et al, 2020).

The concept of problematisation enables us to bridge the gap between discourse and societal responses, as problems are constructed in such a way that they implicitly contain their solutions (Bacchi, 2016). In other words, the way in which a problem is talked about, thought about, and understood, will necessarily influence society's response to it. So, when entire groups of people are constructed as being 'waste,' we can see how 'waste management' becomes the logical solution. Tyler argues, 'practices of waste management are accelerating, and borders, cages, camps and walls are proliferating across the face of the earth' (2020: 19). From this perspective, the police, outreach workers, and other agents have effectively become street cleaners, by moving people on and sanitising our streets of

such unsightly populations (Cloke et al, 2010; Garland et al, 2010; Kinsella, 2011; Cheshire and Zappia, 2016; Hall, 2016).

In these cases, discourse proceeds practice, as certain groups – the deviants, aliens, others, and outsiders – are constructed as the kind of population in need of management and containment (Becker, 2018; Tyler, 2020). In the opening series of Tweets, Kelloway's problematisation of homelessness (the visibility of tents) clearly shapes her 'solution' to it (put them in hostels). Visible homelessness is particularly out-of-place and threatening in shopping districts, as they are not productive citizens, but a troubling political-economic class (Hennigan, 2018). Hopper describes the visible poor as an offence 'to the good order of society,' underscored by a distinct 'otherness' which casts them as 'civilisation's exile, nemesis, or as evidenced in its failure' (2003: 46). When the problem is visibility, then the solution is invisibility – populations are rounded up and hidden away in homeless hostels, Home Office Hotels, or some other institution which seeks to conceal them. This thesis goes behind closed doors to investigate how experiences and barriers to getting out of these places are rooted within the interaction order of the institutions themselves.

Creating spatial 'solutions' to contain visible problems

Problematisations surrounding immigration and homelessness have led to sociospatial solutions which centre primarily on 'warehousing' (Vianelli, 2022: 41; Hopper, 2003; Gowan, 2010). Spatial containment is a key tenet of 'urban poverty management,' a geographical concept which captures the range of practices which aim to regulate poverty whilst maintaining civil order within the city (Evans and DeVerteuil, 2018: 308). A key outcome is the socio-spatial containment of potentially disruptive populations, within both geographical areas and dedicated services (Wolch and DeVerteuil, 2001). By containing problematic populations, poverty management strategies tackle the visible signs of poverty and enable society to 'preserve the ordinary rhythms of public life' (Greene, 2014: 318). As containment within each place is often only temporary, individuals bounce from one place to the next, in a form of 'institutionalised cycling' (DeVerteuil, 2003: 361). This perspective, which suggests that containment provides a key societal function insofar as visibility is concerned, will be returned to in Chapter Two.

> We must see the mental hospital in the recent historical context in which it developed, as one among a network of institutions designed to provide a residence for various categories of socially troublesome people. These institutions include nursing homes, general hospitals, veterans' homes, jails, geriatrics clinics, homes for the mentally retarded, work farms, orphanages, and old folks' homes (Goffman, 1961: 154)

Institutions have become a primary spatial solution to many 'problem' populations – to those who are somehow too visible and too out of place. Goffman notes that 'mental hospitals' only exist because there is a need for them, as once people are categorised as 'mentally ill' (Goffman, 1961: 135), to the extent that intervention is required, society needs somewhere to put them whilst they are 'treated' (1961: 225). In this sense, institutions are effectively 'forcing houses for changing persons' (Goffman, 1961: 12). If a central function of institutions is to contain and change certain groups, whether this is expressed or not, then individuals living in 'mental hospitals' may also find themselves contained within a wide range of additional places – such as those in the above quote. This kind of spatial segregation sees that 'troublesome people' are rounded up and contained within institutions alongside other 'abnormals' (Burns, 1992: 169). When living within one such place, individuals are not only contained within physical structures, but also databases, as bureaucratic organisation is key to institutions (Goffman, 1961). Bureaucracy enables small staff teams to manage whole blocks of people, starting with admission, as seen in the Prologue, where individuals are 'trimmed' and 'fed into the administrative machinery of the establishment' (Goffman, 1961: 16). Bureaucracy is considered more fully in Chapter Two.

Whilst intended to 'solve' problems, these places can create, breed, and perpetuate problems by their very design. The introductory example illustrates the dangers inherent in containing large quantities of 'vulnerable' people under one roof, as exploitation, violence, and other forms of harm become a normalised and routine aspect of institutional life. Staff within these institutions may feel overworked at best or unsafe at worst, as they must manage and process large numbers of inmates (McGrath and Pistrang, 2007; Renedo, 2014; Armstrong et al, 2021). Moreover, inmates often become stuck within these places or the broader 'institutional web' (see below) (Jackson, 2015; Mahoney, 2019). Given the

problematic nature of these places, this thesis will outline day-to-day life within one such institution, by focusing on the interaction order of a homeless hostel. This micro-level analysis of population and place, through the study of situated interactions, contrasts with and complements the structuralist approaches taken within human geography, which focus on 'service dependent ghettos' or 'service hubs' as assemblages of places within which marginal populations are contained (Dear and Wolch, 1987; DeVerteuil et al, 2022).

Making invisible places visible

> Just as we fill our jails with those who transgress the legal order, so we partly fill our asylums with those who act unsuitably (Goffman, 1963b: 248)

By stepping inside, and taking an ethnographic approach, to the homeless hostel – one of the places used to render populations less visible – this thesis makes day-to-day life within the institution visible. Institutions are a useful unit of analysis for many reasons. Firstly, as the similarities between them may be so glaring and persistent, it makes sense to look at the 'underlying structural design common to them all' (Goffman, 1961: 124). In doing so, it is possible to move beyond individual inmates and wardens, to appreciate the issues associated with institutions themselves, particularly as each institution likely sits within a broader 'institutional web.'

Secondly, whilst particular individuals, attitudes, beliefs, and language may come and go, the social organisation of the setting remains largely consistent over time. This social stability is a temporal achievement of the institution's members, who effectively do the same things time and time again, through production and reproduction, and by reference to established social expectations (Hughes, 1984). It follows that the challenges and barriers which individuals face are unlikely to be unique to them, rather they are rooted within the interaction order of the institution (Goffman, 1983). Inmates of the past, present, and future are therefore likely to experience similar issues.

Thirdly, there is an important relationship between self and setting. For example, a person can be a 'garçon de café only at a certain time, in a certain place, in a certain social setting,' so a server at McDonalds would hardly fit the bill (Hacking, 1986: 167). The roles we assume

are limited to those which are 'operationally relevant' according to a particular setting and activity, so whilst an 'inmate' may also be correctly categorizable as 'a husband,' 'a plumber', or 'a Christian,' these roles are of little relevance within the prison setting (Coulter, 1996: 342). It is important to remember that the self belongs to settings (Goffman, 1961). Goffman posits that the body is a mere peg in the study of the self, 'the means for producing and maintaining selves do not reside inside the peg; in fact, these means are often bolted down in social establishments' (1959: 253). Those caught in this perpetual state of 'institutionalised cycling' (DeVerteuil, 2003: 361) develop an 'institutional self' as they move between comparable institutions. We must therefore look to the institution to understand the institutional selves it produces and how 'inmates' negotiate and preserve their own sense of self in such conditions.

Interactional barriers to exiting institutions

This thesis illustrates how, by taking an ethnographic and interactionist approach to the homeless hostel, it is possible to make institutional barriers visible. Holbrook House is the pseudonym given to the English homeless hostel within which ethnographic data was collected. Most of Holbrook's residents have experience of living in similar institutions (see Chapter Five), as they have been caught cycling the 'institutional web' for years. They move from prison to the hostel, or from the hostel to a care home, or they bounce back and forth between the hostel and mental health hospitals. During the course of my research, they just happen to be in 'this place,' at this time, though are containable within any number of comparable places. In response to the circularity of movement around the 'institutional web,' this thesis seeks to understand what prevents individuals from getting out of 'this place' (see Chapter Five) and places like this.

Much of the existing literature on 'exiting' homelessness adopts a 'pathways' or 'careers' approach to homelessness, though each has received criticism (see Chapter Two). One tendency, within this body of literature, is to conceive of 'barriers' to exiting homelessness as existing at either the micro-level (personal barriers) or macro-level (structural barriers). This approach often results in a list of barriers which contribute to people becoming stuck, with factors like drug use and mental health sitting at one end of the spectrum, whilst unemployment and the benefits system sit at the other end (May, 2000b; Morrell-Bellai et

al, 2000; Ravenhill, 2003; Barrett et al, 2010; Lowe and Gibson, 2011; Williams and Stickley, 2011; Piat et al, 2014; Benjaminsen and Andrade, 2015; Johnson et al, 2015; Nilsson et al, 2019).

The interactionist approach taken within this thesis provides an alternate way of looking at the barriers to exiting institutions, and avoids this micro-macro dichotomy, by instead foregrounding the setting itself. In doing so, it asks what is it about 'this place' which prevents people from getting out – of the setting in a narrow sense and the 'institutional web' in a broader sense? Consequently, this thesis offers a deeper understanding of the ways in which interactional barriers are rooted within the interaction orders of institutions. From this perspective, we can appreciate how certain unseen barriers are folded into the everyday experiences of hostel users, as they may be such an obvious consequence of living at a place like this, that they often go unnoticed (see Chapter Seven). For instance, it is only through situated interactions within Home Office Hotels that child abductions are conceived of as a normal consequence of living there.

Given that individuals and structures are 'the joint products of an interaction order sui generis' – i.e., their existence depends on interaction in the first place – the study of situated interaction provides a different way of thinking about those 'micro' and 'macro' barriers (Rawls, 1987: 138). Chapter Eight illustrates that whilst 'drug use' can act as a barrier to moving on, the barrier does not exist at the 'micro-level,' but within bureaucratic inter-institutional interactions which require concrete and tick-box reductions in usage, as evidence of 'move on readiness,' a status which acts as a precursor to a 'positive' movement. Moreover, whilst most of the hostel's residents are unemployed, this barrier does not exist at the 'macro-level,' but is a product of 'hyper inclusion' within a place like this and the taken-for-granted assumption that 'you can't work and live here' (see Chapter Seven). This alternative way of seeing offers a messier and more nuanced understanding of the interactional barriers to exiting institutions like Holbrook House.

Concepts and contributions

This thesis makes a number of contributions to the academic literature. By taking an interactionist approach to the topic of barriers to exiting homelessness, it illustrates how

barriers are entrenched within with interaction orders of settings, and the significance thereof, a phenomenon which is only made visible through the use of ethnography. This situated approach to qualitative research offers academics a new way of seeing, thinking about, and understanding a multitude of issues, within the field of housing studies and beyond. Methodologically, it encourages qualitative researchers to challenge the conflation of 'positionality' with biography, as 'roles' are ascribed and not selected within the hostel context, whilst 'spatial positionality' is found to be a more important determinant of role than gender, class, or similar characteristics (see Chapter Four). Moreover, a number of key concepts – '*the institutional web*,' '*hyper inclusion*' and '*learning to see*' and '*learning not to see*' – are developed herein, which further our knowledge and understanding of institutions, such as the homeless hostel.

The institutional web

> Why don't people move on? 'It's the system' says the man with the mohawk, 'it keeps the middle-class wealthy.' He links addiction, unemployment, and imprisonment together with a string of statistics, '80% of prisoners use, but it's cheaper to keep them in there than treat them. I've been waiting 10 years for help with my addiction, became an addict when I was 20 and I'm 40 now.' I say he can talk to me any time, but he insists, 'when I unload it affects people's mental health.' (Fieldnotes, 18/09/21)

The 'institutional web' captures the cyclic movements of individuals as they bounce between a range of institutions. Other academics have similarly described this collection of institutions and services – which include night shelters, detox facilities, hospitals, prisons, and homeless health service – as 'a service hub,' 'homeless network,' or 'institutional bricolage' (Lowndes and McCaughie, 2013; Jackson, 2015; DeVerteuil et al, 2022). However, this thesis argues that the term 'institutional web' is more apt, given the multiple institutional intersections and the tendency for some to become stuck in this web once they enter such places.

Further, rather than comprising a pre-mapped network of institutions, the 'institutional web' is continually talked into being and made visible, for example, through previous

institutional points of contact (Chapter Five) and practices surrounding 'moving on' and 'getting out' (Chapter Eight). Interactions captured in this thesis highlight the institutional interconnections between homeless hostels, care homes, detox centres, prisons, hospitals, and mental health hospitals – all of which have, at some point or another, formed part of this interactional 'web.' The institutional web is a product of interaction.

The stickiness of the institutional web is evident in the way members talk about it, as in the above extract, where a resident describes being contained in various institutions without being given any real help. Members often describe moving around and around a series of institutions without getting anywhere at all (see Chapter Five). By focusing on mobility (or immobility) within the web, this concept highlights that the same people may find themselves in prisons, hospitals, and homeless hostels at different points in their lives. Labels such as 'care leaver,' 'prisoner,' and 'drug user' may therefore apply to the same indistinct 'troublesome' group of people, by virtue of them being pushed from one place to the next, as they reside in each for a short period of time. This concept has a cynical undertone, as inmates find themselves stuck in a constant state of motion, as they become 'fixed in mobility' (Jackson, 2015: 5; 2012).

Hyper inclusion

When individuals become caught up in the variety of places which make up the institutional web, they find that they also become 'hyper included' within those institutions and services. In consequence, they are forcibly plugged into multiple bureaucracies and are required to routinely engage with any number of services, as they disclose information, meet with service providers, and take medications, for example (Lipsky, 2010; Graeber, 2015). The Prologue illustrates the process of becoming 'hyper included' and the kind of trimming which this may entail (Goffman, 1961: 16). This concept expands Evans' argument, that individuals are 'included through their exclusion' (2011: 31), by illustrating that they are simultaneously excluded through their inclusion. This is most clearly illustrated in Chapter Seven, through the series of 'institutionally-backed abnormalities' which stem from 'hyper inclusion,' such as the need to resort to illegal or degrading means of making money when contained within institutions. The irony is that whilst these institutions aim to 'normalise' individuals, 'hyper inclusion' may actively inhibit their ability to lead 'normal' lives, and

conversely provoke 'abnormal' reactions (Becker, 2018). A final point on 'hyper inclusion' is that it offers an alternative and more accurate discourse to that of 'social exclusion,' as it is difficult to say that the kind of individuals who become caught in the web are socially excluded when appointments, curfews, and treatments ensure that they are more plugged into our society, through routine engagement with services and systems, than most.

Learning to see and learning not to see

Chapter Six pays attention to the experiences of the staff at Holbrook House, an important chapter given the paucity of research on this area. It considers how the staff team are caught between the desire to care and change people's lives, and the everyday need to exert control and process people. One consequence of the 'ordinary institutional troubles' which staff at any institution face – overburdening, understaffing, and multiple competing demands – is that the daily round of staff activity resembles that of a people-processing institution (Lipsky, 2010; Goffman, 1961; Bittner, 1967).

Faced with a constant stream of demands, the staff team must exercise discretion *in situ,* by 'learning to see' and 'learning not to see.' 'Learning to see' what is really 'up' at the hostel is a skill developed by old hands through years of knowledge and experience (Wieder, 1974: 108; Bittner, 1967). It is by learning to see in a certain way – according to situated understandings of normality – that the staff learn to see the normal in the abnormal and vice versa, and therefore know when to intervene. 'Learning not to see' is equally as important, as when faced with an array of 'ordinary institutional troubles,' staff must learn when it is safe for them to turn a blind eye.

A note on language

There are points throughout this thesis where I use the term 'inmates.' In these instances, I am not referring to prisoners, but to any collection of individuals who find themselves contained within an institution, as Goffman himself did in Asylums (1961).

The term 'pathway' or 'homelessness pathway' crops up twice within this thesis. Whilst I try to make clear which 'pathway' I am referring to at any given time, I will distinguish them

here for the sake of clarity. In the first instance, it describes the body of academic literature which centres on individual's journeys into, through, and out of homelessness (see Chapter Two). In the second, it refers to the treatment-first model of housing within which Holbrook House is located (see Chapter Five). This surely attests to the popularity of this metaphor.

This thesis sometimes adopts the term 'the homeless' as opposed to 'people experiencing homelessness' – although the latter is now considered more appropriate – as this reflects the way in which this group is often talked about.

The terms 'micro-level' and 'macro-level' barriers are used within this thesis to refer to personal and structural barriers respectively, as this reflects the language used within the housing studies literature. The term 'micro,' when used in this way, refers to personal barriers and not microsociology in the Goffmanian sense.

Structure of the thesis

The remainder of the thesis is organised in the following way. Chapter Two further draws on some of the themes which have been introduced in this opening chapter. It starts by exploring the academic literature on pathways through homelessness, probing the ideas of 'exits' and 'barriers' which are contained within it, whilst critiquing its tendency to dichotomise macro-level and micro-level issues. It then considers the intermediary nature of homeless hostels and comparable institutions, as they become caught up in the vertical and horizontal axes of poverty governance (Seim, 2017). The literature on urban poverty management then helps readers to understand the patchwork-like quality of the 'institutional web,' which inhabits a 'messy middle ground' (Cloke et al, 2010: 11) of poverty governance (Evans and DeVerteuil, 2018). The treatment-first model of housing is then introduced and criticised on several grounds, including its normative underpinnings, arbitrary nature of 'housing readiness,' moralising undertones, and general ineffectiveness. The chapter then looks back at recent homelessness policy and the historical use of institutions as spatial solutions, to understand how and why homeless hostels and treatment-first models have become solutions to the problem of homelessness. It concludes by focusing on discrepancies in idealised mobility (i.e., pathways through and out of services

in a linear direction) and actual mobility (i.e., the indefinite cycling of the 'institutional web' in a circular motion).

Chapter Three redresses the micro-macro dichotomy set out in Chapter Two, by advocating in favour of an alternative theoretical approach to the study of 'barriers' and 'exits,' which focuses on interaction and is rooted in the work of Erving Goffman. It introduces two of Goffman's most significant contributions in arguing that a study of the interaction order (1983) of institutions (1961) provides a more holistic and complex understanding of this topic. It then explores different approaches to normality, namely normative and situated, and explains how 'doing being ordinary' is always context-specific (Sacks, 1984). The chapter then introduces the concepts of people-processing (Lipsky, 2010), learning to see (Hall, 2016), and discretion (Bittner, 1967), which can help researchers to better understand the staff world. Finally, it considers institutional categorisation practices, which can have consequences for the institutional self, and must therefore be handled via situated identity-management strategies. The overriding argument is that because barriers to exiting homeless hostels (and other institutions) exist at the level of interaction, researchers should turn their attention to the interaction orders of these institutions (Goffman, 1983).

Chapter Four introduces the reader to the methodology and methods employed within this thesis, by exploring what ethnography is and why it is the most suitable methodological approach for this research. Ethnography enables researchers to get into the field, see what is going on, and speak to those concerned. That means entering and observing places which are used to contain and conceal 'problematic' populations, whilst gaining the perspective of members of that institution (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; LeCompte and Schensul, 2010; Asare, 2015). The chapter then introduces the reader to Holbrook House more fully through formal and informal access negotiations. It was at this point – when trying to gain access to the residents – that I began to question the concept of 'positionality.' The following discussion contributes to the methodological literature by challenging the 'researcher identity,' recognising that roles are ascribed and not selected, whilst contesting common portrayals of simplistic transitions from 'outsider to insider.' Instead, it appreciates that identity is constantly being done *in situ,* and pays particular attention to the spatial dynamics of identity construction, for example, as being the kind of person who can go here

or should not be there, which I term 'spatial positionality.' It then recounts the many ups and downs which accompany attempts to undertake an ethnographic study during a global pandemic, conceiving of the various COVID-19-related waves and lockdowns as a series of 'entries' to and 'exits' from the field. Finally, rather than regurgitating Cardiff University's tick-box ethics form, it explores some of the ethical dilemmas which arose and were handled *in situ*.

Chapter Five is the first of four findings chapters. It focuses on 'this place,' a phrase commonly used by informants, in order to illuminate different understandings of the hostel. Firstly, 'the pathway' represents the official version of reality and a structure which is sometimes talked into being, for instance, when staff deliberate Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), or residents say they are 'playing the game to get out.' Secondly, 'this place' is used by residents as a placeholder for all sorts of maladies and misfortunes, including the numerous territorial breaches which themselves are built into the interaction order of the hostel. It is also used to account for present circumstance, including an inability to get out of this place. Finally, 'the institutional web' is an analytic concept, made visible through hostel-based interactions, which locates the hostel amongst a broader web of institutions and services, within which individuals can become stuck cycling (DeVerteuil, 2003; Jackson, 2015; Seim, 2017; Mahoney, 2019).

Chapter Six foregrounds the staff world. It opens with an extended fieldnote taken from the night shift, which illustrates some of the 'ordinary institutional troubles' which the staff team face alongside grumbles that 'staff do nothing.' These day-to-day troubles take place against a backdrop in which the hostel is gradually being coerced into becoming a people-processing institution – or an 'Assessment Centre.' Despite organisational policy, discretion is an inevitable aspect of the staff role, as staff must constantly decide who gets a tea, a room swap, or access to the phone room. Discretionary practices are situated and often rely on knowledge, experience, and practicalities, such as staff availability (Bittner, 1967). In becoming a staff member, novices must 'learn to see' and 'learn not to see' like a member of staff i.e., learn when to respond and when to turn a blind eye. The chapter concludes with the common frustration – 'what do you want us to do?' – which speaks to the enduring

nature of institutional interactions, such as territorial violations in places like this, and the staff team's inability to do anything about them.

Chapter Seven looks at how residents must negotiate normalities within the hostel. In order to 'get by,' they must acclimatise to situated understandings of normality and what it means to 'do being ordinary' at Holbrook House (Sacks, 1984: 415). For example, within the hostel it is normal for residents to steal, shout, and use drugs. Conversely, stigma is sometimes ascribed when a resident behaves too normatively normal – when they are too clean, both literally and figuratively. By focusing on substance use, this chapter demonstrates the possibility of being both an abnormal user and normal non-user, by highlighting how identity work and stigma are done *in situ*. It then considers how normativity lurks in the background of hostel-based interactions, by using examples of work and money making, addiction substitutes and services, and the ability to withhold money and information. Each example illustrates the ways in which hostel members are 'hyper included' within the institutional web, and some of the 'institutionally-backed abnormalities' which follow. This discourse of 'hyper inclusion' offers an alternative to 'social exclusion.' Finally, it considers the stigma of 'being seen' as a member of this place, given the squashing of the 'institutional self' which occurs within its walls, together with three situated stigma-management strategies, namely invoking alternate identities, 'wilful disattention' (Smith, 2011: 371), and distancing through 'hierarchies of stigma.'

Chapter Eight follows residents as they 'get out' of the hostel. It contrasts pathway-approved 'move ons' with the need to simply 'get out,' highlighting a disconnect between the ideality and actuality of movements, in linear and circular motions, respectively. Moreover, by failing to record moves down the pathway or institutionalised cycling, the pathway does not measure these circular movements, effectively concealing these 'institutional measures of failure.' Within the pathway, moves are moralised and conceived of as either 'positive' or 'negative,' yet there is a further disconnect between recordability and experience. 'Positive' moves do not always reflect that label, as some are triggered by extreme disruption and a need get somebody out, often via the process of 'burden shuffling' (Seim, 2017: 452). In order to become 'move on ready,' a status which proceeds positive movement, it is more important that residents 'play the game' than make any fundamental

change. Even when individuals do make it out of the hostel or pathway, they are haunted by their institutional selves in subtle ways. Further, 'negative' moves, such as eviction, abandonment, and prison recall, may actually be the best thing for an individual at that time, especially if they can no longer handle living in 'this place' (McMordie, 2021a).

Chapter Nine brings everything together and provides an overview of the key findings, contributions, and concepts which are set out in this thesis, whilst noting the various audiences and academic fields who may benefit most from these contributions.

In sum, this thesis argues that the challenges and barriers which all hostel members face are the product of interaction. Each concept introduced in this thesis – including territorial violations, ordinary institutional troubles, normality, identity management, mobility, and bureaucracy – are interaction order phenomena and must be considered as such. Ethnography is therefore the preferred methodological approach, as it is capable of grasping these institutional barriers, as participant observation in particular can make visible the most mundane of challenges, such as Lincoln's struggle to get through to the bank in the Prologue. These barriers exist in plain sight, researchers simply need to get into the field to appreciate them. In short, this thesis argues that the barriers to exiting institutions are rooted within the interaction orders of those institutions, which is accessible predominantly through the observation of situated interactions.

Chapter two: Containing the problem – hostels as a solution to visible homelessness

> I stand by the radiator and a man approaches me, 'you're not gonna get many people talking to you about that' he points. I look at the COVID-19 poster behind me and clarify, 'I'm interested in the things that help people to move on or stop them from moving on from here.' He uses the wall as a canvas and draws an invisible map with his index finger, 'I've gone from here to here to here to here,' he says and lists the various places he has bounced between. He once had a flat 'on the social' but lost it over eight years ago, and has been 'waiting' for another ever since. 'I'm not bidding[2]' he adds, 'I don't know where I stand.' The smell of alcohol lingers in the air. When he sees a female staff member, he tells her that he needs to go to court today – 'I had a little scrap, it was just a conversation really' – then asks, 'will you marry me?' 'Not today,' she says with a smile (Fieldnotes, 10/03/20).

As the man's finger skims the wall, he traces out the 'institutional web' within which he has become stuck over the last eight years. For this man – and a large proportion of Holbrook House's residents – homeless hostels are just one point amidst a diverse web of institutions. Chapter One has already established that certain groups are constructed as 'problematic' or 'troublesome,' whilst spatial containment within an array of institutions has become a natural solution to their being. In other words, this man is part of the problem which homeless hostels, and other institutions, have been designed to solve.

This chapter starts with the specific problem under investigation – namely, the barriers to exiting homelessness – and critiques of the current academic approaches to this topic. It then considers the liminal or limbo-like nature of homeless hostels and positions them alongside a range of other intermediary institutions. Taken together, these intermediary institutions make up the 'institutional web' – an interwoven and interconnected series of places, used to spatially manage a troublesome population. It then provides a reverse chronology, by considering homeless hostels and the accompanying treatment-first ideology, within the context of recent policy and the historical use of institutions as a form

[2] Applying for council properties.

of containment. Finally, it focuses on mobility around the institutional web – as the man above illustrates – arguing that forced and continual motion around the web performs a function in itself. Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that there is some confusion and discord about what 'this place' actually is (see Chapter Five). By turning the reader's attention to the institution itself, and interactions within it, this chapter paves the way for a new way of seeing the issues surrounding 'barriers' and 'exits.' This alternative theoretical approach is subsequently outlined in Chapter Three.

Pathways, barriers, and exits from homelessness

This research originally set out to understand some of the 'barriers' to 'exiting' homelessness, borrowing language from literature which focuses on 'homeless careers', and more recently, 'homelessness pathways' (Fitzpatrick, 1999; Fitzpatrick et al, 2000; Anderson and Tulloch, 2000; May, 2000a; Anderson and Christian, 2003; Clapham, 2002; 2003; Johnson et al, 2008; Harding et al, 2011; Fitzpatrick et al, 2013). This body of literature offers the predominant means of understanding 'exits' and 'barriers,' as it follows the journey into, experiences of, and exits from homelessness. This research offers one way of looking at the multiple difficulties which individuals face as they become trapped in a cycle of homelessness and stuck within the institutional web. Importantly, this body of literature appreciates that homelessness is not a static issue, and as such, it must be studied alongside mobility.

However, many of these studies focus on the early or middle stages of homeless 'careers' or 'pathways,' as they seek to understand the 'causes' of homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al, 2013), or probe individuals' experiences of homelessness (Williams and Stickley, 2011). Whilst this literature says a lot about who becomes homeless and their experiences of homelessness, it focuses less on the process of 'exiting' homelessness. However, a growing body of literature has sought to address this gap, by conceiving of pathways 'out' of homelessness. Research on young people's exits from homelessness have been particularly prominent, with successful 'exits' being attributed to a range of often interlinking factors, such as, educational attainment (Nilsson et al, 2019), having a partner (Nilsson et al, 2019), the assistance of service providers (Patterson et al, 2015), access to stable housing (Mayock et

al, 2013), family support (Nebbitt et al, 2007), engagement with drug treatment (Mayock et al 2011), and distancing from homeless peers (Karabanow, 2008).

It is broadly accepted that the longer an individual remains homeless, the harder it is for them to exit the cycle of homelessness (Somerville, 2013). Several international studies have consequently sought to understand the 'barriers' to exiting homelessness amongst the adult homeless population. These barriers are often conceived of as individual or micro-level on the one hand, and structural or macro-level on the other. Micro-level barriers to exiting homelessness include stigma, substance abuse, high levels of debt, childhood abuse or neglect, mental health issues, a lack of support, and relationship problems (May, 2000b; Morrell-Bellai et al, 2000; Barrett et al, 2010; Lowe and Gibson, 2011; Williams and Stickley, 2011; Piat et al, 2014; Nilsson et al, 2019). Macro-level barriers include poverty, unemployment, benefits systems, a lack of affordable housing, living in institutional settings, overlaps between the care system, prison, and homelessness, limited 'move on' options, and access to support services (May, 2000b; Morrell-Bellai et al, 2000; Ravenhill, 2003; Harding et al, 2011; Barrett et al, 2010; Piat et al, 2014; Benjaminsen and Andrade, 2015; Johnson et al, 2015).

Whilst these approaches undoubtedly provide valuable insights into both 'exits' from homelessness and 'barriers' to exiting homelessness, they are not without criticism. Firstly, what amounts to an 'exit' is often ambiguous and lacks consistency across the literature. May (2000b) criticises Piliavin et al's (1993) measure of 'exits,' as not only did they adopt 14 nights as the arbitrary marker of an exit, but they considered time spent in any form of independent accommodation an exit, including that which was insecure or institutional. Somerville (2013) criticises the 'general fuzziness' of homelessness pathways on similar grounds. He notes that Mayock et al (2008), recorded one person as 'exiting' homelessness despite their tenancy being unsustainable, owing to substance use, suicidal feelings, involvement in crime, and other factors which made for a fragile housing situation. The oversimplification of exit routes and short-term measures of success fail to account for episodic homelessness, as they overlook returns to, and a potentially infinite cycling of, the homeless circuit (Ravenhill, 2003). This feeds into more general criticisms regarding measures of homelessness, including the quantification of homelessness (Busch-Geertsema

et al, 2016), and the measurements of 'success' within homelessness services (Johnson and Pleace, 2016).

The second critique relates to the methods used to understand these 'exits' and 'barriers.' Most of the studies outlined above rely solely on interview data, which can be problematic if accounts are taken as direct insights into the minds and worlds of informants, without appreciating that they are performative in character and socially constructed according to context (Atkinson and Coffey, 2003; Hammersley, 2003). Jackson (2015) found that in interviews, young people experiencing homelessness often closed down lines of inquiry, or told her what they thought she wanted to hear, due to the peculiarities of interview context. These reserved and regurgitated interview performances were particularly stark when contrasted with lively and spirited portrayals of the same individuals in fieldnotes (Jackson, 2015). Interviews are accounts, they allow people to say what they do, whilst participant observation enables researchers to see what they actually do (Atkinson and Coffey, 2003) (see Chapter Four). This distinction aligns with Goffman's two forms of communication, expressions 'given' are usually verbal assertions which are easily engineered, whilst expressions 'given off' are usually non-verbal, theatrical, unintentional, and less easily engineered (1959: 4). This thesis does not oppose the use of interviews, rather it argues for their triangulation with more observational methods, such as those capable of capturing face-to-face interactions between service providers and service users, as this is where key processes are played out (Clapham, 2002).

Thirdly, academics are becoming increasingly critical of the tendency to dichotomise the micro-level and macro-level factors outlined above, as not only is it difficult to pigeonhole certain factors as being as one or the other, such as poor parenting or marital breakdown, but it is now widely appreciated that the two levels are intertwined and interact in complex ways (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Ravenhill, 2003; Piat et al, 2014; Johnson et al, 2015; Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018). Despite this realisation, there is little consensus on how to resolve this micro-macro dichotomy. For example, whilst a 'new orthodoxy' was proposed by some as a means of reconciling the two – by positioning vulnerable individuals as being more susceptible to structural factors (Pleace, 2000) – it has been criticised for lacking theoretical rigour (Fitzpatrick, 2005). Moving beyond the micro-macro division as an ubiquitous starting

point for understanding barriers and exits, some have turned their attention to the 'meso' level as an alternative point of entry, conceiving of this intermediary level as 'situational' (Barrett et al, 2010) or 'mesosystemic' (Sample and Ferguson, 2020), although this is not well documented or theorised. Even more notably, little attention has been paid to the interaction order of hostels or similar institutional spaces.

In addressing the above critiques, this piece of research uniquely seeks to understand the ways in which these 'exits' and 'barriers' play out *in situ*, through the observation of institutional interactions and an understanding of the interaction order of the homeless hostel (Clapham, 2002; Ravenhill, 2003). This unique theoretical and methodological approach to the topic is set out in Chapters Three and Four respectively. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the intermediary nature of homeless hostels, and other places within the institutional web, the geographical literature on poverty management, the prevalent treatment-first models of housing, transformations in homelessness policy over the last 50 years, the institutional lineage of homeless hostels, and the interconnections between visibility and mobility against this backdrop.

Homeless hostels and other intermediary institutions

> 'I've got to get out,' says Lincoln.
>
> 'When are you getting out?' I ask.
>
> 'Nobody knows when they're getting out' (Fieldnotes, 19/11/21)

The academic literature already establishes that homeless hostels are problematic in multiple ways, including on grounds of safety and security, paternalism and infantilisation, bureaucracy, rules and regulations, recruiting and retaining staff, high levels of drug use, multiple intersecting support needs, a lack of move on options, and impacts on social and emotional wellbeing (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007; Hoffman and Coffey, 2008; Donley and Wright, 2012; Stevenson, 2014; Homeless Link, 2018; Mahoney, 2019; Pleace, 2020; McMordie, 2021a; 2021b; O'Shaughnessy and Greenwood, 2021). As such, I will not dwell

on these here. Instead, it is argued that many of these issues are attributable to the intermediary positioning of homeless hostels and other places within the 'institutional web.'

Homeless hostels are often characterised by their intermediary nature, having been described as 'grey zones' (Evans, 2011), 'hybrid or mongrel' institutions (Hopper, 2003), 'liminal spaces' (Tunåker, 2015; Chamberlain and Johnson, 2018), 'places of waiting' (Jackson, 2015), or 'living in limbo' (Mitchell, 2004; Garvie et al, 2023). Like halfway houses, they may be intended as a 'bridge' back to 'normal' society (Wieder, 1974: 48). However, in actuality they are often used as places within which to 'warehouse' or 'dump' the visible homeless (Hopper, 2003; Gowan, 2010; Marr, 2015). From an institutional perspective, homeless hostels are comparable to a range of other 'holding stations' (Goffman, 1961: 354), such as rehabilitation centres, mental health hospitals, halfway houses, and refugee asylums (Evans, 2011). The homeless hostel is therefore not an end destination, but an intermediary place within which people await an uncertain and uncontrollable fate.

Seim (2017) enables us to appreciate the intermediary nature of homeless hostels, through his conceptualisation of the vertical and horizontal axes of poverty governance. Along the vertical axis, hostels are pulled from above and below and represent a compromise between various competing aims. For instance, hostels are pulled from above by the need to meet targets and secure funding from those who control its operations (i.e., the local authority and government). Equally, they are pulled from below by an impulse to care for those who depend upon, and are processed by, the institution (i.e., the hostel's residents) (Seim, 2017). Hostels are therefore caught up in several competing concerns and demands, between punitive and social welfare responses, caring and controlling impulses, and regulative and supportive interactions (DeVerteuil, 2006; Evans, 2011; Watts et al, 2018). This verticality positions homeless hostels, and similar institutions, as street-level bureaucracies, responsible for delivering benefits and sanctions on behalf of the government (Wolch, 1990; Lipsky, 2010; Evans, 2011). This backdrop characterises the everyday experiences of all hostel members, as they navigate these competing aims, and tensions which arise as a result. Support staff may experience conflicts in this duality of their role, as they must simultaneously discipline and support their residents, acting as both counsellor and gatekeeper (McGrath and Pistrang, 2007; Renedo, 2014). Chapter Five illustrates how these

tensions play out in respect of the hostel's aims, as a place of refuge and change on the one hand, and a place to process and meet targets on the other (Jackson, 2015).

Along the horizontal axis (Seim, 2017), hostels are physical spaces of transition which sit alongside a range of other intermediary institutions – each of which only contains individuals temporarily – and together make up the 'institutional web.' Each place is meant for short-term use, as is evident in the physical spaces which deter prolonged usage (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007) and a preoccupation with moving people on (Dobson, 2022). As such, people tend to flow between these places, which collectively represent 'a series of laterally interacting institutions' along the horizontal axis (Seim, 2017: 451). Horizontality encourages researchers to focus on mobility, as individuals move between and around these institutional settings. DeVerteuil foregrounds mobility through his concept of 'institutionalised cycling,' which encapsulates the often-involuntary movements of various 'disruptive' populations:

> across diverse array of unrelated, time-limited settings - including standard residential dwelling units, shelters, jails, prisons, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, single-room occupancy (SRO) hotels, and the streets (2003: 361).

The vertical and horizontal dimensions of poverty governance add another dimension to the 'institutional web,' as it encourages researchers to think not only about the range of institutions which make up the web, but the various, competing demands which these institutions may face.

The messy middle ground of spatial management

The geographical literature on urban poverty management helps researchers to rationalise the intermediary nature of homeless hostels and other institutions, which have become a 'solution' to homelessness (Wolch and DeVerteuil, 2001). Poverty management is underscored by the socio-spatial management of the visibly poor, often through containment within a range of institutions, which effectively renders them invisible (Evans and DeVerteuil, 2018; Long and Evans, 2023). Whilst this approach may appear to be unduly punitive, poverty management is not premised solely on control, rather it represents more

of a 'messy middle ground' (Cloke et al, 2010: 11) made up of 'caring, curing, and controlling institutions,' such as food banks, health services, detox centres, and prisons (Evans and DeVerteuil, 2018: 308). Given that they operate within this messy middle ground, it is unsurprising that tensions, discrepancies, and ambiguities play out within homeless hostels and other intermediary institutions. For Evans and DeVerteuil (2018), these institutions are spatial manifestations of distinct poverty management strategies, for example, treatment facilities are rooted in the strategy of rehabilitation, whilst prisons stem from punishment.

However, the aims of 'caring' and 'controlling' are not necessarily exclusive – institutionally or interactionally – as the two often overlap as society responds to homelessness. The homeless day centre, for example, is a key setting within which these two aims collide. Often thought of as a space of refuge, within which its users can receive care and support, day centres are equally underpinned by various fragile and subtle forms of social control (Johnsen et al, 2005; Jackson, 2015). Outreach work provides a further example, as on the one hand, outreach workers befriend and provide immediate street-based care to rough sleepers, whilst on the other, they are responsible for 'managing and manoeuvring them' off the streets (Smith and Hall, 2018: 379). Homeless hostels are used to contain those experiencing homelessness, as they are swept up off the streets, thereby tackling the visible signs of poverty and enabling society to 'preserve the ordinary rhythms of public life' (Greene, 2014: 318).

The broader web of intermediary institutions has a patchwork-like quality, owing to its gradual development over time, either in line with, or as a response to gaps left by, changes in government policy (Gowan, 2010; Jackson, 2015). The next sections will therefore consider recent policy approaches to homelessness and the historical development of such institutions, which together have culminated in the use of homeless hostels as part of England's poverty management regime, largely in its drive to contain and conceal this problem population (DeVerteuil, 2003).

Contemporary containment within the treatment-first model

The treatment-first model of housing – the most common form of supported housing in the UK – is premised on movement through a series of intermediary housing options. This

approach is sometimes referred to as a 'pathway' or a 'staircase' in recognition of the intended linearity of movement through these services (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010). The ideal is that individuals progress through a series of temporary services, proving that they are 'housing ready' at each stage, before moving into the next. The 'housing ready' status is often bestowed in recognition of 'normal' behaviour, such as keeping a tidy room or being able to manage your own front door[3] (Marquardt, 2016), and rewarded with accommodation which gradually becomes more 'normal' (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010). Individuals may move from hostels to shared houses to self-contained flats, before being given the ultimate prize of independent housing when (or rather, if) they make it out the other side (Dordick, 2002). Hostels typically sit on the lowest rungs of the treatment-first model and are the first square in a game of housing snakes and ladders (Jackson, 2015). This is significant in two respects. Firstly, by conceiving of homeless hostels as a starting point, they represent the beginning of an individual's journey through various less visible forms of homelessness. Secondly, as the starting point in a series of accommodation options which become progressively more 'normal,' the insinuation is that hostels are relatively abnormal places (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010).

Progression rests on the perceived 'housing readiness' of individuals, an ambiguous term which results in arbitrary judgements by service providers as to whether an individual is 'ready' to manage a lower level of support or not (Warren and Barnes, 2021). Given that treatment-first models entail multiple levels, it is also premised on 'multiple stages of eligibility and prioritisation' (Warren and Barnes, 2021: 51). Indicators of 'readiness' may centre on an individual's ability to abide by social norms, and may be seen in transformations, for example, from dependence to independence, substance use to sobriety, dirtiness to cleanliness (Brookfield et al, 2021; Marquardt, 2016). The model effectively rewards normative changes, and only provides stable and independent housing – the end goal – to those deemed 'deserving' or 'worthy' on this basis (Dordick, 2002; Sahlin, 2005; Stewart, 2019). In essence, progression through the pathway, or up the staircase, is conditioned upon 'abnormal' individuals demonstrating their ability to become 'normal' (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010). Conditionality is evident across a range of systems and

[3] This phrase is common within homelessness services. It refers to an individual's ability to control who comes into their accommodation.

services, including the welfare system (Deacon, 2004; Watts et al, 2018). Where progression is linked to worthiness, street-level bureaucracies may prioritise 'star candidates' based on a motivation to engage and an ability to meet the formal requirements of an institution (Volckmar-Eeg and Vassenden, 2020: 169). Given the centrality of the institutional frame in determining 'housing readiness' and similar statuses, a focus on the institution enables researchers to understand how models, like treatment-first housing, play out in interactions.

A focus on institutional interactions may highlight that whilst mobility is embedded within treatment-first housing, discrepancies exist between idealised movements (i.e., those contained within targets) and actual movements. The promise of 'moving up' the pathway or staircase is the carrot, dangled before service users to secure their compliance under the guise of 'housing readiness' (Sahlin, 2005; Mahoney, 2019). As accommodation further up the pathway is often more favourable – or 'normal' – mobility can be used to reward, through moves 'up,' or punish, through moves 'down' (Sahlin, 2005). However, this 'moralisation of movement' – the labelling of some moves as 'positive' (good) and others 'negative' (bad) – does not always reflect the actual circumstances of a move. For instance, McMordie (2021a) notes that whilst 'abandonments' are regarded negatively, they may actually be the best option for an individual in certain circumstances. Moreover, whilst moves 'back' or 'down' the pathway may be a consequence of institutional interactions – inadequate support, for instance – they are often framed as personal failings (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009).

It is unsurprising that this approach has its critics (Ridgway and Zipple, 1990; Hoch, 2000; Busch-Geertsema, 2010; Sahlin, 2005; Wong et al., 2006; Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007; Marquardt, 2016; Stewart, 2019). Firstly, despite evidence that this approach does not work, including high attrition rates, the model continues to expand (Sahlin, 2005; Johnsen and Teixeira 2010). Secondly, this model employs the rhetoric of 'social improvement' (Hoch, 2000), as it focuses on the deficiencies of 'the homeless', a population conceived of 'incapable of independent living' and therefore undeserving of normal housing (Sahlin, 2005: 125). Thirdly, as those with complex needs may be unable to meet the demands of this model, it is unlikely that they will ever make sufficient progress, or reach

the end of the pathway (Dordick, 2002; Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007; Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010). Finally, the metaphors and discourse employed by this model imply a degree of choice (Fopp, 2009; Stewart, 2019), whilst conceiving of forward motion as 'good' and backwards as 'bad,' which effectively moralises movement (see Chapter Eight). Jackson proposes an alternative, and more accurate, metaphor: 'it is like a housing version of Snakes and Ladders – possible to go up and also very easy to slide down' (2015: 106). The model itself perpetuates the cyclical movements of individuals as they are pushed from one intermediary institution to the next (Patterson et al, 2015).

Housing-first is an alternate model of housing and represents something of a paradigm shift. This model provides individuals with accommodation in the first instance, before offering (but not compelling them to accept) further support (Stewart, 2019). It does not try to 'fix' clients or force them to become 'housing ready,' in fact there are no behavioural requirements for this model (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010). What it does do is provide a stable place from which further changes can be made. Mackie et al (2017) have consequently found this approach to be much stronger than any other housing-based interventions. Whilst 'housing-first' may seem promising, the 'treatment-first' approach continues to dominate the supported housing landscape. The next section will consider how recent homelessness policy has led to a position in which treatment-first housing has become the preferred form of containment.

Policies on homelessness: The last 50 years

From the late 1960s, homelessness re-emerged as a central political issue, following calls for government intervention (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000). This resulted in the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977[4], under which local authorities were responsible for housing those experiencing homelessness, provided that: there was a local connection, homelessness was unintentional, and there was a priority need. These criteria effectively distinguished the deserving from the undeserving, and prioritised families and pregnant women, largely to the exclusion of single homeless individuals, whom the voluntary sector expanded to

[4] The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 applied to the whole of the UK, though housing policy later became devolved.

accommodate (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000; Pickvance, 2012; Jackson, 2015). The 1980s brought with it two decades of Thatcherism[5], which shrunk existing housing and shelter options for the poor, by decreasing the production of new social housing, selling off council homes under the Right to Buy scheme, closing very large hostels, and triggering the withdrawal of asylum provision (Cuncev, 2015). Thatcher's government was keen to move away from communal living and emphasised the need for a 'normalisation of lifestyle' amongst the homeless population (Cuncev, 2015: 29).

In 1997, New Labour took a different approach to homelessness, by positioning it in relation to the broader problem of 'social exclusion. ' Social exclusion was a culmination of multiple linked problems including unemployment, poor skills, inadequate housing, high crime rates, health issues, and family breakdown (Social Exclusion Unit, 1997). Munck criticised this definition for positioning the 'socially excluded' in relation to a normatively defined 'integrated individual,' which suggested that 'to be poor is to be excluded from ordinary living patterns' (2005: 23). The moralising discourses surrounding social exclusion constructed the excluded as lacking – either in finances, work, or morals – and reinforced notions of homelessness as an individual problem (Rosenthal, 2000; Levitas, 2005; Jackson, 2015). Moreover, the concept of 'social exclusion' gradually shifted emphasis from the process (becoming socially excluded) to the label (the socially excluded) (Huggins, 2017). However, given that individuals were forcibly included within so many different institutions (see below), the lingering discourse of 'social *exclusion*' was perhaps misleading. Evans instead described being caught up in a state of 'inclusive exclusion' (2011: 31), as institutions were founded upon a contradictory mixture of inclusion and exclusion. Whilst Evans argued that individuals were 'included through their exclusion' from wider society (2011: 31), here it is also argued that individuals become excluded through their '*hyper inclusion*' within institutions and services (see Chapter Seven).

New Labour also recognised the potential of the third sector, as 'repositories of staff, buildings and resources' which could be tapped into for the social good (Johnsen, 2014: 414). New modes of governing homelessness services were developed by transferring commissioning responsibilities to local authorities, and exerting greater control over how

[5] Thatcherism represents a political belief in free markets and a small state (Green, 1999).

non-statutory 'partner' agencies delivered services, largely through the implementation of strict performance targets (Cloke et al, 2010). These performance targets primarily focused on measures of 'move on' or 'throughput' i.e., the number of individuals who 'progress' through a service (Cloke et al, 2010; Jackson, 2015). The problem with employing market-based solutions to social problems was that the result could be impersonal, dehumanising, and self-interested (Dobson, 2022). This was particularly conflicting for partners in the third sector, such as faith-based organisations, whose social origins, ethos, or goals were completely disregarded in pursuit of targets (Carmel and Harlock, 2008; Johnsen, 2014). The rhetoric of 'saving souls' was consequently accompanied by a flow of bodies – from the streets to institutions, from tents to rooms, from visible spaces to invisible places (Mulder, 2004). A shift towards measurement may have undermined the work of partner agencies, paradoxically hindering an individual's ability to 'move on' (Cloke et al, 2010). This exacerbates the messy middle-groundedness of homeless hostels and other intermediary institutions (Cloke et al, 2010).

Under the coalition government of 2010, several strategic changes directly impacted homelessness services, including a spending review, housing reform, and welfare reforms, which included a cap on benefits and a shift to Universal Credit (Cuncev, 2015). Institutions and services were greatly impacted by an intensification of localism, in which local authorities become increasingly responsible for providing services, whilst being given fewer resources to do so (Jackson, 2015). For instance, Fitzpatrick et al (2019) noted a 78% real term reduction in Supporting People[6] funding since 2010. Fitzpatrick et al (2020) also illustrated how increases in homelessness since 2010 were a consequence of localist policymaking, which in itself tended to disadvantage marginalised populations, such as those experiencing homelessness.

Politicians often narrowly equate homelessness with rough sleeping. Whilst rough sleeping is only the tip of the iceberg, it is certainly the most visible form of homelessness. Current policies which aim to 'end rough sleeping' (DLUCH, 2022) are therefore often underscored by a drive to 'deliver clear streets,' through the regulation of a population who 'can blight

[6] Supporting People funding provides housing-related support to those within our society who are considered most vulnerable.

areas and damage business and tourism' (Pleace, 2000: 13). In recent years, there has been a reduction in visible homelessness in England, including a 49% decrease in the number of people sleeping rough between 2017 and 2021 (DLUHC, 2022). Meanwhile, the number of households hidden away in various temporary forms of accommodation has steadily increased (Wilson and Barton, 2023). In the absence of social or affordable options, these 'temporary' measures are increasingly becoming longer-term options, with recent estimates suggesting that each night over 250,000 individuals are living in temporary accommodation[7] whilst 15,000 people are living in supported accommodation[8], including hostels (Rich and Garvie, 2020; Shelter, 2023). Although these statistics may be new, the underlying rationale of containing visible forms of homelessness is not, as is evident in the range of institutions which have historically been positioned as socio-spatial 'solutions' to 'problem' populations.

Hiding 'the homeless': A historical perspective

At certain points in history, other institutions were similarly introduced to solve the problem of homelessness. Early laws positioned those experiencing homelessness as part of the 'vagrancy problem,' as their apparent mobility posed a threat to wider society (Chambliss, 1964). When the Poor Law system came into place in 1563, places in poorhouses were offered to the aged and infirm unconditionally, and the able-bodied until they found work. Here we saw early moral distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, and the pivotal role played by one's ability to work (Allen, 2012). Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, parish poorhouses became the primary mode of containment. However, they were criticised as people were 'herded together, and subject to no superintendence,' which resulted in 'a mass of poverty, misery and vice… to the aged they are places of punishment… and to the young, schools of idleness and profligacy' (Webb and Webb, 1927: 213-4).

During the nineteenth century, workhouses superseded poorhouses as the most popular form of containment. They served a dual purpose of employing the able-bodied whilst providing refuge for the impotent (Webb and Webb, 1927). They differed from poorhouses

[7] Accommodation which is intended for short-term use, including hotels and B&Bs.
[8] Accommodation which has a supportive aspect, e.g., for those who need assistance with everyday tasks. Homeless hostels fall into this category due to the presence of support staff.

in several respects, for instance, Masters or matrons oversaw these institutions, inmates were subject to certain controls, and poor assistance was administered via the institution (Webb and Webb, 1927; Kinsella, 2011). Both poorhouses and workhouses reduced the visibility of the poor, by eradicating undesirable human elements from public spaces, and enclosing them within purpose-built institutions (Kinsella, 2011). Poverty was positioned as an individual failing (Howell, 2021).

The Victorian era saw a rise in philanthropy and an increase in charitable organisations, including the Salvation Army, Barnardos, and the YMCA. This benevolent attitude contrasted with the harsh provisions of the Poor Law, which developed increasingly specialised agencies for specific categories of pauper, including children, the sick, and the elderly (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000; Fraser, 2017). In response, charities created a new range of institutions, designed to provide refuge for the needy, including 'charity schools, hospitals, dispensaries, asylums, orphanages, reformatories, and penitential homes for prostitutes' (Fraser, 2017: 141). Those experiencing homelessness moved into new night shelters and commercial hostels, which were predominantly created by faith-based organisations to 'save bodies and eventually souls' (Fraser, 2017: 151; Hopper, 2003). However, distinctions were still made between the deserving, who were treated by charity, and the undeserving, who relied on the Poor Law. This moralisation meant that certain culpable groups – the alcoholic, idler, or depraved – were overlooked by charity in favour of those who could demonstrate 'positive signs of moral improvement' (Fraser, 2017: 148).

Nothing notable happened during the first half of the 20th century, rather those experiencing homelessness were contained within one of the aforementioned institutions. However, the prevalence of workhouses decreased as the decade went on, and whilst the use of workhouses was technically abolished in 1930, some were rebranded as 'Public Assistance Institutions' and continued to operate until the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948 (Higginbotham, 2012). Since the early 1960s, was a gradual shift away from the use of institutions. For instance, ideas surrounding therapeutic communities and the Mental Health Act 1959 led to 'community care,' whilst 'asylum closure became the zeitgeist for the second half of the 20th century' (Turner, 2004: 1). 'Deinstitutionalisation' was arguably rooted in an overoptimism in psychiatry together with intense criticisms of

institutions, which meant that the removal of asylums became an end in itself (Bennett and Morris, 1982). Several practical factors were also likely to have preceded this move, including the poor state of Victorian asylums, a recognition that 'institutionalisation' caused negative symptoms, and government perceptions that non-institutional care would be cheaper (Turner, 2004). Whatever the underlying reasons, Hamlin and Oakes estimated that the number of people living in institutions with intellectual disabilities fell from 65,000 in 1960 to 1,500 in 2003, leading them to argue that 'deinstitutionalization is close to completion in the UK' (2008: 47).

There were a number of people for whom community care did not work, as they could not find their place in society (Turner, 2004). These individuals continued to require long-term stays in such settings, yet without the availability of long-term residencies, found themselves cycling in and out of institutions, creating the 'revolving door' patient who drifts from hostels to prisons to the street (Bennett and Morris, 1982; Turner, 2004). Some activists have consequently campaigned in favour of a partial 'reinstitutionalisation,' as a shortage of appropriate secure beds has led to an increase in prisoners with mental health issues (Turner, 2004). Goffman has long noted that 'if all the mental hospitals in a given region were emptied and closed down today, tomorrow relatives, police, and judges would raise a clamor for new ones' (1961: 384). Fakhoury and Priebe (2007) argue that we are seeing a new form of 'reinstitutionalisation,' as whilst psychiatric beds spaces continue to decrease, the individuals who would once have been contained within asylums are now being contained elsewhere, such as supported housing, prisons, and involuntary hospital admissions. There are therefore not fewer individuals in institutional care, rather the problem has been displaced (Fakhoury and Priebe, 2007).

By taking a historical perspective, it is possible to see how institutions which are currently used to contain 'the homeless' hark back to those of the past. Hostels are a modern iteration of poorhouses, as both are convenient containers used to 'warehouse' or 'dump' the visible homeless (Hopper, 2003; Gowan, 2010; Marr, 2015). Given the large-scale closure of asylums since the 1960s, individuals once contained within asylums are now likely to temporarily reside in homeless hostels and other institutions, cycling each of these institutions in turn. The moralising undertones of the treatment-first model – such as the

notion of 'housing readiness' – are rooted in centuries-old distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, influencing the differential treatment of these two groups. Just as modern institutions reflect those of the past, current constructions of homelessness are shaped by a legacy of stigmatising discourses, stemming from earlier depictions of 'tramps' or 'bums' (Gowan, 2010; Smith, 2011). Popular labels illustrate a longstanding preoccupation with the work and mobility of this group – 'the hobo was a migratory worker, the tramp a migratory nonworker, and the bum a nonmigratory nonworker' (Snow and Anderson, 1993: 58). As visibility and mobility have been key concepts running throughout this chapter, the next section will draw them together to explore their interconnections within the current context.

The institutional web: Invisibility through mobility

The man in the opening extract highlights the range of places within which he has been contained and rendered less visible, and his cyclical movements around those places. This kind of circular motion dominates the lives of those experiencing homelessness – as they move from prisons to detox facilities to hostels and back, for example – in what has been described as an 'institutionalised' (DeVerteuil, 2003: 361) or a 'nomadic' cycle (May, 2000a: 737).

The actuality of movement around the 'institutional web' contrasts with the ideality of movement contained within treatment-first pathways or staircases, within which discourses of progress are tied to particular and widespread conceptions of movement. Hall (2016) notes that progress is often described using forward-facing terminology, as we take 'positive steps forward' or 'work towards goals', for instance. On the flipside, the implication is that becoming stuck, slipping backwards, or going downhill represents movement in a negative direction, 'we may feel we have let ourselves and others down' (Hall, 2016: 125). 'Spiralling downwards' or reaching 'rock bottom' suggests that mental state may reflect the housing positions of those moving backwards (McNaughton, 2008; Mayock et al, 2013). Hall and Smith (2013) conceive of mobility not as a practice, but as a value, in which speed is valorised over slowness, and movement over stasis (2013: 272).

According to the treatment-first model, 'positive' moves are made in a linear, forward-facing motion 'through' the pathway or 'up' the staircase, and ultimately 'out' the other side. However, treatment-first models often fail to facilitate such moves, through a lack of move on options (Warnes et al, 2004), the sometimes-unattainable demands of 'housing readiness' (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007), and a mismatch between its aims and what is actually achievable (Jackson, 2015). Failure is arguably built into treatment-first housing models. At the very least, we can surmise that these models intensify physical mobility. Actual movements around the 'institutional web' may take the form of 'burden shuffling' – the offloading of 'undesirable work' (individuals) from one institution to the next (Seim, 2017: 452). Hall and Smith (2013) position stasis – becoming stuck or staying still – as the inversion of mobility. Yet the treatment-first model exacerbates both mobility and stasis, as the two become interconnected. Individuals are continually moving between institutions but stuck in the broader 'institutional web.'

Jackson's concept of becoming 'fixed in mobility' captures the phenomenon in which individuals are constantly moving (mobility) without getting anywhere (fixed), challenging the dichotomy between mobility and fixity (2015: 5; 2012). In doing so, she highlights contradictions between discourses of progress and policies which cause people to become stuck. When individuals become fixed in mobility, they may find themselves forced into a state of perpetual motion, as they move from place to place (Kawash, 1998). Within the homelessness literature, this is referred to as revolving door homelessness (Patterson et al, 2015). With little control over their own movements, those experiencing homelessness may feel imprisoned by this relentless motion (Mahoney, 2019). In consequence, they may lack 'the feeling of well-being that arises from a sense of constancy in one's social and material environment' (Padgett, 2007: 1926). Moreover, this constant state of mobility in itself may be perceived as a marker of abnormality (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007; Jackson, 2015) and may inhibit 'normal' long-term goals and relationships (Snow and Anderson, 1993; DeVerteuil, 2003).

It is recognised that the longer individuals cycle the institutional web, and adapt to cultures within it, the more difficult it is for them to break the cycle and reintegrate into mainstream society (Fitzpatrick and Johnsen, 2009; Fitzpatrick et al, 2011; Mayock et al, 2013; Howell,

2021). In other words, once individuals enter the 'institutional web,' they very often become stuck within it.

Yet cyclical movement – via institutionalised cycling or burden shuffling – may serve a function. The process of movement can be a form of poverty regulation, one which contains 'the homeless' within various institutions and therefore reduces the overall visibility of homelessness (Kinsella, 2011; Seim, 2017). A cynic may argue that the perpetual state of motion around the institutional web is a form of punishment in itself, just as the pretrial process in the US effectively punishes the poor (Feeley, 1979). Further, Graeber describes institutions as violent due to their involvement in, 'the allocation of resources within a system of property rights regulated and guaranteed by governments in a system that ultimately rests on the threat of force' (2015: 58). From this perspective, the treatment-first model of housing is a form of institutional violence, whilst the cyclicality of motion which it endorses is a form of punishment in and of itself (Feeley, 1979; Graeber, 2015).

Conclusion

This chapter opened by introducing and challenging the current literature on homeless pathways and careers, by arguing that we must add nuance and complexity to our understanding of 'barriers' and 'exits.' It then conceived of the homeless hostel as an intermediary institution due to its location amidst the vertical and horizontal axes of poverty governance (Seim, 2017). It is along the horizontal axis that similar intermediary institutions also sit. The literature on urban poverty management is then used to further understand the messy middle groundedness of the institutional web, notably due to its patchwork-like quality, and the different aims of institutions which may make it up, such as care and control. The chapter then looked back in time to locate the popular treatment-first ideology in relation to homelessness policy in England over the last 50 years, and the use of homeless hostels in relation to institutions which have historically dealt with the problem. In doing so, it appreciates how both are current iterations of past policy and practice. It considers further how the visibility of certain populations (see Chapter One) is managed, not only through containment within one institution, but in a constant state of motion as individuals cycle the 'institutional web.' This kind of mobility is conceived of as a form of poverty management at best, and punishment at worst.

This thesis fills a gap in the literature by approaching the topics of 'barriers' and 'exits' from a different methodological and theoretical vantage point, by adding complexity and nuance to our understanding of this topic, and redressing some of the critiques delineated above. This study is unique as it foregrounds interaction through a study of situated institutional interactions – in this case at a homeless hostel – in order to understand how exits and barriers play out within this intermediary institutional setting (Chapter Three). This is achieved by taking an ethnographic approach to the topic, which facilitates an 'up close' look at the lives of hostel residents, and results in a richer and more holistic understanding of the issues (see Chapter Four). Instead of producing a simple list of facilitators and barriers to exiting homelessness, it will reintroduce some of the messiness and complexity into our understanding of mobility and immobility within this context, by probing what it is about 'this place' (or these places) which cause people to become stuck in the institutional web. It adds a polyphonic voice to this topic, by representing the viewpoints of both residents and staff (see Chapter Six), which is important given that movement is the product of interactions between the two groups (see Chapter Eight).

Whilst the focus is on Holbrook House and its residents, the findings are applicable to a broader range of institutions and used to hide 'problem populations.' Homeless hostels may therefore be substituted for assisted living residencies, children's homes, Home Office Hotels, or other places within the 'institutional web.' By taking a broader view of the poverty management landscape, this humble research into exits from homelessness also provides a social commentary on how society regulates marginal populations, particularly those who are out-of-place, move immorally, and are ultimately too visible (Adams and Bloch, 2023).

Chapter Three offers a new way of seeing some of the concepts introduced in this chapter, such as barriers, normality, stigma, mobility, and bureaucracy, by conceiving them as interaction order phenomena. In answering the research question – *are barriers built into the interaction orders of institutions?* – it considers how members might experience, produce, and negotiate the institutions within which they are contained.

Chapter three: The interaction orders of institutions

> Emran panics when he sees me, worried initially that his support worker, Megan, is leaving. She quickly reassures him and asks, 'how are you today?' Emran smiles and occasionally bows, 'happy, on the moon, yesterday was 29 degrees, I had three showers, and tomorrow is Eid.' Emran is a Somalian asylum seeker whose leave to remain lapsed in 2016, at a time when he had no support. He was living in a flat with other asylum seekers, before being evicted and ending up on the streets. His leave to remain was conditional, 'he was red flagged as a significant over stayer because he witnessed a number of crimes.'
>
> Holbrook House doesn't ordinarily accept people like Emran, but he slipped through the net when the council failed to pick up on his expired visa. Megan has been supporting him – and navigating the asylum process – ever since. She describes the process of (re-)applying for leave to remain as 'slow,' as there's a lot of paperwork. She started the process in June 2020 and it's July 2022 now, 'I've only just been able to do the fee waiver application.' The fee waiver is only a precursor, the real asylum application starts now. She attributes this 'slowing down' to a combination of COVID-19 delays and a reduction in her hours. The solicitor needs more information from Emran, so Megan agrees that on Thursday, she will accompany him to the bank, before helping him to call benefits. Emran won't leave Holbrook, not until the application is complete. He trusts Megan because she knows his story (Fieldnotes, 20/07/21).

Introduction

Building upon the literature in Chapter Two, this chapter fleshes out the specific theoretical approach taken within this thesis, together with some key concepts and ideas which can help researchers to better understand barriers to exiting homelessness. Grounded in the writings of Erving Goffman, this chapter makes the case for focusing on the interaction orders of institutions, as it is within situated interactions that barriers to exiting homelessness arise and are handled. Goffman (1983) avoids the macro-micro dichotomy explored in Chapter Two, by focusing on the interaction order as a distinct analytic domain

and treating situations as the basic unit for analysis. This chapter introduces concepts such as normality, stigma, bureaucracy, people-processing, learning to see, discretion, categorisation, and identity management – all of which are interaction order phenomena and must be studied through observation, as Chapter Four will elaborate. To fully comprehend how individuals become stuck in places like this, researchers must observe situated interactions to build up a picture of the interaction order of an institution, as it is here, at the level of interaction, that barriers are produced, maintained, perceived, and negotiated.

Goffman, the interaction order, and institutions

Erving Goffman is renowned for his systematic analysis of face-to-face interaction. Goffman has long argued that researchers ought to pay attention to social situations, as they constitute a reality *sui generis* and therefore warrant analysis in their own right (Goffman 1964: 134). A focus on interaction has enabled Goffman to: explicate the ways in which individuals align to definitions of situations through impression management (1959), highlight the everyday experiences of those contained within institutions (1961), and explore constructions and negotiations of stigma (1963a). Throughout his research, and culminating in The Interaction Order (1983), Goffman promotes the study of interaction as a means of understanding the self in social contexts, whilst conceiving of the face-to-face domain as analytically viable in its own right, preferably through the method of microanalysis (1983).

The interaction order reproaches theories which reduce order to situationalism on the one hand, or structuralism on the other, such as the literature on homelessness 'pathways' or 'careers' outlined in Chapter Two (Rawls, 1987). Goffman criticises the micro-macro dichotomies which result, with their polarisation of individuals and structures. Goffman's alternate focus – on the 'interaction order' as a distinct analytic domain – offers a way of resolving this dichotomy, as he treats individuals and structures not as separate and competing entities, but as 'joint products of an interaction order *sui generis*' (Rawls, 1987: 138). Put another way, both social structures and social selves depend upon an order of interaction for their existence, the interaction order is therefore constantly being produced and reproduced by individuals *in situ*.

Emran's keyworking session with Megan helps to illustrate this theoretical approach. We can see that it is within these situated interactions – and not at the micro- or macro-level – that barriers to exiting homelessness are constructed and negotiated (Goffman, 1983). A simplistic reading of this extract may surmise that it is structure, namely the asylum process, which acts as a barrier to Emran moving on. However, a more nuanced and intricate interpretation highlights how several intersecting interactional barriers result in Emran becoming stuck at Holbrook House. Emran lost his leave to remain due to a lack of support, he is currently re-applying for leave to remain with Megan's help, Megan must learn to navigate the asylum process herself, the process is lengthy and bureaucratic, the process is made slower due to COVID-19 and a reduction in Megan's hours, Emran must interact with other systems and services as part of the process and needs Megan's support, Emran trusts Megan and he will not move on for this reason until his application is complete. The study of interaction therefore offers a more complex and holistic understanding of institutional life, as well as the interactional barriers which prevent individuals from getting out. This chapter will argue that in order to understand individuals' experiences of the 'institutional web,' including their (in)ability to escape it, it is necessary to examine the interaction orders of these institutions (Goffman, 1983).

The interaction order cannot be understood within the constraints of a macro-micro dichotomy, as it exists independently of structures and individuals, so rather than focusing on individuals or structures, Goffman takes social situations as the basic unit for analysis. He recognises that 'our doings' are socially situated, and that social situations themselves provide a 'natural theatre in which bodily displays are enacted and in which all bodily displays are read' (Goffman, 1983: 6). The preferred method for studying the interaction order is therefore through the observation of situated interactions. Goffman likens the workings of the interaction order to 'the consequences of systems of enabling conventions, in the sense of the ground rules for a game' (Goffman, 1983: 5). Rawls later clarifies that people conform to these interactional ground rules, not out of choice, but because their 'social selves would cease to exist' if they did not (1987: 136).

Goffman was unparalleled in his explication of the interaction order and its constituent elements, which have been referred to as the 'basic architecture' of the interaction order

(Smith, 2006: 34). However, his 1983 paper titled 'The Interaction Order' did not provide conclusive theoretical integration as some might have hoped, meaning that his ideas seemed to be 'continually in process, reaching no final resting place' (Smith, 2006: 33). In consequence, his sociology of the interaction order has been left open to a degree of interpretation, and at times misinterpretation (Rawls, 1987; Smith, 2006). One of the ambiguities left by this legacy relates to the position of the interaction order within sociology more broadly, as either a heuristic device or ontological theory.

Some have argued that the concept of the interaction order intended to position interaction as an 'analytically (semi-)autonomous social domain,' in relation to individuals and structures, as opposed to one which was fully autonomous (Handulle and Vassenden, 2024). From this perspective, the interaction order acts as a heuristic device as it enables researchers to bracket off and interrogate particular interactions – for instance, responses to stigmatisation – whilst regarding them within the context of specific structural and historical processes, such as inequality (Vassenden et al, 2024). Vassenden et al (2024) argue that the interaction order does not exist in isolation from structures, ideologies, or history, and thus conceive of structure as a separate and independent entity.

An alternate position, and the one adopted within this thesis, is that the interaction order was intended by Goffman to be an ontological theory, meaning that interaction is a fully autonomous domain of study in its own right. From this perspective, neither the self nor social structure can be properly understood without reference to interaction (Rosenberg, 2022), as the interaction order sui generis 'derives its order from constraints imposed by the needs of a presentational self rather than by social structure' (Rawls, 1987: 136). The interaction order is a production order, meaning that it jointly produces individuals and structures sui generis (Rawls, 1987). This ontological starting point is evident throughout this thesis, as each findings chapter recognises that the observed phenomena exist at the level of the interaction, not the individual or structure, such as the ascription and management of stigma (Chapter Seven) and the 'move on' process (Chapter Eight). To regard the interaction order as an ontology is not to dismiss inequality, but to appreciate that inequalities are the product of social interaction, such as the existence of race at the

level of interaction (Rawls, 2000) and the interactional maintenance of established social hierarchies (Branaman, 2003).

In Asylums, Goffman (1961) focuses on interaction within institutional settings, emphasising the importance of context on interaction. He conceives of the self as a property of (institutional) settings and explores 'how the physical facts of an establishment can be explicitly employed to frame the conception a person takes of himself' (1961: 150). Goffman describes the 'moral career' through an institution as the progressive changes in the belief which a person holds about themselves, marked by a series of 'assaults upon the self,' until they are forced to accept the institution's view of them (1961). Upon entry to an institution, a person may be subject to a set of 'mortifying experiences,' which include 'restriction of free movement, communal living, diffuse authority of a whole echelon of people, and so on' (1961: 148), some of which has already been alluded to in the Prologue. Whilst contained within an institution, individuals orientate themselves to that institution and consequently formulate a new sense of self. Although institutions may intend to 'change' or 'reform' inmates in accordance with 'some ideal standard' (Goffman, 1961: 74) – as the treatment-first model sets out to do (see Chapter Two) – not only is change seldom realised, but when alterations do occur, they are often 'not the kind intended by staff' (1961: 71).

This association between self and setting is further reflected in the ward systems of institutions. Similar to that of treatment-first pathways, inmates live in a series of graded living arrangements, ranked from the 'worst' level to the 'best' (Goffman, 1961). Differences are not only material, but are built into the interaction order of each ward or level. Whilst moves up the ward or pathway are accompanied by shifts in self-constructive equipment and status, they also come with a calculus of risks:

> As the person moves up the ward system, he can manage more and more to avoid incidents which discredit his claim to be a human being, and acquire more and more of the varied ingredients of self-respect; yet when eventually he does get toppled and he does-there is a much farther distance to fall (Goffman, 1961: 167).

Individual interactions are building blocks upon which a picture of an institutional interaction order can be built. This is evident in Asylums, through Goffman's indexing of

'secondary adjustments' – 'any habitual arrangement by which a member of an organization employs unauthorized means or obtains unauthorized ends' (1961: 189). Secondary adjustments include 'make-dos' (using artifacts for unofficial ends), 'working the system' (exploiting official activities for private ends), and ritual insubordination (which is empty of intrinsic gain). Taken together, the full set of secondary adjustments comprise the 'underlife' of an institution and represent ways of 'getting around the organization's assumptions as to what he should do and get and hence what he should be' (Goffman, 1961: 269). These minor acts represent a self-preserving 'rejection of one's rejectors' and a distancing from the place they are officially accorded (1961: 315). In a similar vein, Wieder (1974) finds that certain patterns of behaviour make up the 'convict code' of a hallway house, including 'doing disinterest and disrespect', 'passive compliance', and 'doing violations.' Such adjustments enable individuals to carve out, and preserve, a sense of self through their resistance to the institution, whilst within its confines (Goffman, 1961). Wieder (1974) also notes how the telling of the code can be used to account for certain lines of behaviour.

Within institutions, the interaction order offers a degree of resistance, through 'concessions' which are won by the self, enabling inmates to survive intact (Rawls, 1987). In other words, it helps members to 'get by.' Inmates do not choose to resist institutional demands, rather the interaction order resists these in its own right (Rawls, 1987). The interaction order therefore provides some elbow room, 'between himself and that with which others assume he should be identified' (Goffman 1961: 320).

Within institutions, a focus on the interaction order enables researchers to understand how people flesh out their lives when their existence is cut to the bone (Goffman, 1961: 305). The interaction order can therefore facilitate a better understanding of institutional life, as it enables sociologists to extract, analyse, and catalogue what is intrinsic to interactional life, allowing for historical and geographical comparisons (Goffman, 1983). By extracting the interaction order of one institution, such as the homeless hostel, researchers can make comparisons with others, including Home Office Hotels. Goffman's writing is applicable to the kinds of institutions which may make up the 'institutional web,' the 'forcing houses for changing persons' (1961: 12) or the 'hopeless storage dumps' whose function is 'performed

by fences, not doctors' (1971: 336). Despite their flaws, Goffman (1961) notes that such institutions exist because there is a need for them, so if every homeless hostel closed today, then tomorrow there would be clamour for new ones. In other words, they serve a function, as Chapters One and Two suggest.

Normality in an abnormal place

> If the inmate's stay is long, what has been called "disculturation" may occur – that is, an "untraining" which renders him temporarily incapable of managing certain features of daily life on the outside, if and when he gets back to it (Goffman, 1961: 13).

Whilst institutions may officially claim to rehabilitate or reform inmates in line with some ideal standard, more often than not they simply teach them the 'adaptive techniques' needed to survive similar institutions (Goffman, 1961: 65). Rather than learning to live independently, for instance, inmates merely learn how to live in an institution (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007; Howell, 2021). This phenomenon is commonly referred to as institutionalisation. In the literature on homelessness, disculturation and institutionalisation lead to 'entrenchment,' in other words, the more acclimatised an individual becomes to institutional life, the harder it is for them to reintegrate back into 'normal' society (Mayock et al, 2013; McMordie, 2021a). Staff must adapt too, by similarly acclimatising to abuse, violent conflicts, and overdoses, all of which are commonplace within homeless hostels (Johnsen et al, 2005).

Howell argues that homeless hostels prevent 'the pursuit of positive lifestyles' (2021: 21) when the culture within them 'embraces norms and values that are accepting of drug use, violence, and/or offending' (2021: 30). Institutionalisation can prevent individuals from making 'progress,' as 'the treatment of deviants denies them the ordinary means of carrying on the routines of everyday life open to most people' (Becker, 2018: 35). This is fairly obvious where illegal activity is concerned, such as illicit means of making money (Becker, 2018). However, it is evident in more subtle ways too, such as through 'hyper inclusion,' as individuals must engage with a multitude of street-level bureaucracies, from the Job Centre to mental health services. This forced and frequent engagement with a range of social service and control agencies inevitably shapes the daily lives and routines of homeless

hostel users (Murphy and Irwin, 1992; Snow and Anderson, 1993). This literature contrasts different conceptions of normality, as the idea of a 'positive lifestyle' is grounded in normativity, whilst the ubiquity of drug use and other behaviours represents a situated understanding of normality within a specific context. Tensions exist between these two understandings within institutional contexts, as this section will illustrate.

From the outside, certain geographical places or institutions – skid-row or 'asylums,' for example – are filled with 'abnormals' (Burns, 1992: 169; Bittner, 1967). The relative abnormality of people and place reflect and reinforce one another, in what Hacking refers to as the 'looping effect' (2007: 286). However, such constructions of abnormality rest on a particular understanding of normality, which is rooted in normativity. Bittner (1967) explains that the inhabitants of skid-row are only abnormal according to prevailing standards of middle-class morality.

Normativity permeates the 'institutional web,' both the institutions which contain individuals and the services which treat them (Long and Jepsen, 2023). This is evident in substance use services, as 'recovery' is increasingly becoming 'a process of demonstrating normative attributes and desires, rather than strictly a process of health behaviour change' (Brookfield et al, 2021: 2). Treatment-first models of housing are similarly couched in normativity, as is evident in the 'housing ready status' and moralising distinctions between 'positive' and 'negative' moves (see Chapter Two). Inmates are effectively encouraged to maintain the impression that they are making 'change' by displaying visible signs of normality (Goffman, 1959).

Becker highlights the problems associated with a normative approach by exploring the multiplicity of normality and deviancy. 'Outsiders' are judged to be deviants because they stand apart from 'normal' members of a group (Becker, 2018). However, given that people belong to many different groups, each with their own rules and norms, they may break the rules of one group by mere membership of another (Becker, 2018). The line between normality and deviancy is therefore blurred, and far from fixed. Goffman attests that, 'a community is a community. Just as it is bizarre to those not in it, so it is natural, even if unwanted, to those who live it from within' (1961: 303).

To appreciate what institutional normality looks like, researchers must endeavour to understand life from the inside, by focusing instead on situated understandings of normality. This approach recognises that 'normality' (and 'abnormality') are situated accomplishments (Smith, 2021), as the diagnoses of normality, or abnormality, are made within the specific social situations in which they are embedded (Goffman, 1971). For example, 'public injectors' face heightened levels of discrimination and stigma, not because of substance use per se, but because of the public situations in which use occurs (Rhodes et al, 2007). Normality and abnormality are social constructs, achieved through situated interaction (Goffman, 1983; Misztal, 2016). In his writing on stigma, Goffman notes that 'a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed,' as an attribute may stigmatise an individual in one situation whilst confirming their usualness in another (1963a: 3). Normality and abnormality are therefore products of, and accomplished through, social interaction. Becoming a hostel user is not so different from becoming a marijuana user, as both roles require learning and alterations in an individual's conception of normality (Becker, 1953). Roles do not carry stigma in themselves, rather stigma arises in interactions, as 'the normal and the stigmatized are not persons but rather perspectives' (Goffman, 1963a: 137). Drug dealers, for example, may be heroes when amongst their clientele but villains in their dealings with the police.

Sacks (1984) notes that 'doing being ordinary' is an accomplishment, that it must be worked at and treated like a job. To achieve 'ordinary,' individuals must spend their time in 'usual ways', by having 'usual thoughts', and maintaining 'usual interests' (Sacks, 1984: 415). However, what constitutes 'usualness' is relative and involves knowing what others in similar situations ordinarily do. A 'usual' evening may consist of having dinner and watching TV, or it may consist of acquiring and using drugs. The clearest marker of ordinariness is its 'nothing much' quality – of being able to say you are doing 'nothing much' whilst engaging in the activity – something which could equally apply to watching TV or using heroin, depending on the situation. Given the mundanity of 'doing being ordinary,' researchers must learn to see the 'unseen,' those things which are right before our eyes, but we do not see due to their obviousness (Laurier, 2004: 382).

Aspects of daily life which are usual within one institution may be common across an array of others (Goffman, 1961). For instance, institutions commonly create barriers to social intercourse with the outside, regardless of their degree of totality[9] (May, 200b; Goffman, 1961; Hall, 2006; Neale and Brown, 2016). They may also force individuals to ask or beg for simple things, such as water or permission to use the phone, which they would not have to on the outside (Goffman, 1961). Further, secondary adjustments are common across institutions, as a means of pushing back against the institution and the institutional self which membership implies (Goffman, 1961). Given the compulsion to engage in secondary adjustments, individuals may find it difficult to stay out of trouble, as acts of resistance may be taken as 'signs of their maker's proper affiliation' (Goffman, 1961: 306). Those who wish to refrain from secondary adjustments may have to 'forego certain levels of sociability with his fellows to avoid possible incidents' (Goffman, 1961: 43). Further, those who abide fully with the rules and demands of the institution are said to make 'primary adjustment' to it (Goffman, 1961: 189).

Finally, individuals routinely experience violations of the territories of the self – the boundaries between their being and their environment (Goffman, 1961). They have reduced control over their full range of territories, including sensory violations stemming from the smells or sounds of fellow inmates, the gaze or words of others, and even information about themselves (Goffman, 1961; 1971). This inability to maintain deference and distance may impact a person's sense of being a 'fully-fledged person' (Goffman, 1971: 61). As rank is commonly reflected in the size of, and control over, these territories of the self, inmates share a similar rank to that of children (Goffman, 1971). The staff-inmate split is another common feature of institutions, and will be considered next (Goffman, 1961).

The staff world

The bureaucratic demands of people-processing institutions

Institutional staff are 'street-level bureaucrats,' responsible for 'the bureaucratic management of large blocks of people' (Goffman, 1961: 9), with discretion over the

[9] Institutions sit on a spectrum, ranging from those which are completely open, to those which are completely cut off from wider society i.e., 'total institutions' (Goffman, 1961: 4).

dispensation of benefits and/or allocation of sanctions (Lipsky, 2010). Their work often centres on an essential paradox, between highly scripted policy objectives on the one hand, and responses to individual cases on the other (Lipsky, 2010), for example, by balancing performance targets with 'good' support work (Cloke et al, 2010; Jackson, 2015; Mahoney, 2019). Whilst bureaucracy may enable a small number of staff to observe and monitor a large number of inmates, bureaucratic procedures often involve a simplification, which ignores the subtleties of real human experience and reduces people to statistical formulae, for instance (Graeber, 2015).

Goffman likens people-work to object-work, as both are processed and 'followed by a paper shadow showing what has been done by whom, what is to be done, and who last had responsibility for it' (1961: 74/5). The Prologue illustrates how new inmates are input into the 'administrative machinery' of the establishment (Goffman, 1961: 16). Throughout their stay, staff collect, catalogue, and deal in information about the inmate, recording 'scandalous, defamatory, and discrediting' information in the 'case history,' and sharing it with the broader staff team in meetings (Goffman, 1961: 158). Staff and inmates engage in an 'information game' when in one another's presence, in the form of 'a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery' (Goffman, 1959: 8). However, as humans are better at reading others than manipulating their own behaviour, the staff outmanoeuvre the inmates, thereby upholding this interactional asymmetry (Goffman, 1959).

As inmates push back in ways that inanimate objects do not, the staff team face a series of conflicts. Firstly, institutions often fall short of their aims – such as reform or rehabilitation – and instead function as mere storage dumps (Goffman, 1961). For Goffman, 'this contradiction, between what the institution does and what its officials must say it does, forms the basic context of the staff's daily activity' (1961: 74). Staff may have set out to work at a 'people changing' institution, though soon find out that they are doing little more than 'people-processing' (Comfort et al, 2015; Seim, 2017). Despite discrepancies between the aims and actual experiences of institutions, the staff may nonetheless find themselves under pressure to present the institution in an 'appropriate' light to outsiders, including those who fund its operation (Goffman, 1961).

Secondly, staff must strike a balance 'between humane standards on one hand and institutional efficiency on the other' (Goffman, 1961: 78). They may face conflicts between support and security, or care and control, for example (Watts et al, 2018). Staff may experience contradictions in their role, as simultaneous supporters and enforcers, or friends and policemen, which can cause confusion between staff and inmates (McGrath and Pistrang, 2007). The gap between objectives (people-changing) and capabilities (people-processing) may also cause staff to feel 'severe dissonance' in their roles (Lipsky, 2010: 78). Whilst staff may seek to foster positive relationships with inmates, they are constrained by the 'realities of working in an under-resourced sector involving direct contact with desperate people' (Johnsen et al, 2005: 17). In consequence, the staff simply end up doing what they can with what they have (Lipsky, 2010; Long and Evans, 2023).

Although bureaucracy is flawed, it is positioned as a solution to almost any issue, and has 'become the water in which we swim' (Graeber, 2015: 4). Bureaucracy lies at the heart of the UK's policies and legal responses to homelessness, and from a staff perspective may feel like an 'iron cage' – 'an inflexible set of rules which constrains human freedom' – essentially reducing street-level bureaucrats to mere cogs in a machine (Browne-Gott et al, 2021: 5). In order to get by, all members of an institution must learn to play the bureaucratic game. Paradoxically, learning to 'play the game' is a form of institutionalisation in itself (Somerville, 2013).

Cyclical movements around the 'institutional web' are reflected in the circular nature of bureaucracy, which takes on a 'mazelike, senseless form' (Graeber, 2015: 53). Those who become stuck in the institutional web also become caught up in the bureaucracies which underpin each institution and service. Emran and Megan must navigate various bureaucratic processes – relating to immigration, charities, solicitors, banks, and benefits – as they fight for Emran's leave to remain. This is common, as problem populations, such as 'the poor,' are seldom processed in isolation, but rather through 'interactions with other institutions across the welfare and penal states' (Seim, 2017: 472). Experienced members, who have been around the system multiple times, become familiar with the various 'monotonous' forms which need filling out (Jackson, 2015: 116). Hostel members must learn the language and processes associated with numerous systems, including health, benefits, prison, and

immigration, and may find themselves playing several games at any one time. Case histories provide evidence of bureaucratic battles – of delayed benefits claims, immigration applications, and the like – which individuals must partake in to improve their situation or to simply just 'keep their heads above water' (Jackson, 2015: 149).

Learning to see like a (staff) member

Staff must also 'learn to see' like a member of an institution, as they adapt to situated understandings of normality within it (Hall, 2016: 207). Hall (2016) describes how outreach workers find their clients by searching for clues and traces of homelessness, and learning to see otherwise inconspicuous items or markings – an orange lid here, a dislodged fence panel there – as signs of activity, and therefore life. This way of seeing the city comes with experience, as outreach workers re-learn how to see insignificant collections of objects in telling ways. Seeing is a practical accomplishment, as 'to make enquiries in this way is to gather up and assemble, to build a picture of what is going on out there' (Hall, 2016: 231).

In a halfway house, staff must account for the behaviour and location of their charges, thereby ensuring compliance with the law and parole conditions (Wieder, 1974). Staff learn to see parolee behaviour in terms of potential violations, as they are responsible for 'the detection and rectification of deviance in their midst' (Wieder, 1974: 64). When a parolee has new clothes, questions arise concerning money and potential criminality. Just as outreach workers must learn to see signs of activity, halfway house staff must learn to see signs of deviance. Both result in otherwise inconspicuous objects and behaviours being interpreted in context-specific ways. Just as Hall's outreach workers built up a picture of what was going on out there, Wieder's halfway house staff built up a picture of what was going on in here. The ability to see in this way is a skill, developed over time. Novices may at first see alarm and catastrophe as being everywhere, whilst old hands display a 'cool efficacy' that comes with experience (Goffman, 1971: 243). Old hands develop a 'special sensitivity for qualities of appearances that allow an intuitive grasp of probable tendencies' (Bittner, 1967: 712).

This ability to read seemingly invisible signs in order to determine 'what's up' is the purview of various other agents of social control, including the police and school-teachers (Goffman,

1971). Sacks (1972) notes that an intimate connection exists between noticeability and deviancy. For example, a parolee's rupturing of routine in the halfway house makes their behaviour noticeable and therefore questionable (Wieder, 1974). Noticeable behaviours may arouse suspicion that something is 'up.' What counts as 'noticeable' or 'deviant' depends on the situation, as it is within situations themselves that categories of 'normal,' 'unusual', or 'deviant' are invoked (Smith, 2021: 184).

Exercising discretion

Whilst institutions are governed by a myriad of rules and regulations, staff teams cannot enforce every rule upon the discovery of deviancy, as they themselves face a unique set of interactional challenges – or 'ordinary institutional troubles' (see Chapter Six) – which stem from them being under-resourced, under-staffed, over-worked, and over-stretched (Goffman, 1961; Johnsen et al, 2005; McGrath and Pistrang, 2007; Renedo, 2014; Armstrong et al, 2021; Dobson 2022). In consequence, staff teams exercise discretion in deciding when to enforce rules, and when not to, which results in a large gap between laws or rules as they are written, and laws or rules in action (Lipsky, 2010). In reality, rule enforcement does not necessarily follow a rule breach, whilst sanctions may be applied where no specific violation has occurred (Goffman, 1963b; Becker, 2018). From a practical perspective, staff do not have the time or resources to tackle the volume of rule-breaking, and may consequently 'temporize with evil,' by allowing some acts to go unpunished or unnoticed (Becker, 2018: 153). Routinized discretion may take the form of secondary adjustments, potentially resulting in an 'authorized-but-not-quite-official system' (Goffman, 1961: 175). Out of necessity, staff teams must learn when to turn a blind eye. Discretionary practices surrounding enforcement vary according to people, time, and situations, in other words, they are interaction order phenomena which must be observed *in situ*.

Whilst there is little research on the discretionary practices of institutional staff, we can learn about discretion from another street-level bureaucrat, namely the police (Lipsky, 2010). Graeber describes the police as 'bureaucrats with weapons' (2015: 73), who do not so much enforce the law, as resolve administrative problems with force or the threat of force. Bittner similarly sees the police as 'all-purpose remedial agents' who use their discretion to solve problems in the field (1967: 702). In outlining the police's approach to

peace keeping, Bittner notes three areas of significance. Firstly, officers equate their knowledge of the people with their control over the area, and therefore know a great deal about skid-row's many residents, whilst possessing an 'immensely detailed factual knowledge of his beat' (Bittner, 1967: 707). Whilst interactions are often familiar and informal, power nonetheless 'lurks' in the background of encounters. Secondly, discretion is frequently exercised and sometimes unavoidable, to the extent that the police officers arguably do not enforce the law, but 'use it as a resource to solve certain pressing practical problems in keeping the peace' (Bittner, 1967: 710). Finally, practicality plays a more central role than legal norms in *ad hoc* decision-making processes, as they match 'the resources of control with situational exigencies' (Bittner, 1967: 713). Sometimes an arrest depends simply on the availability of a police van. For Bittner, the police's 'overall objective is to reduce the total amount of risk in the area' (1967: 713). This suggests that they are only concerned with activity within a particular location, whilst they are more concerned with the population as a whole than individual cases.

> The wretched man positively insisted on being arrested. I'd been watching for a long time. And I didn't see how I could let him carry on much longer like that. He might get killed. Or someone might make a complaint at the police station. Then where would I be? There were a lot of people watching him and I thought most of them knew I had seen him. They would be thinking it was time I did something about it. They couldn't be expected to realize that I was a policeman who had never made an arrest. I could almost feel them looking at me, wondering how long it would be before I went into action. If only he would actually get on to a bus it would be all right. He would be whirled away, out of my uncomfortable little world, in no time at all. But he never did get on to a bus (Sacks, 1972: 6).

Whilst 'seeing' is central to the discretionary practices of street-level bureaucrats, so is 'being seen' by others. Sacks illustrates how the two are interlinked in the above extract, in which a police officer tries to not see, yet is conscious about being seen to act by others. Bittner (1967) also notes that being seen to act is one of the many factors underscoring the police's seemingly *ad hoc* decisions to exert coercive control.

Discretion enables staff to control both immediate situations and the broader trajectories of those moving through an institution (Williams, 1996). Staff at homeless hostels are the gatekeepers to move on, as they have the power to both 'evict' and decide when somebody is 'ready' for a positive move (Sahlin, 2005; Stewart, 2019; Dobson, 2022). Given that the term 'housing ready' is loose and subjective, staff have unavoidably wide discretion when it comes to mobility (Dordick, 2002; Stewart, 2019). Housing readiness is largely determined in the absence of the individual, as 'the inmate is excluded from knowledge of the decisions taken regarding his fate' (Goffman, 1961: 9). Instead, case records and staff meetings are commonly used to reach a 'collective agreement concerning the line that the patient is trying to take and the line that should be taken to him' (Goffman, 1961: 160). The ad hoc decision-making practices of staff may result in some cases being prioritised, whilst others are downgraded (Volckmar-Eeg and Vassenden, 2020). Returning to the original research aim (see Chapter One), in order to understand how individuals become stuck in the 'institutional web,' researchers must pay attention to the discretionary practices of staff, alongside the actions of inmates.

Categorisation practices within the confines of an institution

Emran is categorised as both an asylum seeker and person experiencing homelessness within his keyworking session, suggesting that the two are not distinct populations, but ways of categorising individuals within interactions. Whilst Emran is also a friend, son, adult male, Muslim, sun lover, benefit's recipient, Manchester United supporter, and alcoholic, as well as a vast array of alternate identification categories – he may find that categorisation practices are necessarily limited by setting (Coulter, 1996). Whilst Emran does allude to some of these alternative categories, Megan quickly returns to, and foregrounds, the category of asylum seeker, as she is under pressure to progress his claim and is keen to make the most of their session.

People-processing institutions often reduce individuals to categories based upon the impression they give off (Goffman, 1959), this is why 'the poor slide across the transient statuses of ambulance rider, hospital patient, and street criminal' as they circle the web of institutions (Seim, 2017: 459). Within these large, congregate settings, members are likely to see one another in terms of categories (Smith, 2021) – residents may speak of spice heads,

snitches, and bullies, whilst staff invoke categories of vulnerable, entrenched, or unwell, for example. Categorisation practices are not benign. When individuals are conceived of as a case of any category – a heroin user or gypsy, for example – assumptions are made about the individual based upon the category, which is then bound up with their fate (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2015). For example, within the halfway house, being labelled a snitch attracts 'potent' social sanctions from fellow parolees, including the use of violence (Wieder, 1974: 114). Further, the staff's use of informal categories on a hospital dementia ward, such as 'climbers' or 'feeders,' has implications for their treatment (Featherstone and Northcott, 2021). When hostel staff categorise residents as 'unwell,' it implies multiple things, including the need to keep them at the hostel. Categorisation practices are linked to move on in more direct ways too, as 'move on ready' is a category in and of itself (Marquardt, 2016).

If categorisation practices occur within the sociospatial confines of the institution, then setting is an important determinant of identity construction and role ascription. Whilst individuals may juggle multiple, contradictory roles with ease on the outside – a good husband and an adulterer, or a productive employee and an alcoholic, for example – this rests on an ability to segregate and compartmentalise these conflicting roles (Goffman, 1961; Erwin, 1992). In institutions, these spheres of life are 'desegregated,' so inmates experience a squashing of the self (Goffman, 1961: 37). The term 'role dispossession' captures this collapsing of the multiple roles maintained on the outside into a single role on the inside – that of 'inmate' (Goffman, 1961). Inmates consequently learn of the limited extent to which conceptions they had of themselves on the outside can be sustained on the inside (Goffman, 1961). Setting plays an important role as the relevancy of any category will depend on '*this* setting' and '*this* activity' (Coulter, 1996: 342). Within institutions, individuals may no longer be relevantly categorizable according to their external relations or situation prior to institutionalisation, such as being a 'builder,' 'son', or 'bookworm.' Instead, categories of 'schizophrenic,' 'alcoholic', or 'abandoner' become more relevant, each brings with it an array of cultural assumptions about that person, or at least that kind of person (Goffman, 1983).

Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) takes a granular look at categorisation practices, rendering 'visible the relationship between morality, practical action and the social organisation of

everyday social life' (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2015: 3). MCA offers a way of understanding how 'identity is done, managed, achieved, and negotiated *in situ*' (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2015). Just as Sacks is interested in the ongoing process of 'doing being ordinary' (1984: 415), he is also interested in the process of 'doing identity,' for example, by invoking, ascribing, negotiating, and achieving categories within situated interactions.

Ethnographers identify various ways in which individuals 'do identity,' by resisting categories which are ascribed within an institution, or are implied by membership of it. Distancing enables individuals to deflect attention and stigma from themselves by expressing disapproval of others, effectively creating a boundary between the normal self and the abnormal other (Snow and Anderson, 1993; Hoolachan, 2020). Given that stigma is an interaction order phenomenon, 'it should come as no surprise that in many cases he who is stigmatized in one regard nicely exhibits all the normal prejudices held toward those who are stigmatized in another regard' (Goffman, 1963a: 138). Thus, within total institutions, small groups find that in order to define themselves as normal, they must define other groups of patients as abnormal (Goffman, 1961). For example, 'pissheads' may define themselves as superior to 'smackheads' and vice versa (Anderson, [1976] 2003; Johnsen et al, 2005; Hoolachan, 2020). Jackson similarly finds that young people experiencing homelessness define themselves in opposition to others, by emphasising particular identities, such as the white working-class male, or by actively disassociating from those categorised as 'street rats' (2015: 121). 'Hierarchies of stigma' are thus created *in situ*, for example, by enabling individuals to claim that conventional notions of morality should apply to this drug, but not to that one (Becker, 2018).

In some situations, individuals may seek to neutralise 'deviant' behaviour by invoking self-justifying rationales (Becker, 2018). Marijuana users may point out the benefits of the drug, highlight that conventional persons indulge in more harmful practices, and celebrate certain aspects of drug use (Becker, 2018; Hoolachan, 2020). Reasons used to justify 'deviant' acts are similar to those used to justify more conventional acts, for example, because it helps with sleep (Becker, 2018). Further, actions may be neutralised through remedial interchanges (Goffman, 1971) or accounts and stories, such as sad tales or apologia (Goffman, 1961). Further, those who come into contact with a 'deviant' may willfully disattend to, or momentarily disregard, discrediting information which positions them as

'risky and often extremely dislikeable by normal standards' (Smith, 2011: 371). However, this is often in pursuit of a specific motive, such as information gathering (Smith, 2011).

In other situations, individuals may invoke alternate identities in the face of potentially stigmatising ones, for instance, individuals experiencing homelessness may re-cast themselves as survivors in response to common stereotypes (Parsell, 2011; McCarthy, 2013; Roche, 2015). Equally, individuals may emphasise their past employment, current work-related skills, or conventional goals for the future (McNaughton 2008; Roche, 2015; Terui and Hsieh, 2016). Snow and Anderson find that, 'while homeless males tend to stand outside the normative order in their way of life, some of them are, nonetheless, very much of that order in their dreams and fantasies' (1987: 1361). Of course, these may simply reflect the goals of services and institutions which encourage people to lead 'normal' lives (Brookfield et al, 2021).

Identity work does not cease at the point of institutional exit. Instead, individuals carry the residual impact of institutionalisation long beyond their stay – as they become ex-users, ex-inmates, ex-mental patients, and so on – and therefore continue to negotiate and navigate these identities (Goffman, 1963a). For example, ex-inmates may attempt to 'pass,' by concealing discrediting details of their institutionalisation in the outside world (Goffman, 1961; 1963a). Discovery of past categorisations may have consequences for the self. For example, Becker notes how ex-users are often treated in the same way as active users, under the notion that 'once a junkie, always a junkie' (2018: 37). Further, categorical transitions of this kind may leave individuals feeling that they do not fit in or cannot cope, particularly if they are to be regarded as 'proper' or 'normal' members of society (McNaughton, 2008; Chamberlain and Johnson, 2018).

Conclusion

This chapter opened with a fieldnote extract taken from Emran's keyworking session with Megan. By observing this interaction *in situ*, it was possible to comprehend the complexity of Emran's situation, and the interactional barriers upon which it was based. Instead of compiling a list of macro- and micro-level factors (see Chapter Two) it provides a holistic and nuanced look at Emran's situation, whilst conceiving of these barriers as interaction order

phenomena. It further illustrates how all hostel members – residents and staff alike – are governed by the interaction order of the hostel and are caught up in the broader 'institutional web.' Whilst there is some literature on the experiences of staff within institutions, this thesis argues that gaining this vantage point is crucial in being able to fully understand the interaction order of the institution. For instance, 'move on' is the product of staff-resident interactions, and depends heavily on staff discretion, therefore the staff team should not be overlooked.

By observing situations and paying attention to the most routine, mundane, everyday aspects of hostel life, we can begin to build up an understanding of the interaction order of the hostel, with its territorial violations, secondary adjustments, staff discretion, and so on. After all, these kinds of interactions only become so 'routine,' and therefore unseen, due to their deep embeddedness within the interaction order of that institution. In sum, all of the key concepts and themes outlined herein – from staff exercising discretion to categorisation practices – exist within situated interactions and must therefore be studied this way. As promised in Chapter Two, this chapter offers a new way of seeing the aforementioned issues. This chapter argues that interactionism, and the interaction order in particular (Goffman, 1983), enables researchers to gain a nuanced and complex understanding of institutional life, including barriers to exiting the institution. Chapter Four will set out the methodological approach most well-suited to the study of situated interactions – namely ethnography.

Chapter four: Methodology

When researchers focus on situated interactions, they gain a new perspective and way of seeing, which embraces the 'messiness and uncertainty of social reality' by engaging with social life 'on its own terms' (Hall, 2000: 122). For example, by observing Emran's keyworking session in Chapter Three, a unique vantage point was gained into some of the interactional barriers faced by Holbrook's residents. This chapter builds upon the theoretical contributions of Chapter Three, by explicating a methodological approach capable of examining the interaction order of the hostel. It argues that ethnography enables researchers to observe these situated interactions, thereby placing them in the unique position to interrogate what it is about '*this place'* that prevents people from getting out of it. This 'up close' look grants the researcher access to the interactional intricacies of institutional life, in this case, facilitating an in-depth exploration of the barriers to 'exiting' homelessness. The chapter will begin by exploring what ethnography is and why it is well-suited to the present study, before introducing the homeless hostel and its residents. It then follows the researcher throughout the data collection process, from entry to final exit, challenging the literature on positionality, considering the impact of COVID-19 on data collection, and setting out the analytic approach taken. It concludes by considering some of the actual ethical dilemmas which were encountered whilst in the field.

Ethnography: What and why?

> It was then and still is my belief that any group of persons-prisoners, primitives, pilots, or patients-develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable, and normal once you get close to it, and that a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject. (Goffman, 1961: ix/x).

Ethnography does not possess a neat or standardised definition, owing to its complex historical development and numerous theoretical influences (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). From explorations of non-Western cultures to backyard communities, and from Marxist to symbolic interactionist influences, ethnography has been readapted and reinterpreted within a range of different contexts and perspectives. Ethnography is often

described as a methodological approach – or 'a way of seeing' (Wolcott: 1999: 41) – which is primarily concerned with understanding the world through the eyes of those being studied (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010; Asare, 2015). In order to gain insights into the lives of informants, emphasis is placed on the interpretation of meanings, actions, and practices, as well as their location within wider contexts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In other words, it enables researchers to physically 'get close' to the lives of their informants so that they are 'close to them while they are responding to what life does to them' (Goffman, 1989: 125).

To achieve this outcome, ethnography has a number of practical preferences: for open-ended and in-depth research, less structured data collection, a combination of qualitative research methods with participant observation at the forefront, a lengthy period of fieldwork, and an inductive analysis (Hall, 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; LeCompte and Schensul, 2010). Participant observation is central to ethnography and involves researchers immersing themselves in the lives of their informants within 'natural,' rather than experimental, conditions, by listening to what they say, watching what they do, and attempting to get close to the members' perspective (Bernard, 2006; Creswell and Poth, 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Hoolachan, 2016). Hall (2003) achieved this by simply spending as much time as possible talking to young people who were experiencing homelessness, allowing his movements and views of homelessness to be determined by his informants. Participant observation is therefore the primary method for understanding the interactions of informants.

Whilst interviews have always formed part of the ethnographic research process, there has been concern with an over-reliance on interview data in recent years, reflecting what Atkinson refers to as the 'interview society,' i.e., a preoccupation with self-revelation and accounts of personal feelings or experiences (Atkison, 2015: 94; Hammersley, 2006). This is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, interview data are often taken at 'face value' as offering some sort of privileged access to the realm of the personal, as opposed to being regarded as performances in their own right (Atkinson, 2005). Secondly, an over-emphasis on the individual has led to a neglect of the social, which runs contra to the work of interactionists over the years, including Goffman who argued that we must focus not on

‘men and their moments. Rather moments and their men’ (1967: 3). Even those who commonly employ interviews as a research method concede that problems arise from an overreliance on, and unreflective use of, interview data (Vassenden and Mangset, 2024). I have already alluded to the existence of such problems within the housing policy literature, with its critical realist leanings (see Chapter Two).

Within the context of this study, interviews alone would have failed to capture certain ‘barriers,’ including those which were mundane, routine, and unremarkable, taken-for-granted aspects of institutional life, and those not conceived of as barriers by hostel members. In other words, those which were deeply embedded within the interaction order of the institution. Crucially, without participant observation, it would have been difficult to answer my very research question - *are barriers built into the interaction orders of institutions?* That being said, interviews remain an ‘indispensable sociological tool,’ capable of addressing one of ethnography’s greatest limitations, that of feasibility (Vassenden and Mangset, 2024: 1002). Where physical access to a setting or community is impossible, then observation becomes unfeasible, as I myself discovered during the course of my fieldwork. Whilst it is not desirable to reject the interview altogether, researchers should practice greater situational awareness when conducting and analysing them (Vassenden and Mangset, 2024).

An ethnographic approach is particularly well-suited to the present study for a number of reasons. Firstly, ethnography can provide researchers with detailed insights into the lives of their informants, by capturing the minutiae of their everyday experiences (Smith, 2011). It enables researchers to get close enough to informants to pick up on ‘minor grunts and groans’ as they respond to their situation (Goffman, 1989: 125). Moreover, it is uniquely positioned to ‘capture processes; to connect what people say with what they do; and to explore everyday lived experiences’ (Hoolachan, 2016: 32). For Atkinson (2015), an ethnographic approach ensures that researchers take a non-judgemental approach to a given group whilst taking their culture and social organisation seriously. In the context of this research, participant observation creates space for the emergence of a more holistic and complex picture (Hoolachan, 2016), as researchers can witness first-hand the kinds of interactions which result in institutional ‘exits’ or contribute to individuals becoming stuck.

Secondly, as ethnography allows time for the development of trusting relationships between researchers and informants, it is especially well-suited for studying marginalised or hard-to-reach groups, such as those experiencing homelessness (Cloke et al, 2010). The development of rapport is evident in the number of penetrating ethnographies on the topic of homelessness (Snow and Anderson, 1993; Duneier, 1999; Spradley, 1999; Hall, 2003; Ravenhill, 2003; McNaughton, 2008; Hoolachan, 2016; Hall, 2016; Howell, 2021; Williams, 2022). However, Bernard (2006) notes that 'building rapport' is merely a euphemism for 'impression management,' whilst Wolcott dedicates a chapter to the 'darker arts' of fieldwork and states that 'in fieldwork one must be prepared to fake everything' (2005: 116). I engaged with these 'darker arts' as I fostered familiarity with my informants and attempted to reduce social distance, particularly with the residents (Hall, 2000; DeVerteuil, 2004; Raheim et al, 2016). For example, casual dress, colloquial speech, and the language of 'pins,' 'scripts', and 'gear', went some way to reducing any sharp distinctions in 'appearance' and 'manner' between myself and my informants (Goffman, 1959; Bernard, 2006). I also made certain self-disclosures – about my background, experiences, and stories. However, it is noted that these 'dark arts' are not confined to fieldwork, but provide necessary responses to the naturally suspicious nature of human activity more broadly (Wolcott, 2005). Further, if our informants are expected to speak openly, then it is only fair that we do so ourselves (Hammersley ad Atkinson, 2007).

Finally, ethnography facilitates a holistic understanding of populations and their places; one which develops naturally over time, accounts for the complexity and messiness of social life, and does justice to the stories of those encountered (Hall, 2003; Hoolachan, 2016). By observing interactions from within places like homeless hostels, it is possible to see how processes between service users and providers play out in interactions (Clapham, 2002), whilst appreciating how these spaces are 'lived, perpetuated, and experienced' by their members (Jackson, 2015: 3). Our understanding becomes even more complete when multiple voices and perspectives are incorporated (Snow and Anderson, 1993). Ethnography is capable of producing a multidimensional and polyphonic account of the barriers to exiting homelessness, without relying on assumptions made in the academic literature.

Whilst ethnography has been subject to several criticisms, these tend to centre on positivistic measures of validity, reliability, and generalisability, and therefore hinge on key epistemological and ontological differences (Hoolachan, 2016). For instance, as ethnography produces highly qualitative outcomes, findings are often dismissed for being 'too subjective' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Creswell and Poth argue that the continued use and application of such positivistic notions facilitates 'the acceptance of qualitative research in a "quantitative" world' (2007: 11). Instead of forcing ethnography to adhere to positivistic measures of validity, reliability, and generalisability, academics have proposed alternative measures of credibility, which are better equipped at testing the trustworthiness of ethnographic research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Eisner, 1991; Wolcott, 1999; Whittemore et al, 2001; Spindler, 2014). For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the measures of: 'transferability', i.e., the readers' ability to decide on the applicability of research to different contexts based on thick description; 'dependability', which relates to consistency over time and is enhanced by audit trails; the 'confirmability' of findings, which should derive from the data rather than the researcher; and 'credibility,' which relates to the plausibility of findings and is underpinned by various techniques, including member checking and the triangulation of sources and methods. These are the more appropriate standards of credibility to which I have held my research.

There are some more subtle criticisms from within ethnography too. Ethnomethodologists, for instance, fault ethnography for being 'both too involved in and too removed from the social worlds it studies' (Pollner and Emerson, 2007: 118). Pollner and Emerson warn that ethnographers risk missing essential practices due to 'unwitting cultural communion between researcher and subject' owing to the researcher's membership of a broader common culture (2007: 125). In consequence, ethnographers risk making presuppositions and relying on variations of 'natural facts,' rather than paying attention to the interactional work which goes into the achievement of such 'facts.' Moreover, ethnographers risk using members' grumbles – their concerns and explanations – as analytic resources rather than treating them as a topic. For instance, ethnographers may simply regurgitate the accounts of their informants, collecting and collating their taken-for-granted assumptions, rather than critically engaging with those accounts and seeking to understand the social and interactional work which goes into accomplishing such assumptions (Smith, 2020).

Whilst my research is not ethnomethodological, I have nonetheless probed taken-for-granted aspects of life at Holbrook House, partly in an effort to make the familiar strange (see below), though more importantly, in an attempt to comprehend the interaction order of the hostel (Goffman, 1983). Chapter Five provides an illustration of this, as rather than assuming that 'this place' was to blame for all sorts of maladies and misfortunes, including one's inability to escape it, I probe the ways in which the phrase is instead used to account for present circumstance. A less critical ethnography may appropriate such accounts and go on to conclude that 'this place' is the problem, simply because members said so.

(Re-)Entering Holbrook House

> Holbrook House is a four-story, off-white building, located in the South of England. It towers over the industrial units and social housing which sit either side of it and is encased by tall, black metal fences. The entrance to the front garden is via a heavy metal gate, which is often propped open, rendering the intercom redundant. I follow the path to the front door. A man passes me by, head down and hood up. I knock on the glass front door and a member of staff buzzes me in. I sign in and am buzzed through a second set of doors, into the resident reception area. Megan sits behind the staff reception desk and stares at a computer as we exchange courtesies. Our paths had briefly crossed before, she had just started working on reception as I left my admin role. I tell her about my PhD, 'I'm coming back to Holbrook to do my research, starting with some observations,' 'oh you're coming to spy on us?' she retorts in possible jest (Fieldnotes, 17/01/20).

Holbrook is a traditional hostel. It is made up of 93 single occupancy ensuite bedrooms and a variety of communal spaces, offers short-term accommodation, and is only available to single males (Liddiard and Hutson, 1991). It also offers the highest level of support within the city's treatment-first pathway (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010). Geographically, it sits within the central 'service hub,' which comprises a range of services for those experiencing homelessness, including day centres, drug and alcohol support services, a medical centre, and soup kitchens (Evans, 2019).

Hostels can be difficult places for researchers to access. However, having previously worked at Holbrook, I was able to get my foot in the door and informally agree access with Charlie, the hostel's manager and primary gatekeeper. I had previously worked at Holbrook in an administrative capacity and spent most of my time out the back, in the staff offices, though I also undertook the occasional 'relief' shift, in which I helped to cover reception. However, once I secured funding for my PhD, I stopped working at Holbrook in any capacity, to put some distance between myself and the hostel's members. Having informally agreed access, I did not consider approaching another hostel in the city. Whilst Holbrook is fairly typical of the city's hostel provision – in its design, high levels of support, and location within the homelessness pathway – it is also the largest.

I wrote the above fieldnote extract after entering Holbrook for the first time in nine months, for a pre-arranged meeting with Charlie. As Charlie had raised no concerns prior to this meeting, I had naively come with a simple list of practical questions – When can I start? Will I be given a building pass? Will I have access to desk space? and so on. However, when discussing the finer details, particularly the proposed duration of my fieldwork, Charlie's eyes widened. This was not the only misunderstanding to crop up during the course of our meeting, with the most significant pertaining to confidentiality. This became evident when Charlie commented on the 'insights' he would gain from my research, assuming that I would report back to him on both the residents and staff. I later found out that a member of staff had recently been sacked for drinking on the job. However, I quickly clarified my position, explaining the importance of upholding researcher confidentiality. Although taken aback at first, he recognised that I would not want to be seen as a 'hotline to management.' Access was a negotiation, the boundaries of which were delineated within this first meeting, where amongst other things, it was agreed that I would break confidentiality if somebody was at risk of harm, refrain from doing any of the staff's work as this may cause confusion, and spatially confine myself to communal areas unless accompanied by a staff member.

At one point, Charlie asked whether I would be filming or recording, and wanted reassurance that I was not creating a 'panorama-style documentary.' I was slightly offended and reaffirmed that I was just 'doing research,' though it was the offer of paperwork – including a copy of my acceptance letter, ethical approval, and signed copy of discussion we

had had that day – which appeased him. In this instance, paperwork provided a safety net, a bureaucratic counterbalance to the possible risks associated with data collection (Graeber, 2015). Charlie recognised that he was being 'risk averse,' though recalled a time when a new member of staff had attempted to create a Panorama-style documentary of the hostel. Upon reflection, the risk was that this often-invisible space – this people-containing institution – would be rendered visible to an unknown 'public' (Hopper, 2003).

What was interesting in my interaction with Megan was that whilst I re-entered the hostel proclaiming to be 'a researcher,' I was immediately re-categorised as 'a spy', a category which initially I found hard to shake. When I attended the weekly Resident's Meeting to introduce myself and my research to the residents (4/93 attendees), I was prompted by a staff member to state that I was 'not a spy' (Fieldnotes, 22/01/20). In consequence, when it came to introducing myself to the staff team during a handover, I felt the need to reiterate that I was 'not a spy' from the outset. Further, I was discouraged from my initial attempts at making open notes, for instance, when one resident warned another, 'she's watching you' (Fieldnotes, 22/01/20).

Researchers have described similar feelings of mistrust and suspicion from residents and staff at comparable settings (Hall, 2000; DeVerteuil, 2004). This is unsurprising, given that there are two kinds of 'finks' who carry out observations, the police and researchers (Goffman, 1989). Whilst ethnographers are generally met with some suspicion in the early stages of fieldwork, it got me thinking about the significance of the 'spy' category within this particular setting (Herbert, 2001; Simmons, 2007; Driscoll and Schuster, 2018; Dawar, 2021). It was emblematic of the general paranoia which permeated the hostel setting, for instance, Charlie was simultaneously encouraging and fearful of me being a spy, depending on who I would report back to. Moreover, my immediate re-categorisation from researcher to spy, made me challenge the idea of an *a priori* 'researcher role,' as well as the conflation of positionality with biography, given that my 'position' within the hostel was largely out of my hands, a point which I will consider in more depth now.

‘So, you’re doing your research just standing *there*?’: Spatial positionality of the researcher

Securing physical access to the hostel was only the first step in my access negotiations, as further gatekeepers to interaction lay ahead (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In preparing for encounters with these multiple gatekeepers, I read at length about the so-called ‘researcher role,’ which McCall and Simmons described as the ‘single most important determinant of what he will be able to learn… where he can go, what he can do, whom he can interact with’ (1969: 29). I had assumed that I would actively be able to claim the ‘researcher role,’ together with a number of suitable sub-roles, such as those of: ‘participant-as-observer’ or ‘observer-as-participant’ (Gold, 1958); ‘the wise’, who is accepting of and accepted by those who bare stigma (Goffman, 1963a); the ‘buddy-researcher’ who spends time hanging around with, and therefore develops a rapport with, their informants (Snow and Anderson, 1993); and the ‘sympathetic listener’, who listens non-judgementally to the plight of their informants (Cloke et al, 2000: 145; DeVerteuil, 2004). I felt that these roles would allow me to get close to, and gain access to, the lives of my informants (Perry, 2013).

Given that I was a female researcher about to enter a male-only hostel, I also read extensively about positionality, and the insider-outsider dichotomy, in anticipation that my gender could either help or hinder access to my informants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Some researchers purportedly capitalised on this dynamic, as the traditionally subordinate role of women made it possible to gain access to male informants in a non-threatening way (Gurney, 1985). Others warned of commonly-encountered issues such as sexual hustling, sexist remarks, and exclusion from male ‘fraternity,’ sometimes in the quest to create and maintain hegemonic masculinities (Gurney, 1985; Arendell, 1997; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Goffman, 2014; Lumsden, 2013). However, upon entry, aside from an occasional reference to my gender – ‘*Do you have a boyfriend?*’ *‘You remind me of my daughter,’ ‘I’d hate to see this sweetheart around when a fight broke out’* – it was nowhere near as significant as I had anticipated.

> The residents keep thinking I'm staff, I tell Simon. 'It's only natural' he says, 'if you're not somebody's girlfriend and not somebody's sister, then you're staff' (Fieldnotes, 28/01/20)

My gender was most relevant as residents made sense of who I was, i.e., what sort of female candidate would enter a male-only hostel (Laurier, 2004). In the early stages, it was often assumed that I was a member of staff, perhaps the most logical inference given the sparsity of other categories of women within the hostel. This was apparent when residents called me 'miss,' a title reserved for female staff members, and asked me to perform staff duties, such as letting them into the telephone room. I was possibly ascribed the staff role over others due to the presence of an 'omni-relevant device' within the hostel, made up of the categories 'staff' and 'resident' (Sacks, 1992: 313).

In the early stages of fieldwork, my gender was made relevant by the residents, albeit in more subtle ways than I had originally envisaged, such as those above. However, as fieldwork progressed, I realised that another, more important, determinant was used by residents to make sense of who I was. I will refer to this determinant as 'spatial positioning.' To build trust with the residents, I sought to distance myself from the staff team in multiple ways: by minimising the amount of time spent visibly talking to staff; eating meals with the residents rather than staff; refraining from entering the staff reception area, the most visible of staff territories; and hiding my building pass and safety alarm. In doing so, I was spatially and symbolically distancing myself from the staff team, demonstrating to the residents that I was not on the staff's 'side' (Becker, 1967; McCulloch, 2015).

> Stanley asks, 'are you a student then?' I tell him about my research aims. He points towards the staff reception area and says, 'not back there?' Isam responds on my behalf and says 'no' whilst shaking his head. I joke and tell Stanley that I'm not interested in them. Stanley pauses for a moment, then says, 'I've been here for one year, I'm not a druggie and I'm not an alcoholic' but that he's struggling to move on (Fieldnotes, 13/02/20).

As the above sub-heading suggests, some of the residents were initially sceptical of my hanging around, questioning how I could possibly be doing research by 'just standing there,'

but as Hall (2000) noted in his research with young people experiencing homelessness, time was an invaluable tool for overcoming these early misgivings. As such, I developed the skill of 'hanging out' in communal hostel spaces (Bernard, 2006), particularly the reception area, whilst putting my faith in the power of 'pure sociability' as a mechanism for establishing trust (Hammersley and Atkison, 2007: 70). I engaged constantly in small talk, often around whatever happened to be on TV at the time – food, travel, history, animals, education, the government, hobbies, family, the weather, just to name a few. Although mundane chitchat may seem trivial, repeated engagement in small talk formed the building blocks upon which I was able to develop trusting relationships with my informants.

My perseverance paid off when Stanley – who had initially been reluctant to even give me his name – started to open up about his experiences of living at Holbrook House and his frustration at becoming stuck there. Prior to this breakthrough, we had simply been talking about soup kitchens and Valentine's Day. His willingness to open up hinged on my spatial positioning, as I was not 'back there,' meaning that I did not spend time in staff areas and was therefore not allied with the staff team. Isam, who also spent a lot of time in reception, vouched for my spatial positioning, i.e., that I was the kind of person who was 'out here' and not 'back there.' As Isam vouched for me on multiple occasions, consequently facilitating deeper interactions with others, he became a key internal gatekeeper in the early stages of my fieldwork. By spending time in resident spaces, I was able to reduce the social distance between myself and my participants (Hall, 2000; DeVerteuil, 2004; Raheim et al, 2016). Residents began to approach me and said things like, 'I hear you're writing a book' or 'I've seen you around,' thereby facilitating an introduction (Goffman, 2014).

> At the front gate, Jake demands, 'why were you in there?' He points towards the building, and I realise he means the staff reception. I reassure him that I wasn't and tell him that he might have confused me with a blonde member of staff. 'I was sitting by the radiator,' I say. He smiles, 'where you used to sit.' I smile back, 'yeah' (Fieldnotes, 04/11/20).

Although Jake did not live at Holbrook at this point, he had once spoken to me with candour, and therefore understandably felt betrayed when he thought I'd crossed the

physical and symbolic boundary into staff territory. These types of encounters, together with remarks about being 'seen' around, highlighted the importance of my *visible* spatial positioning. However, the importance of visibility extended beyond mere shows of allegiance, as crucially, my spatial positioning also determined what was visible to me. Time spent in staff spaces risked opening my eyes to alternate ways of seeing, which may be at odds with the carefully crafted impressions residents conveyed. For instance, the recent trouble which Jake – the self-proclaimed poet – had been causing, or the 'real' reason Stanley had become stuck at Holbrook, which will be returned to in Chapter Eight.

Through my spatial positioning I became caught up in multiple 'local webs of associations' (van Maanen, 2003: 59), not just between staff and residents, but the multiple, ever-changing factions within the hostel. So, after Damian passed through reception, claiming that his attack was unprovoked, that he had only asked for 'a drag of a cigarette,' I had exchanged glances with Isam and Abbas, and they burst out laughing, 'she knows it's bullshit!' In other words, I became seen as, and began to see like, somebody who hung around at reception. Whilst I did gain some valuable insights during this period, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic ensured that it was relatively short-lived, the effects of which will be considered further below. However, even during this short period of time, I was ascribed a multitude of roles, including that of student, staff, investigator, writer, volunteer, local, normal, good person, spy, and friend, amongst others, as is the case with every hostel member (Coulter, 1996). And as with every other hostel member, the ascription of these roles was necessarily restricted by the setting itself (Coulter, 1996).

My experience challenges the idea that ethnographers can simply claim the role of 'researcher,' or any other role for that matter. Instead it encourages researchers to think reflexively about the roles which they are ascribed within the field by members of that scene, as well as the role played by the setting in role ascription. It also challenges 'shopping list positionality' as a means of statically situating the researcher in relation to their informants, according to an insider-outsider dichotomy. The concept of spatial positionality contests the idea that a researcher's characteristics – including visible characteristics, such as ethnicity or gender, and invisible characteristics, such as education or family background – determine how they will be received and interacted with by their informants (Reyes, 2020;

Folkes, 2022). Instead, by thinking reflexively about my own position (quite literally) throughout the research process, I was less fixated on the fixity of field roles and paid more attention to the ways in which my identity was constantly being constructed by others (Sultana, 2007).

Data collection during a global pandemic

My original plan for data collection involved participant observation, creative methods via an art group, interviews, and focus groups, all of which would be based at Holbrook House. However, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and first lockdown commencing just two months into my fieldwork, this plan had to be re-assessed. Whilst there was suggestion of adapting my research and moving data collection online, my passion for interactionism and ethnography meant that I instead chose to bide my time, adapt certain aspects of the data collection process, and simply collect data wherever and however I could. As such, I have divided this section into three parts, which loosely reflect my experiences of the different phases of data collection: in the pre-COVID phase I began with my original data collection plan; during the first lockdown I was forced to undertake data collection remotely; and beyond that I was able to return to the field intermittently, in line with the various waves of COVID-19 and their accompanying lockdowns. Despite the huge practical disruption caused by the pandemic, together with its incalculable mental toll, I undertook 218 hours of participant observation between January 2020 and December 2021, carried out three creative timeline interviews with former residents via telephone, engaged 13 staff members in semi-structured interviews via Zoom or telephone, and carried out 8 in-person unstructured interviews with current hostel residents.

Pre-COVID: Participant observation – multiple spaces, multiple perspectives

> Bradley flips a burger and looks at Lara, 'you've got to get a list, make sure people don't just come when they smell the food.' He mentions this frequently and stands by the motto, 'you don't cook, you don't eat.' Lara retorts, 'do you remember what I said earlier? Do you *remember* what I said earlier? This is about cooking *together*.' The group continues in momentary silence, which Lara breaks, 'the problem is we have what we have and that's it.' She has tried to get more frying pans but there

> isn't the money. Ray suggests charity shops, but she doesn't have the time. He comments on reception staff 'just sitting around' (Fieldnotes, 13/02/2020).

As with most ethnographic research, I foregrounded my fieldwork with a period of participant observation, commencing in January 2020. I recruited my informants informally through conversations in which I told them about my research and asked if they would be willing to take part. Responses were mixed, some members were keen to share their thoughts on the 'real' problems, and whilst nobody explicitly refused to participate, I quickly got a sense of who was an unwilling participant, through their one-word answers and general tendency to avoid me. Nonetheless, as Wieder (1974) found, members' reluctance to talk in itself provided interesting institutional insights.

Participant observation was about getting close to the activities and experiences of my informants, through immersion in their worlds, to grasp what was meaningful and important to them (Emerson et al, 2011). As such, I practiced the art of 'hanging around,' by eating meals in the dining room, attending ping pong and cooking groups, and watching lots of television. By joining in with the mundane activities of informants, I was well placed to pick up on the sorts of 'minor grunts and groans' which Goffman was concerned with (1989: 125). From this perspective, I could better empathise with certain complaints, for example, I related to complaints about the cold toast because I also ate the cold toast.

I became aware of the multiple perspectives on any given topic, represented by the polyphony of grunts and groans (Cloke et al, 2000). During the cooking group, for instance, Lara (staff) and Bradley (resident) held conflicting opinions about who should be allowed to join the group and when. As an ethnographer, I navigated the multiple, situated realities of my informants. In doing so, neutrality and detachment were impossible, as the more time I spent around certain people and groups, the more I was exposed to their unique perspective (Emerson et al, 2011). For example, the more time I spent with Isam and Abbas, the more I began to view Eric's behaviour from their perspective, paying attention to his shouting, dealing, bullying, and stealing. Whilst I had hoped to strategically position myself – to avoid showing excessive loyalty to any one group or faction – this proved tricky, as Eric often saw me spending time in the reception area, alongside Isam and Abbas. Eric seemed

sceptical of my presence for multiple reasons, another being detailed below, and avoided me on this basis – I would therefore never truly gain his perspective on events. Nevertheless, this added further weight to the above argument relating to the researcher's spatial positionality.

I captured the intricacies of day-to-day life at Holbrook House, particularly the interactions which took place within it, through the 'thick description' of interactions and scenes (Geertz, 1973; Atkinson, 2005). Geertz (1973) argued that the thick description was the object of ethnography and borrowed Ryle's example of the wink to differentiate 'thin description' from 'thick description,' the former described quite literally as a rapid contracting of the eyelid, whilst the latter could be interpreted as a conspiratorial sign to a friend or a burlesque wink. The difference lies in the ability of the ethnographer to interpret the significance of the wink – together with other actions or interactions – which first requires them to speak the language of the setting and learn how to participate themselves (Luhrmann, 2015). Geertz explained that the analysis of culture was therefore not 'an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning' (1973: 311), that ethnographies were essentially interpretations, and that the skill of the ethnographer lay in their ability to clarify what happens in the field. Rather than reifying 'culture' by treating it as something independent, Geertz conceived of it as being enacted by individuals and therefore the product of joint activity (Risjord, 2007), a standpoint which places equal emphasis on social action (Atkinson, 2005).

I have interpreted actions and interactions throughout the course of my research, bridging the gap between literal actions and the meanings which suffuse those actions. So when in chapter seven, a man on a bike says, 'Lincoln, come here,' I understand that Lincoln is going to be offered drugs and that he will take them despite his desire to 'get out,' and that this exemplifies the interactional barriers to escaping Holbrook House. In the same chapter, I also understand that a man's shaking is the result of a spice attack, whilst comprehending the spatiotemporal problem which this attack poses to all hostel members. Thick description of this kind not only makes the reader feel more familiar with those being studied by reducing the distance between readers and informants, but it enables them to decide on

the applicability of findings beyond the present context (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Snow and Anderson, 1993).

The first few days in the field were especially important for capturing and documenting initial feelings of strangeness in this way (Hall, 2000). Aware that this strangeness would not last forever, I set out to record the small, often overlooked details of the building, paying close attention to its temperature, sounds and smells, the posters which covered its walls, the atmosphere at different times, the number of residents in reception, and the seating arrangements in communal areas, amongst other things.

I recorded a series of jottings whilst undertaking observations, before translating these into full sets of fieldnotes, either later that day or the next morning, depending on the time of my observations. I experimented with different methods for making jottings early on, from open to covert note-taking, ultimately settling on the latter, ironically for fear of being categorised as a spy. To capture key words and phrases verbatim, I used the notes app on my phone, whilst making routine trips to the bathroom to expand upon these, adding details of informants and simple doodles of scenes, all of which helped to jog my memory when it came to writing up fieldnotes (Cahill et al, 1985; Emerson et al, 2011). Fieldnotes are luminous descriptions of socially situated behaviours (Katz, 2001). For Emerson et al, fieldnotes are simultaneously descriptive and inscriptive, as they transform events, persons, and places into the written form, and thereby offer 'subtle and complex understandings of these others' lives, routines, and meanings' (2011: 17). As I transformed events and people into fieldnotes, I sought to record as much detail as possible, meaning that on average each hour of fieldwork resulted in between two to three pages of typed fieldnotes.

The first lockdown: "I'm surprised you're still here"

> I don't think the men's lives have changed much… there was a great deal of fear and anxiety at the beginning, but that's sort of March, April, now we're like May, into June, it really, I know it sounds daft, but it's like COVID has come and gone as far as our men are concerned [Fiona: okay (laughs)] and actually within the pathway, people are still able to move on, so I think that's a really good thing (Interview with Simon, 11/06/20).

As the threat posed by COVID-19 loomed large, my continued presence within the hostel – as somebody who fell into the 'non-essential' category of membership, alongside visitors and external service providers – was increasingly being questioned by the staff team. I was eventually forced to leave the field, in the first of a series of entries and exits, which loosely aligned with the various waves of COVID-19. During my final days of this first phase, I witnessed staff cleaning handles, questioning when they should wear gloves, distancing from one another, and working out how to deal with residents who were exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, which problematically resembled the symptoms associated with substance withdrawal. The residents mostly carried on as usual, complaining about their lack of money or asking for a light, though some contemplated how the pandemic may affect them, such as when Shaun patted his chest and announced that he would kill his dealer for drugs if he had to (Fieldnotes, 16/03/20).

The last day of my first phase of fieldwork was 20th March 2020. In anticipation that this day would come, I rushed around, putting alternative data collection plans in place. My plan was two-fold: firstly, I collected phone numbers and agreements, from staff and former residents, to take part in distanced interviews, and secondly, I planned for creative methods which could be undertaken in my absence. Olivia became my key point of contact for the creative methods, as a member of staff who had previously expressed interest in arts-based research methods. I left her with a bunch of disposable cameras and blank journals, each affixed with instructions, which asked residents to 'take photos of everyday obstacles' and 'use this journal to document your day-to-day life' respectively. Whilst observation may have been preferable, it had also become unfeasible (Vassenden and Mangset, 2024). Creative methods and distanced interviews were a way of gathering some kind of information about the hostel beyond my expulsion from it. Interview data therefore went some way to plugging those large gaps where I was stuck at home.

During the first lockdown, between late March and early June 2020, I conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with staff members. These took place either on Zoom (2) or over the phone (11), and engaged reception staff, support staff, and managers. I asked two sets of questions, which varied slightly based on job role, the first set centred on my research interests – daily experiences, barriers to getting out, the move on process, and inquiring

about actual observations – whilst the second set probed what life at Holbrook House was like during the pandemic. The degree of flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews meant that I could ask pre-planned questions or deviate from them, depending on the flow of conversation (Ruslin et al, 2022).

In terms of the COVID-19 lockdowns, the range of measures being implemented to ensure social distancing included: the removal of furniture in reception, markers on the dining room floor to space people out as they queued, cancellation of activities and initially support sessions too, use of personal protective equipment (PPE), negotiation of script (prescription) pickups, a ban on visitors, and influx of NHS posters, and the provision of hand sanitiser. This bricolage of measures was pieced together by hostel staff during the 'epicentre period' or 'eye of the storm' (Charlie, August 2020) – between March and May 2020 – in the absence of specific NHS or Government guidance for homeless hostels and similar institutions. Absurdly, such guidance was not published until August 2020, once England had begun to 'reopen' (DLUHC, 2020). There was a gradual shift in the attitudes of staff over the course of interviews, which ran from April until August 2020, stemming from 'an undercurrent of fear' that the virus would 'sweep through the building' (Adrian, April 2020) to a sense that 'nothing's changed' and that residents were back to their pre-COVID routines and behaviours (Simon, June 2020).

During this period, I also undertook 3 timeline interviews with former Holbrook House residents. Two weeks prior to each interview, I sent out a pack containing an information sheet, blank timelines, pens, and coloured stickers, to enable participants to create visual depictions of their life histories (Berends, 2011). Participants were simply asked to 'create a timeline of your experiences of homelessness,' and were advised to 'use the timeline to document any life events which are important to you.' By keeping the instructions relatively vague, participants were given the freedom to frame their own journeys, by organising their own thoughts and experiences in their own way (Bagnoli, 2009; Kolar et al, 2015; Pell et al, 2020). For instance, Paul used the timeline to capture his entire life, whilst Fred's began in 2018, as he felt that his time in prison served as a useful turning point, and therefore starting point. In the interviews which followed, participants described the timeline activity as being cathartic and enjoyable (Pell et al, 2020). Moreover, the timelines facilitated rich

insights into the intricacies of the participants' lived experiences (Mannay and Creaghan, 2016; Pell et al, 2020). The depth of detail captured by these interviews was reflected in interview length alone, as they ranged in length from one to two hours.

All interviews were conducted at a distance. One criticism, levelled at telephone interviews in particular, is that they do not allow researchers to pick up on non-verbal cues, such as body language (Balushi, 2018). Another is that they may make it difficult to build rapport (Novick, 2008). However, these interviews enabled me to gather some form of data, which I would not otherwise have been able to do whilst stuck at home. Telephone and Zoom interviews therefore provided a convenient means of collecting data during the pandemic, as they were accessible, flexible, and feasible during the various lockdowns (Cachia and Millward, 2011). Further, I had already built a level of rapport with each of my participants during my first phase of my fieldwork.

> I call the hostel for an update on the journals. There's a queue, which is unusual, then a man answers, 'she's out the back' he huffs when I ask for Olivia. He connects me and she apologises, 'it's been crazy here.' I tell her I understand. She's only given out two journals, because they're not in contact with the guys as much. I thank her and ask how things are at Holbrook. They've had to close reception, stop visitors, and close the gates at the front (Fieldnotes, 24/03/20)

The auto-photography (Glaw et al, 2017) and journalling (Hayman and Wilkes, 2012) methods were not as successful as hoped, given the circumstances. After leaving the field, Charlie said that he was not comfortable with the auto-photography as he felt that the disposable cameras could be 'misused.' As such, they were not distributed. Furthermore, restrictions on staff interactions with residents made it difficult for Olivia to hand out journals. I also felt guilty for asking, given the triviality of my request compared to the 'extraordinary institutional troubles' (see Chapter Six) which the staff faced during this 'epicentre' period. Even so, when I eventually returned to Holbrook, Olivia handed over two partially-completed journals, the other two having left the hostel with those who had been filling them out. The first focused on the frustrations of missing out on food and questioned

whether they would be better off in jail, stating that 'this place fucking sucks.' The second largely contained illustrations, which I did not attempt to interpret.

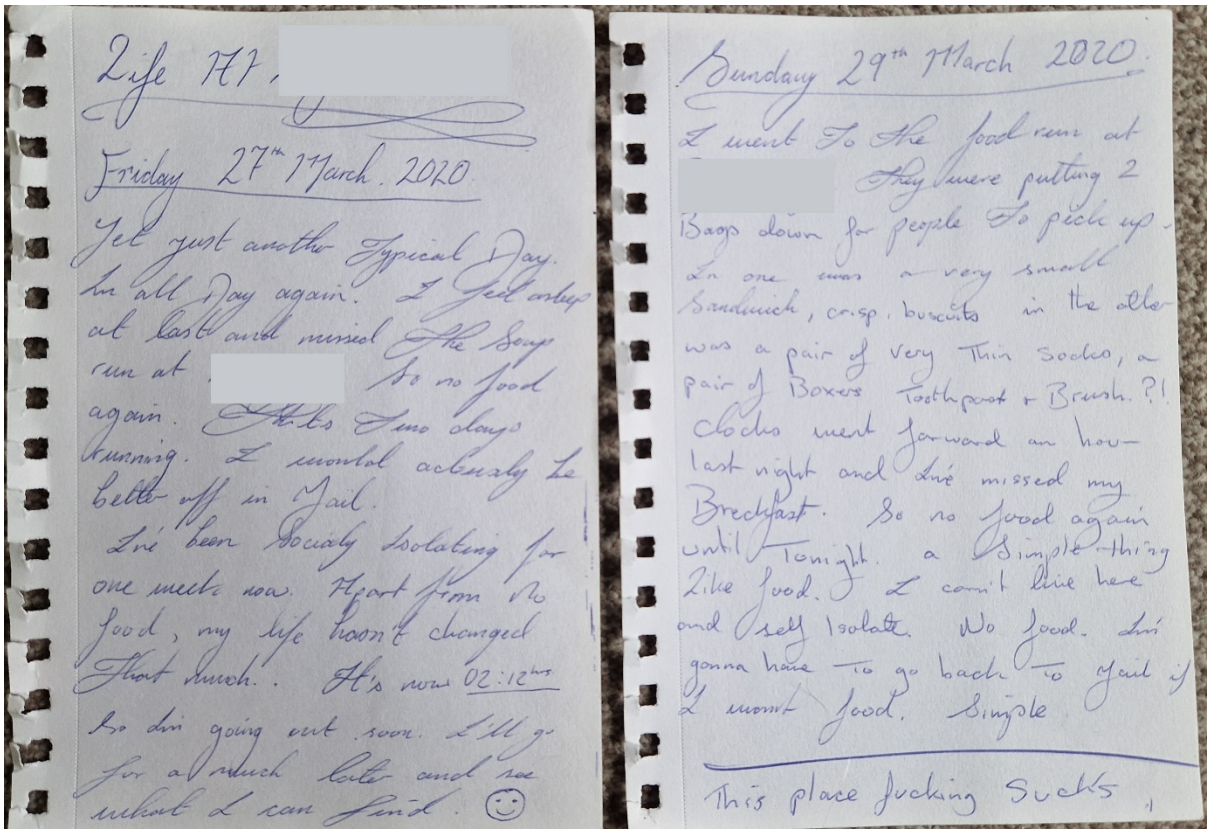

Figure 1 Journal one

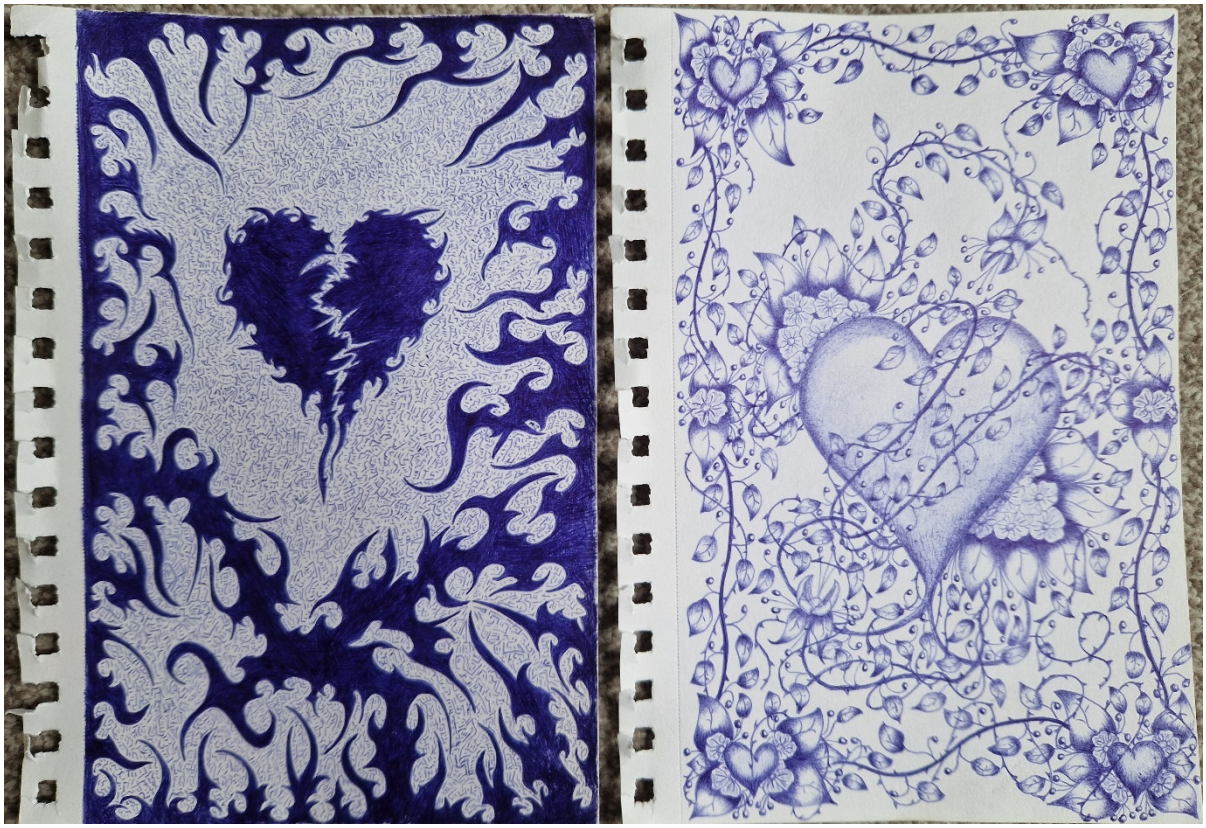

Figure 2 Journal two

The COVID-19 pandemic as a series of entries and exits

> Several men stand in the front garden despite the rain. I put my mask on as I walk down the path. All eyes are on me. There are two new faces behind reception. Rachel hands me a COVID form, which I fill in and she signs off. I try using my pass to open the door, though it doesn't work. Reception is unusually quiet, the TV is off, there's no chatter, and the empty chairs are distanced from one another. The shutter dividing the staff and resident areas is down, the COVID-related posters stuck to it suggest it's not been up in a while. I go to the support office for handover, Charlie advises that I pull up a chair and try to keep 2 meters away, though the small L-shaped office makes this tricky (Fieldnotes, 29/10/20).

Despite the gradual easing of England's lockdown restrictions from June 2020, and having the hostel manager's approval to return shortly afterwards, university restrictions meant

that I was not actually able to return to the field until 29th October 2020. Charlie questioned the university's timing, as cases of COVID-19 were on the rise again by that point, though thankfully he allowed me to return. I managed to collect four more days' worth of fieldnotes before the second national lockdown came into force on 5th November 2020.

If I felt slightly out of place by hanging around during the first phase of fieldwork, I now felt incredibly exposed without the buffer of the television and familiar faces. Despite being mostly quiet, there were occasional bursts of activity in which residents briefly hung around or passed through reception. I tried to strike up conversation, though between the face mask and physical distancing, this felt clunky and unnatural. I pulled my mask down a couple of times when meeting new people, so that they could see my face. However, just as residents started to recognise me, saying 'alright' in passing, I was once again forced to leave the field. I bumped into Isam as I left the hostel on the last day of this phase, he had been evicted and was sleeping rough despite being disabled, and last night had been robbed. He said that outreach didn't want to help, the council didn't want to help, that he had no help.

It was not until 22nd April 2021 that I returned to Holbrook for a final, undisrupted period of fieldwork. At this point, there were no longer any chairs or tables in either the reception or dining areas. Social interactions within communal spaces were as sparse as the furnishings, as with no reason to stop and with nowhere to sit, many residents simply passed through reception, and therefore passed me by. The shutters which divided the staff and resident reception areas remained closed for the remainder of my fieldwork – limiting conversation and visibility across this border (see Chapter Six). The reconfiguration of these spaces impacted my spatial positionality at the hostel. I was often ignored and treated like a non-person by the residents, somebody who was present during interactions but did not partake in them (Goffman, 1959). For those who recognised me, the response was often along the lines of, 'I didn't think you were coming back' (Fieldnotes, 22/04/21).

Due to my lack of interaction with residents, especially during the early stages of this period, I began to attend staff handovers more frequently. At least I could gather some data there. Handovers now took place in the dining room, where social distancing was possible,

following a severe COVID-19 outbreak amongst the staff team. During this final phase of data collection, my time was more evenly split between the residents and the staff. Whilst this had not been my original intention, I felt that it gave me a more well-balanced understanding of the interactional barriers to exiting the hostel, given that staff discretion played a pivotal role in the move on process. For instance, the handover was a place in which the fate of residents was so often debated and determined (Goffman, 1961).

I started taking a chair from the dining room so that I could sit in reception, with my back to the wall. From here I could see the entire reception area, down the hallways either side, and into the front garden. As time passed by, I started talking to more of the residents – Lincoln, Dean, and Layton regularly stopped for a chat. Occasionally, residents copied me and brought their own chairs from the dining room. By the end of this final period of fieldwork, there were often two or three dining chairs in the reception area at any one time.

The rhythm of my fieldwork was more erratic than most ethnographers, as rather than undertaking a lengthy and continuous period of participant observation, mine was forcibly shaped around a series of entries and exits (Smith and Delamont, 2023). This had consequences for my data collection. Each time I exited the hostel involuntarily I felt a deep sense of frustration, like I was moving several steps backwards in the data collection journey, anticipating that I would need to start again upon my re-entry. This feeling of needing to start again was fuelled by two factors: firstly, the high turnover of staff and residents meant that I needed to develop new rapports, and secondly, I had to navigate gradual spatial reconfigurations which were specifically designed to limit interactions within communal spaces.

The in-between phases: An analytic intermission

Between each exit and re-entry, I had lots of time on my hands, and whilst I filled some of it by conducting interviews, transcribing, and reading, I also used this opportunity to deepen my analysis. Williams (2023) treated his brief physical exit from the field as an 'intermission,' which enabled him to take a break from the site of fieldwork and reflect upon his initial findings. There is value in the research removing themselves from the field periodically, as this gives them time to think about the data and ask, what is really going on here?

(Atkinson, 2015). As I had already made a substantial number of fieldnotes – 211 typed pages after the first phase of fieldwork – I began the analytic process of 'reviewing, reexperiencing, and re-examining' my data (Emerson et al, 2011: 173), by initially reading, highlighting, and makings notes in the margins of my printed fieldnotes. This iterative process of moving back and forth between data collection and analysis was central to my analytic strategy, namely grounded theory.

Glaser and Strauss (1965) first developed grounded theory (GT) in response to the limited analytic approaches to qualitative research at the time, which were largely deductive and relied on hypothesis-testing. Dissatisfied with the status quo, they formulated a new approach to qualitative inquiry, which was aimed at the generation of theory based on empirical research as opposed to simply testing it (Glaser and Strauss, 1965). They named this approach 'grounded theory' as its primary concern was with grounding theory in empirical data. In 1967, Glaser and Strauss published a seminal text in which they outlined their new approach, detailing how theory can be generated inductively through comparative analysis and the benefits thereof. When theory is grounded in data 'it can usually not be completely refuted by more data,' despite inevitable modifications and reformulations, further this approach can help 'forestall the opportunistic use of theories that have dubious fit' (1967: 4).

Since this first iteration of GT, which is often referred to as classical or traditional GT, there have been two further developments. In 1990, Strauss and Corbin brought an interpretivist approach to the methodology and sought to address perceived concerns surrounding the rigidity of classical GT (Sebastian, 2019). More recently still, Charmaz (2006) developed a constructivist approach to GT, in which she argued that theories were not simply 'discovered' but that they were constructed through the researchers' experiences, past and present (Sebastian, 2019). The schismatic nature of GT has since been well-documented in the academic literature (Keny and Fourie, 2014). However, Atkinson has observed that these different 'versions' of GT tend to be 'more articulate on what being "grounded" means than on the proper analysis of different types of data' (2005: 11).

Disagreements concerning philosophical underpinnings, methods, or coding procedures may actually divert attention from the primary aim of GT, which Glaser has since put quite simply – 'the GT methodology is based on coding what we do naturally, that is comparing incidents in our lives to see patterns in everyday life' (2014: 47). GT thus describes some of the heuristic methods used by researchers as they engage with an empirical domain, in order to make sense of it (Atkinson, 2015: 56). Although there may be different 'versions' of GT, each still retains some familial resemblance in terms of these basic heuristic methods, namely constant comparative analysis, memo writing, and the concurrent data collection and analysis (Kenny and Fourie, 2014; Chun Tie et al, 2019).

I did not adopt a highly prescriptive or formulaic approach to data analysis, as is the case with much 'textbook' GT, nor did I treat data collection and data analysis as separate phases of research. Instead, I employed these heuristic methods throughout my fieldwork in order to actively explore Holbrook House, whilst gradually making sense of the life within this setting. For instance, I observed that the staff team allowed certain individuals to do or have things in some circumstances, but not in others. By constantly comparing similar instances, I began to develop ideas concerning the use of staff discretion, which are now contained within chapter six. Memo-writing gave me space, away from the field, to mull over my observations as I began to look for patterns within my data. Initially I wondered whether 'teams' might be central to staff's discretionary practices – as I noticed that staff with lived experience were more amenable to the requests of residents – though soon realised that practical concerns played a more central role in the staff's ability to exercise discretion. I used memos to bring in relevant literature too, including Bittner's (1967) observations of police discretion. By carrying out data collection and analysis concurrently, I was able to test and disprove my early team-based hypothesis, whilst finding a more fitting alternative. Moreover, once I realised the importance of staff discretion within the field, I was able to look for further instances of it, and soon understood that discretion was not only about who got a cup of tea and who did not, but that it underscored every staff-resident interaction, including those relating to move on. In other words, I developed sensitising concepts which informed further data collection, enabling me to generate and modify ideas, thus employing a mode of reasoning which has been termed 'ethnographic abduction' (Atkinson, 2015: 57).

Theorising happened throughout my period(s) of fieldwork and beyond – each time I squiggled down an idea in a memo or noticed a pattern in my observations – though once data collection had ended, I took a more systematic approach to analysis. I began by familiarising myself with my data, by reading and re-reading my fieldnotes, highlighting sections and jotting ideas (or initial codes) in the margins, as I continued to make sense of what was going on. As I read over my fieldnotes yet again, I started to group and refine these early ideas, creating a rather large set of codes. I then found it useful to visualise these codes by using coloured pens, sticky notes, and 'situational maps' as I tried to work out how they related to one another (Clarke, 2003; Maher et al, 2018) – these were further heuristic methods which enabled me to make sense of my data (Atkinson, 2015). Figure 3 depicts an early attempt at bringing all of my codes together, whilst Figure 4 illustrates how I ordered and refined the codes which eventually made up Chapter 6. The analytic process was therefore continual, messy, and employed various different formats. Although I did use NVivo to sort my codes and neatly organise my data, it functioned more as a filing cabinet than a mode of analysis. Whilst it is useful to index data in this way, the procedural task of inputting data into computer assisted qualitative data analysis software should not be mistaken for actual analysis (Housley and Smith, 2011; Atkinson, 2015).

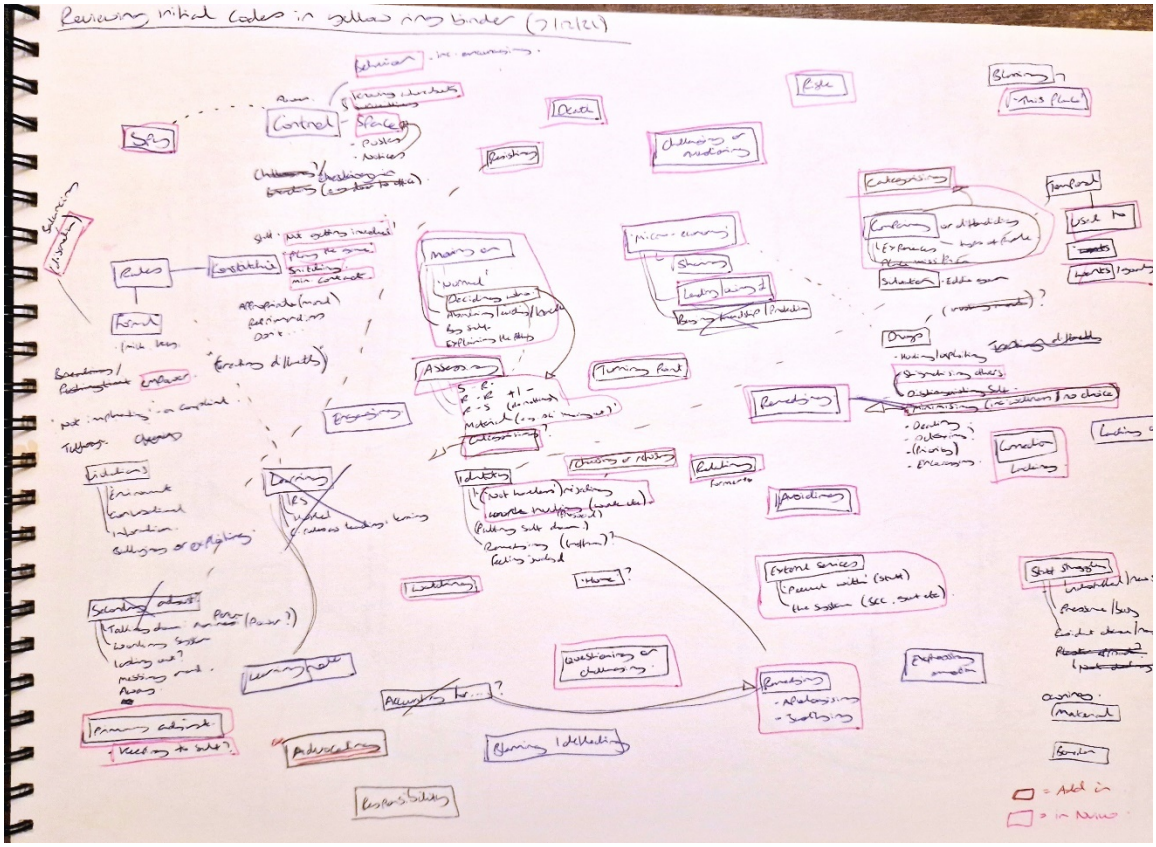

Figure 3 Mapping all codes

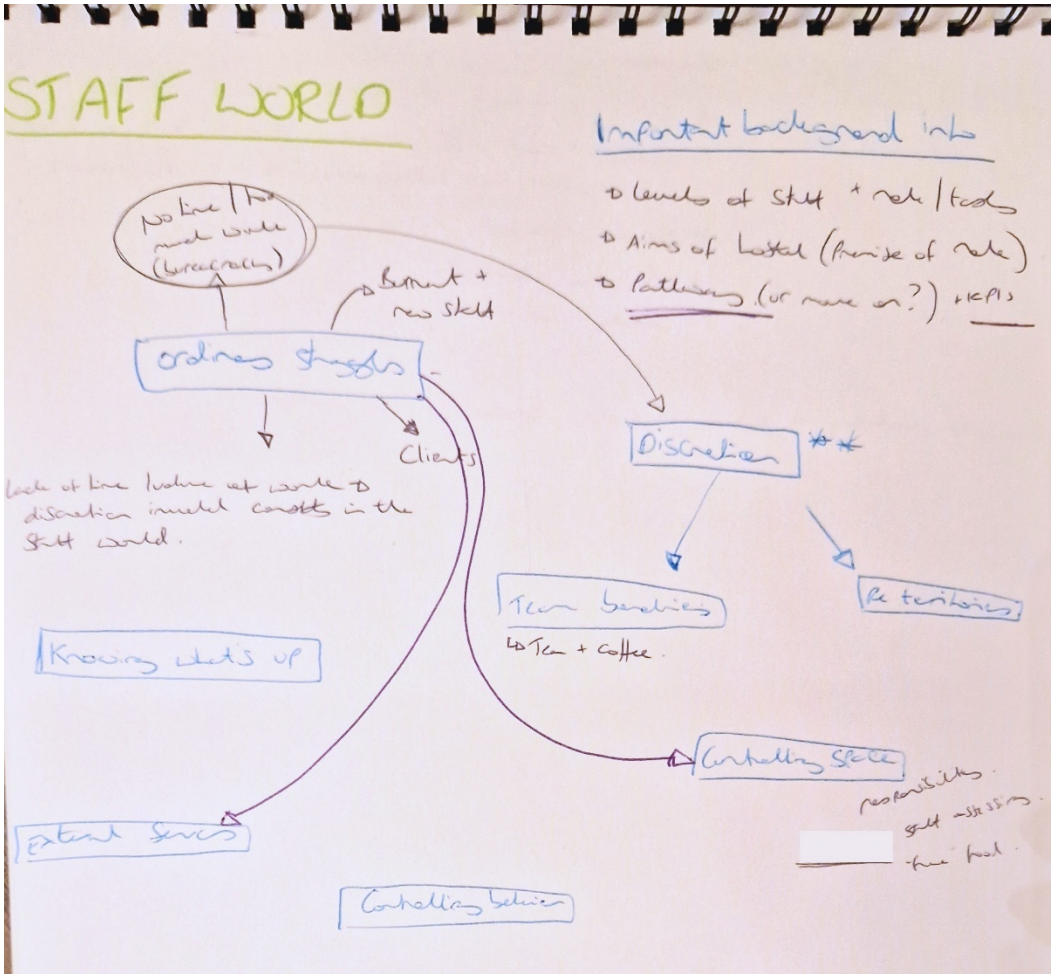

Figure 4 Refining 'staff world' codes

The final exit

The fragmented nature of my fieldwork also impacted my experience of leaving the field for the final time, an often-neglected aspect of the data collection process (Smith and Delamont, 2023). The field had not become a 'second home' in which exciting things happened (Rock, 2007: 36). I therefore did not feel a strong mental or emotional response when it came to leaving the field for the final time, nor the 'grief or relief' that so often comes with such a decision (Fitzpatrick, 2019: 165). My final day of fieldwork was nothing special, I left some gifts and cards for the staff and residents in the support office, had a chat with Charlie in which I member checked some of my emerging themes, had my last lunch in the canteen, and observed a new staff member treating a new resident's wound. My last interaction was with Olivia, who simply noted that they would not be restarting any of the hostel-based activities any time soon. This final exit hardly differed from the exit I made at the end of each day of fieldwork. I did not get the sense that anybody would miss me, or

perhaps even notice I had left. I therefore experienced leaving the field as more of a fizzle than a bang.

Whilst I may have officially left the field, I do not feel as though the field has truly left me. Since leaving Holbrook, the 'field' continues to spill beyond its walls, through its people, the relics I encounter, and the memories I carry. In terms of the people, many hostel members partake in what Carlin (2023) has termed 'pavement culture', by engaging in public begging practices, such as selling the Big Issue. I often see the residents engaging in pavement culture by begging, socialising, drinking, walking, shopping, and just generally going about their daily lives. Further, I not only see, but am seen. Months after 'leaving' the field, Eric saw me on the phone and shouted, 'why don't you ever ring me?' with a grin. Another man ran across a busy road when he saw me, almost one year later, and after some small talk said, 'do a mate a favour and lend me £4.' When sharing the same city, is it ever really possible to leave the field entirely? Memories are another aspect of fieldwork which stay with the researcher, lingering long after completion of any project (Lester and Anders, 2023). For me, memories from the field still arise in multiple, subtle ways: when I see a particular graffiti tag, I think about Martin and his claim that the artist was a murderer; when I think about comparative drugs policies, I am reminded of Pablo's case for the Portuguese system; and when I hear Rhianna play, I cannot help but hear Noah's rendition of 'we found love in a *homeless* place.'

Reflexivity

At its core, reflexivity recognises that the researcher is part of the world they are studying, and therefore draws attention to the dynamics between the researcher, the researched, and the research (Finlay and Gough 2003; Lumsden, 2019). Given that ethnographic texts are interpretations of social worlds, ethnographers must be attuned to the multiple factors which ultimately influence those interpretations. In other words, as neutrality is not possible, honesty becomes essential (Lumsden, 2019).

Lumsden (2019) advocated in favour of writing the self into ethnographic texts to meet this end and detailed the ways in which she differed from the masculine, working-class boy racers whom she studied – based on class, gender, and commitment to car modification –

and the consequences thereof, including those pertaining to field experiences, emotions, and access. For Lumsden, this was important as 'the researcher's feelings, values, beliefs, and social position are central to the creation of the ethnographic narrative' (2019: 69). Whilst it is important to write the self into texts, reflexivity should not be mistaken with or reduced to personal reflection, as to do so would caricature reflexivity (Lumsden, 2019). Instead, it is acknowledged that reflexivity comprises multiple interacting levels, each of which will briefly be mentioned here.

Each aspect of reflexivity is epistemic – given that reflexivity relates to the production of knowledge within sociology – 'epistemic reflexivity' can therefore be used as an overarching term which encompasses the more specific kinds (Whitaker and Atkinson, 2021). This pertains to the fundamental idea the act of research partly constructs or defines the object of our research, through the questions we ask or observations available to us, for example (Whitaker and Atkinson, 2021).

Under the umbrella of epistemic reflexivity, we find 'disciplinary reflexivity,' which relates to the disciplinary framing of research, including the taken-for-granted assumptions which exist within a given discipline or field (Whitaker and Atkinson, 2019). Disciplines inevitably set the parameters of research, by suggesting what it sees as particularly productive lines of inquiry, often to the exclusion or dismissal of others. As a sociologist, I focused on day-to-day life within Holbrook House, whilst others may instead have focused on crime and delinquency within the hostel (criminology) or sought to understand the minds and behaviours of its residents (psychology). Further, by adopting an interactionist stance, I was not alive to the concerns of other branches of sociology, so whilst I focused on face-to-face interactions, critical realists would have sought to identify generative mechanisms.

'Positional reflexivity' highlights the numerous ways in which a researcher's identity comes to bear on the research process (Lumsden, 2019). Whilst I have already acknowledged the role of my gender in the above discussion on spatial positionality, there are other ways in which a researcher's biography can impact research. For instance, the perceptions which informants hold about a researcher can influence the potential scope of data collection. Some residents assumed that I lived in a posh part of town whilst others said that I could not

hack living in a place like this, meaning that judgements were made about who I was, including my class, upbringing, and experiences. These judgements have implications for fieldwork. The residents who thought that I was from a posh part of town, for instance, largely kept their distance from me or responded to my attempts at interaction with short utterances, effectively brushing me off. Perhaps they assumed that I thought I was 'better than' them, an issue which is introduced in chapter seven.

'Textual reflexivity' draws attention to the idea that research findings are the product of interpretation, as opposed to an accurate copy of whichever phenomena is being reported (Finlay and Gough 2003). Ethnographies are textual interpretations of social worlds, therefore my choice of language not only reported on phenomena within Holbrook House but constituted them (Whitaker and Atkinson, 2019).

Finally, 'methodological reflexivity' highlights how the choice of research methods inevitably shape the phenomena being studied, for instance, through modes of identification and classification. Where participant observation is concerned, this type of reflexivity does not simply refer to informants' reactions to the ethnographer, but to the availability of observable interactions within the field, which are the product of situated negotiations (Whitaker and Atkinson, 2019). My 'field ' was necessarily shaped by access negotiations, as I was not allowed to go upstairs and was only able to observe the interactions of certain residents, such as Isam above.

In terms of research methods, participant observation enabled me to watch interaction order phenomena play out, whilst interviews and informal conversations helped me to understand how my informants felt about those experiences (Whitaker and Atkinson, 2019). For instance, in Chapter Seven I share observations in which Harry – somebody who is relatively 'abnormal' within the hostel context – is teased for being a 'good boy,' before including his own thoughts and feelings on this, which were accounted for in a timeline interview. Equally, informal conversations with staff helped me to understand their experiences of the KPIs, as a contributor to the ordinary institutional troubles which they faced (Chapter Six).

It is important to distinguish interviews from conversations in the field. Interviews are a very particular type of encounter, one which people are familiar with and will likely have experience of, meaning that they often take on a particular form. Many of the residents will have been 'interviewed' by the police, Job Centre staff, doctors, and supported housing providers amongst others. For example, the booking in process at Holbrook House takes on the form of an interview (see Prologue). I conducted 8 in-person, 'unstructured' interviews with hostel residents, and each time the interviewee sat opposite me and waited for me to begin asking questions. Within, and owing to, the peculiarities of interview context, people may close down lines of inquiry or tell the interviewer what they think she wants to hear (Jackson, 2015). In other words, this is how they have learned to perform within interviews. We must therefore pay attention to the performative nature of interviews, including the form and function of narratives elicited with them (Atkinson and Coffey, 2003; Atkinson, 2005). When I told one resident, during the course of an interview, that I would anonymise both his name and the hostels' name, he ended the interview abruptly. What was the point? That was the impression I got from him. Given that he had been complaining about 'this place' – the people, the lack of sleep, the drugs – prior to the interview, it can be inferred that his 'imagined audience' was a kind of regulator capable of either improving or condemning Holbrook House (Vassenden and Mangset, 2024).

By contrast, conversations were situated interactions, often but not always arising in relation a prompting event. Unlike the interview, they did not take on a distinct form, rather they were happening naturally within the field, all of the time, between all members of the hostel. I had an innumerable number of conversations within the field, and whilst some were purely sociable, others entailed narration and enabled me to ask probing questions. Whilst I often chatted to Lincoln, our conversation in Chapter Seven happened as we sat side by side, watching the people out the front – '*those out there*' – and he launched into a biographical narrative. The most interesting finding arising from this conversation related not to the narration itself, but to the many conflicts between Lincoln's account and his actions. This highlights that interviews and conversations alone cannot be equated with the observation of social action (Atkinson, 2015).

Importantly, interviews enabled me to gather some form of data when entry to the field was prohibited (Vassenden, 2024). Interviews therefore gave me insights into life at Holbrook House during the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did I get a sense of the physical distancing measures being put in place within the hostel, but by paying attention to shifts in the language used by staff over this period, I understood that hostel members were gradually adapting to this 'new normal,' i.e., a sense of continuity and difference. Smith et al, in paraphrasing Orwell, explained how a 'social organisation can change out of all recognition and yet remain fundamentally the same' (2020: 196). The hostel was therefore different, but also very much the same.

Interviews also enabled me to stay in touch with individuals beyond their residency at Holbrook House. This was important as by interviewing former hostel residents I began to understand how living in Holbrook House, or a place like Holbrook, can have a lasting impact on individuals, as I elaborate on in Chapter Eight. Whilst participant observation is the preferred method of interrogation for the reasons highlighted throughout this thesis, interviews should not be dismissed, as provided the interviewer exercises situational awareness, they can contribute to qualitative research, particularly in situations where observation is unfeasible (Vassenden and Mangset, 2024).

The role of documents should also be reflected upon, as they are 'not simply instruments of bureaucratic organizations, but rather are constitutive of bureaucratic rules' (Hull, 2012: 251). An individual's movement into, through, out of, and between institutions will necessarily be followed by a 'paper shadow… a chain of informative receipts detailing what has been done to and by the patient and who had most recent responsibility for him' (Goffman, 1961: 75). When individuals move into the hostel they are accompanied by forms, must complete further forms (see Prologue), and are handed a series of documents. Their goings on are then documented on individual case files and the staff handover, before they complete yet more forms in order to get out. Documents are important as they mediate between classifications and particular individuals, including those who attain the 'move on ready' status. Chapter Eight details the bureaucracy inherent in the move on process.

Moreover, documents also informed staff practices, including their orientation towards the hostel's KPIs. Whilst I never saw this document materialise, it fed into the official version of 'this place' (Chapter Five), with knowledge of these targets spread via hostel-based interactions. This was representative of my general approach to documents, as instead of collecting and analysing documents themselves, I paid attention to the ways in which they were used as resources within situated interactions. Documents became interactionally relevant in numerous ways, including whenever new posters were put up on the walls, residents queried or complained about letters, or staff issued notices to residents. These documents were not 'transparent representations of reality' as they were produced socially (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 130), meaning that documents were simultaneously interpretations (e.g., the way in which events were recorded on the handover) and interpreted (e.g., deciding what constituted non-use of a room – see Chapter Six).

Encountering ethics in the field

> A new staff member asks, 'are you observing us today?' I say yes and joke about 'always observing.' 'So, you don't need consent?' I tell her that I gain consent verbally instead of using forms. Feeling attacked, I bite back, 'you haven't been scared off yet then?' She tells me she chose to work here. Then there's silence (Fieldnotes, 14/09/21).

This study gained ethical approval from Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee on 10th January 2020. Whilst ethical approval provided sufficient grounds for commencing my fieldwork, this tick-box activity did not prepare me for the multiple, unpredictable, and often ambiguous ethical dilemmas which would arise in the field. The above interaction happened towards the end of my fieldwork and caught me off guard, as nobody had accused me of being unethical up until this point. It shook me and caused me to reconsider the ethicality of my entire study – had my data collection practices been deceitful and immoral all along? After re-reading my ethics application and discussing this encounter with my supervisors, I felt reassured that my research was ethical. In my ethics application, I explained that I would acquire consent verbally, ensuring that it was informed by frequently reminding my informants of my research project.

Where ethnographic research is concerned, the practice of issuing consent forms at the outset and assuming their validity throughout the entire period of data collection is actually highly unethical. Had I taken this approach, my informants could have signed a form in January 2020, which would have assumed their informed consent up to two years later. Instead, Ablitt makes the case for building verbal consent into lengthy periods of fieldwork, a process which is 'slow, iterative, processual, interactional – and regularly renegotiated' (2021: 151). In doing so, he draws on the work of Brown et al, who argue for 'situated, ordinary ethics grounded, not on the classical philosophical positions but in the particular sensitivities and everyday judgments of research participants and 'the practice of being ethical'' (2016: 177). In essence, ethics are not fixed but situated and must therefore be navigated by researchers *in situ*. Therefore, rather than regurgitating the contents of my ethics application, I will draw on some of the actual ethical dilemmas I encountered during the course of my fieldwork. Whilst these were multiple – including the ability to truly anonymise the hostel, opposition to anonymity, and the inability to make any real difference to the lives of my informants – I will primarily focus on issues which related to familiarity.

As a former staff member, I was familiar with the hostel and held prior knowledge of the setting and its members, based on the kinds of 'involvements and interactions' which Charmaz (2006) was concerned with. Such familiarity can impact data collection in multiple ways, for example, researchers may take things for granted, hold preconceptions, and develop myopia (Hall, 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The need to fight familiarity is therefore well documented in the ethnographic literature (Delamont et al, 2010; Delamont 2012; Delamont, 2016). One strategy for fighting familiarity is to be reflexive about what we bring to situations, including what we see and how we see it (Charmaz, 2006; Delamont, 2016).

I kept a research journal to interrogate feelings of familiarity, and by doing so realised that this fight was about more than merely noticing, that there was a strong ethical dimension to familiarity too. For example, I became aware of an innate inclination to see things from a staff perspective, as I felt a strong sense of familiarity for the staff and their routines. I was therefore mindful as to how I slotted into the existing grid of power relations and the ways

in which this could affect my fieldwork (Sultana, 2007). Given the familiarity of handovers, for example, I could easily have glossed over their peculiarities, with their formal timings and structures, informal opportunities for socialising and cigarettes, and natural language adopted within them, such as 'kicking off' (aggressive outbursts) or 'not well' (struggling with their mental health). Morriss (2016) similarly conducted ethnographic research with her former social work colleagues, though it was not until analysing her data that she began to challenge their taken-for-granted language and accounts as representing the 'natural' order of things. Moreover, she noticed that they used the pronouns 'we' and 'our' to include her within their community. Reflexivity encourages criticality of such 'business as usual' approaches, enabling researchers to instead question the complexities which underlie them (Morriss, 2016; Atkinson and Morriss, 2017).

> I'm trying to get Eric onside today. We joke about the lift breaking and comment on the number of clothes in reception. Unfortunately, Charlie cuts our conversation short, he wants to show me where the risk assessments are kept in the staff reception. Eric watches me from the corner of his eye.
>
> Eric is suspicious of me and I'm suspicious of him. I dislike him and find this unavoidable, probably because I know about his past. He'd started using drugs after a period of sobriety and was intimidating his ex-partner into giving him money. She'd called the hostel in tears and begged somebody to intervene. I also suspect he's dealing, although he denies it, again based on my past experience of working at Holbrook (Fieldnotes, 30/02/20).

I wrote reflexive notes contemporaneously alongside my fieldnotes, using a purple font to differentiate them. By logging my thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and prior knowledge of Holbrook House, even before re-entering as a researcher, I created space to reflect upon my preconceptions, concerns, speculations, and assumptions. This helped me to understand how my familiarity with the hostel setting may have coloured my observations of it. For example, I realised that my relationship with Eric was tainted by familiarity, that he would always be suspicious of me – categorising me as a 'spy' throughout no doubt – whilst my knowledge of Eric's behaviour unavoidably affected my feelings towards him.

Through reflection, I also questioned whose 'side' I was on. For Becker (1967), it is inevitable that researchers take sides, and that research captures a particular vantage point, however, we must be explicit about that vantage point from the early stages of research and make clear the limits of our study (Atkinson et al, 2003). Whilst I had originally set out to capture experiences and interactions of the hostel from the residents' vantage point, the erratic rhythm of my data collection meant that I ended up capturing both the staff's and resident's 'sides' at different stages in the process, based on the data which was available to me. Thus, whilst the majority of my findings chapters come from the vantage point of the residents, Chapter Six approaches hostel life from the staff's perspective.

Of course, familiarity worked both ways. During the handover in which I introduced myself and my research to the staff, Elizabeth said, 'we already know who you are' with a smile, whilst others said that it was 'good to have me back' (Fieldnotes, 22/01/20). During my first phase of fieldwork in particular, the staff team categorised me as a 'former staff member,' and introduced me to newer staff members as such. Having established that I used to work at the hostel, an agency worker told me that he wouldn't be applying for a permanent position because 'it's not enough money' and that his friend gets paid more at Asda (Fieldwork, 31/01/20). In consequence, the staff initially saw me as a colleague, somebody who has put on 'the same kind of performance,' who understands their difficulties and point of view, and therefore assumed a kind of solidarity (Goffman, 1959: 160).

> Charlie asks for a 'favour,' 'whilst you're watching, can you keep an eye on Jake?' He points to the man slumped in the chair, his head falling forward, 'make sure he's still breathing' (Fieldnotes, 30/01/20).

The ethical implications stemming from this categorisation were multiple. For example, there were occasions in which I was asked to do things associated with the staff role – to help move residents' belongings, check which fire alarm was going off, and keep an eye on individuals like Jake in the above example – which fell beyond the scope of my role, and which Charlie had explicitly asked me not to do during the above access negotiations. I felt uneasy about being asked to do such things, especially as I had set out to distance myself from the staff. Nonetheless, I walked a fine line between keeping good relations with the

staff team, whilst aligning myself more closely with the resident team. I consequently set boundaries early on, so when a member of reception staff asked me to cover reception, I affirmed that I could not because I was not staff.

There were clear benefits to being known to some of my informants, for instance, the staff team were happy to share information with me. When I asked a newer member of staff about an eviction she hesitated and deferred to Polly, who said, 'of course you can tell her' (Fieldnotes, 29/10/20). Hammersley and Hammersley (2007) use Hoffman's study of elites to illustrate the connection between the researcher's perceived identity and the data which they are able to gather. Overall, I felt that the staff treated me with little suspicion, were remarkably candid, and volunteered access to observe backstage interactions, such as keyworking sessions.

Moreover, the staff welcomed me into their offices – their backstage (Goffman, 1959) – to talk or type up notes without any hesitation. It was within these spaces that further ethical dilemmas arose. As I sat in the support office and typed up the most recent batch of fieldnotes, conversations were happening all around me – issues were brought to the attention of managers, grievances shared, and moves negotiated. At other times, I had conversations with those who still categorised me as a former staff member, in which relatively sensitive information was shared with me privately – the reason for a support worker leaving, for example. Ascription of the 'former staff' role, and the information gleaned as a result, sometimes made me feel that I was a 'spy' after all (Forsey, 2004; Simmons, 2007).

Whilst insightful, I debated whether it would be ethical for me to include such 'incidental data' within my fieldnotes (Mercer, 2007), was this to be expected or would this amount to an abuse of access? I decided to record incidental data in the first instance, clearly marking it as such, thereby giving myself time to mull it over and make the decision later on. I since chose not to use incidental fieldnotes directly within my thesis, although such data has both informed my analysis and shaped interactions with hostel members. For example, I asked staff members questions on the basis of incidental data, making clear that I was interested in the phenomena from a research perspective. This compromise enabled me to gain a

holistic and multi-perspective view of life within Holbrook House, without feeling that I had overstepped any ethical boundaries. In order to practice 'being ethical' (Brown et al, 2016), I adopted an iterative and interactional approach to informed consent in encounters with the staff team, often in subtle and natural ways, such as reminding them of my research or student status. When I did, staff were often keen to share their own insights and experiences, and were happy to support my research. Some hypothesised the barriers to exiting homelessness, whilst others put me in touch with residents who faced specific barriers, such as Emran and his immigration status in Chapter Three.

A final ethical dilemma associated with familiarity was that upon re-entry to the hostel, I brought with me more than knowledge of the subject and a research agenda, I also brought existing friendships and collegial rapport. Even before starting my fieldwork, I was concerned about producing findings which would reflect badly on the hostel and its staff, worried that my former colleagues would feel exploited or deceived as a result. This dilemma encompassed a strong emotive dimension, as researchers often feel fearful or ashamed when criticising their friends or colleagues (Taylor, 2011; Morriss, 2016). Morriss described feeling 'dirty' and said, 'I feel ashamed and guilty that I am somehow betraying my cultural colleagues' (2016: 537). Feelings of deception were perhaps strongest where a researcher's findings did not align with their informants' perceptions (Labaree, 2002).

Whilst ethnographers may consequently feel a sense of responsibility, or perhaps even pressure, to portray a community in a favourable light (Labaree, 2002; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), Becker advised that if there is an 'irreconcilable conflict between the interests of science and the interests of those studied' (2017: 329), that it may be necessary to provoke some hostile reaction in the pursuit of sincere and valuable findings. Before entering the field, I tried to placate my fears and worries, by reminding myself that any criticism would be made in pursuit of my research aims, of which the staff were aware. Moreover, once I started fieldwork, I realised that this concern was rooted in the assumption that the staff team would want the hostel to be painted in a favourable light, when in reality, most were very candid with me about the multiple issues faced.

Conclusion

This chapter started out by introducing ethnography as the methodological approach taken by this study, by focusing on what it is and why it was well-suited to this research. It then introduced Holbrook House, capturing my initial (re)-entry and access to those within it, from early access negotiations with the hostel's manager, which would determine the physical limits of my fieldwork. It challenged shopping list positionality, and instead focused on the importance of 'spatial positionality' – of being somebody who does not go 'back there' – in developing rapport with the residents. It then captured my experience of collecting data during a global pandemic, conceptualising each 'lockdown' period, and forced removal from the field, as a series of entries and exits, whilst detailing the successes and failures of the alternate, improvised data collection methods which were implemented at a distance. The erratic rhythm of data collection created more space for data analysis, though meant that my experience of leaving the field for the final time felt like more of a fizzle than a bang. Finally, this chapter recognised the need for a situated approach to ethics, and explored some of the actual ethical dilemmas faced, which related to the researcher's familiarity with the setting, yet were not contained, or containable, within the 'tick-box' ethical approval forms.

Chapter Five begins to answer this thesis' overriding research question – *are barriers built into the interaction orders of institutions?* – by first questioning what 'this place' is, and establishing different and competing understandings surrounding the purpose of 'this place.'

Chapter five: 'I can't believe they put me in *this place*' – unpacking different understandings of 'this place'

Tyler leaves the telephone room. Bradley watches, 'on the phone to the police?'

'Fucking grassing you up man.' As they exchange minor insults – 'big nose' – their faces grow closer. Olivia pierces the tension, 'have you cleaned your room yet? Have you cleaned your room yet?'

'I need a couple of days,' says Tyler, his eyes fixed on Bradley.

'A couple of years, more like,' laughs Olivia as she walks away.

The men resume, 'got a fiver?' 'Piece of shit.' Laughter breaks out and they go for a smoke. Bradley swings the front door open as four police officers emerge from the staff reception, 'we don't want your type in here,' he says loudly enough to be heard, but gone before they can respond.

One officer gazes into the faces of each passing resident, recognising most, before ruling them out. 'I've been good,' remarks Shaun with an exaggerated smile. Shaun often boasts about his shoplifting skills.

Polly consults the CCTV screens, 'he's upstairs.' She escorts them to the lift.

The men know that someone is being taken away, they don't send four officers otherwise. The lift creeps up through the floors, then stops. 'They're on the fours!' beams Shaun, 'they're after Sam. He done a bad job shoplifting, been waiting for 'em to come for months, been barricading himself in.' As predicted, 15 minutes later a deflated Sam shuffles out of the lift, one officer holding his wrist, whilst the other carries two bags. 'See you later,' calls Shaun. 'I'll be back in about 15 months,' says Sam (Fieldnotes, 16/03/20).

Introduction

'*This place*' was a phrase bandied about so much by Holbrook House residents that it became its own in vivo code. Whilst Holbrook House is a place in the physical bricks-and-mortar sense, '*this place*' encapsulates so much more, socially and symbolically, and therefore conceives of the hostel as 'more than physical space' (Wynne and Rogers 2021: 2). This chapter sheds light on the different understandings of 'this place,' which have been divided into three. Firstly, it considers the official aims of the institution and the broader 'homelessness pathway' within which it sits, by looking at the idealised aims of Holbrook House and the homelessness pathway. Secondly, it looks at members' uses of 'this place' in interactions and explores how the phrase is both used as a placeholder for all sorts of minor grunts and groans – conceived of as a series of territorial violations – and as an account for present circumstance. Finally, it develops the analytic concept of the 'institutional web,' by locating the hostel in relation to other intermediary institutions, whilst tracing individuals' movements around the web. By introducing this gap, between the official aims of the institution and actual experiences of it, this chapter alludes to certain tensions between 'getting by' at the hostel and 'getting out' of it, which will be revisited in Chapters Seven and Eight. The underlying argument is that whilst living at Holbrook House, individuals found it difficult to make the changes necessary to get out of it, as barriers to getting out of the hostel were interaction order phenomena.

The homelessness pathway: The official aim(s) of 'this place'

> Individuals will move through the pathway before moving out and into independent accommodation… People need not move through every level but to the accommodation deemed most appropriate (local council document)

> We aim to aid clients create a new sense of self, restore their sense of autonomy and control, and realise their potential as community members (Holbrook House's website)

> You've gotta prove yourself to the council, prove you're homeless, prove you've got something wrong with you, it's a fight to get anywhere, all the red tape and

> everything, it's so hard. You can't just phone up and get a place now, you've gotta prove everything (Interview with Harry).

When I noted that Holbrook was almost being used as a 'sorting office,' Charlie (the hostel's manager) sighed and conceded, 'that does happen.' He told me that a few years ago, the local council wanted to turn Holbrook into an 'Assessment Centre,' but that he and the other staff had refused on several grounds. Firstly, this was people's home, they did not want to live in an 'Assessment Centre.' Secondly, the staff did much more than simply 'assess' people, so to call it that would 'completely devalue' all of their hard work. Thirdly, the staff would undoubtedly be doing the same work anyway. Fourthly, this change in status would most likely affect their funding (Fieldnotes, 08/09/21).

The 'official aims of the institution' (Goffman, 1961: 6) could be divided in two. On the one hand, Holbrook House aimed to fundamentally change those who came through its doors, helping them 'to create a new sense of self,' a desired outcome which was expressed both on its website and in the efforts and hopes of staff members (see Chapter Six). On the other hand, the local council aimed to move people into the homelessness pathway, through it, and out of the other side with as much efficiency as possible, as was reflected in the range of movement-centric Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which are detailed here and returned to in Chapter Eight. Whilst institutions 'typically fall considerably short of their official aims' (Goffman, 1961: 83), this was particularly apparent when the different aims of the institution did not coalesce. Conflicts in the official definition and aims of 'this place' caused tensions, which underscored day-to-day hostel life. Most notably, whilst Holbrook claimed to be capable of 'people-changing,' it was forced, through bureaucratic measures of success, to resemble a 'people-processing' institution (Goffman, 1961: 87; Comfort, 2015; Graeber, 2015). Chapter Six highlights these tensions from a staff perspective.

Most of the city's supported housing was contained within council-commissioned homelessness pathways and premised on the treatment-first model of housing (see Chapter Two). 'Change' or 'progress' (a concept which is unpacked in Chapter Eight) was rewarded with movement 'up' the pathway structure. Holbrook House was a level one hostel within a four-level pathway for single men. The idea was that the men started at level one,

progressed through the levels, then moved out the other side. The pathway concept, and treatment-first approach, were founded on this idea of forward motion. However, these ideals were rooted in discourses which unquestioningly moralised the movement of pathway members, as moves 'through,' 'up', and 'out' of the pathway were constructed as 'positive moves', whilst moves 'down' or 'back' were recorded as 'negative moves' (Sahlin, 2005). Immobility was particularly problematic and remedied only by movement – so the pathway informally monitored length of stay, to ensure that people did not become stuck for 'too long' – because within this sector, and society at large, 'mobility trumps stasis' (Hall and Smith, 2013: 276) (see Chapter Eight). Reflecting this, Holbrook complied with a number of council-derived KPIs which, when boiled down, centred on movement: staff were encouraged to move more people in, faster, and regardless of the risk they posed, whilst moving more people out of the pathway in a positive way, with bonus points for moves which did not rely on limited social housing stocks.

The precondition of 'change' was couched in normativity and required residents to continually prove themselves in order to move on. In one of the opening extracts, Harry explained how he needed to prove himself, not only to gain access to the pathway, but at each and every subsequent move through it. However, being able to evidence 'change' (see Chapter Eight) was not easy within a place like this.

> Anthony, who normally stumbles around the building, telling elaborate tales, and slurring 'alrighhh *sweetaaart*' in a thick scouse accent, now sits quietly to my left. He tells me about his estranged children, his past employment, and the moment he found out his partner was cheating. He tells me about his last flat, where they gave him food and gift cards in exchange for work, where he'd invested in 'brand new' goods to make it his own. When he was told he'd be moving to Holbrook five months ago, he thought he'd done something 'wrong' and was being punished. It turned out the flat was only temporary. He gave away his new things as there was no space here.
>
> Now he's up on the third floor with 'the young lot.' He just wants peace and quiet but they're banging and shouting all night. Other residents tell me about the noise

> Anthony himself makes whenever he has people in his room, though I don't let on. Anthony wants to move out of this place. He feels it is only once he has his 'own flat,' 'a home', that he can begin to 'build my life back up again.' I ask about moving on and he says, 'everyone's just here waiting, we're all on the gravy train.' He's going to start a detox and is adamant that he will 'see it through.' If he does, his support worker will put him forward for a flat (Fieldnotes, 06/12/21).

This sentiment – *when I get out of here, I'll make changes* – was common amongst the residents at Holbrook House, as they positioned the prospect of 'change' as conditional upon first getting out of 'this place.' Of course, that was not how the pathway and its underlying treatment-first ideology worked, quite the opposite in fact, as residents needed to first demonstrate 'change,' before they could attain a 'positive' move out of the hostel. These conflicting views on the correlation between change and mobility were significant, as they ensured that people like Anthony, would be 'wallowing' and 'waiting' for a very long time (see Chapter Eight).

Others talked about making changes. Lincoln often shared his goals – 'I want to lose the weight, then cut off my dreads, buy a car, get a flat, and meet a nice girl' – so when he inevitably ate a big meal or stockpiled the donated food, he made the usual joke, 'I'll start the diet tomorrow' with a smile (Fieldnotes, 19/11/21). Others tried to make changes and failed. Joey had been 'off the drugs' for at least one month after switching from Methadone to Buvidal[10] (se Chapter Seven). Whilst he had initially refused offers of free drugs, something which he noted never happened whilst he was actively using, he was soon back on them. During his brief period of sobriety he said, 'I was offered a snowball[11] within hours of my first injection' and reasoned 'you're keeping others down, so you don't feel so shit' (Fieldnotes, 08/09/21).

Individuals found it difficult to make or maintain 'change' whilst living at Holbrook, as all of the ingredients for becoming stuck – barriers to change, failure, and justifications for not even trying – were rooted firmly within the interaction order of the hostel. From this

[10] Both are prescribed substitutes for opiate, such as heroin. Whilst Methadone is administered orally each day, Buvidal is administered via a monthly injection.
[11] A combination of crack and heroin.

perspective, the phrase 'this place' encapsulated the enduring nature of interaction order phenomena within institutions. For example, whilst Joey's attempt at getting clean was likely ruined by another resident offering him free drugs, it is likely that he has done or would do the same to somebody else in the same situation, and so on and so on. These kinds of interaction – of tempting newly-sober individuals with the lure of drugs, and other attempts to ruin 'change' – were interaction order phenomena, the enduring nature of which meant that they both predated and outlasted the individuals and situations within this thesis. It was not that individuals chose to act in a certain way but were compelled to do so by the interaction order of the hostel, meaning that this reaction to sobriety was almost an inevitability (Rawls, 1987).

When considered within the context of the pathway, the requirement of 'change' was less about creating a new sense of self (as Holbrook's website suggested) and more a simple tick-box exercise which facilitated movement to the next level or place (see Chapter Eight). Making change was therefore tantamount to simply 'playing the game' – of being able to demonstrate evidence of change, without necessarily making any fundamental changes. Those who failed to 'play the game,' like Anthony, found that they became stuck at Holbrook, 'wallowing' and 'waiting.' Despite the hostel's aims and the best efforts of staff, Holbrook House was conceived of as a people-processing institution by multiple parties – including the local council and those who lived within its walls. The people-changing abilities of hostel staff were curtailed by multiple barriers to change, including those mentioned above, which were interaction order phenomena. Moreover, the need to 'get by' at the hostel, and the situated understanding of normality which this entailed, made it difficult for residents to ultimately 'get out' of the hostel (see Chapter Seven). Whilst 'change' was encouraged in accordance with 'some ideal standard' (Goffman, 1961: 74), not only was it seldom realised, but when alterations did occur, they were often 'not the kind intended by staff' (1961: 71).

Members' accounts of 'this place'

> A resident scratches at himself violently. When I ask if he's okay, he lifts his top up to reveal a white belly with a few pink scratch marks on it, 'it's just this place, I don't know.' He carries on scratching (Fieldnotes, 05/02/20).

When residents used the expression 'this place,' it was often said with an air of resignation, as a placeholder for many of their minor (and some less minor) 'grunts and groans' (Goffman, 1989: 125). Two uses of 'this place' will be considered here, the first refers to the lack of distance or privacy which individuals can exercise whilst living in 'this place,' and the second, as a way of accounting for their present situation i.e., their current containment within the hostel.

'This place' as a series of territorial violations

The Residents' Meeting – a meeting intended for the reporting of 'general issues' to staff – centred on some of the commonly recurring grievances with 'this place': dirty plates on the landings; noise throughout the night; things being nicked; rooms being entered; non-residents hanging around; the smell of sick in the lift; and shards of glass and needles on the grounds. Whilst complaints were targeted at 'this place,' they were not about the hostel's physical structure as such, but the residents' reduced ability to maintain 'distance' within a place like this.

Distance can be thought of in terms of two interrelated concepts, firstly 'deference' refers to the ritual appreciation which individuals show to one another (Goffman, 1956: 481), and secondly, 'territories of the self' are the boundaries between the individual and their surroundings (Goffman, 1971). More simply, distance may be thought of in terms of privacy. Goffman noted the associations between class and privacy in relation to both concepts. Concerning deference, he stated that 'the higher the class the more extensive and elaborate are the taboos against contact' (Goffman 1956). Moreover, he commented on the 'socially determined variability' of territoriality, 'the higher the rank, the greater the size of all territories of the self' (Goffman, 1971: 40). For those contained within institutions, the ability to maintain distance was severely reduced, whilst territorial violations were experienced as a common occurrence (Goffman, 1956; 1961; 1971).

Territories of the self were not limited to 'fixed' territories, such as walls and other physical boundaries, but extended to the full range of mobile and often intangible territories, including the space around one's body, turn-taking abilities, possessions, informational preserve, and conversational preserve (Goffman, 1971). In the following extract, Harry's

conversational preserve is violated, as he lacks control over who can talk to him whilst he waits for the lift (Goffman, 1971).

> Stanley and Dylan sit in reception, joking and laughing. Stanley satirises the hostel through casual announcements – 'I'm going shoplifting in Poundland' – which some take seriously, by saying things like 'I stole £200's worth of jeans the other day.' Harry walks in and hears one such announcement. He faces the lift and silently awaits its arrival. Dylan notices the Tesco bag in Harry's hand and loudly tells Stanley, 'Har doesn't shoplift, he's a good boy.' All eyes are on Harry as he turns to face the room. He looks momentarily panicked and then responds, 'fuck that, they'd suss me out!' The men laugh, this comment appeases them. When the lift arrives, Harry quickly makes his escape (Fieldnotes, 21/02/20).

Residents' territories were commonly encroached upon in ways which were sometimes quite subtle, such as the imposition of conversation above, or glances at possessions below. Yet these kinds of violations – these unwelcome conversations, unwarranted glances, disruptive sounds, and repulsive smells – were to be expected when living in a place like this. They were part of the interaction order of the hostel.

> I went up the shops and there was Dylan. Took out my wallet and I paid, and I could see him looking in me wallet and when I walked out, he said, hey mate there's a pub over there, I said I don't drink. Oh, don't you? So he wanted me to take him over the pub and spend all my money on him (Interview with Harry).

Theft was another routine violation to be expected when living in a place like this. Individuals with experience of living in institutions assumed that, given the opportunity, others would try to steal from them. Interactionally, this was an 'obvious' fact of hostel life. For instance, as a resident prepared to move out, Lincoln advised that he put his things in the staff reception, 'obviously' he said, 'people have sticky fingers in here' (Fieldnotes, 26/07/21). Theft was also used to make sense of missing items, so when room keys went missing, for example, it was assumed that 'obviously someone's snatched them' (Fieldnotes, 02/11/20). Charlie remarked that, 'they have different ways of seeing the world through

their experiences,' and gave the example of one resident who considered it normal to steal from cars with open windows (Fieldnotes, 06/12/21).

Residents were most exposed to the possibility of territorial violation within communal spaces, as they lacked the protection offered by walls, doors, and locks. It was in the reception area that police officers gazed into the faces of passing residents, and Harry was compelled to engage in conversation. Consequently, some residents tried to keep a low profile by reducing their time spent in communal areas. These people often said things like, 'I keep myself to myself,' 'I don't get involved', or 'I keep out of the mix.' Instead, they spent their days in their bedrooms watching TV, absorbed in old video games, out walking, or anywhere that was not Holbrook. There were nonetheless periods, however short, where these residents were forced to enter communal spaces and became vulnerable to contamination, via the glances, words, or touch of others.

Harry did his best to remain invisible but ventured into communal spaces to do his washing, collect his meals, see his support worker, and exit the building. Within these spaces, he found that he was constantly exposed to territorial violations, predominantly via the words of others. There was a constant stream of requests – *'have you got a rizla?' 'Can you lend me a pound?' 'Have you got this?' 'Can I have that?'* His conversational preserve was also violated as he lacked control over who could 'summon him into talk and when he can be summoned' (Goffman, 1971: 40). In an interview, Harry reflected upon the mock shoplifting accusations, which became a running joke, 'I came back from doing a shop and one bloke goes, *oh he's back now from doing his shoplifting*. I've never shoplifted in my life. Just because other people in there shoplift, they automatically think everyone does it.' However, the demands of the interaction order of the hostel and the self ensured that honest responses were suppressed, instead Harry was compelled to play along with the joke. Nevertheless, Harry described the lasting impact of such violations, which he posited as an assault on his identity, 'I didn't like that because he was putting a number on me.' This attested to the endurance of the interaction orders of institutions and the 'institutional self' which it produced (this will be returned to in Chapter Seven).

> One resident hides around a corner and beckons me over, he wants to talk to staff without being seen by the man on the bench outside, 'he was evicted for whacking me, he shouldn't be here.' He repeats this to an agency worker, who simply says, 'he's not allowed in the building.' With only one entrance for residents, he questions how he can leave the hostel with his attacker right there. 'I feel victimised. It's not a good place' (Fieldnotes, 22/07/21).

Violations were not only committed by residents. Encroachments were also committed by 'non-residents,' those who did not live at the hostel, but loomed beyond its gates, standing and watching, often for hours at a time. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, non-residents began to enter the garden more frequently, often sitting on the bench in front of the hostel's entrance, as in the above extract. Some saw the hostel as a congregation of particularly vulnerable, and easily exploitable, individuals, who could be used for their own gain, by running drugs, for example. In this sense, the hostel's residents were sitting ducks, as professionals, agents of control (such as police officers), and criminals similarly targeted 'this place' in search of those they were after. This situation was comparable to recent kidnappings of asylum-seeking children from 'Home Office hotels,' as detailed in Chapter One (Zakir-Hussain, 2023).

> It's raining heavily. Jake limps inside, wearing a mismatched pair of holey socks, and slumps into a chair. Isam asks, 'how are you?' Jake looks to the floor, 'stressed out, somebody came into my room when I was sleeping and stole everything.' 'Have you told staff?' Silence. 'Who was with you?' 'Me' says Jake, who lifts himself from the chair and hobbles away. Once out of earshot, Stanley mocks, 'gone to do some more spice already?' (Fieldnotes, 13/02/20).

Bedrooms offered residents a degree of protection from breaches, though intrusions into these spaces was also a normalised aspect of hostel life, as sounds, smells, and bodies frequently violated these fixed territories.

> Bradley says, 'I've had people come in, sit down, smoke a fucking spliff without saying hello, no respect!' Another man counters, 'I've had someone come in and fall asleep, his foot was on the side of my fucking bed!' (Fieldnotes, 05/03/20).

Residents reported that people were constantly 'trying handles' in the hope that rooms had been left open. Harry recounted the time somebody was so drunk that they tried getting into his room with their key, 'when I shouted, who is it, he said, *I'm sorry I've got the wrong door*, but he did it three times. It scared me, Fiona' (Interview with Harry). Windows were similarly weak territorial markers, particularly those on the lower levels, whose restrictors had been intentionally removed. Harry was told early on to keep his room locked and he did, though others, like Jake, were not as prudent.

Room violations were a commonplace and largely accepted consequence of living in a place like this, as were the mechanisms which prevented the reporting of violations. Those who were believed to have reported territorial violations were labelled as 'snitches' and faced social sanctions by virtue of that label, regardless of whether any snitching had actually taken place. One resident was shunned by the others when he was seen talking to the police and said, 'I'm not popular. People saw me talking to the police, but it was only about my ex-girlfriend' (Fieldnotes, 22/07/21). Visibility was therefore key. One staff member noted how a resident didn't want to be seen talking to her, 'because they don't want to look like they're being a grass' (interview with Frances).

An individual's 'information preserve,' i.e., the set of facts over which they expected to have control whilst in the presence of others, presented a further territory which was susceptible to violation (Goffman, 1971). Throughout their stay, hostel residents partook in an 'information game,' 'a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery (Goffman, 1959: 8). From the point of entry, they were compelled to divulge all manner of discrediting information about themselves via the booking in process, as was detailed in the Prologue. Information was collected, recorded, and shared amongst the staff team, who only needed to log onto computers or open paper files to discover which substances residents used, which offences they had committed, and which health conditions they suffered from. From this point onwards, residents were contained, not only within the hostel's walls, but its databases too.

Residents also collected information about their peers, as they worked out who was dealing what, the paydays of their associates[12], who could be relied upon or exploited when money was short, and who to steer clear of. Jake told me that 'payday' was the one thing to look out for in here,' advising that you need a list of everyone's payday so that you know when to get your money back (Fieldnotes, 31/01/20). Just as members sought to discover information about others, they also attempted to conceal certain information about themselves.

Stanley was both a vocal and private presence. He liked to announce his undoubted imminent eviction and boasted, 'I haven't paid service charge in nine months.' One day, Simon pulled a face as he walked past, knowing full well that Stanley was up to date on his payments. Stanley gave the impression that he was defying the institution, whilst secretly complying with it. Maintenance of this contradictory position was undoubtedly precarious work. If Simon had simply said – 'yes you have' – then Stanley's face, and the impression he had carefully crafted, would have been threatened (Goffman, 1959). Limits on residents' abilities to maintain multiple, contradictory roles will be returned to in Chapter Seven, and conceptualised as a 'squashing of the self.'

When I first met Stanley, he was reluctant to divulge any information and said, 'I have no name' in response to my attempt at an introduction. Yet information flowed from him in communal areas whilst residents hung on his every word, 'I had three women in my room last night' he bragged, later revealing that they were in fact paramedics. He carefully crafted an impression of himself as a ladies' man by describing his multiple girlfriends, giving each of them a derogatory nickname ('75p' being the latest, as that was apparently the cost of their first date), announcing that he was 'in trouble with the Mrs,' and occasionally bringing one lady with learning difficulties to the hostel, perhaps to substantiate these claims.

Stanley had good reason for withholding his name. He was a convicted paedophile. As a convicted paedophile, a list of offences he had committed were accessible to anybody who Googled his name. I was baffled by his popularity given that child sex offenders were usually considered 'the worst of the worst' within these kinds of institutions. When I asked staff

[12] Payday is the day on which residents receive their benefits.

about this, they assumed that 'his paedophilia was hidden' and that 'he was probably popular because he gave out tobacco and had a kind of charm' (Fieldnotes, 06/12/21). Stanley presented a carefully crafted self, which he maintained in the eyes of those around him, though was only ever one slip away from being destroyed (Goffman, 1959). Due to the omnipresence of territorial violations, such as the threat of disclosure in Stanley's case, residents experienced persistent feelings of anxiety whilst living in this place (Goffman, 1971). Harry said, 'I get very nervous in here, it's not a good place for me' (Fieldnotes, 12/03/20). He later disclosed that living at Holbrook had started to affect his mental health, 'I was starting to really badly self-harm in there, really badly' (Interview with Harry).

The kinds of territorial violations described so far are ubiquitous. Every resident experienced smells of sick in the lift or mess on the landings, sleepless nights due to noise, attempts of others to enter their rooms, multiple daily requests for items or money, and the precarious nature of information control. The taken-for-granted nature of these violations was evident in the rules which were used to navigate them, by keeping a low profile and reducing visibility or not trusting anyone, for example. These rules were not unique to the hostel, but could be transferred between similar places within the 'institutional web.' The series of territorial violations experienced, and the accompanying attempts to mitigate them, were so routine that they formed part of the interaction order of the hostel (Goffman, 1961; 1971).

This reduced ability to maintain distance and privacy – the boundary between one's being and their environment – had consequences for the 'institutional self,' i.e., the self which arose within the confines of institutions (Goffman, 1961). Residents could do little about these breaches, if they snitched on those who had stolen from them, for instance, then they would have faced social sanctions. This may have contributed to decreased levels of felt self-determination, thereby preventing individuals from seeing themselves as a full-fledged persons (Goffman, 1961). Whilst residents' complaints about 'this place' appeared simplistic on the surface, this phrase represented a complex relationship between people and the places which contained them, including a reduced entitlement to privacy and the consequences for the self which this implied. Given the clear class asymmetries inherent in

the exercise of privacy, members of hostels and similar institutions may make inferences from their severely reduced ability to maintain distance.

Accounting for being in 'this place'

> Damian wanders the corridors. He kicks a yellow 'wet floor' sign across reception, then asks, 'please Miss, can I use the phone?' Damian likes to claim that he is 'not good' because of 'this place.' Today he elaborates, 'someone died here the other day. They had a weak heart and were on spice. I'm trying not to smoke spice, but they put me in *this* place, in *this* environment!' he shakes his head, how could 'they' do such a thing? 'I'm gonna go BANG!' (Fieldnotes, 13/02/20).

Residents also used the phrase 'this place' to account for their present situation, including all sorts of maladies and misfortunes, such as fighting, drug use, itchiness, poor health, a bad back, not eating, and a lack of romantic relations, amongst others. In the above extract, Damian used 'this place' to account for both a recent death and his own spice use, then went on to blame it for a scar on his forehead. Significantly, many residents used 'this place' to account for their inability to get out of this place. When I told one resident that I was interested in the factors that stopped people from moving on, he responded by saying 'this place' without hesitation, then followed this up by elaborating, 'I was only supposed to be here for four months. I'm disabled and spent a year up on the threes' (Fieldnotes, 02/02/20). Isam suspected that spice was the real culprit. Nonetheless, tautological arguments of this kind were common when it came to moving on (or getting out). When I put this ubiquitous phenomenon to staff, their reaction was equally as matter of fact.

> When people say, 'it's this place,' that's the problem. They're not taking responsibility for their own behaviours and actions. It's easy for somebody to blame the building, the staff, the environment, or the people here, as opposed to looking at themselves and what they're doing to help themselves. It's very easy for somebody to misplace that blame and blame whoever or whatever is around them. It's about not taking responsibility. If you really want to put in the effort and make some changes, then it doesn't matter what the bricks and mortar look like (Interview with Polly).

At first glance, these positions appeared to be opposing responses to the question: why do people become stuck at Holbrook House? Discord in the reasoning for becoming 'stuck' in this place, from resident and staff perspectives, aligned with their differential concerns. Nonetheless, in both instances, hostel members talked broader structures into being by adopting the language of the macro level (Coulter, 1996).

On the one hand, residents claimed that they became stuck in 'this place' because of 'this place.' They invoked structure to account for circumstance, effectively glossing over their present situation, including reasons for continued hostel membership. These functioned in a similar way to the kind of 'sad tales' which Goffman observed within mental health hospitals, as lamentations which accounted for present 'low estate,' however, 'this place' effectively enabled residents to substitute agency with structure i.e., the institution (Goffman, 1961: 67). This was perhaps born of a desire not to be known as 'a person who could possibly be reduced to these present circumstances' (Goffman, 1961: 146). Those who explicitly challenged their containment within the hostel did so on a similar basis – 'I'm not being a snob, Fiona, but I don't belong here, I don't drink I don't do drugs' (Fieldnotes, 03/03/20) and 'I shouldn't be here too long, I'm not a druggy' (Fieldnotes, 04/11/20) – thereby expressly linking hostel membership with drug use. The 'institutional self' implied by this association will be returned to in Chapter Seven.

On the other hand, staff claimed that residents became stuck in this place because they blamed 'this place.' They recognised that 'this place' was used by residents as an accounting device, yet from their perspective, it was important that residents took 'responsibility' for their own behaviours and actions. In doing so, the staff sometimes invoked another structure – the homelessness pathway – together with the treatment-first ideology which underscored it, including notions of responsibility and agency. This theme will be returned to in Chapter Eight.

Moving around the 'institutional web'

> 'People just wallow here with all the systems and procedures. I've been waiting over a year for in-patient detox, they put me in here because I was sleeping on the street, but they just push you from one place to another' (Fieldnotes, 09/01/21).

The final understanding of 'this place' resulted in the development of the 'institutional web,' an analytic concept made visible through the interactions of hostel members, whenever members alluded to a broader and interconnected web of institutions. From this perspective, Holbrook House was just one part of the institutional web and was therefore not unique, as it was one of many intermediary institutions within which people 'wallowed' as they 'waited' for better options, such an in-patient detox. It was one place used to contain individuals for short periods of time, anywhere from a couple of months to 12 months, with the latter representing the arbitrary marker of a 'long stayer' (see Chapter Eight). The 'institutional web' existed in interactions and often comprised a variety institutions, including prison, temporary accommodation, refugee accommodation, mental health facilities, detox centres, and others.

As the opening extract suggests, the institutional web was not static but mobile, as people were pushed from one place to the next. However, in contrast to the linear movements idealised by the pathway, actual movements around the web were far less straightforward. Rather than moving 'up' or 'through' the pathway, many found themselves moving 'back,' 'around', and 'getting stuck' as they became caught cycling the institutional web. This suggested that members' actual movements were less linear, and more circular. In consequence, individuals were stuck in a constant state of motion, without really moving anywhere, as they became 'fixed in mobility' (Jackson, 2015: 5). Significantly, the KPIs did not record circular movement around the institutional web, as there were no measures of 'institutionalised cycling' or 'moves back' down the pathway. The actual movements of members, and the moralisation thereof, will form the focus of Chapter Eight. Moreover, when individuals were pushed from one place to the next in this way, they became 'hyper included' within a variety of services and systems, a concept which will be returned to in Chapter Seven.

Becoming a resident: Distinguishing normal and abnormal residents

Individuals came to Holbrook from a range of places – the streets, other institutions, and emergency accommodation, to name a few. No matter where people came from, moves into Holbrook were often constructed as lacking agency and voluntariness – 'they *put* me here' was an expression commonly used by residents. Some individuals, like Noah,

proclaimed that 'this building is excellent' and 'I would stay forever' (Fieldnotes, 24/01/20). However, as Noah abandoned his room shortly after this proclamation, this statement may have been a mere display of 'primary adjustment' (Goffman, 1961: 189) and an attempt at demonstrating 'change,' in a bid to 'play the game' and get out (see Chapter Eight).

Many of Holbrook's new referrals came from places which made up the 'institutional web' – elsewhere in the pathway, prison, detox centres, mental health facilities, and so on. In becoming a resident, individuals are first 'trimmed' and input into the 'administrative machinery of the establishment,' as was detailed in the Prologue (Goffman, 1961: 16). Becoming a resident entailed more than physically moving into the hostel, as it also involved becoming part of this 'made up' population (Hacking, 1986: 186), one which was often stigmatised (Goffman, 1963a). Residents consequently experienced a 'looping effect' – i.e., the impact that classification can have on those who are classified – which was most evident when they talked about 'being seen' (or not) as a member of the hostel population. To be 'seen' as a rightful member of the hostel (or any other institution within the web) had implications for the institutional self, which will be considered further in Chapter Seven.

Discussions about who belonged at the hostel, who might better be contained elsewhere, and who should have avoided containment altogether, drew on situated understandings of normality and the idea of a 'normal' resident. The contours of this 'normal' resident were best illustrated by cases of 'abnormal' residents, often described as 'poor allocations,' a label which indicated that certain people did not belong at the hostel, whilst others did. 'Poor allocations' were those who were deemed either too conventionally normal, or too abnormal, to be contained in 'this place.' At one extreme, there were those with minimal or no support needs, who had no 'experience' of this kind of institution. Staff conceded that Holbrook could be a 'very scary' environment for such people, who 'should never be sent to this type of environment' in the first place. But they were. Whatever the reason, be it poor council assessments or the lack of alternative accommodation, there were 'too many' of these people at the hostel.

At the other extreme, some individuals had support needs which clearly exceeded the staff team's limited capacity. Allen was one of several 'short term measures' sent to Holbrook by

the local council. Staff laughed at the irony of this label. Allen had been at the hostel for months and was a constant feature of the handover, though the tone gradually changed over time. The man who had once cried at the thought of missing a probation appointment later told staff where they could stick that appointment. He was vulnerable, being bullied, and increasing his drug use. Charlie conceded, 'Allen shouldn't really be here, he should be with Adult Social Care, but they don't take people directly from the streets' (Fieldnotes, 08/08/21). This idea of 'poor allocations' highlighted how categories of 'normal' and 'abnormal' resident were thus situated in relation to the institution itself (Jeffery, 1979).

In both cases, referrals were likely made to Holbrook out of practical necessity, simply because there were no bedspaces elsewhere. Whilst Allen should have been with Adult Social Care from the outset, not only did their referral process make this impossible, but due to limited bedspaces, he became stuck at Holbrook for around nine months. During this period, he acclimatised hostel life and began 'getting by' at Holbrook by adapting to the situated normality within it, by using drugs, talking back to staff, and so on (see Chapter Seven for more on situated normality). There were others, like Allen, who would have been better 'contained in some one of these other institutions' which made up the institutional web, though became members of Holbrook House out of practicality (Goffman, 1961: 354). In these cases, Holbrook functioned as a 'holding station' (Goffman, 1961: 354) by taking people in, processing them, assessing them, and eventually moving them on to more suitable places. Holbrook was essentially forced into becoming an 'Assessment Centre,' a container within which to 'put' people for a short while, whilst their fate was determined.

Previous institutional points of contact

> A fair few of the residents know my back story and some of them know me from the past. I show them respect, they respect where I'm at, you know, I've never yet had anyone bring up my past, in fact I've even known it where, in one situation, somebody who's known me for years and years and years, who was a resident, sort of slipped something out, and then he quickly sort of took it back and went 'I'm so sorry' and like it's okay, I don't go round broadcasting it, but it's okay, it's not a secret, but he felt really bad that he had potentially put me in a position of embarrassment or something' (Interview with Adrian).

Movement around the institutional web was fairly common for Holbrook's residents. Interactions within the reception area hinted at the appreciable number of residents who had lived at, left, and then returned to Holbrook House. Hostel members often recognised those moving back in: '*that's a face I haven't seen in a while.*' '*he's not back, is he*? '*Samir, you're back too*!' '*Lincoln's back, I like him.*' As residents routinely spent time cycling the institutional web, many of them knew one another from past encounters within different institutions. These institutional points of contact were handled interactionally, within each situation, as to talk publicly about shared institutional experiences was to disclose potentially discrediting information about another's past (Goffman, 1963a). This was significant given the above-mentioned 'information game' and a desire to conceal discrediting information about themselves (Goffman, 1959).

Nonetheless, these institutional points of contact were made public in some situations. For example, during cooking group, two men talked about living at a local night shelter which was currently closed for refurbishment, 'it was quieter there' said one, 'it was either move here or back to the streets' said the other, 'they've been offering me this place since October.' Another time, Allen wafted spice along the corridor as Lincoln whispered, 'he frightens me, he was always fighting in prison, always biting people,' though rationalised that Allen was usually the one being picked on. Such interactions were common and highlighted the frequency of institutional points of contact between individuals as they moved up, down, and around the institutional web. Moreover, it is the telling of these 'tales from elsewhere' that follow the individual and produce and sustain the sense of the web they find themselves in in the first place.

Whilst these interactions were observable, there were undoubtedly many points of contact which were intentionally unacknowledged, unspoken, and therefore unseeable by me as a researcher. When individuals colluded not to reveal past encounters, they were engaging in a form of situated identity management. This was illustrated by Adrian above, who was a staff member at the time of fieldwork, though had once been caught cycling the institutional web himself. Despite working at Holbrook for a couple of years, nobody ever brought up his 'past' – those past points of contact which once united them – the only time his past was made public, it was treated as a 'faux pas,' and the individual responsible

immediately instigated a remedial interchange (Goffman, 1959; 1971). There was a tacit understanding between hostel members – in this case, between Adrian and those who knew about his past – that such discrediting information would remain a secret, enabling those involved in the interaction to 'pass' (Goffman, 1963a). There was also a general agreement that residents would not disclose information about one another. So when Noah started talking about the resident whose health he was worried about, he quickly caught himself, 'I don't like talking about other people' (Fieldnotes, 18/02/20). Of course, there were exceptions to this rule, such as Shaun's running commentary of people's offences, 'his brother's lifing,' murdered three people 'because of a bird,' and 'he killed his stepdad with a hammer' (Fieldnotes, 17/02/20). This agreement not to disclose information about one another made sense when considering the 'hyper inclusion' of residents within a range of bureaucracies and forcible disclosure of information which this entailed. Given the institutional limits on their informational preserve, residents valued privacy and exercised this wherever they could, on behalf of themselves and their peers.

> As ping pong winds down, the group perch on dining tables. Bradley recalled playing ping pong in a prison where there were 'good screws' – good because he got away with smoking spliffs. The others joined in as the small group ranked different prisons, compared their favourite prison-based activities, and reminisced about the 'good old days.' There were good times, though Bradley complains about being in there with 'a child killer.' Another member reminds him that you don't know what people in here have done. Bradley says he's good at 'sussing people… it's the quiet ones you have to watch out for, the ones who don't talk to anyone' (Fieldnotes, 04/03/20).

One of the biggest institutional overlaps was with prisons. In fact, all of my key informants had spent time in prison at some stage in their lives. Talking about prison provided common ground and an opportunity for mundane chit chat amongst residents, and sometimes staff and volunteers too. This was evident in the above conversation, in which three residents and one volunteer compared their experiences of different prisons, yet the finer details of their time inside, including what somebody was in for, were seldom acknowledged, in front of me at least.

Members felt that those with experience of living in prison would adapt more easily to life at Holbrook House. The transference of rules between comparable institutions – in this case from prisons to homeless hostels – enabled individuals to navigate the setting and interactions within it. Those with institutional experience moved their bodies and possessions with caution; used social sanctions to prevent snitching; reduced the visibility of illegal acts and unfair exchanges; and expressed distance from the staff and the institution. These rules were not formal but constitutive, and arose subtly within interactions, such as when Bradley, in the opening extract, asked Tyler whether he was on the phone to the police. By asking this question, Bradley made relevant the rule against snitching, whilst making Tyler aware of his suspicions. These rules were perhaps more akin to the moral constraints of 'obligations' and 'expectations' described by Goffman (1956). Taken together, these un-explicated rules formed a 'code' of sorts which was usable by members of various institutions and transferable between them (Wieder, 1974).

This was a likely consequence of the bi-directional flow of individuals between homeless hostels and prisons. Holbrook House was a common site of arrest, as illustrated in the opening extract, as the police often entered the hostel to locate and detain specific individuals amongst a mass of familiar others. Many individuals experienced this transition, from homeless hostel to prison, from resident to prisoner. Furthermore, with nowhere else to go upon release, many prison leavers moved back into Holbrook House, transitioning back from prisoner to resident. This is probably why Sam expected to 'move back' to Holbrook once his sentence was up.

Some experienced periods of rough sleeping, emergency accommodation, or stints elsewhere in the institutional web between their time in prison and at Holbrook. Harry was one of many prison-leavers who called the hostel 'home.' Like Anthony, he did not move directly from prison to Holbrook, instead he spent three months in comparatively plush bridge accommodation[13], before being given the ultimatum: Holbrook or the streets. Lincoln fondly recounted a similar period of respite from institutional living, 'I had my own place

[13] Bridge accommodation is short-term accommodation provided to prison leavers who would otherwise be homeless upon their departure from prison. My informants reported that it was often self-contained, and that residency was for a maximum of three months.

away from the chaos, the kitchen was all the way over there, there was carpet in the bedroom, and doors that opened onto the garden' (Fieldnotes, 20/07/21). However, after nine months, he was forced to move into a hostel. When I asked why he could not stay, he explained matter-of-factly, 'they don't want you to clean up. They need people to keep going round the system, so they have jobs.' Lincoln had been cycling the institutional web for most of his life, ever since spending his teenage years in a children's home.

Lincoln was not alone – many of Holbrook's residents spent their lives bouncing from institution to institution without any real choice as to where they would end up next. With little control over their own mobility, it was no wonder residents used the expression 'they put me here,' with its connotations of passivity and non-voluntariness. The relentlessly cyclical nature of the institutional web was drawn into sharp focus when one day, by chance, three neighbouring residents found themselves in the same rooms they had inhabited exactly 10 years prior – 'hopefully for the last time' (Fieldnotes, 25/08/21).

Getting stuck in the web

Whilst staff tried to move people on efficiently, it was not always an easy task given the support needs of hostel members – such as high levels of substance use, mental health issues, and non-engagement – as well as the 'ordinary institutional troubles' they experienced themselves (see Chapter Six). Individuals often became 'stuck' at the hostel when no alternatives were available. Allen remained at the hostel for at least nine months, potentially much longer[14], as he awaited more appropriate accommodation. The lack of space elsewhere in the institutional web was equally problematic for residents who experienced a rapid decline, in their mental health, for example.

> Tyler stomps and shouts, 'I'm a 40-year-old man, you're treating me like a kid. My bags are packed, just push the button.' He describes different types of gun and pretends to shoot, 'blasting heads off!' He repeats the same date over and over, 'ask

[14] COVID-19 restrictions came into force during this time, interrupting my fieldwork and temporarily ousting me from the hostel. By the time I was able to return, Allen had moved on.

> the fucking Queen!' The lift opens, he gets in, and shouts all the way to the fourth floor.
>
> Rachel fills me in, 'he's got really bad mental health, he's on his way to sectioning.' The mental health team were here yesterday and saw all of this, but she suspects that they're waiting for something to happen. Adrian had this with another resident and says, 'they didn't get involved until he threw himself out of a window.' Adrian is frustrated at the involvement of another team, 'we're more than capable of making the assessment' he tells Rachel (Fieldnotes, 13/05/21).

Tyler was sectioned. But only for two days. Then he 'moved back' to Holbrook. His behaviour nonetheless continued to trouble staff, who pursued involvement from the mental health team. The team attempted to triage Tyler by calling him on the phone, and when he did not answer, simply closed his case. This happened several times. Meanwhile, Tyler became a danger to himself and others: his behaviour became erratic and angry, he did not have the level of support he needed, other residents threatened to 'sort him out,' and he jumped into the staff reception area, threatening the staff. By September 2021, Tyler shouted less and engaged more, without any intervention from the mental health team. Whilst this outcome was positive, it was also lucky – he could quite easily have become another person to have thrown himself out of a window. Getting stuck at an inappropriate institution was clearly not benign in its consequences, for Allen, Tyler, or any other member for that matter.

> They won't deal with a person's mental health until he gets clean. But how can you get clean when you've got mental health and nobody's helping you? And then there's an expectation that you're gonna attend regular appointments, but if you're particularly unwell, then you may forget about appointments. So, the criteria for accessing support can be unrealistic… Crack can lead to extended psychotic breaks from reality. Why should people be penalised when their psychotic episode is triggered by drugs? It's still a psychotic episode (Interview with Adrian).

This pointed to a wider flaw with the places which made up the institutional web, as the staff at Holbrook were frustrated that many were 'not integrated' at best, and 'did not care'

at worst, particularly when it came to dual diagnoses[15]. Adrian criticised the bureaucracy of mental health services and alluded to the presence of stigma in health care professionals' differential treatment of drug users. He was not the only staff member to do so. The institutional web is flawed in multiple ways, from the bureaucratic underpinnings of institutions, to the 'ordinary institutional troubles' faced by staff (Chapter Six), to the propensity for individuals to become stuck, not within a single institution, but in a constant state of motion between them (Jackson, 2012; 2015).

Conclusion

This chapter answers the taken-for-granted question – 'what is this place?' By examining the dimensions of 'this place' from three distinct vantage points, it has added complexity to our understanding of 'this place,' as a 'more than physical space' i.e., as more than a mere hostel (Wynne and Rogers 2021: 2). The first section looked at the official version of this place, in order to understand the intended purpose of Holbrook House. By comparing and contrasting the hostel's aims with the pathway's aims, it was possible to see discord between the two, expressed in this chapter as a tension between people-changing and people-processing (Goffman, 1961: 87; Comfort et al, 2015; Graeber, 2015). Whilst the institution and its staff had hoped to achieve the former, they were often forced into resembling the latter, through institutional measures of success, such as the pathway's KPIs. Given that 'change' was a precursor to movement out of the hostel and up the pathway, the chapter then considered what constituted 'change' against this bureaucratic backdrop. It found that residents were being asked to make the kind of changes which could be recorded and used as evidence when filling out forms (Lipsky, 2010). However, given the particularities of hostel life, individuals like Joey and Lincoln found that they struggled to make or maintain this kind of demonstrable change. This was because whilst living at Holbrook House, individuals found it difficult to make the changes necessary to get out of it, as barriers to getting out of the hostel were interaction order phenomena.

The second section explored the residents' use of 'this place' in interactions. In some instances, residents used this phrase to encapsulate and consolidate the range of grunts and

[15] Dual diagnosis is the combination of mental health and substance use issues.

groans they had about the hostel, many of which stemmed from their reduced ability to maintain distance within a place like this (Goffman, 1971). It then went on to consider some of the observed ways in which the hostel setting reduced residents' ability to maintain distance within it, by conceiving of 'this place' as series territorial violations (Goffman, 1971). These violations – including forced information sharing, unwanted conversation, and breaches of fixed boundaries – existed at the level of interaction and were endured by all members of this setting. The phrase was also used by individuals to account for present circumstance, including their inability to escape 'this place.' Talking broader structures into being, and adopting the language of the macro level, enabled residents to gloss over the reasons underlying their continued residency at Holbrook House (Coulter, 1996).

The final section showed the multiple ways in which the institutional web – the overlaps and points of contact between different institutions and services – was talked into being, shedding light on the persistence of movement around it. It looked at how individuals were sometimes allocated a space for purely practical reasons and the problems which this could cause, as was the case with Allen or those with no experience of similar institutions. These individuals were conceived of as 'poor allocations,' or abnormal residents, and therefore did not belong. The consequences of being deemed a 'normal' and rightful resident will be returned to in Chapter Seven. Each time individuals came into contact with another strand of the institutional web, they become 'hyper included' within that service or institution too, which had implications for the above-mentioned information game (see Chapter Seven). The relentless nature of forced movement around the institutional web was illustrated through their previous institutional points of contact, only some of which were made visible to me. This kind of movement meant that they became stuck, not in a place as such, but in a perpetual state of motion as they endlessly cycled broader the institutional web (Jackson, 2012, 2015), a point which will be returned to in Chapter Eight.

Homeless hostels were not the only institution used to contain and process 'problem' populations. The Home Office hotels which were introduced in Chapter One functioned in a similar way, as they too were used to contain and process another problematic population – asylum seeking children. Whilst Holbrook House was a physical space, 'this place' was also so much more. The remainder of this thesis will continue to probe the complex nature of

‘this place,’ by taking a staff perspective of the hostel (Chapter Six), focusing on different and competing understandings of normality within it (Chapter Seven), and illustrating how individuals manage to ‘get out’ of it (Chapter Eight).

Chapter six: 'We're doing the best we can, but we're busy' – the discretionary practices of hostel staff

The summers are much worse. But even now, on a chilly autumn night, non-residents trickle into the front garden. Trevor watches the CCTV footage, 'some of them are so daring.' They've been dealing from a blind spot in 'that corner.'

After a quick handover at 9pm, Trevor conducts the nightly 'health and safety' checks. He walks the entire building alone, turning alarms on, closing filing cabinets, checking that gates and windows are secure, and locking doors – 'we need to seal all the external entry points that people might try and come through.' He sees the building's weak spots – fire doors through which 'non-residents' have previously slipped, or crevices within which they once slept. He always carries Naloxone. He once found a resident who was dead, though brought him back, 'just in the nick of time.' With only two people on shift, controlling the immediate environment is a priority.

Trevor's checks are interrupted several times by the radio – can you come back to reception? He stops, starts, stops, starts. He finds a resident on the floor of the third-floor kitchen, hunched over a pile of dog ends, a small bottle of vodka to his side. He tells Trevor, 'I feel sick. I cut my nails for an hour. I might need an ambulance. I might have syphilis.' Trevor tries to reassure him but he's adamant, 'I just wanna die.'

The radio sounds, 'Trevor, can you knock on a door?' The girlfriend of the man in room 205 is here and she needs her bank card. The radio sounds again, 'can you check the third-floor kitchen? Somebody is trying to get out the window.'

The kitchen is empty, so he knocks on the door of the man who wants to die. He answers, 'they keep frightening me, they think I'm retarded and keep saying you '*owe me £20 for a phone'*, they're the ones that steal phones, they're parasites.' Trevor asks him to close his window, but he says he likes the breeze. Trevor tells him to call the police if people are stealing from him. When Trevor reports this to

Caroline, she asks, any names? No. Anything to do with him being found dead[16] on the train with ketamine? It's unclear. He's a known drinker, but not a drug user, so his ketamine use was not normal.

Caroline suggests locking the kitchen as a precaution, but they decide to keep it open. At least they can see the kitchen window from reception, his bedroom window faces the back of the building. In the end, it takes Trevor two hours to complete the health and safety checks.

Caroline falls behind in logging the night's events on the system. A resident sways on the spot as he complains to her about being 'on notice' for suspected dealing. 'You need to put the complaint in writing,' she says. He doesn't. This conversation happens nightly. I ask how staff decide when to give notices for suspicion. Caroline says, 'it's being monitored, and his name keeps coming up. Non-residents are in the garden, he comes down, and there's a hand shuffle. Or a non-resident makes a quick phone call, and he suddenly appears.'

It's time for welfare checks. Caroline informs me, 'legally welfares should be done by two people, but we can't close reception. There's a lot of lone working on the night shift.'

The girlfriend of room 205 is back and begs them to knock for him again. Caroline says she 'wouldn't normally,' but he controls her and she's seen a pimp eyeing her up. They bring the man down and Caroline asks, 'have you got her card?' 'What card?' he snaps. She realises that there is no card and she's 'been played.' She decides to log it as 'a goodwill gesture' on handover (Fieldnotes, 19/11/21).

[16] When an individual overdoses and is technically dead for a short period of time, members refer to this as a 'death.' By this logic, some hostel members have 'died' multiple times yet are still very much alive.

Introduction

> This contradiction, between what the institution does and what its officials must say it does, forms the basic context of the staff's daily activity (Goffman 1961: 74).

Having explored 'this place' largely from the perspective of residents, this chapter takes the viewpoint of the staff. It foregrounds one common friction between the staff and resident teams – which centred on complaints that 'staff do nothing' – by delving into the various factors which may underlie this. Firstly, it considers the numerous 'ordinary institutional troubles' which the staff come up against on a daily basis. Secondly, it argues that discretion within this context is necessary and looks at some of the ways in which it is exercised by staff. Thirdly, and stemming from their discretionary practices, it considers how staff members 'learn to see,' and 'learn not to see', by orientating to what is considered 'normal', or not, within this place. Finally, it returns to the tension between people-changing and people-processing institutions, and implications for the degree of care or control inherent in the staff role. As every issue outlined herein is interactional – from ordinary institutional troubles to discretionary practices – a focus on the interaction order of the hostel offers the most appropriate way of understanding the staff world (Goffman, 1983). Moreover, from this perspective, we can appreciate how all members of an institution are governed by its interaction order.

Staff 'do nothing'

> Mr P is a middle-aged Asian man with multiple health issues. I see him in the dining room at breakfast time. One day, after a staff member tells him about my research, he asks to talk to me 'in private.' He says, 'I try to avoid the dining room' but it's difficult to carry food trays whilst holding a walking stick. He experiences lots of problems with 'this place,' 'I face racist comments when people are on drugs' he says, then complains about people continually asking him for money. All of these things cause him stress. He finds it 'a very challenging environment, like a shadow prison.' The staff are part of the problem too, 'they are not implementing all the rules and regulations, even if you complain, nothing happens' (Fieldnotes, 20/02/20).

Complaints about the staff doing 'nothing' were common amongst the residents. One day, Anthony welled up after his grandmother's bread plate, which had been passed down through the family, had gone missing. I asked if he had reported it to staff but he said it was not worth it, as when he had mentioned it, they had 'done nothing,' despite 'all these fucking CCTV cameras' (Fieldnotes, 10/02/20). There were instances in which residents confronted staff about their doing nothing. For example, when Abbas approached Elizabeth on reception and complained about the noise which had been going on throughout the night, she simply said, 'we can't do anything unless people actually report it to us.' Abbas protested, 'people have reported it!' Isam verified this. When Elizabeth remained silent and continued to look at the computer screen, Abbas walked away and shrugged (Fieldnotes, 09/03/20).

However, during the Residents' Meetings, I witnessed several instances of staff 'doing something' in response to complaints: the sheds used to store ex-residents' possessions had been replaced; the Wi-Fi had been upgraded throughout the building; ovens in the communal kitchens had been replaced; the food offered in the canteen had become more varied and catered to a broader range of dietary requirements; a plumber had been hired to look at the building's pipes; and new activities had been introduced. Perhaps the issue was that whilst these complaints and their resolutions were largely material, the complaints made by Anthony and Abbas were interactional, pervasive, and therefore less easy to fix. Many stemmed from the territorial violations of 'this place,' detailed in Chapter Five. When territorial violations, such as theft or noise, were raised in Residents' Meetings, staff could do little more than encourage residents to 'report it to reception.' It was about these kinds of complaint that the staff purportedly 'did nothing.' Residents Meetings were sparsely attended. When Rachel asked passers-by if they would be attending the meeting, many avoided the question, though one resident was very explicit in his reason for non-attendance, 'I'll tell you why I'm not going, because you don't fucking listen!' 'I'll listen,' she said, but he insisted 'it's been like this for three years and nothing changes' (Fieldnotes, 23/09/21).

Ordinary institutional troubles

> Allen tails Chrissy who briefly turns to him, 'we're doing the best we can, but we're busy, I'm sorry if that's not enough… I'll see if anyone's free.' Allen hangs around reception, popping outside and back inside repeatedly until Frank, a support worker, comes from the support office five minutes later and asks Allen if he wants to talk. The Chapel is in use, so they enter the small telephone room. Another member of reception staff informs Frank, 'I'm helping Allen with his room later' (Fieldnotes, 15/09/2021).

The night shift was both exceptional and unexceptional. It was exceptional as only two members of staff were responsible for the hostel's 93 residents[17], yet unexceptional as the troubles they faced were not unique to them. These troubles – which I have termed '*ordinary institutional troubles*' – were composed of the various practical challenges which the staff team came up against whilst carrying out their roles. The troubles were 'ordinary' as they were likely to be experienced by staff at similar intermediary institutions, and 'institutional' as they had become a taken-for-granted aspect of working in a place like this. Many of these difficulties stemmed from overburdening, understaffing, and the bureaucratic demands of people-processing structures.

In the above extracts, both Trevor and Chrissy rushed around the building as they tried to undertake routine tasks, whilst being pulled in different directions, by multiple parties and for multiple reasons. Given that they were on the frontline, positioned adjacent to the main reception area and accessible 24/7, the reception staff were particularly exposed to these multiple demands, including – buzzing residents in, taking phone calls from the council, managing void times[18], handling requests for post or meal tickets or room keys (all of which were kept behind reception), undertaking welfare checks, monitoring psychotic episodes or excessive drug consumption, responding to epileptic fits or overdoses, breaking up fights, responding to fire alarms, buying residents cakes and cards on their birthday, running activities, helping with benefits, taking residents to appointments, clearing out rooms,

[17] During the day, there were around 10-15 reception staff, support staff, and managers on shift at any one time.
[18] Rooms were classified as 'voids' during the period in which they were empty.

moving individuals in and out of the hostel, and recording significant events on the handover. In other words, the reception staff were often overburdened.

> I've got to manage 12 clients, and that is a lot because of the paperwork we've got to do. I look at some of the guys and think, they would benefit from meeting more. But we're doing duty manager shifts, and then you've got the stuff that goes on in here, like overdoses or fights, that sort of stuff (Interview with Roger).

> We are badly underfunded and don't have enough workers. We average a case load of 12 clients for a 40-hour week. Now, we're a level one, high support hostel. That implies that the lads need high support. Now, you can only fit in a one-hour session per client per week because of all the paperwork and stuff that you've got to do: risk assessments, support plans, updating the Council website, that sort of stuff. And we're not just there to work with the guys, we have to do duty manager shifts, attend meetings, that all takes time out of your day (Interview with Adrian).

The support staff sat in a shared office and spent their days on computers or telephones, only leaving for pre-arranged and sporadically-attended keyworking sessions, to undertake duty manager[19] shifts, or to join the handover[20]. Despite being backstage, and away from the immediate demands of clients, support workers were also pulled in multiple directions and, like reception staff, felt overburdened as a result. Support workers shared a common frustration regarding the non-supportive elements of their role, which entailed paperwork, duty manager shifts, and various meetings. Given that this particular burden stemmed from the more administrative, or people-processing, aspects of their role, it could be said that support staff bore a largely 'bureaucratic burden' (Graeber, 2015).

This feeling of being overburdened was particularly strenuous during periods in which the hostel was understaffed, a second ordinary institutional trouble. Different categories of staff member held different understandings of what it meant to be 'understaffed,' something

[19] Duty manager shifts are rotational and compulsory for support workers and managers. Reception staff can elect to take on shifts too, in exchange for a minor increase in pay for its duration.
[20] A meeting attended by reception staff, support staff, and managers, in which the key events from the past 24 hours or so were shared and discussed.

which came to light in a conversation between Rachel (manager) and Polly (reception staff). Polly looked tired and commented on the team being 'understaffed,' though Rachel maintained, 'we have the right amount of staff on,' Polly persisted, 'it feels like we're understaffed because it's busy' (Fieldnotes, 18/02/20). From a management perspective, the hostel was technically fully staffed, yet on the ground there was a feeling of understaffing as there were not enough staff available to tackle the shared burden.

Whether understaffing was numerical or felt, the lack of capacity had real consequences for the staff team. For instance, this sometimes meant that staff had to 'lone work,' in contravention of organisational policy. Trevor was not the only one who found himself lone working, Lara also ran a hostel-based cooking group alone each week. One week, after making a fry up, the five participants filtered out one by one as Lara cleaned the kitchen, leaving just one man behind, who was categorised as No Lone Working (NLW). She asked me discretely, 'do you mind waiting with me for a bit?' as she was scared of being left alone with him. Pablo, who was a resident and a keen cook, pointed to an absurdity in the policy regarding lone working in the van, as staff were allowed to lone work with residents when moving them out and transporting them to their new accommodation, but not for any other purpose, such as trips to the fish monger to gather cooking ingredients. Perhaps this lone working concession was made in accordance with the movement-centric aims of the pathway, outlined in Chapter Five.

> Elizabeth reviews the upcoming bookings in and Evie frowns, 'they'll all end up coming tomorrow and I'll have to do them all.' 'Don't be so negative,' says Elizabeth. 'Well, we do our best and are told it's not good enough' retorts Evie. Within the hour, one of the managers tells Evie to 'prepare for tomorrow' as they'll be clearing out the room of a notorious hoarder. She leaves reception, 'I need a minute.' (Fieldnotes, 15/6/21).

> The personal alarm has been sounding for a minute. Frank, a support worker, intervenes by visiting the area in which the alarm had been set off. When he returns to reception he complains that the reception staff 'were just standing there' and that being inexperienced is no excuse, 'they should've asked' (Fieldnotes, 05/02/20).

Understaffing was one consequence of high staff turnover, as many staff left for better paid and less stressful roles elsewhere. One support worker told me that he was leaving for a management role at another organisation, 'I'm looking forward to working somewhere else, this place is crazy, it's been affecting my mental health' (Fieldnotes, 25/05/21). The interactional demands of 'this place' evidently affected the staff as well as residents. Further, as more experienced staff members left, their roles were filled by novices or agency workers, who possessed limited knowledge about the institution and its residents. Following a period of high staff turnover, Evie was tasked with carrying out multiple bookings in and room clearances, as she was one of the more experienced members of staff, despite being a relative novice herself. Staff turnover was most stark when I returned to Holbrook in October 2022, 11 months after completing my fieldwork, as I did not recognise a single reception or support worker. Further, having too many novices or agency workers on at one time posed a potential risk, as the above extract concerning the personal alarm illustrated.

> The reception staff are sceptical of the new referral, he's been here before and was trouble then. Elijah insists, 'we only get two refusals per quarter, we should go into it with an open mind.' They agree to give him a chance (Fieldnotes, 11/05/21).

> Olivia says, 'our beds are controlled by the council so we generally don't refuse clients, and we do have a lot of clients we can't manage because of that… they're probably thinking it's not the best place for trying to get over addiction and acute mental health.' I ask, 'is that because of the 'refusals based on risk' KPI?' She thinks it could be. On the topic of KPIs she adds, 'when it's target-driven, the meaning of support becomes obsolete.' She raises the evictions KPI, 'there have been lots of evictions lately. It's a clash of interests.' The evictions were necessary for the safety of the hostel (Fieldnotes, 18/09/21).

Pathway KPIs dictated that each accommodation provider was only able to refuse two referrals on the basis of risk each quarter. When Olivia said, 'our beds are controlled by the council,' she meant that it was the council who often made those referrals to Holbrook. The hostel's managers juggled competing demands too, as they tried to simultaneously appease those within the hostel and beyond its walls. This was most stark when it came to the local

council's KPIs. In interactions between managers and other staff, KPIs were made relevant in numerous ways, including encouragement to move people on, pressure to clear rooms quickly, and debates about whether or not to evict. The KPIs were at times controversial, as they had potentially negative consequences for day-to-day hostel life, whilst causing tension amongst its members. This tension attested to 'a multiplicity of conflicting official goals' (Goffman, 1961: 176), such as the conflicts in official aims, detailed in Chapter Five.

As illustrated in the above extracts, when it came to the refusals based on risk KPI, 'the decision is often this, it's either say no and have control over the hostel or say yes and fulfil the KPI' (Fieldnotes, 06/12/21). Another KPI urged service providers not to evict, meaning that residents who had threatened or attacked others were sometimes allowed to stay at the hostel. This led to an increase in risky residents being allowed in and a decrease in the number of dangerous residents being evicted. Yet Holbrook had to adhere to these KPIs, as their funding depended on it. Adherence was perhaps even more crucial amidst discussions about the hostel becoming an 'Assessment Centre' (see Chapter Five). The consequences of meeting council KPIs was nonetheless felt by staff on the ground.

Charlie recognised the people-processing tendencies of the pathway, 'when you go up any structure it's not person-centred, you have lost the ground truth, there are different priorities, strategies, funding etc. There are no names, it becomes abstract' (Fieldnotes, 06/12/21). By the time you got to the council's level, individuals were reduced to mere points on a graph. They were only interested in statistical data, graphs, and the occasional 'success story,' which did not reflect the experiences of most individuals who were stuck within the pathway. Furthermore, Charlie explained that those who commissioned homelessness services had little or no experience of working in places like this, seldom visited pathway accommodation, and when they did, made no secret about it being a perfunctory tick box exercise. Yet there were sometimes ways around KPIs. One referral was marked as 'inappropriate' rather than 'refused based on risk' due to a previous incident with Caroline on the night shift (Fieldnotes, 22/04/21). This was one of the ways in which staff were able to refuse the kind of 'poor allocations' mentioned in Chapter Five, without performing negatively according to the KPIs. This was important, as the staff team had to 'play the game,' by being seen to hit their targets whilst maintaining control over the hostel.

> Samir storms through reception, 'I need to get out of this place! If it's not the water, it's the washing machine, I can't even wash my face!' Attempts to appease him only fuel his anger, 'I'm gonna smash this place up!' (Fieldnotes, 01/09/21).
>
> Caroline reads a new poster which has been affixed to staff reception. It apologises for a lack of heating and hot water and advises the residents to contact the landlord directly if they have any complaints. Caroline explains, 'they own the building and are responsible for repairs, but it takes nearly a year to do a repair, the heating's been like this for over two years, some have heating, some don't, now it's turning cold and quite a few residents don't have heating, but it's a basic human need. The residents get angry at us, the staff and management, but it's the landlord. It's the first time I've seen Charlie say make a complaint to the landlord, normally we take it all, maybe if they hear from the residents themselves they'll do something' (Fieldnotes, 19/11/21).

Some of the challenges of 'this place' (see Chapter Five) were beyond the staff team's control, such as issues with the building itself, which fell within the landlord's remit. At one point, the landlord had refused to service the Thermostatic Mixing Valves (TMVs), so residents began to lose hot water one room at a time. This caused lots of conflict, as in Samir's case, as residents blamed the staff team for these issues. When the TMVs came up in handover, Charlie said, 'we've been pushing for months and months, now they've agreed to the quote' but there was still no confirmation of dates. His solution was to provide residents with the landlord's number, 'if there's an issue, phone the number, it's a landlord issue, we've done everything we can' (Fieldnotes, 06/11/21).

Against this backdrop of ordinary institutional troubles, it was possible to see how the relatively small staff team struggled to juggle multiple, competing demands. When they were spread so thinly, it was not possible to implement all the 'rules and regulations' as Mr P had expected, or intervene whenever a territory had been violated. This situation was amplified by the demands of the local council, which resulted in the hostel accepting 'poor allocations,' like Allen in Chapter Five, who took up a great deal of the staff's time and focus. Unresolved problems, such as those with the building, also fuelled conflict between staff

and residents, yet lay beyond the staff team's control. Staff also struggled to do anything about the multiple territorial violations which occurred within 'this place,' as outlined in Chapter Five. Despite juggling all of this and trying their best, the staff team were nevertheless construed by residents as 'doing nothing.'

'Justifiable, person-centred inconsistency': Discretionary practices in intermediary institutions

> A man storms through reception and yanks the door handle so hard that it slams into the wall. He shouts, 'no-one's supporting me to move, I'm gonna jump off the bridge now.' Adrian enters staff reception and tells Elizabeth, 'I think he refused a place,' she responds, 'he did' and they say no more about it (Fieldnotes, 22/09/2021).

Against a backdrop of ordinary institutional troubles, the staff team had to decide when to intervene, and when not to, when to take claims seriously, and when not to, when to enforce rules, and when not to. In other words, discretion was an inevitable aspect of life within Holbrook House. I asked Elizabeth what they would do about the man's suicide threat, and it took her a moment to compute, 'oh him... what he's saying isn't true, he's been offered a place, it's just not in the right area, so to answer your question, it depends.' She knew that this particular man was 'doing it for effect' and noted that quite a lot of the guys were doing it at the moment. The entire encounter lasted no more than 30 seconds, before Adrian resumed his search for a resident and Elizabeth went back to clicking away at the computer. This scenario illustrated how the staff team were constantly exercising discretion, and how these decisions were often fleeting, handled interactionally, and determined *in situ*. In the above example, the decision to 'do nothing' followed consensus between Elizabeth and Adrian that the man's suicide threat was false and stemmed from his refusal of accommodation elsewhere in the pathway. Nothing more came of this encounter, it was not followed up, recorded on the handover, or shared with other staff members.

> Caroline reads Trevor an email, 'Rachel says we shouldn't be giving milk out at night.' She welcomes this validation from management and admits to being 'a broken record' on the subject but says 'it's always the same residents. I know they're hungry, but they need help budgeting' (Fieldnotes, 19/11/2021).

The staff exercised discretion each time they granted somebody access to the telephone room, provided food outside of mealtimes, acted on complaints, intervened in disputes, and nominated individuals for moves out of the hostel, to name a few. However, the amount of discretion which staff were able to exercise depended largely upon practical matters. For instance, with only two staff members working the night shift, they had to prioritise safety and security by keeping things under control. In response, the residents often referred to them merely as 'guards' or 'security.' The night team were so preoccupied with monitoring who came in and out of the building and front garden, and securing it against non-residents who may try to sneak in, that they had very limited capacity to exercise discretion. For this reason, Caroline refused to give out tea, coffee, and milk – perhaps one of the most hotly contested discretionary practices amongst the staff team – and noted that whilst 'the day staff might do it and that's great, there are only two of us.' Caroline took a firm stance in the face of calls for discretion, perhaps this was why she felt so strongly about 'being played,' and felt the need to record a deviation from her normal approach (i.e., not knocking on the doors of residents) as being 'a goodwill gesture.' On the night shift, the balance between 'humane standards' and 'institutional efficiency' tipped in favour of the latter (Goffman, 1961: 78). With limited staffing and resources, the night staff prioritised safety and security out of necessity.

> A single agency worker covers reception whilst everyone else is in handover. An argument breaks out between him and a man on crutches, whom he refuses to buzz in. The man knocks the glass to gain our attention – Dylan and Stanley confirm that he lives here, but the agency worker refuses still (Fieldnotes, 25/02/20).

The need to keep the hostel secure was so fundamental that novice staff would rather prevent a resident from entering freely than risk letting a non-resident into the building. If non-residents did slip by, staff launched a coordinated effort to locate them using the CCTV cameras, found them in the building, and then escorted them back outside.

When it came to giving out tea, coffee, and milk, some staff made the case in favour of humane standards and continued to hand these items out – 'we're in a lockdown situation, the lads can easily go over the boil at the slightest thing, but a cup of tea and a bit of

kindness might prevent an escalation… treat people like human beings and guess what, you'll get treated like one too' (Interview with Adrian, 22/04/20). Others described these staff as 'people pleasers' and made the opposing case for institutional efficiency, 'when it's just given out willy nilly it also destroys the work that I'm doing with a resident, they start using more and know that they can get free food… it's enabling clients' (Interview with Roger, 23/04/20).

> Our approach means that everybody is treated equally and fairly, we can't favour one person over another. If it does happen, then it brings about many negative consequences for the service, the staff team, and the person. It can create tension, lots of confusion, and frustration. You're undermining your colleagues and undermining the policies and procedures. Is it fair that you're favouring one person over the other, or you're saying yes to one and no to the other? There needs to be a very good reason for that to happen. It may be due to a learning difficulty, and if so, it needs to be documented and shared with the wider team, so that everybody's kept in the loop. It needs to be looked at and addressed, otherwise it becomes a culture, a negative culture, and then becomes the norm, and that in itself can have a huge impact on the service as well as everyone that's involved. (Interview with Rico, 17/9/21)

This was Holbrook's official stance on exercising discretion, as outlined by the member of staff who delivered training to new starters. Yet the day-to-day reality deviated from this official line, as the implementation and enforcement of rules, policies, and procedures, for instance, depended more on the situation itself than the formal written rules (Lipsky, 2010). Drugs provided a prime example. The official line, found in the residents' licence agreement, stated that 'the licensee agrees not to have, use or supply, or allow visitors to have, use or supply illegal drugs within the service.' However, this rule was not even mentioned during the booking in process (see Prologue). In fact, during one booking in, the new resident said, 'the first thing I heard when I came in was 'this person's got spice' and everyone went to them,' to which Polly responded, 'there's lots of that, you'll have to put up with it… we know it happens, we just want to keep everyone safe' (Fieldnotes, 09/01/21).

The staff team frequently implemented harm reduction policies in this way, against the broader prohibitionist framework of the organisation, which effectively amounted to them 'turning a blind eye' (Pauly et al, 2018: 21). Whilst staff were aware of the prevalence of drug use, they found that most consumption happened in secret (Goffman, 1963a), 'a lot of them still do try and hide things from us, but what's important is that they do it safely. I suppose it's important for them not to feel judged' (Interview with Adrian, 22/04/20). Conversely, the decision not to enforce rules was sometimes interpreted by residents as staff 'doing nothing,' such as when Isam complained that Elizabeth 'just sat on her backside' whilst Eric was blatantly dealing (Fieldnotes, 10/03/2020).

This meant that by and large, the staff team did not enforce rules against drug possession, use, or supply. In most cases, the staff knew that residents used drugs, and in most cases they did so in their rooms, without attracting any direct attention. There were nonetheless instances in which residents were given a '28-day notice' for suspicion of dealing, particularly where there was increased 'traffic' to certain rooms. The problem with 'traffic' was that it attracted noise and nuisance at all hours, and therefore resulted in an increasing number of complaints to the staff team. There were some instances in which residents were evicted for dealing. When I asked Simon about a recent eviction, he told me that he had been evicted, 'for dealing right there,' within the eyeline of reception staff (Fieldnotes, 26/08/21). In these cases, the rules were not being used to minimise drug possession, use, or supply per se, but were used as a resource to solve practical problems, such as the disruption and blatancy associated with these acts (Bittner, 1967). In other words, the problem stemmed from the visibility of the act rather than the act itself.

In the final phase of my fieldwork, the staff had a real issue with 'that corner,' a corner of the front garden, within which residents and non-residents huddled together and 'blatantly' dealt drugs. Yet the staff did not challenge these individuals, 'they're doing a spice deal, but you can't call them out on it because they'd say prove it' (Fieldnotes, 05/02/20). Over time, the problem with 'that corner' gradually worsened, as it attracted more non-residents, who created more litter and noise, which resulted in more complaints. One morning, staff had to clean up faeces and sick. It became an increasingly notable feature on the handover and one day Adrian listed the names of all the residents and non-residents who 'use it for dealing,' to

which another support worker responded, 'Charlie says there's something in the pipeline' (Fieldnotes, 22/09/21). After several unsuccessful attempts at handling the issue, a gate was placed around 'that corner,' blocking it off entirely. Staff monitored and managed these 'damp corners' – quite literally in this case – as points of vulnerability within which 'secondary adjustments' flourished and threatened the wider establishment, primarily through their visibility (Goffman, 1961: 189). Of course, this did not solve the issue of dealing, it simply displaced it, as new damp corners soon cropped up, in slightly more discreet patches, beyond both the CCTV cameras and eyeline of the staff. The issue was effectively rendered less visible.

In these cases, the staff team were under pressure not only to act, but also to be seen to act (Bittner, 1967; Sacks, 1972). However, internal pressure to act had to be balanced with external pressure from the local authority not to act, as was the case with the KPI against evictions. Whilst some decisions were discussed and debated during handover, and involved a delicate balancing act, the actual outcomes nonetheless gave off the impression of inaction, of 'doing nothing.' For example, it was decided that a particular non-resident would not be removed from the garden despite dealing there. 'I know it's contradictory' conceded Charlie, but this was the only place that the local drug and alcohol service could locate him to bandage the ulcers on his legs (Fieldnotes, 08/09/21).

Despite the high turnover of staff and residents, and despite the inevitability of discretion, the application of rules was generally consistent over time (Hughes, 1984). However, there were observable changes in the enforcement of certain rules following the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, the reception staff consistently told residents that they could not bring bikes or visible containers of alcohol into the building. I was therefore surprised when, during one of my re-entries to the hostel, I witnessed numerous bikes being wheeled through reception and into the lift, whilst several residents held open cans or bottles of alcohol in the reception area, sometimes whilst talking to members of staff. I asked Olivia about this change.

> 'If everyone who walked into Holbrook with a can was given a 28-day notice, that would be everyone.' Olivia says that they have 'leniency for staff sanity.' Yet she

> recognises that this could be 'detrimental' for the residents, they will struggle to 'progress' if they're under the influence because they can't engage. 'It hasn't caused one huge devastating thing, but the impact is felt on the ground by staff, reception especially.' In terms of bikes, 'they're bringing them in and arguing the toss, we can't intervene physically, we can't do anything.' I ask whether the policy had changed. She says, 'no, the posters are still up' with a smile (Fieldnotes, 09/01/21).

This shift was partially practical. It came about during a time of reduced staff-resident interaction, when the staff rota was intentionally being thinned out due to the risk of infection, and the shutters between staff and resident reception areas were closed, thereby reducing visibility. It was also likely that the staff prioritised a different set of rules during this period, those which related to the COVID-19 guidance. The pandemic inadvertently encouraged a rebalancing between humane standards and institutional efficiency, in favour of the former, particularly if they caused 'no harm' (Evans et al, 2023). Whatever the reason for their relaxation, neither of the rules were being (re-)enforced before I exited the hostel for the final time. Olivia concluded the above extract by noting that the staff were in a difficult position, as both the reintroduction of these rules and their continued relaxation would cause problems for them in different ways.

> Charlie says, 'you can't have a consistent *and* person-centred approach, and we're not commissioned to be consistent.' Staff make decisions based on the person – 'they know who's a blagger because they know them' – and the situation i.e., whether the person is vulnerable, cold, polite, or shouting, and whether the staff are busy. He contrasts one resident who 'tries to get tea out of everyone by chatting them up' with another who has brain issues, is quieter, struggles to engage, and for whom it would be 'unusual' to ask, because if they said no to that individual then there could be consequences. He concludes, 'it's about giving staff autonomy and discretion, it's justifiable, person-centred inconsistency' (Fieldnotes, 26/11/21).

The formal hostel rules were rigid, whilst the staff's capacity for enforcement was very limited. It would simply have been impossible for the staff team to have upheld every rule and every policy amidst the 'ordinary institutional troubles' they faced generally, let alone

the ‘extraordinary institutional troubles’ which they faced during the pandemic. Moreover, it was not always desirable to treat everybody exactly the same, owing to the diverse needs of Holbrook’s residents. Discretion was therefore woven into the interaction order of the hostel out of necessity, as the staff team, like the residents, were simply trying to ‘get by’ at Holbrook, by making it through each day relatively unscathed (see Chapter Seven). Discretion was exercised by staff *in situ*, according to the demands of the immediate situation, as well as some demands which lay beyond it, such as pathway KPIs. As Charlie touched on, deciding when to act, and when not to act, depended largely on the knowledge and experience of staff members. In making the transition from novice to old hand, staff therefore gained knowledge of the hostel and its members. Insofar as discretion was concerned, staff needed to learn when to see and when not to see.

Learning to see and learning not to see

In the opening extract, Trevor saw the hostel in terms of its potential weaknesses – its entry points, blind spots, and hiding places. In carrying out his checks, he orientated towards situated ‘normality’, i.e., what was ‘normal’ within the hostel and amongst its members (see Chapter Seven) in several ways, for example: he carried naloxone around the building with him, as overdoses were a common occurrence; he was unsurprised by his interaction with the man who wanted to die and unsurprised that he did not give up the names of those bullying him; he also knew that this man was a drinker, therefore marking his Ketamine-taking as unusual. Trevor had learned to see the hostel, not just as a member of staff, but as a member of night staff, with their very limited capacity and increased focus on security. Learning to see in this way was a practical accomplishment built upon the knowledge and experience of the small team (Hall, 2016).

It was important that staff ‘learned to see’ in this way, though it was equally as important that they ‘learned *not* to see.’ Adrian and Elizabeth, for instance, had learned to see a real suicide threat from a false one through years of knowledge and experience. These old hands were therefore able to quickly identify and dismiss the false claim, not needing to waste their scarce time in following up each and every spurious threat. Like Trevor, they orientated to a situated conception of normality in deciding when to act or not, in this case dismissing the threat as a ‘normal’ response to the preceding situation. Novices may initially

be surprised by the lack of alarm and lack of action following such a threat, though would soon learn the value of 'not seeing' when faced with the ordinary institutional troubles of people-processing institutions.

Seeing, and not seeing, were discretionary practices in and of themselves. If the staff saw, and responded to, every minor grunt and groan, then they would have little time for anything else. The staff team therefore placed necessary limits on what they could see, and what would sit on the periphery of their vision, creating peripheral concerns which they were aware of but did not have the capacity to address. In some instances, these concerns were peripheral because of where they had taken place, such as fights which had reportedly happened beyond the hostel's front gates. In others, peripheral concerns were learned about through overheard conversations or the hearsay of other residents, meaning that the staff did not officially know about them. And then there were instances in which residents told different versions of the same story and things became 'muddled,' often surrounding the borrowing and lending of money. In these situations, the staff opted not to see, and therefore not to get involved. Moreover, the shutters which divided the staff and resident reception areas remained closed long after the rest of the world went back to 'normal' (Smith et al, 2020), and would not be reopened, on grounds of safety, respite, and privacy. However, this divide provided another function, as it enhanced the staff's ability to 'not see' what was going on right there in reception.

It was crucial that novices quickly learned to see – and not see – like a member of staff. Old hands possessed an extensive and detailed knowledge of the hostel, its residents, and hostel-based interactions, meaning that they could swiftly tell a blagger from somebody who was vulnerable, amongst other things (Bittner, 1967). So, when a resident fell to the floor and started fitting, the novices panicked whilst the experts barely flinched, they knew he was an epileptic, and that this seizure would soon pass. In other words, this was normal behaviour for that particular resident. In carrying out their role, staff continuously interpreted signs and symptoms in line with their knowledge of what constituted normality within the setting (Goffman, 1961).

Novice staff gradually learned to see when something was truly 'up,' which meant learning to see context-specific abnormalities, such as when the resident in the opening extract used ketamine. Of course, this involved knowing what was normal, or not, in the first instance. Staff therefore had to develop an understanding of 'normal' hostel life and acclimatise to this, like all new hostel members. For this, knowledge and information were key, as this enabled staff to see the normality in conventionally abnormal acts and vice versa. For example, one day a resident climbed over the 6ft fence which bordered the hostel's front garden and pavement. When this was commented on, an experienced staff member simply said, 'oh yeah, he's tall,' as this was normal behaviour within the hostel context. Yet another day, a residents' fence-climbing made it to handover, its notability based on information provided by probation, which led to the conclusion that it was 'almost alibi behaviour.' Staff informed probation of his fence-climbing and he was recalled to prison. Information sharing practices between institutions illustrated that the 'hyper inclusion' of individuals was embedded, not only within isolated services, but across the wider 'institutional web' (see Chapter Seven).

It was through knowledge and information sharing that the staff knew when to take matters seriously or not, and therefore when to see or not. This enabled them to write off one resident's belly dancing and Hitler-talk as merely 'childish behaviour' and nothing to be concerned about. Equally, it allowed them to see budding 'friendships' as a sign of imminent exploitation. When a novice commented on the apparent normality of one such friendship, Charlie insisted, 'this is different,' the man in question had lots of money whilst those befriending him were crack users, he urged that this be taken seriously as 'lots of people are trying to cultivate him as a friend.' Staff consequently made plans to intervene as this was not a 'normal' friendship. The staff team paid close attention to budding 'friendships,' and the implications therefore. In handover, a newer staff member noted, 'it says he uses spice, not alcohol,' though Elizabeth countered, 'he's been hanging around with that little group', the implication being that he was likely drinking alcohol now too, on the basis of these new associations (Fieldnotes, 27/07/21).

Information sharing was central to the staff handover, a meeting which happened four times per day, and within which staff discussed the key events of the past 24-hours or so

(Goffman, 1961). The staff recorded anything of significance onto the system to share during handover, making note of conversations, observations, unusual behaviours, notable activities, who was doing what, and who was spending time with whom (Goffman, 1961). The staff team had an immense knowledge of what was going on at Holbrook House – who was dealing, who was being unusually quiet, historical feuds between residents, family situations, how the tactical movement of certain individuals could change the dynamic of a floor, and where the stolen cleaning products were likely to be. The staff played the 'information game' (see Chapter Five) too, as they were reluctant to disclose too much of their acquired knowledge to residents.

One reason for this was that such knowledge could act as a barrier in staff-resident interactions, for example, one day Jake said, 'you seem to know where I am every fucking minute of every fucking day' (Fieldnotes, 12/03/20). Polly recognised how being seen as 'authoritarian type figure' was a key interactional barrier to support.

> 'If they've been institutionalised for any length of time, we're seen as somebody to disagree with or fear, there's a power imbalance if you like, so we try to explain that we're not the enemy.' She consequently kept many of her conversations with residents light-hearted and chatty, albeit from behind staff reception (interview with Polly).

With a limited number of staff, particularly during nights, maintaining effective control over the hostel depended on staff 'knowing' what was going on within it and being able to identify when something was truly 'up' (Wieder, 1974: 108). Knowledge was equated with control, as the more knowledge the staff team possessed, the more control they felt they had over the hostel (Bittner, 1967). Staff consequently played the information game, using their shared knowledge of 'normal' hostel life to make sense of situations, choose whether or not to see, and act accordingly. Given the staff team's limited capacity, many concerns only existed on the peripheries of their vision, with more pressing matters in their direct line of sight. Of course, the risk was that staff would develop short sightedness and be seen as 'doing nothing' in some circumstances, yet against the backdrop of ordinary institutional troubles, there was little more that they could do.

‘Doing the best we can’: Balancing care and control in intermediary institutions

> Our hostel does the best job that it can, even in these circumstances, and I think our care for the men is real, it’s not just about moving people on or numbers, it goes back to that thing about building a relationship (Interview with Simon).

> Staff do the best that they can, but you know, being such a big hostel with so many vulnerable, complex people, obviously it’s quite difficult on a day-to-day basis for a lot of the guys (Interview with Megan).

> I think we’ve done the best we can, you know, nothing’s perfect, but I think we’ve done our very best to make the men feel as safe as possible (Interview with Bernie).

Cooking group ran into Lara’s unpaid overtime, Olivia received a ‘needlestick injury’ whilst clearing out a room, and Elizabeth kept the orders of service from every funeral she attended. The work which staff members undertook was sometimes demanding, dangerous, dirty, stressful, and traumatic. However, these individuals came back each day, not for the prestige, or the hours, and certainly not for the pay. They were motivated by compassion, they wanted to make a difference to the lives of those they supported. Polly said, ‘we are here to support, our job is to help.’ In interviews, the staff described how they felt they were best able to help the residents: by being ‘person-centred’, ‘non-judgmental’ and ‘flexible’ (Roger); ‘having that level of trust is really important’ (Megan); ‘everybody wants to feel like they matter, so I think it's really important to show these people that you're hearing them, even if they're shouting’ (Frances). Recurring themes included relationship-building, flexibility, promoting independence, a non-judgemental attitude, encouraging routine, and active listening.

> It took six months before he could log on to Universal Credit on his own, but I gradually earned his trust. We’ve worked towards him discovering himself. It took from May up to Christmas for him to realise his depression and anxiety. He used to sit on a bench and cry himself to sleep and after us exploring that, we ended up going up to the GP and now he’s taking 40mg of Citalopram. With his drinking and stuff, it was only kind of 3 weeks ago that he admitted to me that he’s got a cocaine

> and alcohol problem. So yeah, it's taken a long time to build the trust and work with somebody in a motivational, person-centred way (Interview with Roger).

Staff shared tales of residents who made positive changes whilst living at Holbrook, such as Roger's resident, who was initially 'very anti-establishment' and banned from every Job Centre in the area. However, the day-to-day reality of working at Holbrook House seldom mirrored such tales of transformation. With 93 'high support' residents to oversee and a limited staff team, the staff often found that they were forced to prioritise institutional efficiency over humane standards, control over care, and people-processing over people-changing (Goffman, 1961; Watts et al, 2018). The booking in process (see Prologue), which centred on the collecting and recording of discrediting information, set the scene for future process-driven interactions between residents and staff. Whilst this was a necessity borne out of ordinary institutional troubles, it nonetheless caused cognitive dissonance amongst the staff team, who had set out to care and change lives. Some staff consequently left their roles, in search of work elsewhere, adding further fuel to the ordinary institutional troubles which the staff team faced.

Those who stayed developed a sense of resignation over time as they learned the limits of their role. Staff learned not to celebrate short periods of sobriety too soon, as within this setting relapse was likely to occur (see Chapter Five). They learned that even if residents moved on in a 'positive' way, chances were that they would be back at some point (see Chapter Eight). They learned that their capacity to care was severely restricted by the bureaucracy of the organisation and the broader pathway structure. They learned that institutions which branded themselves 'people-changing' were primarily concerned with 'people-processing.' Whilst staff may have set out to care and change lives, they soon became caught up in juggling the seemingly irreconcilable aims of different organisations.

Novices may once have thought it possible to remedy pervasive issues within the hostel – the sort upon which complaints about 'this place' were founded (see Chapter Five) – though soon learned their limits here too. When it was reported at handover that two residents had been hanging around Jared's room, Milly questioned, 'what do you want us to do?' Jared will be moving out next week, and they will just move onto the next room anyway, 'I'm not

really interested' she concluded (Fieldnotes, 11/05/21). When Dylan complained about people slamming doors and banging throughout the night, Roger said that he would pass this on with the caveat, 'I've been here 9 years and it's never changed,' especially as there were only two members of staff on at night (Fieldnotes, 05/03/20).

These issues were so deeply embedded within the interaction order of the hostel that the staff team could do very little about them. Whilst residents claimed that 'staff do nothing,' the staff felt that 'nothing changed' even when they tried. These social expectations – about what life was like within the hostel – were embedded within its institutional memory. The resulting sense of resignation was not confined to the staff at Holbrook, but permeated other institutions and services within the 'institutional web.' One staff member criticised the Crisis Team for 'not caring,' 'at first I thought it was a funding issue but after speaking to them I realise they don't really care about their job and blame issues on it being 'the way it is'' (Fieldnotes, 07/07/21).

Conclusion

This chapter took the perspective of the staff and their daily round of activities, which revolved around a central contradiction, 'between what the institution does and what its officials must say it does' (Goffman, 1961: 74). Whilst the official version(s) of what the institution must do were outlined in Chapter Five, this chapter focused on what the institution actually does. In doing so, it probed some of the rhetoric which permeated staff-resident interactions, and started by unpacking the common complaint that 'staff do nothing.' Whilst the staff team certainly did lots, and resolved many of the residents' complaints, there were also limits to what they could do. Firstly, there were some common complaints which were so ingrained within the interaction order of the hostel, that there was little the staff team felt they could do about them (such as the territorial violations detailed in Chapter Five). Secondly, given that all staff members had to carry out their roles amidst a range of ordinary institutional troubles – such as understaffing, overburdening, and juggling multiple demands – there were limits to what they could feasibly do in a day. Thirdly, there were instances in which residents accused staff of 'just sitting there,' as from their perspective they were not visibly working. However, it was here, on chairs and at

computers, that staff dealt with a range of bureaucratic demands, as they responded to emails, recorded events on the handover, and checked CCTV footage.

The ordinary institutional troubles outlined herein are not unique to homeless hostels, rather the underlying difficulties are likely to be applicable to the range of places which make up the 'institutional web.' For instance, prisons have similarly been found to struggle with both understaffing and overburdening (Martin et al, 2012; Dennard et al, 2021). These two troubles are interlinked, as understaffing can cause overburdening which can lead to further understaffing, as members of staff feel overwhelmed and compelled to quit for their own wellbeing. Further the need to balance competing demands is common to all institutions, including mental health hospitals (Kirby, 2019) and detox centres (DeVerteuil and Wilton, 2009). At Holbrook, the staff had to balance demands which seemed to be in opposition with one another, as on the one hand, KPIs required that they take on riskier clients whilst reducing evictions, whilst on the other, it was their role to keep the hostel under control and safe for those within it. In some cases, they found loopholes, such as deeming a referral as 'inappropriate' rather than refusing them, which allowed the staff team to meet both demands.

Discretion was inevitable within Holbrook, regardless of what the official line said. The staff team continually exercised discretion in deciding whose claims to take seriously, when to intervene, and when to refrain from doing anything. When exercising discretion, visibility was important, as the staff were compelled to enforce rules when residents' behaviours became too disruptive or blatant, or in other words too visible. Further, in order to cope with the pressures of working at 'this place,' the staff team had to both 'learn to see' and 'learn not to see,' which were equally important in enabling them to simply 'get by' each day. Both concepts required the staff team to know when something was truly up (Wieder, 1974: 108). This first required them to orientate to situated understandings of normality (see Chapter Seven), as only with this knowledge could they see the normal in the abnormal, and vice versa, and decide when intervention was necessary. From this vantage point, the staff team knew when to take matters seriously and when they could turn a blind eye. The problem was that it took time to build up this knowledge and experience, and for novices to become old hands. Yet by the time staff members became an old hand, they may

have become so beaten down by ordinary institutional troubles, that they too left, further fuelling understaffing, and creating space for yet another novice.

The staff team felt a sense of resignation, as they were 'doing the best' they could, though their desire to change people's lives was curtailed by the people-processing demands of the role. The resulting rhetoric of 'doing what we can with what we have' (Long and Evans, 2023: 1) was not limited to the hostel, but was felt by the myriad of institutions, services, and organisations which made up the broader 'institutional web,' introduced in Chapter Five.

Having considered day-to-day institutional life from the staff perspective, including in their orientation towards situated normality, Chapter Seven returns to the residents' viewpoint to further consider how competing understandings of normality arise and collide within the hostel context, and the implications thereof.

Chapter seven: ‘I want a normal life more than anything’ – navigating competing understandings of normality

Joey says, ‘my Subutex injection (Buvidal) is the best thing ever, I wake up and feel like a normal person.’ Pablo is still on Methadone, a Class A drug itself. Both treat opiate addiction, though the practicalities are very different. Pablo is on a daily pickup. He visits the chemist each day, so the pharmacist can watch him swallow. By contrast, Joey receives a monthly injection, ‘I could go on holiday if I want’ he beams. He encourages Pablo to switch but warns that they’ll try to fob you off with the ‘generic’ one as ‘they don’t want to invest in addicts.’

The men notice me as they queue for lunch and ask what I do. I tell them I’m doing a PhD, that I’m interested in the barriers to moving on. They each have their own ideas. Joey tells me the ‘honest truth,’ ‘it’s money, rent top up is £100 a month, when they’re on drugs they’re not paying it. They prioritise drugs. I used to use so I know.’

Pablo semi-agrees, he thinks people use out of boredom, they need a focus. Without structure, ‘I’ll just drink all day,’ he says as he sneaks sips from the can of cider in his backpack. He complains that the rent top up is meant to include activities, but there are no activities. He’s suggested paint balling and canoeing, but staff always make excuses not to. He wants to volunteer or work or gain a qualification, but all the staff say is ‘I don’t know.’ In Portugal, drugs users are ‘given help, not treated like criminals.’ He tells me that in Italy, people do work placements in exchange for a wage and accommodation, with a 72% success rate. Here, people are ‘stuck in their rooms but need to get out.’ He contemplates withholding his ‘top up’ due to a lack of activities.

I follow Pablo to reception. He engages regularly with the local drug and alcohol service but won’t tell the staff because ‘they'd put it down on my record and try to claim it as their support’ which he doesn’t want. So instead, ‘they don't know what I'm doing.’ He nods towards a small huddle of men in the front garden, ‘do you want

to score? They're doing it now.' People come from all over to buy their drugs, it's the 'biggest crack house' in the city (Fieldnotes, 26/08/21).

Introduction

> Each moral career, and behind this, each self, occurs within the confines of an institutional system… The self, then, can be seen as something that resides in the arrangements prevailing in a social system for its members. The self in this sense is not a property of the person to whom it is attributed, but dwells rather in the pattern of social control that is exerted in connection with the person by himself and those around him. This special kind of institutional arrangement does not so much support the self as constitute it (Goffman, 1961: 168).

This chapter is about navigating competing normalities. It argues that different understandings of normality were attached to 'getting by' at the hostel and 'getting out' of it – in a 'positive' way at least. The previous two chapters demonstrated that being able to 'get by' at Holbrook House – being able to make it through each day or night with the least amount of trouble possible – involved acclimatising to situated understandings of normality within the hostel. This was the case for both the resident and staff teams. In Chapter Five, we saw how territorial violations, including thefts, forced conversation, and noise at all hours, were normalised aspects of life at Holbrook. Then in Chapter Six, we saw how staff members orientated to this situated understanding of normality, so that they could 'see' (and 'not see') what was normal and what was abnormal within this context, and were able to act accordingly, carrying out their roles with as much efficiency as possible.

This chapter will take a closer look at the 'moral careers' of Holbrook House residents, focusing specifically on the point at which they became fully acclimatised to hostel life. It was at this point that individuals orientated to the institution and formed a new sense of self accordingly, as they forcibly accepted the institutional view of themselves (Goffman, 1961). Through interaction, individuals learned how to 'do being ordinary' within the hostel context (Sacks, 1984) and therefore learned how to be a hostel user (Becker, 1953). This chapter also explores how multi-layered, competing normalities were at play within the hostel, by illustrating clashes between situated and normative understandings of normality

within it. By detailing certain 'institutionally-backed abnormalities' – in relation to work and money-making, addiction substitutes and services, and the ability to withhold money and information – it argues that such abnormalities are the result of the 'hyper inclusion' of individuals within the 'institutional web.' It finally looks at the consequences of competing normalities for the self, by exploring some of the ways in which residents seek to negotiate the 'institutional self' implied by hostel membership.

'Doing being ordinary' at Holbrook House

Acclimatising to Holbrook House entailed a degree of 'disculturation' or 'reculturation,' of learning how to see like, and behave like, an ordinary member of this type of institution (Goffman, 1961). It was through acclimatisation that hostel members – both staff and residents – were able to get through each day relatively unscathed. As was detailed in Chapter Five, those with experience of living in this kind of place adapted more easily to ordinary day-to-day hostel life, with its stealing, drinking, arguing, cheating, fighting, exploiting, shouting, begging, and partying, amongst other things. Those who lacked experience had to clue themselves up pretty quickly. Secondary adjustments were a common feature of hostel life, including small acts of resistance, such as shouting at staff, slamming doors, kicking the lift, and setting off fire alarms (Goffman, 1961: 189). However, secondary adjustments were a doubled edged sword, as whilst they enabled residents to express distance from the institution, retain a sense of control, and carve out a sense of self, they also confirmed their rightful containment within the hostel, as 'signs of their maker's proper affiliation' (Goffman, 1961: 306).

Perhaps one of the most striking features of ordinary hostel life, for those who were new to this kind of environment, centred on the prevalence of drug use together with the various means of funding it. For example, Shaun's shoplifting afforded him a steady supply of crack and spice. One day, he marched into the hostel with a bag in his hand, and another resident asked about money, 'I will once I've sold this, just done Ted Baker right over' (Fieldnotes, 24/02/20). At times, his tactics were inventive, such as when he used the drawstrings of his jacket to secure a couple of Yankee candles against his stomach – these were sold for £20, which went towards £30 worth of crack. At other times, he reportedly relied on aggression, 'the bigger they are the harder you hit them' (Fieldnotes, 05/02/20). Shoplifting had

become part of Shaun's 'normal' daily routine, he said, 'it's easy being a junkie, you just wake up, use, run into a shop, grab, take out the security guard, go into a pub, and sell £400 of North Face clothes for £200' (Fieldnotes, 20/02/20). Others followed a similar pattern and described their 'ordinary' routines along similar lines, 'I wake up, go out, and feed my habit' (Fieldnotes, 20/05/21).

For a large proportion of residents, this was how they did 'being ordinary,' as acquiring money for, and then using, drugs amounted to a 'usual' activity within the hostel context (Sacks, 1984). These activities were so normal that they developed a 'nothing much' quality about them, in the sense that residents could say that they were 'doing nothing' or 'not doing much' when they were making money for drugs or using drugs (Sacks, 1984: 414). Not only was this routine considered normal amongst hostel members, but drug use was normalised in several ways. When Shaun was caught shoplifting and the security guard had said, 'you've done this to yourself,' he was adamant that there was no choice – 'if you felt like me just for one day, you'd let me go straight away' – that the so called 'choice' was between shoplifting and being in pain (Fieldnotes, 05/02/20).

> Anthony says, 'I drink to let the pain out.' He is estranged from his wife and says, 'my Mrs was a nightmare.' His two daughters are married and live abroad, 'they lead a correct life, whatever that means' (Fieldnotes, 10/03/20).

Drugs and drink were often framed as facilitating conventional normality, as they eased aches and pains, from broken legs to the intense nausea of a come down, known as 'clucking.' Equally, drugs lessened the symptoms associated with certain mental health conditions, in the short-term at least. Although he is now 'clean,' Fred used to take a cocktail of cocaine, crack, alcohol, and amphetamines, in order to 'alleviate the anxiety' of daily life, as for Fred, these substances once provided 'a protective bubble for insecurities' and helped him to 'just to get along' (Interview with Fred). Drug use was a coping strategy. Residents spoke about the normal functions of drugs and alcohol. They helped pass the time, cured the boredom of institutional life, and helped them get to sleep. When Anthony was drunk, he often spoke about his estranged family, the drink replacing these lost connections, 'it's a comfort zone, it's like your Mrs' (Fieldnotes, 03/03/20).

Death was a common consequence of heightened drug use, and had also become normalised within the hostel context. Residents often spoke of overdoses, describing each momentary stopping of the heart as a death. One resident casually said, 'I died two days ago' (Fieldnotes, 25/08/21). Another man had died nine times and laughed as he said, 'I wish that it would hurry up' (Fieldnotes, 11/03/30). Shaun knew forty people who had died of an overdose in the last six years (Fieldnotes, 03/03/20). Each time somebody died (in a permanent sense) at the hostel, staff displayed their photo in reception, enabling hostel members to write their goodbyes on a Post It note.

Drug use was seen as normal in the eyes of the staff team too. For instance, staff adapted their own working patterns to fit around this routine, by scheduling keyworking sessions first thing in the morning, for example, to increase the chances of residents turning up. Furthermore, staff often positioned drugs as the culprit when making sense of all sorts of 'abnormal' behaviours, such as hearing voices, acts of aggression, self-discharge from hospital, and missing persons (Wieder, 1974: 106-7). As two staff watched a resident from reception, one said, 'he's been burning incense to get rid of the evil spirits,' whilst the other retorted that 'reducing his crack usage might stop him seeing demons' (Fieldnotes, 19/11/21).

> I was coming down the back stairs because they led me straight to the dining room and a bloke walked past me, have you got a Rizla? I said I don't smoke, so he said you shouldn't be living here should you if you don't smoke, what are you doing here? (Interview with Harry).

Residents who did not behave in a normal and ordinary way, in a situated sense – for example, by not drinking, not using drugs, or engaging too keenly – were often cast as 'outsiders' and judged as deviant when compared to 'normal' members of the group (Becker, 2018). If residents did not fit in, then they stood out, which caused alarm and attracted unwanted attention (Goffman, 1971). In other words, they faced the consequences of their relative abnormality. Such residents faced social sanctions for failing to engage in 'ordinary' hostel activities. By not smoking – a very usual activity within the

hostel – Harry was marked as abnormal and told that he did not belong at the hostel on this basis.

A rumour circulated that Fred was 'undercover police' because he did not smoke, drink, or do drugs, was clean and tidy, kept to himself, and often wore headphones. As each of these activities were unusual within the hostel, their culmination marked Fred as highly abnormal and resulted in significant social consequences, such as verbal accusations, threats with a screwdriver, and spice being blown under his bedroom door. Fred was seen as suspicious and ascribed the category of 'spy' because he failed to do 'being ordinary' within the hostel context, together with the situated constructions of normality which this entailed. Both Harry and Fred were stigmatised for standing out at Holbrook (Goffman, 1963a), however, whilst they were similar insofar as they were both clean, kept to themselves, and refrained from drink, drugs, and alcohol, Fred faced greater repercussions. Perhaps this was due to the visibility of Fred's situated abnormality – he did not sneak down the back staircase in the same way that Harry did.

It is important to note that the ascription of such categories and attribution of stigma were not foregone consequences of non-engagement with these ordinary activities, rather the actual picture was much more nuanced and always negotiated within interactions. When a middle-class man with ADHD, no drink or drug problems, and a very limited experience of the 'institutional web' moved in, the staff team were concerned for his wellbeing, as on paper he was a highly abnormal resident. Whilst he had a rocky start, within months he had developed key acquaintances within the resident team, by chatting and joking with the likes of Lincoln and Eric. In other words, he acclimatised to life within Holbrook House without engaging in drug and alcohol consumption. Instead, he was able to do 'being ordinary' in a different way, through mundane chit chat, which was similar to the way that I built up relationships (see Chapter Four). Sobriety was therefore not always a marker of abnormality. Charlie noted that he created 'social strength' through his relations with other residents, 'he's made wise alliances but is not losing ground by making himself insubordinate' (Fieldnotes, 06/12/21). In this sense, becoming a hostel user was not so different from becoming a marijuana user, as both required learning and alterations in individual's conceptions of 'normality' (Becker, 1953).

> The silence in the dining room breaks as the new resident folds over, his face on the canteen bars as he starts to shake. Everyone looks, but it is Ronnie who acts. After a few seconds, he declares 'it's a spice attack' and demands that the man 'get up and get out.' Ronnie herds the man towards the door with a loud 'Get! Get!' Once the man is gone, Ronnie adds, 'spice at this time in the morning' with a shake of his head. The room unites in tuts and grunts. Ronnie returns to his cornflakes and laughs, 'wake and bake, his tongue was on the hotplate.' People smile and return to their breakfast (Fieldnotes, 25/02/20).

Whilst drugs were certainly a normalised aspect of life at Holbrook House, to say that drug users were 'normal' and non-users 'abnormal' would be an oversimplification. Instead, the normality of drug use depended primarily upon the situation within which it arose. The above encounter was over very quickly, as Ronnie removed the man from the dining room with remarkable haste. Ronnie disapproved of the new resident having a spice attack 'at this time in the morning.' However, I later discovered that it was not only the timing of the man's spice attack which marked him as abnormal, but the location too. Isam complained about Eric 'shouting and dealing' in the dining room at breakfast time, and had apparently reported it to staff, though they had 'done nothing' about it (Fieldnotes, 09/03/20). Breakfast time was when Eric conducted most of his business, dealing to those who were eager for their first fix of the day. The visibility of this spice attack therefore risked drawing unwanted staff attention to a specific place, at a crucial time, which had potential consequences for future breakfast dealings. As the man's actions were 'out of place' and threatened to disrupt the situation, he was categorised as a 'disorganisation man' (Burns, 1992: 177), and was consequently extruded from the situation on that basis. The new resident was situationally abnormal, not because of the drug or even the attack, but because of the visibility, noticeability, and therefore deviancy of his behaviour, which could have caused staff to realise that something was 'up' (Wieder, 1974: 108).

Normality and abnormality therefore stemmed, not from the *a priori* attributes of individuals or the drugs they used, but from the specifics of the situation. The abnormality of the new resident's spice attack was constructed in spatio-temporal terms, which suggested that there was a time and a place for using, dealing, and even spice attacks, just

like any other activity (Rhodes et al, 2007). At another time, or in another place, the same individuals would not have flinched at the attack, and it would have been considered normal, but in this particular situation, he was marked as 'unusual' and 'deviant,' and was excluded as a result (Smith, 2021: 184).

This attested to a general discretion and collusion amongst residents, to hide the signs and symptoms of drug use, as most residents practised 'secret consumption' (Goffman, 1959: 42). Crucially, it was only when such behaviours were minimally visible that the staff team could practice 'not seeing' (see Chapter Six). Any behaviour, legal or illegal, which became too visible and too disruptive, had to be seen and responded to by the staff team, as they themselves had to be seen to act (Bittner, 1967, Sacks, 1972: 6). When these behaviours were seen, they underwent official interpretation, as the act of gathering items became 'hoarding,' borrowing money became 'exploiting', and too many visits to a particular room became 'traffic,' which was a notable sign of 'dealing' (Goffman, 1961). It was therefore in all members' interests to render such activities less visible.

'Hyper inclusion' and 'institutionally-backed abnormalities'

Even as hostel members acclimatised to normal life at Holbrook, normative understandings of normality nonetheless lurked in the background of hostel-based interactions. This was evident whenever residents referred to the collective abnormality of those living within the hostel, by calling them 'monsters' or 'exiles,' or saying things like 'there's not one normal person in here.' These comments expressed the realisation that beyond Holbrook's walls, residents were likely to be seen as abnormal by virtue of their membership at the hostel and the ordinary activities associated with it. On a societal scale, they faced stigma (Goffman, 1963a), whilst their containment within the hostel was tantamount to their 'inclusion in a stable community composed of 'abnormals' (Burns, 1992: 169).

This was also evident in the conventionally 'normal' goals which hostel members expressed. For example, although Shaun stole and sold North Face clothes for drugs, he nonetheless wanted to own a flat, buy a car, find a job, and get a girlfriend. Snow and Anderson (1987: 1361) found similar goals rooted in self-employment, money, possessions, and the opposite sex and note that, 'while homeless males tend to stand outside the normative order in their

way of life, some of them are, nonetheless, very much of that order in their dreams and fantasies.' Whether these accounts were genuine, or a mere regurgitation of the pathway's aims – geared towards achieving a normatively 'normal life' – they were nonetheless commonly expressed by residents (Brookfield et al, 2021). Yet, paradoxically, there were certain aspects of life within this, and every, institution which reinforced the relative abnormality and otherness of its inhabitants and prevented them from attaining such normative goals. Joey and Pablo touched on some of these 'institutionally-backed abnormalities' regarding work and money-making, addiction substitutes and services, and the ability to withhold money and information, as they queued for lunch one day. It is argued that these abnormalities are the result of the 'hyper inclusion' of individuals within the array of bureaucratic services which make up the institutional web.

'You can't work and live here': Work and money-making

Money-making possibilities within the hostel were often at odds with the basic work-payment structure found in wider society (Goffman, 1961). By and large, hostel members did not have jobs and often said, 'they won't let you work and live here' (Fieldnotes, 02/03/20). Whilst this was an oversimplification, living at the hostel certainly curbed residents' ability to apply for and hold down a job. This was due to the benefits system. All residents living at Holbrook House had to be on benefits – this was something which staff clarified early on in the booking-in process (see Prologue). If individuals worked more than 16 hours per week, they were not entitled to the benefits which covered their rent. It was not that non-recipients were prohibited from living at the hostel per se, but that the weekly cost of renting a room in a supported hostel (which was £276 at the time of fieldwork) was likely to be too expensive for most. Those on benefits only had to pay a weekly service charge (or 'top up') of around £20 from their own pockets. Even this proved tricky to obtain in some cases. It was also assumed that those who could hold down a full-time job likely did not need such high levels of support.

However, Pablo noted above that a lack of work resulted in a lack of structure, which caused boredom, which in turn led to drinking and drug use. Without something to keep people occupied – work, volunteering, or education – residents' days were filled with a sense of nothingness, it was therefore unsurprising that many people turned to alcohol and drugs.

After all, the acquisition and use of drink and drugs provided a structure in itself, as with the 'normal' routines of drug users, detailed above. Using drugs and drinking alcohol therefore performed a dual function: not only did they take residents 'away' from their immediate environment, but they provided some semblance of structure amidst an unending sense of nothingness.

For Joey, money was the greatest barrier to move on. Drugs were not cheap and were unlikely to be covered by the benefits money which each resident received. When residents prioritised drug use over everything else, they sometimes failed to pay their top up, which resulted in certain residents racking up high levels of debt for non-payment of their rent top up. This viewpoint was positioned as the 'honest' truth by residents on numerous occasions. During one group session, a resident brought up service charge and said 'honestly' he did not pay it because he wanted to spend his money on drugs (Fieldnotes, 06/07/21).

With a humble income from benefits alone, and an inability to work in a 'normal' sense, many residents resorted to alternative means of money-making to feed their addiction. Drug dealing, shoplifting, stealing, exploiting others, prostitution, borrowing, and begging were some of the means employed by residents in order to maintain their habit. These were means of making-money or acquiring items which individuals may have considered beneath them on the outside, such as pestering others for a Rizla or begging for change (Goffman, 1961). Residents coped with this discord by creating situated hierarchies of money-making, in which their preferred method was never 'the worst.' For instance, Noah didn't like begging, but it was either that or shoplifting, which he considered much worse (Fieldnotes, 18/02/20). Shaun, on the other hand, would never beg as he saw it as degrading, so opted for less legal forms of money-making. This idea of a hierarchy of stigma will be returned to below, in the context of drug use.

This incompatibility between Holbrook and the work-payment structure of society was evident in respect of three 'institutionally-backed abnormalities': firstly, as the hostel actively discouraged residents from working, secondly, as residents sought to fill their empty and unstructured days by consuming alcohol and drugs, and thirdly, as they were forced to resort to illegal or degrading methods of money-making in order to feed their addiction.

Addiction substitutes and services

For many, the need to pick up drug substitution prescriptions, or 'scripts,' provided a small amount of structure each day. Pablo, like many others, was on a daily pickup for Methadone – the most common opiate substitute amongst hostel users – so had to make daily trips to the chemist where he had to be seen taking it. This was a very normal and routine aspect of hostel life, and one which the staff encouraged residents to get sorted as soon as possible. It was only when Joey talked about receiving a monthly injection, as opposed to a daily, orally-consumed liquid, that the abnormality of the ubiquitous daily Methadone pickup was brought to light. Joey claimed that the monthly injection made him feel like a 'normal person.' Not only did he wake up feeling normal due to its slow release, but he was able to do things an ordinary person would do, such as going on holiday (Sacks, 1984). By contrast, those on a daily pickup often felt unwell until they took their Methadone, whilst needing to the same place each day meant that holidays and other 'ordinary' activities requiring travel were simply out of the question. Pablo and other Methadone users were 'hyper included' within the pharmaceutical system of drug substitutes.

> Anthony was recently hit by a bus, 'you say accident I say suicide attempt' says another resident. I ask Anthony whether he's ever considered a detox, though he says, 'you have to prove yourself to get in, they won't take you if you test positive.' I say, but surely if you can do it yourself then you don't need a detox? He nods, 'exactly, put that in your book' (Fieldnotes, 03/03/20).

When it came to 'getting off the drugs' or drink – one of the goals embedded within the pathway structure – staff encouraged residents to engage with specialist support services. These services helped residents to reduce their consumption and in some cases undergo a detox. A few months after Anthony was hit by the bus, he started to slur and stumble less and agreed to go to some 'alcohol meetings,' which were set up by his support worker. He told me that if he went to all six then they would put him on Librium, which treated the symptoms associated with alcohol withdrawal. However, he found the meetings stressful due to the endless questions and paperwork. For both the detox and the Librium prescription, treatment was conditional and depended upon Anthony's ability to 'do being ordinary,' not in a situated sense, but in a normative sense. For the detox he had to prove

that he was able to refrain from drinking alcohol, and for the Librium he had to attend frequent meetings. Of course, both were difficult for those struggling with addiction, particularly in a place like this. Anthony was essentially being asked to demonstrate his ability to be conventionally normal as a precondition to treatment.

This level of bureaucracy was common amongst the range of institutions and services which made up the institutional web, with strict rules which offered little wiggle room for those who struggled to meet their demands. For instance, when Tyler, who was introduced in Chapter Five, experienced severe psychotic episodes, the Job Centre nonetheless expected him to attend his weekly sessions or risk losing his benefits. Ending the requirement for weekly meetings on the basis of his mental health entailed further levels of bureaucracy, as he would need to meet with a health team and undergo assessments. Bureaucratic reasons also underscored the recent increase in the number of 'short term measures' being accepted by the hostel. Although Holbrook House was not an ideal setting for people like Allen (see Chapter Five), who had complex needs and were easily exploitable, the hostel was still forced to accept them in an intermediary capacity simply because Adult Social Care did not take people directly from the streets.

Withholding money and information

Residents were also restricted in their ability to withhold material and informational preserves from the institution (see Chapter Five). In the above extract, Pablo talked about withholding his 'top up' and information about his engagement with drug and alcohol services, each of which will be considered.

Firstly, hostel residents had to pay their rent regardless of the service received. On the outside, if an individual did not get what they paid for– a bad meal or unfriendly customer service, for example – then it would be reasonable to expect a monetary deduction. Yet when Pablo did not get the activities which he had expected and was paying for via the 'top up,' he did not have the power to make such deductions. Threats to withhold the top up were nonetheless very common and could be expected whenever things did not go a resident's way, such as when a toilet could not be fixed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Whilst a small number of residents did withhold their top up, this had clear consequences for the

individual. For example, if residents racked up large debts whilst living at the hostel, this in itself acted as a major barrier to move on, as other accommodation providers were reluctant to take on the risk of future non-payment. Further, non-payment of rent or service charge was perhaps the most frequent ground for staff putting residents on notice. One resident noted the absurdity of withholding payment on the basis of dissatisfaction with the hostel, 'if you don't pay service charge, you won't move on. They don't think about the consequences of withholding service charge' (Fieldnotes, 20/05/21). Residents therefore had to 'play to game' to get out, which will be returned to in Chapter Eight.

Secondly, on the outside, individuals were able to maintain a degree of control over their informational preserve (Goffman, 1971). Outside of the hostel, for example, it would have been normal for Pablo to keep details concerning his engagement with drug and alcohol services to himself. However, his failure to divulge this information to staff within the hostel may have inadvertently hampered his chances of moving on, as engagement with support services was one of the key indicators of 'move on readiness' (see Chapter Eight). Likewise, when a resident was admitted to hospital, he did not consent to Holbrook House being updated on his condition, which put him a risk of abandonment through non-use of his room. This provided yet another example of residents' 'hyper inclusion,' as those who withheld information or money, and therefore challenged the system, faced consequences when it came to their movement around the 'institutional web,' or lack thereof. By withholding – information, money, or anything else – from the staff team, residents exerted a degree of control over their territories and consequently preserved a sense of self (Goffman, 1961; 1971). However, to do so had negative implications for an individual's career through the pathway. This dilemma nicely illustrated what it meant to 'get by' as opposed to 'get out,' in which short-term preservation of the self within the institution was pitted against a resident's longer-term ability to escape that setting.

There were two points to note about these enforced abnormalities. Firstly, they were so deeply rooted within the interaction order of the hostel that they were largely taken-for-granted by its members as a natural consequence of hostel life. Secondly, residents found that they were excluded from society, not on the basis of social exclusion, but their 'hyper inclusion' within multiple services and institutions, and each of their bureaucratic systems.

The irony was that the services and institutions which sought to 'normalise' individuals often had the opposite effect in actuality.

Being 'seen' as a hostel member and negotiating identity

Lincoln doesn't 'mix' with the men in the front garden, not anymore. Though this comes at a price, 'if they say you think you're better than us, then you have a target on your back.' Although Lincoln makes a point of differentiating himself from the others – in his approach to women, his values, and even his posture – he is equally wary of this differentness being too visible. He once reprimanded me for calling him a 'posh boy' on the basis that he'd been to boarding school, 'keep that on the down low in here!'

His 'real' friends are those he knew before living in 'places like this.' His eyes turn pale pink with tears, 'I fucked up. I was so upset when they saw me on the street, they offered me places to stay, but my pride…'

A female friend saw him outside of the hostel gates recently, though another resident muscled in, 'they try to put stigma on you. Don't like to see other people doing well so they try and ruin it for you. I can't have *those* friends around *these* people.' But he feels that stigma follows him around. Once he was in town with his mum, 'somebody shouted '*Lincoln, you black bastard*.' It's a violation, I had to nip it in the bud.'

He's seen prison guards around too, 'pushed their kids behind them. I wouldn't hurt their kids, that's just their way of thinking, their guilt.' This happened when he was with a girlfriend and she 'clocked it.' She asked what that was all about, and he said 'nothing,' so she put it down to racism. He struggles with telling women about his past. He's opened up about it twice, and both times they'd left, 'I'm never going to tell them again.'

Lincoln recently bumped into one of his 'Baby Mamas' and she brought up the break-up, he was worried things were getting 'too wild' and he didn't want her to

> end up like one of the women 'out there,' pointing towards the scantily clad drug users in the front garden. He says she thanked him for this. I ask about his kids and he says he's been putting money away for them each month, even before prison, to buy them presents at Christmas (Fieldnotes, 26/07/21).

Lincoln did not want to be 'seen' in the same way that he saw the people around him, though recognised the importance of fitting in, for fear of having a 'target' on his back. Lincoln experienced stigma during interactions where his 'institutional self' came into contact with his non-institutional self, such as when residents and prison guards encountered his friends and family.

Within the hostel context, stigma was also a consequence for failing to 'do being ordinary,' and was ascribed through categorisations such as 'good boy' or 'spy,' as with Fred and Harry above. However, it is important to note that these categories were not stigmatising in themselves, rather it was their ascription within situated interactions which attracted stigma (Goffman, 1963a). This was exemplified by the clean, middle-class resident who – despite being similar to Fred and Harry on the face of it – was accepted as an ordinary member of the institution. Practices surrounding the ascription and management of stigma therefore depended not only upon context, but the specific social interactions within which they arose (Vassenden and Andersson, 2011). Fitting in and standing out were thus both rooted in interaction, as categories of 'normal' hostel user or 'deviant' outsider were determined *in situ* (Smith, 2021: 184).

Residents like Lincoln wanted to fit in, but did not want to be seen externally as a rightful member of the institution, as this had implications for the self. One resident was pleased when his neighbour did not recognise him outside of the hostel, 'inside they say *alright* but outside they won't even bat an eyelid, I'm so glad I'm not in their clique' (Fieldnotes, 20/07/21). He was grateful that in the wider world, he was not 'seen' as a hostel resident. Whilst separation from the institution made it easier to distance from the resident role, this task was much more difficult within its confines.

A squashing of the self: Institutional categorisation practices

> No matter how big a scoundrel a man is, no matter how false, secretive, or disjointed his existence, or how governed by fits, starts, and reversals, the true facts of his activity cannot be contradictory or unconnected with each other. Note that this embracing singleness of life line is in sharp contrast to the multiplicity of selves one finds in the individual in looking at him from the perspective of social role, where, if role and audience segregation is well managed, he can quite handily sustain different selves and can to a degree claim to be no longer something he was. (Goffman, 1963a: 63)

It was easy to maintain multiple, contradictory roles when audience segregation was possible. For example, a person could be a good husband and an adulterer, provided the wife and mistress remained separate (Goffman, 1963a). However, for individuals contained within institutions, their ability to segregate or regionalise roles was severely restricted, owing to the compressed spatial and social organisation of the hostel, and places like it (Goffman, 1961; Erwin, 1992). In other words, given that residents carried out many of their activities under one roof, under one authority, and amongst others who upheld a particular, situated understanding of normality, they faced challenges in preserving multiple roles.

Further, the hostel setting placed necessary constraints on the self through the notion of categorical relevance, as roles needed to be relevant 'for *this* setting and for *this* activity' (Coulter, 1996: 342). In Chapter Three, we saw that whilst Emran was many things, including a son, Muslim, and football supporter, these were less relevant in his interaction with Megan than his role as an asylum seeker. 'Role dispossession' occurred when the multiple roles maintained on the outside were collapsed into a single role on the inside – that of patient, inmate, or resident (Goffman, 1961).

> Jared keeps quiet and looks straight ahead as Anthony shouts at the TV. He's older, has neatly trimmed hair, and wears clean, casual clothes. He's unhappy about having to move in but stays positive, 'I shouldn't be here for too long, I'm not a druggy.' He knows, 'all the basics,' paying bills and that sort of thing, and often chats to the staff (Fieldnotes, 04/11/20).

> The alarm sounds. A new member of staff is on her own, so she radios for backup. Milly and Bernie arrive, though the alarm stops before they can intervene. As they walk away, they resume their conversation, 'I was giving him the benefit of the doubt but after that' says Bernie, 'he plays the sweet little old man' responds Milly (Fieldnotes, 17/05/21).

Jared maintained two highly contradictory roles for a number of months – the 'sweet old man' and the 'aggressive drug dealer' – before the staff team cottoned on. He had successfully managed to present himself in one light before the staff team, and quite another before the residents. He achieved this by dealing from his bedroom window, which conveniently overlooked 'that corner' (see Chapter Six). However, these once-compartmentalised roles collided when the staff team observed increased 'traffic' to Jared's room and learned about him threatening another resident with a knife. From this point onwards, the staff gathered further evidence of his drug dealing and threatening behaviour, and made it their mission to 'get him out.' Once this happened, Jared could no longer maintain the role of 'sweet old man,' and the staff team recategorized him as a 'con man' (Fieldnotes, 26/08/21) (Goffman, 1959). The staff felt 'betrayed' by Jared because he 'pulled the wool over our eyes' in maintaining these two contradictory roles (Fieldnotes, 07/07/21).

Maintaining conflicting roles within the confines of an institution was precarious work. This was also highlighted by Stanley in Chapter Five, as whilst the staff knew he was a paedophile, the residents saw him as a joker and a ladies man. He carefully negotiated his identity and managed to 'pass,' by keeping the discrediting information relating to his crimes hidden (Goffman, 1963a). This was despite the information – which not only threatened Stanley's face, but put him in danger of physical harm – being only a slip or a search away. The spatial and social organisation of the hostel meant that self-production was 'cumbersome,' whilst the risk of exposure was high (Goffman, 1959).

Whilst these were extreme examples of individuals maintaining highly contradictory roles, it was nonetheless common practice for residents to present themselves in different roles depending on their audience. Amongst other residents, individuals employed various secondary adjustments as a symbol of inmate solidarity. They drank cans of beer in the

hostel's front garden, conspired to withhold their top up, and took pleasure in breaking the rules. However, in interactions with staff, most residents portrayed a different side of themselves, one which was worthy of moving on. By foregrounding different roles at different times, residents attempted to negotiate their identity in a bid to both 'get by' at the hostel and 'get out' of it. This 'two-facedness' was common within institutions (Goffman, 1961: 65). In balancing the two, residents effectively learned to 'play the game,' a theme which will be returned to in Chapter Eight.

Stigma-management strategies

> The task the homeless face of salvaging the self is not easy, especially since wherever they turn they are reminded that they are at the very bottom of the status system (Snow and Anderson, 1993: 202).

Given that stigma was not attributed to specific roles, but was the product of interaction, manifestations of stigma were often subtle and nuanced (Long and Jepson, 2023). For example, Lincoln felt stigma during interactions in which relational roles, such as son, partner, or friend, came into contact with institutional roles, such as prisoner or hostel user (Goffman, 1963a). Further, stigma was felt by Anthony when he compared his nomadic lifestyle to his daughter's 'correct life,' which comprised marriage, children, a house, and a job. As normativity often framed, or lurked in the background of, institutional interactions, residents were routinely reminded of their relative abnormality on a societal scale. This was further emphasized by 'hyper inclusion,' and particularly the institutionally-backed abnormalities which it produced. As such, residents employed various situated identity management strategies, to both manage their identity and negotiate stigma.

Invoking alternate roles and identities

> Isam says, 'I used to make £2,000-3,000 every month working in the kebab shop.' He can't do that now because he's on crutches and working messes with your benefits. I ask how many hours you can work, and Samir says 16. Samir used to work all the time at his mum's café, '6 till 6, I'd cook the same thing every day, 12-hour shifts were nothing.' The men reminisce about their jobs (Fieldnotes, 09/03/20).

In some cases, individuals emphasised roles or identities which lay beyond the confines of the hostel. Many of the men who lived at Holbrook took pride in their work, even though for most it was just a memory. When a device needed PAT testing, for example, Dean jumped at the opportunity to explain how PAT testing worked, 'I used to be an electrician' he informed the staff (Fieldnotes, 26/08/21). The phrase 'I used to…' was employed by residents time and time again as they conjured tales of past employment or entrepreneurialism. One resident travelled around the Czech Republic with his brother, selling hemp to tourists who thought it was cannabis, 'some even came back' he sniggered (Fieldnotes, 04/02/20). Another resident worked in hospitality at Liverpool Football Club, 'after the 10-hour shift, we'd eat and watch the football, we made £50 each in tips too' (Fieldnotes, 10/02/20). Shaun was once a decorator, Dylan a lorry driver, Noah a scaffolder, and Anthony worked with cars. The residents were proud of their working-class careers and emphasised their hard work, brandishing 10 or 12-hour shifts like a badge of honour (Willis, 2017).

For most, these work-related identities were rooted in the past, whilst their current situations – being in receipt of benefits, with additional income from dealing, stealing, or begging – were a far cry from the hard work of scaffolders or lorry drivers. Nonetheless, residents invoked these past work identities in interactions, as a means of salvaging the self (Snow and Anderson, 1993). The staff similarly invoked past work identities in interactions with residents. For example, Shaun said, 'I don't want to die again' after attempting suicide, so Milly reassured him, 'you've got too much to lose, you're a young man and a good worker, you can turn it around' (Fieldnotes, 06/05/21). Milly positioned Shaun's age and work ethic as both a means of escaping his current situation and reasons to live.

Residents also claimed a range of relational identities. For example, individuals claimed to be 'good dads' despite being estranged from their children. Noah hadn't seen his daughter for over two years, 'I tell her to just use your head, so when I saw her playing with boys in a field, I didn't tell her off. I'm a good dad' (Fieldnotes, 18/02/20). Lincoln had multiple children with multiple women, rarely saw any of them, and did not make regular child support payments to any. Nonetheless, in the above extract he claimed to be a good dad on the basis that he was putting away money to buy them Christmas presents. Lincoln also

represented himself as a 'good partner,' by ending things with one of his 'baby mamas' before things got 'too wild' and she ended up like one of the women 'out there.' Again, whilst residents' behaviours seldom aligned with claims of being a good dad or partner, these alternate identities were invoked in interactions as a means of salvaging the self. Most stemmed from a seed of truth, for instance Lincoln equated gift-giving with being a good dad, despite the absence of long-term economic support, whilst depicting the abandonment of his partner as a form of protection (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009).

The men clung onto these alternate roles, which were either rooted in past experiences or fragments of truth. Identity work of this kind went some way to reconciling contradictions between the estranged and caring father, or the lazy benefits recipient and hard manual worker. However, as Chapter Four has already noted, roles within the hostel were ascribed and not selected. Residents therefore struggled to foreground these self-selected roles on the basis that they were not categorically relevant (Coulter, 1996: 342). Being a good dad or an electrician was less relevant within the hostel context than being somebody who smoked spice or could be easily exploited for money (Long and Jepsen, 2023). As such, residents found that 'certain roles are lost to him by virtue of the barrier that separates him from the outside world' (Goffman, 1961: 16). The temporal dimension inherent to these roles and goals – of being a good dad in the past or wanting to own a flat in the future – suggested that residents were haunted by their past and future selves, of what has been and what could be, yet due to present circumstance and containment within 'this place' was not currently achievable.

Mitigating stigma through 'wilful disattention'

> Spittle flies from Jared's mouth as he shouts at reception staff, 'she's a cunt! She's not organising anything. It's my fucking life, it's my fucking flat!' Staff calmly offer to help Jared with his benefits, but he continues to rage. They empathise with him, the situation is far from ideal. Jared gradually calms down, 'sorry, I'm not angry at you, you caught me on a bad day.' 'It's understandable, I'm here if you need to talk' (Fieldnotes, 05/07/21).

'The staff try their best to treat them very, very normally' (Interview with Simon). In staff-resident interactions, normativity became apparent in several ways. For instance, staff ran a range of activities, such as cooking, art group, choir, and ping pong, so that for an hour or so at least, the individuals who participated could be chefs, artists, singers, and ping pong players. Moreover, staff encouraged residents to develop 'normal' skills, by encouraging them to cook (or at least eat), clean their rooms, handle benefits issues, budget, and engage with support services.

In interactions with residents, staff showed 'unconditional positive regard' and practiced 'elastic tolerance.' These institutional concepts encouraged acceptance, empathy, and flexibility, irrespective of a resident's behaviour, as was evident in the interaction with Jared, above. Despite possessing a wealth of discrediting information about residents, the staff endeavoured to normalise their interactions with residents in the front region. Through 'wilful disattention,' staff momentarily disregarded information which positioned them as 'risky and often extremely dislikeable by normal standards' (Smith, 2011: 371). This mechanism underscored a great deal of mundane chit chat, as it enabled staff to put their knowledge of an individual's paedophilia, murder, and violence aside, thereby freeing them up to talk about the weather, sport, and other 'ordinary' topics of conversation.

The staff also wilfully disattended to the actions of residents, such as those which would later be translated as them 'kicking off.' Staff remained calm in the face of aggression and tried their best to convey a sense of understanding and empathy. After residents 'kicked off,' they often engaged in remedial interchanges, correcting their offensive behaviour through an apology, justification, or the like, and restoring their image in the eyes of others (Goffman, 1971). There was usually a pattern to these exchanges – kick off, make good, and carry on – as Jared demonstrated above.

> Simon waited in the van as Joey went to pick up his 'drinks,' nutritional shakes to help him gain weight, from the pharmacy. As Joey left the shop empty-handed, Simon muttered 'oh no.' 'They said *tomorrow* and I'm like, EH!?' Joey shouted. Simon got out, walked towards the pharmacy, and smiled, 'were you vulgar?' 'No, I told them I'm changing pharmacy, Boots wouldn't behave like that!' Simon went into

> the pharmacy to both find out when Joey's drinks would be available and to smooth things over with its staff (Fieldnotes, 08/09/21).

One challenge for residents was that whilst this kind of behaviour was disattended to within the institution, the same behaviour was not tolerated within the wider community. Normalisation was thus contained, temporary, and aligned to institutional goals (Smith, 2011). If Jared had acted in this way within another social establishment – a GP surgery, bank, Job Centre, hospital, or the post office – the staff would not have tolerated the abuse, and he may have gotten into trouble or been banned. Further, the staff were sometimes left to engage in remedial work on residents' behalves, as was the case with Simon and Joey. In an interview, Polly explained that such scenarios represented a 'disconnect,' between what you could get away with inside the hostel and what you could get away with outside of it, which for some was a 'big culture shock' (Interview with Polly). This provided further evidence of a disconnect between situated and normative understandings of normality, and the problems arising from this (see above).

Normalising the self by stigmatising others

> 'This building is excellent, you get breakfast, a shower, a pool table, it's like a clubhouse,' says Noah as Eric walks in, 'you should talk to Eric too.' Eric looks up, 'I'm not really homeless, I've always had a roof over my head.' I tell him I'm interested in all forms of homelessness, though he persists that he is '*not* homeless' and says sorry with a shrug (Fieldnotes, 24/01/20).

Stigma was implied when individuals were reduced to 'an aggregate of persons who are likely to have to suffer the same deprivations as he suffers because of having the same stigma' (Goffman, 1963a: 113). This was perhaps why Eric rejected the 'homeless' label. Eric effectively distanced himself from Noah, and others who had experienced rough sleeping, by disavowing the homeless label altogether (Snow and Anderson, 1993). He claimed that he had never been homeless by narrowly defining homelessness as rooflessness. By distancing himself from the label, Eric created some elbow room, 'between himself and that with which others assume he should be identified' (Goffman, 1961: 319). Bourgois and Schonberg found similar contradictions, exploring how individuals engaged in certain

practices without interpreting these practices as 'identity markers,' for example engaging in homosexual relations whilst claiming to be homophobic (2009: 215). Eric did just that, as despite living at a homeless hostel, he claimed that he was 'not homeless.'

> Anthony slurs, 'people condemn us, but the people here have been to hell and back.' A man walks past and smiles. Anthony's eyes follow him, 'he's the black widow, a nasty piece of work.' He then continues, 'it's the life I live, not the life I choose' (Fieldnotes, 12/03/20).

Distancing practices often involved stigmatising another individual or group of individuals, as residents portrayed themselves as normal when compared to an abnormal other (Snow and Anderson, 1993). This was evident in the opening extract when Joey distanced himself (a former drug user) from 'them' (current users). Sometimes distancing was achieved through statements about an anonymous 'other,' for example, 'there are bad people living here' (Fieldnotes, 15/02/20), 'there are worse out there' (Fieldnotes, 17/05/21), or general references to 'those out there' (Fieldnotes, 22/07/21). Lincoln distinguished himself from those 'out there,' a category which relied on spatial positioning (see Chapter Three), and enabled him to spatially and symbolically distance from other hostel members. This spatial positioning reflected the staff's references to 'that corner' in Chapter Six.

Sometimes individuals distanced from specific groups, for instance, 'spice heads,' 'crack heads', 'junkies,' and 'alcoholics.' Anderson similarly found that categories such as 'winehead' were only ever used by those who did not consider themselves a member of that group, it was therefore a 'symbol of denigration' ([1976] 2003: 93). At other times, individuals stigmatised a specific person as somebody who they deemed 'worse than' them. This practice can be contradictory, such as when Anthony challenged the stigma attached to the 'resident' label, then proceeded to stigmatise a particular individual for being 'a nasty piece of work.' The bottom line was that residents always found somebody who was 'worse than' them, take the topic of room cleanliness.

> Shaun and another man joke about the state of Tyler's room. Shaun lifts a hand to his waist, 'it's up to here.' The other man chips in, 'and that was last year!' They both laugh (Fieldnotes, 03/03/20).

Tyler's room was known for being dirty and messy, he was one of the hostel's most prolific hoarders. Yet even Tyler, who was experiencing psychotic episodes at the time (Chapter Five), engaged in these distancing practices. When Adrian asked Tyler to clean his room, Tyler yelled, 'have you *seen* Ricky's room?' (Fieldnotes, 11/05/21). The distancing process was thus fluid and interactional, as it enabled residents to deflect attention and stigma from themselves by expressing disapproval of others *in situ* (Hoolachan, 2020). In interactions, Ricky could similarly conceive of others, Tyler perhaps, as being 'dirtier than' he was. Residents therefore created situated 'hierarchies of stigma.' These were not fixed hierarchies in which the cleanest residents were at the top and the dirtiest at the bottom, but interactional hierarchies which ensured that nobody ever had to be 'the dirtiest,' or 'the worst,' resident. Whilst being 'clean' was sometimes used to salvage the self – such as Shaun's pride at his drug-induced 'mad cleans' and claims that he had 'the cleanest room in the hostel' (Fieldnotes, 03/03/20) – being too clean could be a marker of abnormality, as with Fred above. It was therefore not 'dirtiness' and 'cleanliness' which were the issue per se, but the way in which these categories were invoked in interactions, to distance from, and stigmatise, other hostel members. The comparative nature of these situationally-constructed hierarchies meant that residents could always point to somebody who was 'worse than' them.

This situated distancing practice, of salvaging the self by stigmatising the other, was evident whenever an individual constructed themselves as 'better than' somebody else on a whole range of grounds, including age, culture, appearance, money-making, and crimes committed, amongst others. As we saw above, shoplifters often constructed this method of money-making as 'better than' begging, and vice versa. A group of residents teased another who was on a 'kitchen placement,' 'you're earning about 30p a day' said one with a smirk (Fieldnotes, 25/02/20). Contradictorily, whilst the placement gave him 'normal' skills, namely cooking, it marked him as abnormal on the inside, pointing again to this central tension between 'getting by' and 'getting out' (Willis, 2017).

> Isam mimics injecting. Damian says, 'no mate' and gets into the lift. Isam says he became homeless when he became disabled and couldn't work anymore, whereas

> people like Damian were here because of 'crack and heroin,' and you cannot trust those people (Fieldnotes, 12/03/21).
>
> Noah is 'really anti-spice,' he's seen friends on spice kill themselves. Later a man growls into his phone, 'I need my fucking money. I'll come to your house and take your TV.' Noah points out, 'that's spice for you, those who don't fit out get aggressive' (Fieldnotes, 24/01/20).

Residents similarly created drug hierarchies *in situ,* for example, spice users often constructed themselves as 'better than' IV users, and vice versa. Isam insinuated that spice users were more trustworthy than IV users in the first extract, whilst Noah suggested that spice users were more aggressive than IV users in the second. Interestingly, users of both drugs levied similar accusations at one another, for example, that they would 'steal from their granny' to feed their habit. The phrase 'at least' was significant here. Somebody may have smoked spice, but 'at least' they did not inject, and vice versa. Through these interactional hierarchies, individuals were never 'the worst' drug user.

This hierarchy expanded beyond illegal drugs to include legal substances, such as alcohol and prescription medications, as well as other forms of addiction too (Long and Jepsen, 2023). Alcoholics were often stigmatised by drug users, who described alcohol as 'poison,' and alcoholics as 'time wasters.' The most visible displays of distancing occurred when alcoholics called for ambulances. One day, Anthony stood at reception, on the phone, then followed advice to sit down. When two paramedics turned up and asked to see him in a private room, Jake mumbled, 'he's wasting time, people are out there dying, all he needs is another drink or a detox' (Fieldnotes, 04/02/20).

Residents recognised this hierarchical phenomenon too. When I mentioned it to Matteo (the 'nasty piece of work'), he said, 'coke heads and crack heads hate each other but it's the same drug.' He added that 'pregabs' (pregabalins) were 'way worse' than crack or heroin. This painkiller, which was prescribed by doctors, 'shuts off parts of your brain.' Matteo, Isam, and others blamed pregabs for the string of recent deaths amongst spice users. In these situations, prescription medications were constructed as being 'worse than' illegal

drugs in terms of the harms caused, and were therefore placed at the bottom of the drug hierarchy.

Residents normalised their own drug addictions by saying 'everybody has something,' whilst stigmatising other 'worse' kinds of addiction. For example, Shaun said, 'you're always gonna chase something, chase money, women, cars,' another man added, 'everybody has habits, if you don't go for women, you're a drunk, if you're not a drunk, you gamble.' They talked about gambling for a minute and concluded 'that's the worst.' Shaun recounted the story of a friend who had gambled everything away, 'imagine your Mrs finding out you'd gambled everything away' he said (Fieldnotes, 03/03/20). These men created a hierarchy of addiction in which gambling was at the bottom, implying that whilst they may be addicted to crack, 'at least' they don't gamble, as within this interaction, gambling was the worst of the worst. These hierarchies were clearly not fixed but fluid, they belonged to situations, and always enabled the speaker to be 'better than' somebody else.

Whilst distancing practices were common between different groups, such as spice and IV users, such practices also happened within these groups too. For example, Shaun distanced himself from other IV users on the basis of his using practices, because he, unlike many others, rotated when he injected, did not inject into his legs due to the risk of ulcers, and used new needles. He showed staff his still-visible veins, and told them that people damaged their veins by being 'lazy and using old blunt needles from the drawer' (Fieldnotes, 20/02/20). Individuals also used the reasons underlying their drug use as a basis for distancing from others, suggesting that some reasons were more valid than others. One resident complained about another's drug use as he had 'no problems,' such as divorce or family issues, and therefore had no real reason to use (Fieldnotes, 10/03/20).

These distancing mechanisms meant that whilst individuals may have been limited in terms of categorically relevant roles within the hostel, they could argue that they did not fall into 'the worst' category of drug user, or were not 'the worst' within their category of drug use (Coulter, 1996). Whilst distancing strategies enabled individuals to salvage the self within specific situations, the stigmatisation of others perpetuated the stigma associated with drug use more broadly, on a societal scale (Sibley et al, 2020; Long and Jepsen, 2023).

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted tensions between situated understandings of normality and normativity, both of which must be navigated by residents at Holbrook, as they try to both 'get by' in the short term and 'get out' in the long term. It started by shedding light on normal hostel life, in a situated sense, by probing what it meant to 'do being ordinary' at Holbrook House (Sacks, 1984: 415). This illustrated how various activities, such as drug use, which may be seen as abnormal in many contexts, were very usual within the hostel setting. In many cases, the normality of drug use and drinking within the hostel meant that those who abstained were constructed as situationally abnormal. However, that is not to say that all drug users were normal within this context, whilst all non-users were abnormal, as that is a huge oversimplification. Rather, it explored how the relative normality or abnormality of drug use was situational and belonged to the interaction order of the hostel. It was only by observing situated stigma-ascription practices – such as the case of the man having a spice attack at breakfast – that we could see how (and perhaps why) some drug use practices were constructed as abnormal. In exploring situated constructions of normal and abnormal drug use, this chapter has offered much more nuanced and sophisticated look manifestations of stigma. Instead of conceiving of whole groups as being 'stigmatised' on the basis of some attribute or other (Tyler, 2020), it has shifted the focus back to the 'language of relationships,' as Goffman had originally intended (1963a: 3).

The chapter then considered how normativity lurks in the background of hostel-based interactions, reminding residents of their relative abnormality on a societal scale. It looked at how certain 'institutionally-backed abnormalities' were a consequence of 'hyper inclusion' within the services and institutions which made up the institutional web. When it came to money-making, residents were forcibly included into the benefits system, unable to work as a consequence, and therefore compelled to resort to illicit or degrading means of making money. Inclusion within drug substitute services meant that residents were tied to visiting the same place every day, which created an abnormal routine and prevented the possibility of them living a 'normal life.' Further, drug and alcohol services expected individuals to demonstrate normative behaviour, such as frequently attending meetings, as a precursor to treatment. Finally, and stemming a reduced ability to maintain distance

(Chapter Five), residents found that they were unable to withhold information and money in the way that people might on the outside. The irony was that services which set out to 'normalise' individuals often had the opposite effect.

It then considered the 'institutional self' which was implied by hostel membership and some instances in which residents felt stigma by virtue of their institutional membership. Lincoln recounted feeling stigmatised as a result of both his prison and hostel membership during interactions which involved non-members. The 'institutional self' also encapsulated a squashing of roles, as within the sociospatial confines 'this place' – and others within the 'institutional web' – it was challenging to claim and maintain separate, contradictory roles. Yet all residents attempted to do this to an extent, particularly as they attempted to simultaneously 'get by,' by fitting in with the others, and 'get out,' by demonstrating normativity, resulting in a 'two-facedness' which was common within institutions (Goffman, 1961: 65).

Hostel members employed a range of stigma-management strategies within interactions. Firstly, residents invoked and foregrounded alternate roles and identities, which were sometimes rooted in past work ('an electrician') or relationships ('a good partner'). However, the problem with this was that such roles were less categorically relevant 'for *this* setting and for *this* activity' (Coulter, 1996: 342), than being 'a dealer' or 'easily exploitable.' Secondly, the staff team wilfully disattended to the more problematic aspects of resident's biographies and behaviours, for example, by tolerating abuse and expressing empathy. The problem was whilst these behaviours were normalised within the hostel, they were not tolerated and seen as abnormal outside of it. Finally, residents sought to distance themselves from the institution and its members, most notably through the creation of situated 'hierarchies of stigma.' These hierarchies were interactional, and always enabled residents to point to an individual or a group (i.e., 'spice heads' or 'those out there') who was 'worse than' them. Whilst this practice enabled individuals to 'salvage the self' in a particular situation (Snow and Anderson, 1993: 202), it perpetuated the stigma associated with drug use and alcohol on a broader scale (Long and Jepsen, 2023).

This chapter has demonstrated that to 'get by' at an institution, individuals needed to acclimatise to situated normality by 'doing being ordinary' within that context – for instance, by using drugs or pushing back against the institution – yet this in itself acted as an interactional barrier to exiting the hostel. Chapter Eight will shed further light on this by considering how situated normality is at odds with the pathway's normative underpinnings. It will argue that to 'move on' from the hostel, in a 'positive' way at least, individuals must visibly de-acclimatise from the institution, by effectively demonstrating their ability to behave normally.

Chapter eight: 'I've got to get out' – the mobility and immobility of hostel residents

Dylan has the pimply face of a teenager despite being in his thirties. His mood fluctuates like one too. One day he bounces a rubber ball around with glee, the next he berates the reception staff about his lumpy mattress and small room. Dean is smaller, older, and greyer. His blue eyes dart from side to side behind thick, rectangular glasses. He too is prone to the occasional outburst. Both men exude the stale scent of vodka. They spend much of their days together doing 'nothing much' – watching TV, making plans for their fictitious lottery winnings, pottering around town, and getting very drunk.

They turn the residents' meeting – meant for 'general' issues – into an opportunity to list their endless personal complaints, despite Simon's best efforts. Dean announces, 'I have a complaint! I'm not allowed people in my room, but people keep knocking. I told the night staff, but they said, *what do you expect me to do*.' Dylan jumps in, 'ABCs (anti-social behaviour contracts) are so strict, you even get in trouble for people knocking on your door! But I'm going anyway.' Simon asks, 'where?' 'Anywhere.' 'How?' 'I've got legs and all.' Simon suggests that Dylan speak to his support worker though Dylan snorts, 'Roger? He's rubbish. He seems like he don't care. He has seven in front of me before I move out. And he's already looking to move that new resident out.'

Dylan's gripe is not with Roger as a person, but Roger as a gatekeeper of the move on process, and differing ideas about what it takes – or should take – to become 'move on ready.' Many residents, particularly those who have been to prison, share Dylan's time-based expectations. If they've been here for six months say, then they have surely done their time. However, this is at odds with the support staff's constructions of 'readiness' to move, which instead centres on some sort of 'positive change.' Significantly, support staff are the ones with the power to actually move people through the system.

During handover, Elizabeth describes Dylan as being 'aggressive, anxious, and angry.' This follows a confrontation at lunchtime in which Dylan exclaimed, 'it's wrong that they treat people on drugs different' across the dining room. There's also talk of him smashing up a TV and not paying his service charge. Roger interjects, 'yesterday he opened up about some stuff and perhaps needs some reassuring.' Despite this, Roger had to put Dylan on an ABC following reports that he and Dean were getting drunk in his room until the early hours. 'I told him he would need to make some decisions. He'd need to ask Dean to leave his room, but he refused, which is why he's on an ABC and why he's not ready to move on. This is to do with him taking responsibility.' Dylan is not ready for a move and at risk of losing his room at Holbrook due to the ABC.

Dean abandons his room two weeks later without prior warning. This marks a turning point in Dylan's moral career through the hostel. Simon expresses relief when this happens, he thinks Dylan is quite 'childlike,' probably because he lost both parents quite early on, 'I wonder whether he saw Dean as a father figure.' Simon notes how Dylan's behaviour has already changed as a result – he attends choir and worship now, for instance. In other words, Dylan increasingly makes 'primary adjustment' to the hostel by participating in institutional activities (Goffman, 1961: 189). He is often the only resident who attends choir, others prefer to peak in and snigger. Nonetheless, these markers of normativity soon pay off, as one month later, Roger decides that Dylan is not only 'ready' to move on, but ready for a move to level four, the final level in the pathway.

During a keyworking session, Roger explains which factors predicated this decision: 'you've got your probation worker, friends, benefits sorted out, and a job sorted' – Roger chooses not to see the cash in hand nature of this job and its potential complications. Dylan proves himself to Roger and has effectively played the game. He still has a drink, though says, 'I've calmed down a hell of a lot since Dean's gone.' Dylan demonstrates that he is capable of behaving 'normally' in a conventional sense.

Roger clarifies the nature of a move to level four, 'you'll have to manage your own front door, no keyworkers there, if you go out and have a drink you have to come back quietly and respectfully. You've got to be good at money, cooking, and not smash stuff up.' Together they fill in a form, which asks about housing history, everyday living, skills and strengths, services engaged with, and any required support. Roger brings up Dylan's 'singing in the night' and negotiates, he'll rescind the ABC if Dylan stops singing. Roger emphasises, 'it's about working towards a state of maturity… it's not too early to start managing your front door and stuff like that.' Dylan agrees and in the weeks that follow, successfully 'moves on' from the hostel.

Dylan is long gone by the time Dean returns, seven months later. Dean sits alone in reception and looks at his feet, his blue jeans dark with urine. Elijah passes by, 'you alright Dean?' Dean mumbles 'not really,' though Elijah is already in the staff reception by this point. 'He's a dick head, he's a dick head,' Dean repeats as he punches at the air. When Elijah returns, Dean exclaims, 'I'm not happy with you! Dick head!' Taken aback, Elijah asks, 'what did you call me?' 'You're a dick head,' he responds. Elijah says, 'don't speak to me like that,' tells him that his language is 'inappropriate,' and suggests that he go away and sober up. He then reminds Dean, 'if you carry on like that, you won't be here long.' Dean feels he's being spoken to 'like a kid' and insists, 'if they evict me, I'll take them to court.'

At handover, Elijah asks, 'what's up with Dean?' Apparently, he's been going on about 'the usual stuff' and on 'the same loop' – complaints about bullying, a vague reference to rape, a relationship with his carer, and the potential loss of his toes.

Nine months later, the staff can't help but comment on how 'smart' Dean looks ahead of his meeting with the manager of an 'extra care' facility. Olivia attends this meeting with him, despite it being her day off. Dean beams as he exits the chapel, it went well, 'I just want somewhere permanent now, I'm fed up with drifting.' He's in his 60s and is ready to 'stay still' (Jackson, 2012). Dean describes it as a place for 'vulnerable people,' for people who have been 'robbed' like he often is. He'll get his own room and cooking facilities, though Olivia debunks some of Dean's other

embellishments, such as the bi-annual cruise. She's still learning about the process herself and finds that finances are both complex and vary according to the facility. Dean's case is 'out for brokering' for some months, meaning that any interested company can assess him. Eventually, Dean gets out too.

Introduction

> One can fairly say that bureaucracies are utopian forms of organization. After all, is this not what we always say of utopians: that they have a naive faith in the perfectibility of human nature and refuse to deal with humans as they actually are? Which is, are we not also told, what leads them to set impossible standards and then blame the individuals for not living up to them? (Graeber, 2015: 48-9).

> Policy debates and interventions often mystify large-scale structural power vectors and unwittingly reassign blame to the powerless for their individual failures and moral character deficiencies. More mundanely, policy is often an irrelevant bureaucratic sideshow and sometimes, despite good intentions, intensifies the deeper forces that distribute misery unequally (Bourgeois and Schonberg, 2009: 297).

This chapter will contrast the ideals of the pathway with the actual movements of residents around the 'institutional web' (see Chapter Five for this distinction) – illustrating a deep disconnect between bureaucratic measures of 'success' and the fallible nature of humans. In doing so, it will shed light on the 'moralisation of movement' within the pathway, as certain moves are conceived of as 'positive' whilst others are seen as 'negative.' This chapter is structured around these so called positive and negative moves and uses examples to demonstrate that these labels are not necessarily reflective of circumstance. Firstly, it demonstrates how 'positive' moves were just another form of staff discretion, as staff decided when residents were 'move on ready,' which often depended on them 'playing the game.' However, 'move on readiness' was not always at the heart of positive moves, as was the case with 'long stayers.' It then considers the lasting impact of having lived at one or more of the places which make up the institutional web. Secondly, it considers each of the most prominent 'negative' moves in turn, namely evictions, abandonments, and prison,

whilst arguing that these moves were not necessarily experienced as such. Thirdly, the chapter returns to those who had become 'stuck' in the 'institutional web,' such as those who 'move back' to Holbrook after temporary containment elsewhere. It questions the pathway's bureaucratic measures of success, arguing that not only was the current system setting people up to fail, but that it did not capture these clear 'institutional measures of failure,' such as 'moves back' or 'institutionalised cycling' (DeVerteuil, 2003: 361). In essence, it will demonstrate how all of the ingredients for becoming 'stuck' within the institutional web are rooted within the interaction orders of institutions (Goffman, 1983).

Pathway KPIs: Getting out vs. moving on

> A resident exclaims at his support worker, 'urgent! I've got to get out of here!' He says that he can't live here anymore because the other residents are 'divs.' She says, 'then you've got to come and see me.' He makes an excuse for missing the last key working sessions and they arrange a time to meet again (Fieldnotes, 03/11/20).

Given the problems which residents experienced with 'this place' (see Chapter 5), it was no wonder they wanted to 'get out.' When another resident said 'I wanna get out,' I asked when he was going to move out, to which he responded, 'they didn't say when, just gotta keep waiting' (Fieldnotes, 15/07/21). For residents, 'getting out' was about removing themselves from the institution and a desire to live elsewhere, the implication being that 'anywhere' must be better than this place. However, the pathway deemed that there was a right way of moving on and a wrong way, which effectively moralised the movements of Holbrook's residents (Hall and Smith, 2013). This was embedded within the value-laden discourse of the pathway, with moves 'through,' 'on,' and 'out' being constructed as positive, whilst moves 'back,' and immobility were conceived of as negative. This societal tendency to valorise and dichotomise mobility – for example, constructing movement as good and stasis as bad, whilst constructing moves forward as good and moves backwards as bad (Hall and Smith, 2013; Hall 2016) – formed the foundations of the pathway's KPIs.

KPIs were the institutional measures of success which differentiated the desire to simply 'get out' from the progress implied by a 'move on,' the latter representing those movements which were institutionally-approved and flowed in the intended direction of the

pathway. The ideal was that individuals progressed through the pathway levels, proving themselves 'move on ready' at each stage, before exiting the pathway in a positive way. In order to achieve a 'move on,' residents had to engage with normative standards of normality, or at least demonstrate their ability to do so, by conforming to the institution and showing some degree of 'primary adjustment' to it (Goffman, 1961: 189).

Supported accommodation providers within the pathway reported their KPIs to the local council each quarter. The KPIs sought to ensure that: 1) fewer individuals were refused a room on the basis of risk, 2) rooms were turned around faster (referred to as 'void times'), 3) fewer people were evicted, 4) 'planned' departures from the pathway outweighed 'unplanned' departures, and 5) fewer individuals were given 'priority' access to council housing. Movement was at the heart of each KPI, as the first two centred on getting more people into pathway accommodation and faster, whilst the final three were concerned with how individuals left the pathway and where they went upon exiting it.

There were numerous problems with these KPIs. Firstly, by reducing humans to points on a graph, the quarterly reporting of KPIs to the local authority did not reflect actual human experience. For example, whilst the local authority may simply have seen that evictions had decreased, they could not have appreciated the challenges faced by the staff team in meeting this KPI through statistical reporting alone (see Chapter Six). The bureaucratic management of men in this way was therefore underscored by a key tension, between seeing humans as KPIs, with a 'naive faith in the perfectibility of human nature,' and seeing humans as they really were, as unique, fallible, and at times unpredictable (Graeber, 2015: 48; Lipsky, 2010). The actual movements of residents will be considered in more depth below.

Secondly, the KPIs were not a great measure of 'success' as they were inherently short-sighted. Whilst they measured entries into, and exits from, the homelessness pathway, they failed to capture movements which happened within it, as individuals moved up and down the pathway structure. Furthermore, the KPIs failed to measure the number of individuals who left the homelessness pathway – to temporarily reside elsewhere in the institutional web or beyond – before later returning to its accommodation. This meant that whilst

individuals commonly cycled the institutional web, being pushed from one place to the next (see Chapter Five), there was no formal measure of 'institutionalised cycling' within the pathway (DeVerteuil, 2003: 361). The KPIs therefore neglected to record these 'institutional measures of failure.'

Thirdly, the final KPI set out to reduce the number of individuals being offered 'priority' access to council housing. This KPI was a response to the city's limited social housing stock and lengthy waiting list (Cuncev, 2015). Nonetheless, it was out of kilter with the pathway structure, which was geared towards individuals eventually attaining a flat of their own, should they prove themselves ready for independent living. In the Prologue, for example, Polly explained, 'they try to get you up to levels two, three, and four, and then into your own place. Sometimes people go up, sometimes people go down. But the aim is to get your own place if you want to.' Attaining a council flat was positioned as a choice, something within the residents' control and dependent upon their compliance, though the reality was that even for those who had adhered to the demands of the institution, had progressed up the pathway and proved themselves 'ready' for this final move, attaining a council flat was not a certainty (Dordick, 2002). The prospect of attaining a council flat was therefore dangled, like a carrot, at the end of the homelessness pathway.

The mechanics of a 'positive' move

> There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so (Shakespeare, 2003 [1603]: 72).

Positive moves comprised both movements through the pathway in a positive direction i.e., to levels two, three, and four, and 'planned departures' from the pathway e.g., to live with a partner or begin a residential detox, with only the latter being recorded for the purpose of KPIs. Movements in a 'positive' direction were generally underscored by a treatment-first ideology (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010). This structure and its underlying rationale were not dissimilar to psychiatric ward systems of the 1960s, in which 'patients start as social infants and end up, within the year, on convalescent wards as resocialized adults' (Goffman, 1961: 163). As Holbrook House was a level one hostel, it marked the beginning of this resocialisation process.

The mechanics of 'positive' moves up the pathway, to levels two, three, and four, went something like this: 1) support staff deemed a resident 'move on ready,' 2) staff 'nominated' that resident for a move, 3) information in support of their 'readiness' was uploaded onto the system and shared with prospective accommodation providers, 4) this 'nomination' was discussed by accommodation managers at a weekly meeting, 5) a decision was made by managers about where that individual would go, and finally 6) once a vacancy became available, they would move.

> I try to nominate people based on the evidence, their housing history, assessments and things like that, and my relationship with them, my interactions with them and where they are. I try and move them on as quickly as possible. I don't see any point in being in an environment like ours too long because I think it can be detrimental, you know. Even people that have never had a substance misuse problem, if you're in that type of environment for long enough, the chances are that maybe out of sheer boredom or loneliness, you get involved with a social group that does use… I've seen it, I've experienced it, so my personal belief is, if you don't need to be there, off you go (Interview with Adrian).

Much of this decision-making was out of the residents,' and even their support workers', hands. Residents were only given 'one reasonable offer,' meaning that they could technically be evicted for declining an offer of accommodation if it was considered reasonable. Furthermore, with so many steps, there were sometimes weeks or even months between the initial categorisation of 'move on ready' and the move itself. In line with Adrian's sentiments, any delay in movement – and a failure to strike the iron while it's hot, so to say – had a potentially detrimental impact on the individual, including relapse, for instance. One day Roger watched as Hassan, a small Iranian man, as he hobbled around reception and begged for cigarettes, before surmising, 'he looks a bit out of it. I had him down for level three but he's not level three anymore' (Fieldnotes, 05/03/20). It was during, and owing to, this period of waiting that the Iranian man was recategorized as no longer being ready for a move to level three. The implication was that his nomination would either be amended, and the process would begin again with level two providers, or rescinded completely. Olivia also had a client who was sober for two weeks and in need of 'dry'

housing, though due to 'administrative delays,' i.e., he was not showing up on the list of nominations, they missed this 'small window' as he had started drinking again (Fieldnotes, 18/09/21).

At the other end of the spectrum, there were instances in which accommodation providers further up the pathway asked Holbrook's residents to move with insufficient notice, in a bid to reduce void times. In one instance, a resident 'went ballistic' when he was asked to view, sign up to, and move into a property on the same day, resulting in one of Holbrook's managers complaining to the accommodation provider (Interview with Simon). In sum, the mechanics of positive moves were bureaucratic, laborious, and sometimes KPI-centred as opposed to person-centred.

Becoming move on ready

> One frequent official objective is the reformation of inmates in the direction of some ideal standard (Goffman, 1961: 74).

Support staff were gatekeepers to the move on process. Before a move could be put into motion, staff first had to deem a resident 'move on ready,' by gathering evidence of such, gleaned from information about the resident and interactions with them, as Adrian described above. With no clear-cut criteria for a move on, this decision was ultimately a matter of staff discretion (see Chapter Six). However, the staff noted several key indicators of move on readiness, including: engagement with support workers, linking in with support services, reduced substance use or alcohol consumption, an ability to do 'taken for granted' things, such as showering or buying food, money management, developing a routine, and an ability to manage their front door. These indicators were steeped in normativity and suggested that becoming move on ready was akin to becoming 'normal' (Brookfield et al, 2021). Normality was essentially used as a resource, an outside frame of reference, through which staff could judge whether residents were ready for a lower level of support or not (see Chapter Seven for contrasting understandings of normality).

It was here that tensions between 'getting by' and 'getting out' became most apparent, for example, being categorised as one of 'the quiet ones' was a double-edged sword. In Chapter

Five, Bradley warned that the quiet ones are the 'ones you have to watch out for,' whilst in Chapter Seven, Fred and Harry's quietness and proclivity to keep to themselves marked them as contextually abnormal and resulted in various social sanctions by fellow residents. Yet the staff team often perceived these same qualities – of being 'a loner,' 'keeping to themselves', and 'spending time away from the hostel' – as indicators of move on readiness. Whilst Fred and Harry struggled to 'get by' at Holbrook, they were able to 'get out' of it faster than those who adapted better to hostel life by 'doing being ordinary' within that context (Sacks, 1984: 415).

Fred and Harry were ideal candidates for 'positive' moves, as both men made primary adjustments to the hostel and did what was asked of them to attain a move: they paid their service charge, took their medication, attended keyworking sessions, and engaged with support services. In informal conversations and timeline interviews, they even adopted the language of the institution, when talking about 'managing front doors,' for example. They proved that they were 'ready' to live independently (Warren and Barnes, 2021) – 'that's why Adrian pulled out all the stops and got me this place' said Harry, after moving into a smaller, self-contained flat at level two (Interview with Harry). However, Harry and Fred were exceptional in their drive to 'move on,' and their resulting compliance with the demands of the institution. Most residents sought to 'play it cool,' by combining different strategies, such as secondary adjustments and colonisation (claiming that life inside is more desirable than on the outside), to maximise their chances of getting by and 'eventually getting out physically and psychologically undamaged' (Goffman, 1961: 65). In these cases, 'evidence' of readiness to move was not quite as obvious as in Fred and Harry's, which blurred the line between ready and not ready. It was left to the staff to decide who was worthy of, and 'ready' for a positive move, and who was not, through local discretion and individual constructions of move on readiness. Dylan's and Dean's journeys through Holbrook illustrated this in the introductory extract.

Both men's experiences attested to this tension between 'getting by' and 'getting out.' Initially, Dylan and Dean 'got by' at Holbrook by acclimatising to its situated normality and by doing being ordinary in the form of boozing and bantering. This stemmed from a need for sociability and connection, which was not only utterly human, but enabled the self to exist

(Goffman, 1959). However, 'getting by' had implications for 'getting out,' as these behaviours directly impeded their ability to 'prove' themselves 'ready' for a positive move.

Whilst both men eventually 'moved on' in a 'positive' direction, their journeys were bumpier than those of primary adjusters, like Fred and Harry, as rather than taking the most efficient route through the hostel, their paths were much windier and more cyclical. Significantly, whilst neither man fundamentally changed during their time at Holbrook – they still drank, socialised with other residents, and caused a bit of disruption – they did enough to become 'move on ready' in the eyes of their support workers. They made visible progress which could be recorded as evidence of move on readiness. In other words, they learned to 'play the game.'

'You've got to play the game to get out'

> Lincoln leans in and whispers, 'I've got a plan to get out. I'm gonna go to my support sessions, do the activities, and see my probation worker.' His face is deadly serious. He knows somebody who did just that and was able to get out (Fieldnotes, 20/07/21).

Hostel members sometimes employed a game metaphor when they talked about getting out of the hostel, as they positioned 'playing the game' as a precursor to 'moving on.' The phrase was used by all hostel members, often rather explicitly, such as when reception staff said to Dylan, 'you've got to play the game and engage, why don't you engage? Too rebellious?' (Fieldnotes, 12/03/20). Residents similarly told staff about their plans to get out of the hostel by engaging with external services, 'I'll start attending to get out of that gate' (Fieldnotes, 09/07/21). This game playing wisdom was passed on through interaction, either explicitly or implicitly, from one resident to the next. 'Playing the game' was often equated with 'engaging,' whether that was going to keyworking sessions, attending drug and alcohol services, or becoming involved with any of the other services and institutions – in other words, individuals had to become 'hyper included' within the 'institutional web' (see Chapter Seven).

When it came to playing the game, visibility was key. Residents not only had to do the things which predicated a move on – such as those touched on above – but crucially they had to be seen by staff to be doing those things. Insofar as the pathway was concerned, the visibility of engagement was perhaps more important than the engagement itself. This was apparent in cases such as Pablo's (see Chapter Seven), as whilst he was engaging with drug and alcohol services, he chose to withhold that information from staff – thereby reducing the visibility of his engagement and rendering it unusable by staff as evidence of his readiness to move. This ultimately hampered his ability to move out. On the flipside, secret consumption enabled residents to use drugs or drink privately, whilst maintaining the impression before staff that they were making 'progress' or 'change.' The reduced visibility of consumption also made it easier for staff not to see it (Chapter Six).

Some residents sought to exploit this requirement of visibility. Damian often made loud and recurrent requests in the communal areas – such as, 'can I engage in some support?' or 'I need support' – yet did not engage with his support worker and became involved in all sorts of trouble. He sought, through 'dramatic realization,' to give the impression of change, without actually acting on it (Goffman, 1959). The staff quickly saw through this façade, so not only was he considered to be 'a bit of a stuck record,' but his constant demands and gripes meant that he was visible to staff for the wrong reasons.

> There are checkboxes, so have they got any mental health issues? Yes, okay. Are they medicated? Are they engaged with services and receiving support or counselling? In terms of physical health, are they medicated? Are they engaging with their GP? Have they attended any hospital appointments they need to attend? In terms of substance use, they don't have to necessarily not be using but they should be at least addressing it so be engaged with support services (Interview with Megan).

The staff at Holbrook needed to 'play the game' too. If they could not record evidence of progress, then they could not move people on, meaning that they would potentially fall short of their KPIs. Charlie conceded that the pathway was 'a bit of a game, if you want to progress, then these are the rules' (Fieldnotes, 06/12/21). Before nominating a resident,

support workers needed to demonstrate that they were addressing their various support needs, as this enabled service providers further up the pathway to scrutinise that individual and decide whether or not to invite them in for an assessment. This was quite literally a checkbox exercise, as Megan described. As a new support worker, Megan inherited her caseload from a temporary staff member who 'didn't really know what they were doing,' for instance, one of her nominations had been 'unsuccessful' as the forms had been completed incorrectly (Lipsky, 2010; Graeber, 2015). In other words, this temporary support worker had failed to play the bureaucratic game.

This emphasis on visibility (and recordability) was built into the pathway structure. Whilst in Chapter Seven we saw how the staff team learned to see (or not), this chapter is concerned with that which is made visible (or not). Nominations had to be made on the basis of recordable evidence, black and white facts which indicated 'progress' or 'change,' for example, through a daily reduction of methadone from 50mg to 30mg, or frequent depot injections[21]. Given the number of people who lived in the pathway, this tick box activity was necessary to ensure an efficient flow of individuals through the pathway, whilst enabling services to meet their KPIs. These were common characteristics of people-processing institutions. Paradoxically, whilst 'playing the game' implied a temporary show of compliance, just enough to make it out of the door, the broader pathway structure ensured that to make it to the next level, and the next, and the next, individuals had to begin playing the game all over again, often without any real end in sight. This structure also acted as a barrier for those who did not make visible and recordable improvements, as 'you need a body of evidence to say we think this person can now deal with a reduced level of support, so one of the barriers is the lack of evidence that they have actually progressed significantly to reassure the new provider that they will cope' (Interview with Elijah).

'Playing the game' could also be used by residents to strategically account for certain behaviours, particularly those acts which exhibited compliance with the demands of the institution. This enabled residents to simultaneously engage in support whilst claiming that they were only going through the motions and 'playing the game,' that they were not doing so in spirit. By accounting for their engagement in this way, residents avoided the social

[21] A slow release, anti-psychotic injection.

sanctions faced by primary adjusters like Harry and Fred, as detailed in Chapter Seven. In these instances, the game metaphor acted as a self-saving mechanism for those who maintained that their compliance with the rules was actually all part of a secretive and sneaky plan to get out. They were the ones duping staff, and therefore they were really in control of the situation. This reconstruction created some elbow room between the actions and intentions of residents, because after all everybody wanted to get out of 'this place' (Chapter Five).

'Burden shuffling' as a 'positive' move

> Sometimes we end up losing them anyway, just because they've been here too long, and that's probably not the right thing to do, because invariably they come back. So, one of the structural things that's wrong with the pathway is that it's like a conveyor belt, you can understand why it's a conveyor belt because the demand for supported accommodation is quite heavy, so you're putting people on the conveyor belt and after 8, 10, 12 months, especially after 12 months – that seems to be a sort of arbitrary sort of milestone – questions are asked, well why is that person still at Holbrook? And then the answer often is, because they haven't made sufficient progress that gives us confidence that they will do well at the next level. But then there's this sort of pressure to move them on. I always describe it as a conveyor belt, but somebody's turned the speed up a little bit too fast for some of the clients (Interview with Elijah).

Sometimes residents were moved on because they were so disruptive that the staff simply needed to get them out. Whilst such individuals could be evicted, this was a last resort, given the KPI against evictions. Instead, they were often given a 'sideways swap' or 'a swap.' Sideways swaps enabled accommodation providers at the same level to trade in their most troublesome clients, meaning that Holbrook could swap their problematic residents with those at other level one services. It was hoped that this would both alleviate problems within the hostel, whilst the 'change of scenery' would do them some good. However, as swaps were bidirectional, the staff never knew which problems they might receive in return.

There were several prime candidates for sideways swaps which centred on: drug dealing, mental health issues which were exacerbated by the environment, severe levels of bullying or exploitation, and overstaying. As these were all fairly routine aspects of hostel life (see Chapter Seven), the staff first had to determine that the issue was exceptional enough to warrant a swap. Again, visibility was key to this discretionary practice (see Chapter Six). Whilst there was not a KPI for length of stay, pathway managers urged 'long stayers' to move on, especially before they hit the 12-month mark. However, as Elijah suggested above, these individuals remained at Holbrook because they were not ready for a lower level of support and would likely fail if they moved to another level. Yet the time inevitably came when they were moved, nevertheless.

One resident was offered a sideways swap when he was categorised as 'very unwell.' At handover, his support worker said, 'he's cross-dressing again' which she interpreted as him 'either going back to renting or his mental health declining.' There was other evidence too – he made noise all night, was seeing demons, was angry and volatile, 'messed up' the second-floor kitchen and corridor, and yelled at another resident in the lift, saying 'I know you want to fuck my body!' (Fieldnotes, 05/02/20). Staff were annoyed with the local mental health hospital for sending him here in the first place, as not only was he still unwell, but he had hit one of the hospital staff.

When the request for a swap came from another level one hostel, decisions about who to send in exchange were often ad hoc, informal, and decided *in situ*. One day, Charlie walked into the support office and asked whether there were any candidates for a swap, as a resident at a mixed-gender hostel was being exploited. Elijah asked whether there were any 'long stayers' who could do with a 'change' and Adrian wanted to move one of his residents who had been around for a while. However, Frank trumped this with a 'welfare issue,' a man who shouldn't really be in this area, 'he was attacked quite badly and still has a hole in his leg' (Fieldnotes, 30/01/20).

Sometimes problematic clients were not merely swapped but offered 'positive' moves either 'up' or 'out' of the pathway. It was common, whenever residents caused problems, for staff to ask whether they were 'move on-able.' In other words, were they making

enough progress to warrant a move up the pathway? When Samir and another man come to blows, based on a long history of dislike for one another, staff arranged for the other man to move on, so despite their confrontations becoming increasingly serious, staff reassured themselves that he would be moving shortly (Fieldnotes, 20/02/20). These individuals were pushed to another part of the institutional web – in this case supported accommodation within the pathway – yet still remained within it. Their problems were rendered less visible to staff at Holbrook by virtue of their removal, as they became another service's problem, at least for a while (Seim, 2017).

'Planned departures' out of the pathway were the gold standard insofar as the KPIs were concerned. Jared – the 'sweet old man' turned 'aggressive dealer' who was introduced in Chapter Seven – attained such a move on the basis of his violent dealing. Because he was older, additional accommodation options were available, and he was moved into a residential care home. Simon was concerned that he may try to take advantage of the vulnerable, older people at the home, though reasoned, 'we needed to get him out of here' (Fieldnotes, 26/08/21). This reasoning was reminiscent of Bittner's (1967) skid-row patrolmen, who were concerned primarily with practical work of keeping the peace in their area, rather than society at large. As moves up and out of the pathway were unidirectional, individuals were not merely exchanged, but offloaded entirely. They completely removed that client from the pathway system, for the time being at least. In these cases, the official aims of the pathway (outlined in Chapter Five) had been met, in the official records at least, as individuals had moved into the pathway and out the other end. However, in actuality, they had simply been pushed to another strand of the 'institutional web.'

Whilst these moves were recorded as positive, they were more akin to 'burden shuffling' – as institutions unloaded their 'undesirable work onto others' (Seim, 2017: 452). This was triggered by a need to get individuals out rather than their readiness to move on. For example, Holbrook staff were forced to move 'long stayers' on, knowing full well that they would likely fail and return soon after. Yet as there was no measure of institutionalised cycling, this would not be recorded as an 'institutional measure of failure.' Further, Jared's move to a care home was less than ideal and potentially harmful to others, particularly in light of the recent killing of one care home resident by another. In this case, the killer was a

man who had been shuffled from one institution to the next, whose mental health issues were never adequately addressed, and about whom information was not correctly recorded or shared between institutions (Kelly, 2022).

It is important to note that Holbrook House was also on the receiving end of burden shuffling, for example, by accepting the man from the mental health hospital who continued to suffer from severe mental health issues. Staff since offloaded this particularly problematic individual elsewhere within the 'institutional web,' as whilst a return to the mental health hospital may have been preferrable, long waiting lists prohibited such a move (Goffman, 1961). Burden shuffling was an interaction order phenomena, endemic within the pathway, and broader institutional web too.

The residual impact of people-processing institutions

Living in 'this place' – or indeed a place like this – sometimes acted as a barrier for residents as they tried to move on in a positive way. When one resident inherited £7,000 he thought he would be able to secure his own private rented accommodation, though 'nobody wanted to take him because he's coming from a hostel… he thought with all this money, money talks, but actually it didn't in his case, they didn't want him, and he struggled, it made him very depressed' (Interview with Blake). The individual felt that his membership at Holbrook actively blocked this move, that his housing tenure effectively worked as 'an indicator of moral character' (Vassenden and Lie, 2013: 79). Even where individuals had moved on, and physically left the institution, they continued to feel the residual impact of once having lived at 'this place' or a place like this. Paul and Fred made it out of Holbrook in 'positive' ways, into a council flat and level two accommodation respectively, yet their experiences of moving around the institutional web continued to impact their daily lives in numerous, often nuanced ways. This was evident in separate timeline interviews with Paul and Fred (see Chapter Four).

Paul: 'I just do normal things'

> Today, I am enjoying being ordinary, a good neighbour, a good employee, and just enjoying being in my safe place, my own flat. I'm thankful to the people who helped

> me realise that I needed to change in order to save my life and rebuild what I had so recklessly destroyed through drugs and criminality. And now, four years substance free, I'm in a good place going forward, and always remember that I am only one seemingly irrelevant decision from spoiling all that (Interview with Paul).

Paul moved from prison to an emergency hostel to Holbrook, where it was decided he would wait until he acquired permanent social housing. Paul's timeline followed a redemption narrative of childhood trauma, substance use, imprisonment, hitting rock bottom, losing himself, and finally a period of change as he re-discovered 'the old Paul.' This kind of moral career reconstruction enabled Paul to realise that 'my entire life was heading towards homelessness' (Goffman, 1961). Paul had internalised the institutional view of himself – as an addict and a criminal – and sought vindication for these roles by doing 'all I was asked to do by all the professionals,' including making primary adjustment to Holbrook House. He achieved this by living 'in a positive way' and 'proving' himself to those around him, predominantly by 'fully buying in' to all the help on offer – support services, groups, rehabilitation programmes, activities, and the hostel's stamp scheme. Paul was not alone in his retrofitting of events and behaviours which 'led' to his time at Holbrook, nor in his narrative which was flecked with treatment-first and resocialisation ideologies.

The pathway ideology, with its roots in normativity, had become so deeply ingrained that Paul continued to strive for normality even after escaping the institutional web. For Paul, being 'normal' and living an 'ordinary' life were hugely important, as a means of continually 'proving' himself to family, friends, and professionals. He created rules for himself which enabled him to maintain this ordinary life, such as distancing from his former 'friends,' abstaining from substances and alcohol, and refraining from romantic relationships. Equally, he felt compelled to do things which amounted to 'doing being ordinary' in a conventional sense, such as having dinner with his brother, speaking to his neighbours, working full time, and maintaining his flat (Sacks, 1984: 415). Paul equated being ordinary with being human.

Although Paul had a council flat when I interviewed him, his journey out of Holbrook was not straightforward. He was routinely overlooked for properties despite being at the top of the council's waiting list, later discovering a fatal bureaucratic barrier, as he was still

categorised as being a 'high risk' on one of the forms (Graeber, 2015). Fortunately, this was an easy fix, so within one month, Paul was offered his own flat. The fact that this form was updated was proof to Paul he was right to comply and play by the rules. Whilst Paul described moving into his own flat as 'the best thing that has happened to me,' he also described a 'fear of losing what I've got.' This is illustrative of Goffman's 'calculus of risks' (1961: 167), as the further an individual made it up (or out of) the pathway, the greater sense of self he could build, yet the further he had to fall. This fear fuelled his continued compliance, as he continued to 'prove' himself worthy beyond his time caught in the web.

Fred: 'It's my fault, I need to police myself'

Fred moved from prison to the streets to Holbrook. He was shocked when the council put him, a recently sober person, into a place full of users (an example of the inbuilt failure described below). When he was offered a room in a shared house at level three, he thought that things were going to get better, though it transpired that not only were the other tenants users, but that the property was being run as a brothel. On his first day, a stranger barged in his room and held a knife up to his throat, 'the problem is you've got no one policing the house, keyworkers only visit once a week for 20 minutes, so the house is just a free for all' (Interview with Fred).

When I interviewed Fred, he lived in a self-contained flat at level four, where he felt 'safe' and 'like an adult' for the first time since leaving prison. He was trying to get a council flat, though as with each of his previous moves, this process was riddled with uncertainty. Fred felt anxious, 'I just don't know how it works, I've been told that they can't force a property on me but also if I decline a property, even if it's miles away, they can move me back, it sounds quite ominous really.' His neighbour recently refused a council property and was demoted to level 3, Fred suspected this was a form of 'punishment' (Feeley, 1979).

Fred volunteered at Holbrook at the time of his interview. Whilst the residents assumed that he must be happy, having made it to level four, he was not. He was on anti-depressants, considered 'ending it' at times, and had been on a waiting list for support with his PTSD for over two years. His experience ran contra to the folklore that 'it'll get better when…' and shed light on the lingering affective dimension of living at a place like Holbrook.

Fred attempted, and struggled, to create a 'normal' life for himself. When he went for a job interview, the interviewer questioned him for volunteering at Holbrook, 'he probably thought there was something wrong with me for volunteering there.' Fred interpreted not getting the job as 'a direct expression of his stigmatised differentness' (Goffman, 1963a: 15). It was this felt differentness that Fred struggled with. Fred was desperate for social interaction and tried to develop 'normal' relationships, though felt dogged by stigmatising roles of the past, which centred on his drug use, prison time, and homelessness (Long and Jepsen, 2023). He had merely graduated from 'convict' to 'ex-con,' and so on, meaning that time spent in each institution had the potential to be eternally stigmatising (Lipsky, 2010). Fred sought to conceal discrediting information about his past (Goffman, 1963a). When he joined a ping pong club, he hid his 'real' identity, though was troubled by the risk of being found out, 'if they knew about my past, I wouldn't be welcome to play' (Goffman, 1963a). Lincoln felt a similar fear in Chapter Seven, after being rejected by girlfriends for disclosing his time in prison. Being discreditable therefore presented a challenge of information control within social interactions (Vassenden and Andersson, 2011).

Like Paul, Fred created strict rules for himself to ease the anxiety of a relapse and of falling backwards. First and foremost, he did not befriend or date anybody who drank alcohol or used drugs. Whilst he longed for a girlfriend, he ended one relationship immediately, having found cocaine in her pocket. He conceded, 'everyone drinks or takes drugs, so I have to isolate myself.' He positioned relationships as 'dangerous' and 'risky,' as 'anybody could be a drug user.' Like Paul, he remained single, not by choice but out of felt necessity. He too opted for loneliness over relapse, and for control over connection.

Negative moves

As a level one hostel, individuals who left Holbrook either moved up or out of the pathway. Whilst it was possible to exit the pathway in a 'positive' direction, such as Paul's move into social housing, exits in a 'negative' direction were more common. These exits were recorded as 'unplanned departures' in the KPIs and encompassed moves which were unintended and undesirable, three of which will be considered here, namely evictions, abandonments, and prison recall. These examples illustrated that in some circumstances individuals were

compelled to act in a certain way, and also whilst 'negative' moves were not always experienced as such.

Evictions and unmanageability

> I ask Charlie about evictions. He says that you have to balance the person-centred approach of not evicting with the safety of everybody else, namely the 33 staff, 93 residents, and various non-residents, 'eviction is often about things being unmanageable' (Fieldnotes, 06/12/21).

Residents were put on notices as a precursor to eviction for their actions or inactions, including antisocial behaviour (ABCs), suspicion of dealing, non-payment of rent, and non-use of their room. However, given the KPI against evictions, it was rare for the staff to follow up on these notices with an actual eviction. In handover, Milly announced that a resident was '100% definitely going next week then' as he had not changed his behaviour, though others disagreed, 'I still don't believe that will happen, he will end up staying.' Staff had tried to arrange a sideway swap but nobody would take him, 'he's not suitable for anywhere.' Staff were frustrated by this position and questioned the point of notices if they were never actioned (Fieldnotes, 06/05/21). The residents knew this too.

It was rare for staff to evict residents on the basis of drug dealing (see Chapter Six). Instead, notices were primarily intended to prompt 'behavioural change,' rather than act as a catalyst to eviction. Notices warned residents that their dealing had become too visible, providing them with an opportunity to make necessary adjustments. Eviction was only used as a last resort, for when things became 'unmanageable.' Simon described the process of eviction for suspected dealing, 'firstly, you give them a 28-day notice for suspicion of dealing, then on day 21 you discuss it and either rescind or evict. It's loosey goosey at times, they might quieten down for a bit, then you have to issue another 28-day notice.' The man who was recently evicted for dealing was not surprised about the eviction and continued to deal from the front garden, though was now 'much more low key about it,' meaning that it was less visible to staff (Fieldnotes, 08/09/21).

> Sophie reads the handover and says, 'last night was the worst night ever.' There were five major incidents resulting in three evictions this morning, two of which were on medical grounds. Shaun was evicted, as he had 'tried to hang himself three times' whilst detoxing from spice. Staff agreed that he should not have been released from hospital where he had two people watching him at any time, that the NHS were not taking responsibility, maybe because he was on drugs. Elijah affirms that Holbrook 'acted decisively' in evicting Shaun (Fieldnotes, 12/02/2020).

Following serious incidents, staff could evict residents instantly, without issuing any notices. This happened when residents had been particularly violent or threatening, in which case the decision was made in order to protect the other hostel members. However, the threshold of 'unmanageability' was high, so when Anthony held a knife up to the neck of another resident, this was only considered a 'possible eviction' and staff ultimately decided not to evict (Fieldnotes, 20/03/20). Decisions about whether to evict or not involved a careful balancing act, as Charlie alluded to above, and were often made collectively rather than in isolation.

Shaun was evicted on 'medical grounds,' as the threat of suicide which he posed was unmanageable, particularly during the night, when there were only two staff working. Shaun threatened to come back and kill Charlie and Adrian, the staff who evicted him, so staff and volunteers were warned not to let him into the building. However, the next day, I watched from the third-floor kitchen as Charlie and Shaun talked just beyond the hostel's gates. Within days, Shaun had moved back into Holbrook and bragged, 'they realised they can't kick me out for trying to kill myself' (Fieldnotes, 17/02/20).

The dawn of COVID-19 brought further grounds for eviction. In a phone call with Charlie, he said that two residents had tested positive for the virus, yet refused to isolate, meaning that staff had to evict. These individuals were 'picked up' by the local authority and placed in a flat together, though this was an 'imperfect' solution as they returned to Holbrook most days (Fieldnotes, 09/08/21). Staff later adapted their language in these cases from that of 'evictions' to 'temporary exclusions,' as aside from anything else, this distinction had implications for their KPIs (Fieldnotes, 08/08/21). Apparently, the first man was easy to evict

because he was 'blatantly' breaking the self-isolation rules, whilst the second was sneakier and pretended to isolate initially. In the end, he was partly evicted for his own safety, as other residents had threatened, 'if you don't sort it we're gonna beat him up badly' (Fieldnotes, 08/08/21). As staff could not enforce self-isolation guidelines, eviction was the only solution to a situation which could otherwise have become unmanageable.

Whilst evictions were uncommon, they still occurred when things became unmanageable. In many cases, the threat of eviction alone was enough to instigate change, even if that change only pertained to the visibility of behaviours, and the staff's contingent ability to 'not see' (as in Chapter Six). Threats of eviction were issued formally, through written notices, and informally, such as when Elijah warned Dean about his language in the opening extract. Although this was an empty threat, it was a stark reminder of the power which lurked in the background of institutional interactions (Bittner, 1967). This was a reminder that the staff team were gatekeepers, as they decided who would move on from Holbrook in a 'positive' way, and who would be removed.

Abandonments

Dean effectively 'got out' of Holbrook twice, firstly when he abandoned, and secondly, when he was moved into an extra care facility. Both times, he was doing what was best for himself in the circumstances, by removing himself from a situation in which he was being bullied and exploited, and yet the first move was classed as 'unplanned' (negative) whilst the second was 'planned' (positive) (McMordie, 2021a). With no prospect of a positive move, abandoning meant that Dean exerted what little control he had over his immediate situation at the time. Moreover, Dean and other 'abandoners' increased their informational preserve when they left the hostel in this way, as the staff often had little or no idea as to their whereabouts. This contrasted with planned moves, such as Dean's second move, which involved a heightened degree of information recording and sharing – in other words, 'hyper inclusion' (see Chapter Seven) within more systems, services, and databases.

Abandoners often left without a trace, with little or no clue as to where they may have gone and whether they would be back. The staff searched for signs and evidence of abandonment in their absence. Technically, residents abandoned when they did not use their rooms for

the requisite number of nights. During booking in, staff were keen to convey, 'if you're not using your room, we'll give it to someone else' (see Prologue). However, becoming an 'abandoner' was not as black and white as non-use of a room for a specified number of nights, as the staff team often determined abandonment *in situ*.

The 'not seen' list was a key resource in determining who was, and was not, using their room. Each morning, reception staff printed out a checklist of names and ticked residents off as they saw them. Staff on the late shift then knocked on the doors of the 'not seens,' and if residents were not in there, then a tally began. If they were not seen for a number of nights, then they were put on a notice, and if they did not show up, were recorded as abandoning, their possessions packed up and placed in the storage sheds.

However, the 'not seen list' was not foolproof. Residents sometimes showed their faces to gain a tick, whilst sleeping elsewhere. It often took old hands to pick up on these tricks – such as the resident who came back at 5am, or the one who 'popped in and out' without sleeping at the hostel – as neither circumstance constituted those residents 'using' their rooms. Staff issued or extended notices in these cases. Other signs of abandonment came from the staff encroaching upon the territories of residents (see Chapter Five). 'Overheard' conversations were a key resource. When one resident was not seen for a number of nights, a member of staff overheard that he was not coming back as he owed another resident £600 (Fieldnotes, 29/10/20). Of course, when she asked about this directly, the residents had refused to comment. Room inspections were another key resource. Staff needed only to knock twice on a door before entering with the master key. Once inside, they could assess the scene and look for signs. One day, staff found a clear case of abandonment – a bed which had not been slept in, a room which was suspiciously clean, and several unpacked boxes and bags (Fieldnotes, 22/04/21). In handovers, staff shared a bricolage of information whenever they speculated abandonment – 'his suitcases were out the other day,' 'he's being bullied, might've done a runner', 'he's struggling with his mental health, this place may not be right for him.' This information, taken together, resulted in the staff issuing the notice which was a prerequisite to abandonment.

Abandonment was not a foregone conclusion once a room lay vacant for a number of nights. Instead, the staff could exercise discretion in each situation, on the basis of the information which they acquired, for instance, from elsewhere in the 'institutional web.' When a resident was remanded in custody and awaited trial, staff decided against issuing a notice on 'ethical grounds,' as whilst he was technically not using his room, it was felt that booking him out was 'pre-empting that he will go into custody' (Fieldnotes, 06/05/21). This was not recorded as an abandonment, despite being past the technical point of abandonment. When another resident cropped up as 'not seen,' Olivia justified, 'he stays at his girlfriend's if he needs to get away' (Fieldnotes, 06/12/21). Holbrook's staff therefore determined who was an 'abandoner' and who simply needed 'respite,' on the basis of information available to them. Their 'hyper inclusion' within services and institutions afforded them some leeway and enabled them to keep their rooms. Whilst divulging such information may have enabled residents to keep their room, withholding it afforded them increased control over their informational preserve (Goffman, 1971).

Those moves which were recorded as 'abandonments' were potentially at odds with the actual circumstances of a move. Whilst abandoners may have procured the kinds of 'positive' moves intended by the pathway – such as living with family or a partner – a lack of information meant that individuals who left without a trace were recorded as abandoning by default. Furthermore, there were some situations in which staff were forced to record moves as abandonments, even where this was not the case. This happened when one resident moved into a caravan, as although this was his goal from the outset, the local council did not consider this move to be 'positive.' Despite challenging this decision, the managers at Holbrook were forced to record it as an abandonment (Fieldnotes, 14/10/2022). This further highlighted the moralising, and potentially discriminatory, underpinnings of so called 'positive' and 'negative' moves.

Prison

Most of Holbrook's residents had been to prison and back, some multiple times, as they cycled the 'institutional web' (see Chapter Five). Prison recall was always recorded as a 'negative' move regardless of the circumstances. Stanley was a paedophile whose freedom from prison was subject to multiple conditions. He could not live near schools or be around

children, and was only allowed one mobile phone, so that his communications could be tracked. Stanley knew that the staff knew about these conditions and would intentionally tell staff, 'I'm meeting Linda and her two kids today,' whilst leaving a second phone out on his bed for all to see. Charlie speculated, 'perhaps he's unable to change and wants to get caught, as a form of self-sabotage or self-management' (Fieldnotes, 06/12/21). He likened Stanley's case to recently released tapes of Jimmy Saville in which he was 'basically telling reporters what he was doing.' Several incidents resulted in Stanley being recalled to prison and Simon felt 'partially responsible,' having reported seeing Stanley in town, stroking a young girl's hair.

Shaun was also recalled to prison whilst at Holbrook. By the time of his arrest, he was a skeleton of a man, had attempted suicide multiple times, and lost someone dear to him on an almost weekly basis. Whilst I was not present for his arrest, staff recalled the circumstances with horror. Olivia said, 'he was jumped by the police, who tasered first and thought later.' The arrest was so aggressive that staff members tried to pull police officers off of him. Polly added, 'the whole event was traumatic for everyone, the reverberations are still being felt today' (Fieldnotes, 29/10/21). Whilst the tasering incident was a case of mistaken identity, Shaun was still in custody awaiting other charges. The following year, Shaun popped into the hostel, he was out of prison now and needed somewhere to stay. He wanted to move back to Holbrook. His face was now fuller and his movements less jittery. He said, 'I had to get out last time,' when he was down to 7 stone and getting into trouble, 'July 15th was the worst day of my life, I stabbed three kiddies, and the blood trail led the police back here' (Fieldnotes, 06/05/21). Shaun did not move back in, though I sometimes saw him around, collecting medication or attending health appointments. He was no longer the erratic, impulsive man I met at the start of my fieldwork. Although the circumstances of his arrest were clearly traumatic, and the move was recorded negatively in the KPIs, the act of simply 'getting out' of Holbrook seemed to have had a positive impact on Shaun in the long-term.

Moving back

> I'd been undertaking fieldwork on and off for 16 months when the chef asks, 'what do you do?' I tell him about my research, that I was interested in why some people

> struggle to move out of here. He says, 'people have to fend for themselves, and they can't do that, they've been in prison and here, so when they get their own flat, they come back.' They struggle with cooking too (Fieldnotes, 25/05/21).

As a level one hostel, Holbrook House frequently accepted individuals who had moved up the pathway, failed, and were consequently sent 'back down.' Poor mental health, substance use, and the inability to do those 'taken-for-granted' things discussed above were all precursors to moves back down the pathway. Hostel members frequently recognised the 'new' referrals, greeting them with warm welcomes or muttering snide comments (see Chapter Five). Movements in this direction ran against the intended flow of travel, however, as with institutionalised cycling, there was no official measure for moves back down the pathway. In some instances, it was difficult for staff to judge whether a resident would be able to cope with a reduction in support, and capable of maintaining their own room in a shared house or self-contained flat further up the pathway. Whilst staff at Holbrook were as transparent as possible, individuals' behaviours could change quite radically when they moved between levels, particularly if they had to 'manage their own front door.' Staff at Holbrook sometimes faced backlash from other service providers when this occurred. According to Elijah, the pathway manager justified this by likening level one hostels to living with mum and dad, whilst other levels were akin to going to college, 'you suddenly have all this freedom and haven't got the watchful eye of support staff, so that's where issues occur, and things come unstuck' (Interview with Elijah).

In these instances, individuals were moved back down the pathway. However, Roger criticised the tendency of service providers to send individuals who 'messed up' straight back to level one, even if they had made it all the way to level four. Roger felt that this did not give individuals 'credit' and was a disproportionate response to a 'bit of a slip up,' given that they effectively had to start again from the beginning (Interview with Roger). Jackson likened this phenomenon to a 'housing version of Snakes and Ladders – possible to go up and also very easy to slide down' (2015: 106). When individuals were moved up the pathway, despite clearly not being 'ready' – such as the 'long stayers' mentioned above – a flow of bodies back down the pathway was therefore inevitable.

In these situations, failure was built into the pathway structure, yet these structural shortcomings were reconstructed as personal failures, the official reason for a move being substance use or poor mental health, for instance. Instead of seeing the sudden drop in support as a structural failure – the kind which Fred described above, in his account of a level three service – the individuals themselves were blamed, even when these moves were involuntary in the first place. This reframing was facilitated by the 'rugged individualism' which underscored the pathway's resocialisation perspective (Bourgois and Schonberg, 2009: 197).

When I asked Charlie about housing-first, he felt that it was a good option for those who 'fell through the gaps,' who would never be ready for level two but also did not meet the criteria for adult social care. Charlie raised the case of an ex-resident who had been 'going around the system' for over 14 years, he was interested in sex and drugs and made no 'changes,' so 'just went around and around.' He said, 'it's not a cycle but a hamster wheel,' and noted that this was difficult for service providers too (Fieldnotes, 06/12/21).

This inbuilt failure extended to the broader institutional web. Movements between detox facilities and the pathway provided one example. When it came to detox, 'the detox centre may factor this kind of failure in when deciding who to accept,' for instance, they may refuse someone a place for the sixth time (Fieldnotes, 06/12/21). However, if newly-clean individuals were placed into hostels or house shares comprised of active drug users, then relapse and 'failure' were hardly surprising. Fred experienced this, after first 'getting clean' in prison, though somehow managed to resist the urge to use. Others were not as resolute as Fred, Joey for example, went back to using soon after the brief period of sobriety he experienced after starting his monthly Buvidal injections (see Chapter Seven). Given that other residents actively encouraged relapse, by tempting him with free drugs for instance, it was inevitable that at some point he would 'fail.' It was very difficult to detox or stay sober within 'this place,' or places like this, as relapse was effectively built into the interaction order of the hostel. In these instances, Bourgeois and Schonberg found that drug users were set up, 'for a predictable failure, condemning them to a cycle of self-blame and triumphant, self-destructive oppositionality' (2009: 302).

Individuals were set up to fail and then blamed for failing, as they moved either up the pathway or around the institutional web (Graeber, 2015). The staff at Holbrook appreciated that there were only so many times individuals could be knocked back before they internalised these 'failures' and eventually lost hope. Further, this over-emphasis on individual failings overstated the parameters of agency and failed to account for barriers at the level of interaction, in which situations compelled individuals – like Joey – to act in a certain way, thereby ensuring their 'failure.'

'They come round and round in circles': Being stuck in the web

> A young guy with olive skin and a slight shake asks, 'what are you doing here?' I tell him I'm researching 'the barriers to moving on.' His response is quick and emphatic, 'people just wallow here, with all the systems and procedures. I've been waiting over a year for an inpatient detox, they put me in here because I was sleeping on the street. They just push you from one place to another.' Staff have made four detox referrals to different places, but he is still 'stuck' here. (Fieldnotes, 09/01/21).

When residents did not display the kinds of progress needed for a positive move, and did nothing to warrant a negative move, they became stuck at Holbrook, at least until they fell into the category of 'long stayer.' It was felt that some individuals were at ease with their current circumstance – which facilitated day-long drinking, for example – and therefore did not want to make the prescriptive changes required by the pathway. Those who could not, or did not, want to change, and lacked available move on options, were sometimes described by staff as being 'unpathwayable.' These individuals ended up going around and around the system as a result, indefinitely cycling the institutional web. Others moved back and forth between the pathway and other institutions, such as prison, mental health hospitals, and detox facilities.

Staff felt that if residents did not recognise the need to change, and did not 'play the game,' then this acted as a key barrier to move on. Of course, this situation was not as straightforward as simply making change. Lincoln wanted to get out and shared his plans for doing so – 'got to engage to get out' – though moments later, an individual who was suspected of dealing passed by and said, 'Lincoln, come here,' so Lincoln followed him

dutifully down the corridor and out of sight (Fieldnotes, 19/11/21). Many individuals expressed this desire to 'get out,' though were compelled by situations to engage in behaviours which directly contravened the predicators of move on readiness. When residents used normality as an outside frame of reference, it was one thing to talk being ordinary (as Lincoln and others often did), and quite another to do being ordinary (which they often failed to do). This harks back to the 'normal goals' held by residents, as detailed in Chapter Seven.

Given that barriers to moving on were built into the interaction order of the hostel in this way, it was no wonder that residents became stuck and struggled to move on. Presuming the other institutions operated in a similar manner, it was no wonder that individuals seemed to indefinitely cycle the institutional web. Whilst the pathway idealised movements up and out, more often than not individuals found themselves moving around and around.

Residents accounted for their own immobility by blaming 'this place,' 'the system,' or 'the council' (see Chapter Five). Residents often felt that 'the system' was self-justifying as, 'it keeps the middle-class wealthy' (Fieldnotes, 18/09/21), another accused the local council of racism, 'they keep blocking me, the process is not transparent' (Fieldnotes, 20/02/20).

> Eventually people were saying, are you still here? Why are you still here? And then everybody started to think that I had a secret drug problem because I was still there. They were like, clearly there's something you're not telling us, you must have some problem, a secret drinker or addicted to painkillers. And I'm like no, nothing! (Interview with Fred).

When making sense of others becoming stuck, hostel members often interpreted immobility as evidence that something must be wrong with them, an interactional instance of the 'rugged individualism' touched on above. Fred experienced this when he became stuck at the hostel for five months, despite not using drugs, and having relatively low support needs. His immobility was taken as evidence that there must be something wrong with him, secret consumption perhaps. In actuality, he was on the list of nominations and had been for several months. He raised this with his support worker but felt that there was 'always some excuse popping up' or that she was 'blaming it on someone else in the chain' by saying

things like, ‘the process isn't as fast as you think’ (Interview with Fred). Although Fred refuted that he was stuck at Holbrook due to secret consumption, he nonetheless applied this same logic to others, who found themselves similarly stuck.

> Stanley has been at Holbrook for one year and maintains, ‘I’m not a druggie and not an alcoholic.’ Fred suggests that I speak to Stanley about becoming stuck, ‘he’s got no addiction… that I know of anyway’ (Fieldnotes, 25/02/20).

Hostel members were quick to conflate immobility with drug or alcohol use. Whilst reduction was a key indicator of move on readiness, continued or increased use was a common reason underlying immobility. In reality, Stanley became stuck because there was so much red tape surrounding the moves of paedophiles – they could not live with people who had children, their internet access had to be monitored, and they could not live near schools. This ruled out much of the pathway’s accommodation. One support worker commented, ‘he’s very independent, manages his finances, pretty much does everything on his own, but we just can't find anywhere that will take him given his history’ (Interview with Bernie). It could be dangerous for Stanley if others started to probe the reasons for his immobility. Perhaps this was why he kept up the charade that he was not paying his service charge (see Chapter Five), as at least this provided a logical rationale for becoming stuck.

The moralisation of movement

From an ideological perspective, the homelessness pathway was premised on the treatment-first model of housing. This equated positive movement with forward motion, ‘through’ and eventually ‘out’ of the pathway in a ‘planned’ way, whilst negative moves were those ‘back down’ the pathway as well as ‘unplanned’ moves out of the pathway, such as evictions, abandonments and prison recall. These movements – up and down the pathway, and around the institutional web – were couched in value-laden spatial vocabulary which contrasted ‘steps forward’ with ‘slips backwards’ (Hall and Smith, 2013; Hall, 2016), whilst notions such as ‘housing readiness’ effectively reproduced longstanding distinctions between ‘the deserving’ and ‘the undeserving’ (Sahlin, 2005).

Movement was effectively moralised, as each move was cast as either good or bad. However, these moral judgements, and the KPIs underlying them, were sometimes at odds with the actual circumstances of a move. For example, Jared's move to an extra-care facility, whilst recorded as 'positive,' was the result of burden shuffling, with the problems he caused Holbrook being offloaded onto another institution. Furthermore, Dean's abandonment was recorded as 'negative,' though enabled him to 'get out' of Holbrook and remove himself from a situation in which he was being bullied and robbed. Therefore, whilst 'moving on' was the ideal, there were instances in which residents simply needed to 'get out' by any means necessary.

Given that within society 'mobility trumps stasis' (Hall and Smith, 2013: 276), becoming 'stuck' at Holbrook was perceived negatively, at both an institutional and situational level. At a situational level, members pondered the reasons for individuals becoming stuck at a place like this, implying that they must have something wrong with them, which in itself had implications for the institutional self (see Chapter Seven). At an institutional level, Holbrook and other accommodation providers were encouraged to move people on before they became 'long stayers.' This meant that one way or another, residents moved on from Holbrook House. However, individuals like Dean, who had been stuck in the web of institutions for years and years, wanted nothing more than to simply stay still. For them, stasis was the ultimate goal (Jackson, 2015). Perhaps immobility should be recognised 'on its own terms as something other than the absence or tethering of movement' (Hall and Smith, 2013: 288).

Movement for movement's sake resulted in a particular kind of mobility, as individuals circled around and around the institutional web. Ironically, this cyclical motion was a far cry from the linearity intended by the treatment-first model of housing. Jackson described this phenomenon, of constantly moving without really going anywhere, as being 'fixed in mobility' (2015: 5). Individuals consequently became stuck, not within the confines of a particular institution, but in this state of perpetual movement (Mahoney, 2019). This practice of mobility was a form of poverty regulation, as it ensured that individuals were hyper included within systems, contained within institutions, and less visible to the rest of

society (Seim, 2017). Many of the individuals who cycled the institutional web were therefore caught in limbo, in the form of a perpetual state of movement (Garvie et al, 2023).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how bureaucratic utopias – such as the homelessness pathway and other people-processing institutions – are often incompatible with the imperfect and unpredictable nature of humans (Graeber, 2015: 48-9). It achieved this by contrasting the pathway and its KPIs with the lived experiences of hostel members. It opened by contrasting different ways of talking about exits from the hostel – 'moving on' was rooted in the official language of the pathway, whilst 'getting out' was commonly used by members. These differences in rhetoric reflected the different understandings of 'this place' which were detailed in Chapter Five, namely the official version and the members' version. It then criticised the use of KPIs as institutional measures of success on several grounds, including: the reduction of humans to numbers; the short-sightedness of the measures themselves, which failed to account for 'moves back' and 'institutionalised cycling'; and the intentional removal of the carrot, i.e., social housing, from the end of the pathway.

The chapter then considered the mechanics of a positive 'move on,' by following the journeys of Dylan and Dean as they both made it out of the hostel in a 'positive' way. In doing so, it returned to the idea of 'change' or 'progress' which was first introduced in Chapter Five, in order to consider how residents at Holbrook became 'ready' to move on. There were two important points made about the 'move on ready' status. Firstly, in the absence of clear-cut criteria regarding 'move on,' the staff were responsible for deciding when individuals were ready for a move, and when they were not. In this sense, 'move on' was another example of staff discretion (as detailed in Chapter Six), as they were the gatekeepers to the pathway. Secondly, the visibility and recordability of 'change' was more important than the change itself, given that the process of moving somebody on centred on the completion of a form, and was essentially a tick-box exercise. The need to make visible and evidencable 'progress' in order to move on from the hostel was encapsulated by the idea that you must 'play the game to get out.' This phrase could also be used to justify why residents behaved in a certain way, when signs of engagement or compliance became visible to others.

This chapter contrasted the movement intended by the pathway (the linear, forward-facing movement, contained within pathway's aims and evident in its KPIs) with the actual movements of individuals around the institutional web (a circular motion as they bounced from one place to the next) (see Chapter Five). It paid particular attention to moralising distinctions made between 'positive' and 'negative' moves, whilst highlighting that the actual circumstances surrounding moves did not necessarily reflect those labels. On the one hand, some individuals attained moves which were recorded as 'positive' because staff simply needed to get them out of the hostel, as was the case with troublesome residents and 'long stayers.' On the other, some individuals' moves were recorded as 'negative,' although in the circumstances it may have been the best option available to them, such as Dean's abandonment (McMordie, 2021a). It also noted that whilst 'stasis' is often conceived of negatively, for those who had been cycling the institutional web their whole lives, immobility had become the goal. Those who are fed up with endless movement perhaps already do recognise immobility 'on its own terms' (Hall and Smith, 2013: 288).

The discord between the pathway's bureaucratic measures of success and movement around the institutional web was particularly evident when it came to 'burden shuffling' i.e., the unloading of 'undesirable work onto others' (Seim, 2017: 452). Burden shuffling was built into the institutional web, as not only did Holbrook offload some of its troublesome residents elsewhere, but it received plenty of troublesome individuals from other institutions. Burden shuffling was tantamount to 'institutionalised cycling' (DeVerteuil, 2003: 361) as these were often the individuals who ended up going around and around the institutional web, having become 'fixed in mobility' (Jackson, 2015: 5). Yet the KPIs told a very different tale, as this offloading of problematic residents to some other place within the web was recordable as a 'positive' move. It did not matter if they returned, or became eternally caught up in the web, because for the purpose of the pathway and its KPIs at least, this kind of cyclical movement was not measured. The pathway effectively rendered invisible these 'institutional measures of failure.'

This chapter was peppered with examples which suggested that the pathway itself acted as a barrier to move on. Both Megan and Paul described how some barriers to move on were purely bureaucratic, and could be as minor as an incorrectly filled form, yet the

consequences of this were significant for the individual who became stuck at Holbrook. Further, from a pathway perspective, it was almost inconsequential if residents made any ‘real' change, if the staff did not know about it, as they could not record it as evidence of readiness to move on. This was the case with Pablo in Chapter Seven. Moreover, this chapter appreciated how the pathway ideology, with its normative underpinnings, had become ingrained in individuals like Paul, and haunted them long after they had physically left the pathway, potentially acting as a barrier in their day-to-day lives.

This chapter has come full circle to answer the original research question – what it is about ‘this place’ which prevents residents from getting out of it? Chapter Nine will draw together some of the key concepts underlying this thesis, which when taken together offer a complex understanding of the institutional web and its inherent stickiness. These concepts are interaction order phenomena which have been grounded in hostel-based interactions and are applicable to a diverse array of similar institutions.

Chapter Nine: Discussion

This thesis reported on findings from an ethnographic study into the everyday experiences of members of Holbrook House. The aim of this research was to understand the barriers to exiting homelessness from inside a homeless hostel, by simply asking, what is it about 'this place' that prevents people from getting out of it? This study's key contribution to knowledge is that the barriers to exiting homeless hostels, and similar places, are rooted within the interaction orders of institutions. The rich and nuanced understandings presented within this thesis were only attainable by entering the setting and observing interactions within it, in other words by adopting an ethnographic and interactionist approach to the topic of study. Moreover, by focusing on the interaction order of an institution, it becomes possible not only to comprehend the enduring nature of institutional life, even as members, settings, and structures may change, but also to extract and apply aspects of this order to similar settings. As each of the key themes and concepts developed within thesis are interaction order phenomena, they may be applicable to a broad range of institutions, including Home Office Hotels and other places within the 'institutional web.' It is likely that 'these places' are also understood differently at different levels (Chapter Five), that staff within them face 'ordinary institutional troubles' together with discretionary practices of dealing with them (Chapter Six), that each has its own situated version of normality which clashes with normativity (Chapter Seven), and that 'getting out' of them is never straightforward (Chapter Eight). What I have described across the thesis is how so called 'structural' barriers which prevent individual 'agents' from following positive pathways out of homelessness, actually exist in the interaction order of the institution.

This study also provides a social commentary on how we, as a society, manage the so-called 'problem-populations' with whom our institutions are filled, and the implications thereof. These 'made up' groups are problematic because they are out of place, and as such we do not know what to do with them (Hacking, 1986: 186). As such, there has been a longstanding propensity to manage them through spatial segregation and institutional containment (Evans and DeVerteuil, 2018). In this way, contemporary institutions are modern iterations of the former poorhouses or workhouses, used to contain certain populations and render them less visible (Webb and Webb, 1927; Kinsella, 2011). It also

considers the 'looping effect' (Hacking, 2007: 286) of being seen as a member of an institution, primarily through the study of stigma and the 'institutional self' which membership implies (Goffman, 1961). However, this study offers a more sophisticated and complex understanding of stigma by illustrating how stigma is both attributed and negotiated *in situ* (Long and Jepsen, 2023). Whilst being labelled 'a junkie' may be stigmatising in many situations, it often confirms the ordinariness of hostel members. Conversely, being 'too clean' – in all senses of the word – was often (but not always) a marker of abnormality within this context (see Chapter Eight). The arguments in this thesis support Goffman's assertion that the study of stigma requires 'a language of relationships, not attributes' (1963a: 3). Whilst this study is subject to certain limitations – such as the time-restricted nature of the fieldwork and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection – it nonetheless makes modest theoretical, methodological, and substantive contributions to the existing knowledge.

Summary of research findings

The reader may recall Kathryn Kelloway's Twitter demands in Chapter One to 'tear down these tents,' as she wants them 'in rooms, not in tents.' These sentiments position those experiencing homelessness as problematic on the basis of their mere visibility (Belcher and DeForge, 2012), whilst homeless hostels are then proposed as a spatial solution to manage this unsightly problem (Greene, 2014; Evans and DeVerteuil, 2018). In short, hostels are one place used to render this particular problem less visible.

The theme of visibility (and invisibility) has been recurrent and niggling, cropping up repeatedly throughout the research process, and is now one which suitably encapsulates the multiple contributions made by this thesis. Chapters One and Two explore the above problematisation in greater depth, by contemplating how certain populations are deemed problematic on the basis of their visibility, whilst shedding light on the UK government's propensity to contain such groups within institutions as a solution. Chapter Two criticises concepts of homelessness pathways and careers as the primary means for understanding barriers to exiting homelessness for being too ambiguous, over-reliant on interview data, adopting discourses which suggests choice, and the macro-micro dichotomy of barriers (Ravenhill, 2003; Somerville, 2013; Stewart, 2019). Academics are becoming increasingly

aware that the macro-level and micro-level interact in complex ways, yet they have struggled to fully reconcile the two (Barrett et al, 2010; Sample and Ferguson, 2020). This thesis seeks, in part, to address this gap in the academic literature, by looking at the problem from a different vantage point. In doing so, this chapter locates the homeless hostel alongside a range of other intermediary institutions which have historically hidden away social problems. It argues that within the modern iteration of the 'institutional web,' including treatment-first housing, invisibility is achieved through forced and continual mobility.

Chapters Three and Four offer new ways of 'looking' at and 'seeing' the issues surrounding barriers to exiting homelessness, by adopting interactionist (Chapter Three) and ethnographic (Chapter Four) approaches to the topic (Wolcott, 1999: 41). These theoretical and methodological standpoints are uncommon in the existing literature on housing and homelessness, though offer insights which elude the approaches commonly adopted within these fields (Somerville, 2013; Hoolachan, 2016). Goffman's interactionist approach shows researchers that barriers to exiting homelessness do not exist at the micro-level or macro-level, but at the level of interaction, stemming from the interaction orders of homeless hostels and other institutions (Goffman, 1983). The ethnographic approach taken enables researchers to enter and observe places used to contain and conceal populations, whilst allowing them to 'see' from the perspectives of those being studied (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; LeCompte and Schensul, 2010; Asare, 2015). Together, these complementary theoretical and methodological standpoints have allowed the researcher to see what it is about 'this place' that prevents individuals from getting out of it.

Chapter Five probes the purpose of 'this place' and makes visible the different understandings of place. 'The pathway' arguably represents the official version of this place, and includes KPIs, which are sometimes invoked as a resource in interactions, such as in deciding whether or not to give a room to a troublesome individual. Yet this official version, which foregrounds movement (i.e., people-processing), contrasts with Holbrook's aim of 'aiding clients to create a new sense of self' (i.e., people-changing). Holbrook's ethos is disregarded in favour of targets, due to policies which position places like Holbrook as 'repositories of staff, buildings and resources' (Johnsen, 2014: 414), commissioning them as

'partner' agencies, and applying strict performance targets (Cloke et al, 2010). This conflict exacerbates the intermediary nature of homeless hostels, as they are pulled in multiple directions by different parties (Seim, 2017), which can cause tensions and confusion about the purpose of 'this place' (Jackson, 2015; Seim, 2017). 'This place' is used by residents in interactions as a placeholder for the various problems which they experience, often as a result of their reduced ability to maintain distance within it, resulting in a series of territorial violations (Goffman, 1956; 1971). These violations are interaction order phenomena. 'This place' is also often used by residents to account for present circumstance, including as a reason for being stuck in this place. 'The institutional web' is a key analytic concept (discussed below), which is made visible through the observation of hostel-based interactions. The institutional web locates the hostel amongst a broader web of institutions and services, which individuals continually cycle as they become stuck in the web (DeVerteuil, 2003; Jackson, 2015; Seim, 2017; Mahoney, 2019).

Chapter Six centres on the staff's experiences of hostel life. This perspective is often neglected, and therefore invisible, within the existing literature on homeless hostels. Faced with grumbles that the 'staff do nothing,' it highlights the 'ordinary institutional troubles' which the staff team experience, including understaffing, overburdening, and bureaucratic demands. It then explores how discretion enables staff to manage multiple, sometimes competing demands, and in doing so, introduces the concepts of 'learning to see' and 'learning not to see,' in other words, learning when to intervene and when to turn a blind eye. This practice is often premised on the visibility of behaviours, rather than the behaviours themselves, for instance, individuals may not be reprimanded for dealing if they are discreet about it. However, if their dealing causes disruption and becomes too visible, then the staff team find it increasingly difficult to practice not seeing and must respond, not only to keep matters under control, but as they must be seen to respond by the other hostel members (Bittner, 1967; Sacks, 1972). It concludes with the common frustration – 'what do you want us to do?' – which speaks to the enduring nature of the territorial violations in places like this, and the staff team's inability to do anything about them.

Chapter Seven illustrates the different and competing understandings of normality which are at play within the hostel, and the tensions between them. It first considers what 'doing

being ordinary' at Holbrook House looks like, by taking a situated approach to normality and focusing on the use and supply of drugs and alcohol. Examples show how 'normality' and 'abnormality' are not predetermined but are decided *in situ*. This attests to Goffman's (1963a) assertion that stigma ought to invoke the language of relationships and not attributes. Moreover, it considers how normativity nonetheless lurks in the background of hostel-based interactions, by using examples of work and money-making, addiction substitutes and services, and the ability to withhold money and information. It concludes by considering the stigma of 'being seen' as a member of a place like this, as well as three situated stigma-management strategies, namely invoking alternate identities, 'wilful disattention' (Smith, 2011: 371), and distancing through 'hierarchies of stigma.'

Chapter Eight examines how residents 'get out' of Holbrook House. It illustrates a disconnect between the ideality of 'the pathway' model and actuality of moves as experienced by residents, with the former being linear and the latter often circular. This discrepancy reflects differential understandings of 'this place' from the perspective of 'the pathway' and the 'institutional web,' as is dealt with in Chapter Five. It highlights a further disconnect, between the recordability of a move (as positive or negative) and the way that move is experienced. In theory, 'positive' moves happen when a resident is 'ready' to move on and their support worker consequently nominates them for a move. However, my observations suggest that this is not always the case. Residents frequently 'play the game' – and are sometimes encouraged by staff to play the game – which entails giving off the impression that they are ready for a move, despite discreetly engaging in behaviours to the contrary, such as 'secret consumption' (Goffman, 1959: 42). Further, some moves which are recorded as 'positive' are no more than a form of 'burden shuffling,' as one institution offloads troublesome individuals onto another. Even where positive moves are attained, institutional living has a lasting impact on those contained within them. On the contrary, despite being recorded as 'negative,' evictions, abandonments, and prison recall are not always experienced that way. Finally, it critiques the pathway's institutional measures of success, as whilst the KPIs measure movement 'up' and 'out' of the pathway, there are no formal measures for moves 'down' the pathway or 'around' the institutional web. These 'institutional measures of failure' are therefore invisible within the official statistics, despite being commonplace. Both the pathways literature and local homelessness pathways

oversimplify exits from homelessness in this way, failing to account for the often-cyclical nature of homelessness (Ravenhill, 2003; Somerville, 2013).

With these brief chapter summaries in mind, the next section will draw upon four of the key concepts which underlie this thesis – namely, 'hyper inclusion', 'the institutional web', 'learning to see' and 'learning not to see', and conflicts between 'getting by' and 'getting out' – as not only are they important within the context of the present study, but they can further our knowledge and understanding of institutions more broadly. In essence, they can help researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and so on, to see institutions – and the social problems they were designed to 'solve' – in a different way.

Social exclusion through 'hyper inclusion'

The discourse of 'social exclusion' links together multiple societal problems, including unemployment, inadequate housing, high crime rates, health issues, and family breakdown (Social Exclusion Unit, 1997). It has consequently been criticised for its moralising undertones, which create divisions between 'recipients of stigma from the wider world of respectable citizens' (Young, 2007: 17), such as the normative positioning of the 'socially excluded' in relation to the 'integrated individual' (Munck, 2005: 23). This thesis similarly criticises the concept of 'social exclusion,' albeit from a different vantage point.

It is difficult to say that the individuals and groups to whom this thesis applies are 'socially excluded' from society. Probation appointments, curfews, keyworking sessions, methadone pickups, jobcentre meetings, depot injections, hospital appointments, immigration applications, and mental health assessments are just some of the ways in which institutionalised individuals are not only included, but are 'hyper included' within our society. The concept of 'hyper inclusion' applies to individuals or groups who are plugged into multiple bureaucracies and forced to routinely engage with any number of services. They find that they must frequently share their details, tell their stories, endure treatments, take medication, meet with service providers, and ultimately prove themselves in some respect (Lipsky, 2010; Graeber, 2015). Hostel members must learn to play multiple bureaucratic games, such as when Emran and Megan navigated the asylum system in Chapter Three, and Olivia and Dean the care home system in Chapter Eight.

The Prologue exemplifies the act of hyper inclusion, by detailing the booking in process and shedding light on the kinds of bureaucratic information needed to 'trim' individuals so that they can be contained within the walls and databases of an institution (Goffman, 1961: 16). This excerpt not only illustrates the great deal of personal, intimate, and potentially discrediting information which is collected by services and contained within their databases, but also the interlinking of information across bureaucracies, pertaining to benefits, criminal convictions, mental and physical health, and prior institutionalisation. Moreover, once this information is acquired, and the form regarding information sharing is signed (though seldom read), staff members are free to share these details with others, beyond the walls of the institution. These individuals will continue to exist in files and databases, even after they themselves pass away.

Crucially, this thesis argues that individuals become excluded through their 'hyper inclusion' within the array of bureaucratic services which make up the institutional web, as opposed to their social exclusion. This turns Evans' argument – that individuals are 'included through their exclusion' (2011: 31) – on its head, by arguing that individuals simultaneously become excluded through their inclusion. Chapter Seven illustrates the nuances and subtleties inherent to exclusion through inclusion, most notably through the conversation between Joey and Pablo, which sheds light on three 'institutionally-backed abnormalities' which are commonly experienced by those contained within institutions.

Firstly, when it comes to money-making, members of certain institutions are actively discouraged from working, as without benefits payments, the cost of accommodation would likely become unaffordable. They are therefore included within the benefits system and must comply with its bureaucratic demands or face financial penalties. Nonetheless, as individuals need to make money somehow – given that benefits payments alone do not stretch far enough – they must resort to illegal or degrading forms of money-making, including shoplifting, begging, and theft. A lack of routine and feelings of boredom create more space for the consumption of alcohol and drugs, which must be paid for somehow. It is easy to see how the routines of institutionalised individuals often revolve around making money and procuring drugs. Secondly, it is not uncommon for institutionalised individuals to be included within an array of support services, such as drug and alcohol services. Those on

a daily Methadone pickup are hyper included within the service on paper and in person, as they are required to visit the same pharmacy each and every day. The forced anchoring of individuals in this way means that they are unable to leave the area to do things like visit family or go on holiday. Thirdly, those contained within institutions are less able to express distance, in terms of reduced privacy and territorial control, as distance comes at a cost (Goffman, 1971). When Pablo keeps details of his engagement with drug and alcohol services from staff, he increases control over his informational preserve (see Chapter Five), though potentially hampers his ability to move on from the hostel, as movement hinges on this kind of bureaucratic evidence of 'readiness' to move. From this perspective, individuals may feel compelled to divulge information about themselves or face the consequences of non-engagement.

The irony is that whilst services and institutions may aim to 'normalise' individuals, their 'hyper inclusion' within them actively inhibits their ability to lead 'normal' lives and may conversely provoke 'abnormal' reactions (Becker, 2018). Within institutions, members are encouraged to become 'normal' – in order to progress, recover, reform, or whatever the institution's particular goal is – yet everything about institutional life promotes the relative 'abnormality' of those within it, thereby reinforcing inmates' inability to meet normative demands. As Becker states, 'the treatment of deviants denies them the ordinary means of carrying on the routines of everyday life open to most people' (2018: 35).

Whilst the consequences of hyper inclusion may differ slightly from one institution to the next, through varying 'institutionally-backed abnormalities,' the point is that members of institutions may be compelled to do things, divulge information, or comply in ways that would make most people feel uncomfortable. These institutionally-backed abnormalities are interaction order phenomena and are evident through the observation of hostel-based interactions. Those mentioned above have become so deeply rooted within the interaction order of Holbrook House that they are largely taken-for-granted by its members and are considered to be a natural aspect of hostel life.

Getting stuck in the 'institutional web'

Bodies flow from hostels, to prisons, to the streets, to detox facilities, and back again, in a cyclical motion as they go around and around in circles – on a 'hamster wheel' as one informant describes in Chapter Eight. Movements may vary, as some individuals bounce back and forth between two institutions, whilst others may cycle a broader range of institutions. This kind of cyclical mobility is observable in interactions, such as booking in processes where individuals must declare time spent in other institutions (Prologue), conversations which hint at previous institutional points of contact (Chapter Five), and scenarios in which people move, or are forcibly removed, ready for the next place (Chapter Eight). Many individuals come from one institution and will soon be destined for another, often with very little say in the matter – 'it was either move here or back to the streets' (Chapter Five).

The institutional web exists in interactions and is made up of a multitude of institutions and services, including homeless hostels, care homes, detox centres, prisons, hospitals, and mental health facilities – all of which have been referred to at some point throughout this thesis. Each of these institutions aims to somehow 'treat' those it contains, namely a population which may be constructed varyingly as too visible, transient, dangerous, culpable, needy, or vulnerable (Takahashi, 1997; Hodgetts et al, 2006; DeVerteuil, May and von Mahs, 2009; Garland et al, 2010; Kinsella, 2012; Bevan, 2021; Devereux, 2021). However, as each of the institutions within the web tend only to offer temporary residency, individuals may find that they are pushed from one place to the next. In consequence, those contained within a particular institution may be better off elsewhere, yet are offered residency on the basis of limited space within, or the unaffordability of, other institutions (Goffman, 1961: 354). The institutional web also includes broader systems and services – relating to welfare benefits, housing, healthcare, and immigration – the kinds of bureaucracies within which individuals are 'hyper included.'

Whilst other academics similarly describe poverty management landscapes as a network of services and institutions – using concepts such as 'service hub', 'homeless network', or 'institutional bricolage' (Lowndes and McCaughie, 2013; Jackson, 2015; DeVerteuil et al, 2022) – the 'institutional web' encourages readers to think about interconnectivity between

places, struggles to get out of them, and the ultimate stickiness of the web, which can engulf those who make contact with it. The gluiness of the web is most apparent from the perspective of movement around it, as individuals become caught in a perpetual state of motion without getting anywhere, essentially becoming fixed in mobility (Jackson, 2015).

An appreciation of situated mobilities (and immobilities) helps reintroduce some of the messiness and complexity into our understanding of institutional exits, as well as barriers to such exits. Situated understandings enable us to see why individuals become stuck in the web and how these barriers exist at the level of interaction, as contradictions between programme aims and actual outcomes, the need for all members to 'play the game,' and the tensions between 'getting by' and 'getting out' all contribute to individuals becoming fixed in mobility. Contradictions between aims and outcomes, and this idea of playing the game, will be considered here briefly, whilst tensions between 'getting by' and 'getting out' will be returned to below.

As has been demonstrated, there is often a mismatch between the aims of an institution and what it is actually capable of achieving (Goffman, 1961; Dordick, 2002; Sahlin, 2005; Jackson, 2015). Whilst treatment-first models of housing aim to move people 'through' and 'on' in direction which implies progress (Hall, 2016), the numerous troubles faced by the institution and its members, which are detailed throughout this thesis, often result in movements 'down' or 'back,' or a state of immobility, all the while moralising such movements. Chapter Eight explores how 'negative' moves, often conceived of as personal failures, are built into the pathway structure. For example, 'long stayers' are forced to move on by virtue of their overstay, even if they are bound to struggle and fail at the next level, then return to Holbrook anyway. Significantly, there are no formal measures of such institutional failings, as 'moves back' down the pathway and 'institutionalised cycling' are omitted from the KPIs. It is likely that other institutions within the web similarly set individuals up to fail, blame them for failing, and then fail to record it (Graeber, 2015). This suggests that not only is the institutional web inherently sticky, but that its stickiness is largely hidden.

Knowing that the system is flawed and that institutions do not necessarily achieve what they set out to, members must instead learn to 'play the game.' This applies to both inmates and staff. In order to 'move on' in a positive way, inmates learn the importance of displaying visible signs of improvement, which can be used as evidence of 'readiness' to move on. They learn the rules of this bureaucratic game – 'I'm gonna go to my support sessions, do the activities, and see my probation worker' (Lincoln in Chapter Eight) – which is a form of institutionalisation in itself (Somerville, 2013; Graeber, 2015). If they do not play the game, by failing to provide visible and recordable evidence of progress, then they become stuck. The staff recognise this as a key barrier to move on and therefore encourage game playing in certain situations. When inmates blame immobility on 'this place,' this may be interpreted by staff as further evidence that they are not taking responsibility and are therefore not ready to move on (see Chapter Five).

The staff team must play the game too. At an institutional level, 'move on' allows them to meet their KPIs, whilst at a situational level the removal of difficult individuals makes work slightly easier. Despite their motives for being in supportive roles – of wanting to change lives or make a difference – the interaction orders of institutions may compel staff to perpetuate 'institutionalised cycling,' i.e., the movement of disruptive populations across a 'diverse array of unrelated, time-limited settings' (DeVerteuil, 2003: 361). Staff may therefore move particularly disruptive individuals somewhere else in the web via 'burden shuffling,' which is the offloading of 'undesirable work' onto another institution (Seim, 2017: 452). Chapter Eight explores how staff are on the giving and receiving end of burden shuffling, as they offload Jared, an aggressive drug dealer, onto a care home, though accept a man whose mental health issues far exceed their capacity. It is unsurprising that burden shuffling is endemic to the institutional web, given the array of ordinary institutional troubles faced by staff in these places (see Chapter Six). Staff at different institutions may leverage criticisms at one another – of not being 'integrated' or not 'caring' perhaps – though at the end of the day, they are all simply doing what they can with what they have (Long and Evans, 2023), even if this gives off this impression of 'doing nothing' (see below).

The stickiness of the institutional web is a form of poverty regulation in itself, as it serves to contain problematic populations and hide them away (Seim, 2017). If individuals become

stuck in a single institution, then KPIs may be affected, and questions asked. However, if individuals get stuck bouncing between an array of interconnected, but distinct institutions, with no single overseeing body, then short stints at each are unremarkable. Through institutionalised cycling, the institutional web ensures that individuals are contained somewhere, thereby serving to reduce the visibility of problem populations (Kinsella, 2011). The institutional web therefore intentionally fixes individuals in mobility (Jackson, 2015). With little or no control over their own movements, inmates may feel imprisoned by the constancy of movement. Further, the perpetual state of movement which the institutional web endorses may be a form of punishment in and of itself (Feeley, 1979; Mahoney, 2019). Whilst Hall and Smith argue that stasis represents 'limitation, restriction, incarceration' (2013: 276), the same could be said of this kind of enforced and involuntary mobility.

Places which may aspire to 'change' people, through recovery or reform, for example, are forced to become little more than 'people-processing institutions,' owing to KPIs, bureaucratic demands, and limited resources (Goffman, 1961: 87; Comfort et al, 2015) (see Chapters Five and Six). Despite battling against the local council's drive to turn Holbrook into an 'Assessment Centre,' it is treated as one, nonetheless. This happens when Allen, and other 'short term measures,' are offered temporary residency on the basis that adult social care does not take people directly from the streets (see Chapter Five). Institutions are consequently treated as 'holding stations,' as they are expected take people in, process them, assess them, and then move them onto somewhere more appropriate (Goffman, 1961: 354).

'Learning to see' and 'learning *not* to see' as discretionary practices

Whilst the staff team are often seen rushing around, running activities, clearing out rooms, booking people in, helping people attend appointments, and dealing with the local council, inmates may interpret instances of apparent inaction ('she saw and did nothing') or stillness ('they just sit around') as evidence that 'staff do nothing.' Chapter Six unpicks this grumble and illustrates that this discretionary practice, of acting or not, is rooted in the art of seeing.

'Learning to see' is a practical accomplishment built upon the knowledge and experience of staff teams. Just as outreach workers may see a pile of cigarette ends as a sign of life, staff

at institutions may see a room which is too tidy as a sign of abandonment (Hall, 2016). In an institutional context, staff at a halfway house must learn to see the signs of potential violations, as they are responsible for 'the detection and rectification of deviance in their midst' (Wieder, 1974: 64). Staff therefore develop an ability to read seemingly invisible signs, in order to determine whether residents were 'up to something' (Wieder, 1974: 108). An intimate connection exists between noticeability and deviancy (Sacks, 1972). When behaviours are unusual or out of place, they become noticeable, and alert the staff team that something might be up (Wieder, 1974: 69). Fundamentally, for something to be noticeable as abnormal within a particular institution, the staff team must first know what is normal within that context. Novice staff must therefore first acclimatise to situated normality, appreciating what it looks like to 'do being ordinary' within that institution, just as the inmates must (Sacks, 1984: 414). Normality is considered at length in Chapter Seven, which suggests that things like stealing, drinking, using drugs, arguing, fighting, exploiting, shouting, begging, and partying, are all fairly normal and routinised aspects of institutional life. Having acclimatised long ago, old hands possess an 'immensely detailed factual knowledge' of the people and place (Bittner: 1967: 707) and an 'intuitive grasp of probable tendencies' (Bittner, 1967: 712). They are able to see danger in the mundane – a budding acquaintanceship, use of a particular drug, or somebody climbing a fence – just as they can see mundane in the danger, by dismissing one individual's Hitler-talk and another's seeing demons (Chapter Six). The latter represent ways in which staff 'learn not to see.'

'Learning not to see' is just as important as learning to see. As is noted in Chapter Six, staff at institutions face an array of 'ordinary institutional troubles' at the best of times, not to mention the 'extraordinary institutional troubles' experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. These troubles are common across an array of institutions and tend to centre on overburdening, understaffing, and multiple competing demands (McGrath and Pistrang, 2007; Renedo, 2014; Armstrong et al, 2021). With limited time and resources, 'learning not to see' enables them to observe and dismiss most goings on, thereby enabling them to prioritise the most pressing issues. From a practical perspective, as staff do not have the capacity to tackle the volume of rule-breaking which happens within institutions, 'not seeing' allows some acts to go either unpunished or unnoticed by staff turning a blind eye

(Becker, 2018: 153). In Chapter Six, this kind of leniency is described as necessary 'for staff sanity.'

Learning which acts to see, and which not to see, is a discretionary practice, and may hinge on multiple factors, such as the number of staff on shift or the number of competing demands. Seeing therefore happens *in situ*, and must be observed in this way. For example, Elizabeth and Adrian only take a moment to 'not see' the danger in a suicide threat, before continuing with their respective tasks (Chapter Six). Like the police, staff within the institutional web must match 'the resources of control with situational exigencies' (Bittner 1967: 713). With fewer staff on shift, night teams may therefore turn a blind eye more easily than those on days, though keep a detailed log of events for the day team to pick up on, should they see fit. Whilst 'learning not to see' provides a means of coping with a plethora of 'ordinary institutional troubles,' decisions not to intervene may nonetheless attract criticisms that 'staff do nothing.'

There is a large gap between rules as they are written down and rules in action (Lipsky, 2010). Within institutions it may be against the rules to use or sell drugs, though the ubiquity of such actions would make this rule impossible to uphold. Whilst these activities may exist on the peripheries of the staff team's vision, the decision to see, and intervene in, scenarios involving drug dealing centre on something more than a mere breach of the rules. Rather, rules are used as resources, 'to solve certain pressing practical problems' (Bittner, 1967: 710). Often, the decision to enforce rules (or not) boils down to visibility. If an individual is dealing but their dealing is causing no or minimal disruption, then it is unproblematic, and staff can turn a blind eye. If, however, an individual's dealing causes noise complaints at night, brings unwanted visitors onto the premises, and results in violence, then the staff can no longer turn a blind eye. Staff are instead compelled to rebuke or remove the individual, on the basis of the disruption caused and because they must be seen to act by other members of the institution (Sacks, 1972). When rule breaches become too visible, they can no longer be unseeable to staff.

Interactional conflicts between 'getting by' v 'getting out'

This thesis brings to light multiple tensions, such as those between exclusion and inclusion, institutional aims and actual outcomes, and people-changing and people-processing. However, it is this final tension, between 'getting by' and 'getting out,' which comes full circle and answers the original research question – *are the barriers, which prevent individuals from getting out of these kinds of places, built into the interaction orders of institutions?*

In order to 'get by' at an institution, and make it through each day relatively unscathed, individuals must learn to 'fit in,' because standing out causes alarm and attracts unwarranted attention, as Fred and Harry experience in Chapter Seven (Goffman, 1971: 240). Fitting in involves acclimatising to situated understandings of normality and consequently 'doing being ordinary' within a particular setting, as is also detailed in Chapter Seven (Sacks, 1984: 415). Some of the behaviours which are seen as usual within institutions – kicking off, using drugs, stealing, and an array of 'secondary adjustments' (Goffman, 1961: 189) – would be regarded as largely abnormal within most situations. By contrast, to 'get out' of an institution, in a 'positive' way at least, members must demonstrate that they have made progress according to some 'ideal standard' or at least give this impression (Goffman, 1961: 74). These indicators of 'progress' are often steeped in normativity, as individuals must be able to show that they are becoming progressively more 'normal' – by reducing drug consumption, addressing mental health issues, and engaging in support, for example (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010).

In order to both 'get by' and 'get out,' individuals must carefully navigate the competing understandings of normality associated with each, by acclimatising to situated normality on the one hand, and displaying normativity on the other. This is no easy task, given the multiple points of friction between getting by at an institution and getting out of it. To get out of an institution (in a positive way), individuals are asked to do things which will make it more difficult for them to get by in the short-term. For example, whilst being on 'kitchen placement' helps one individual to demonstrate progress – through the development of 'normal skills' and a show of 'primary adjustment' to the institution (Goffman, 1961: 189) – he is teased by his peers for doing so (see Chapter Seven). Conversely, the short-term lures

of getting by at an institution makes it difficult for individuals to display the kinds of behaviours necessary to get out of it. This is evident when Joey tries to get clean, though is continually tempted with free drugs by those who wish to bring him down (see Joey in Chapter Five). Most individuals seek to find a balance in order to 'play it cool' (Goffman, 1961: 65), by giving staff the impression of 'housing readiness' whilst engaging in practices which are contrary to this status, largely in secret (Goffman, 1961; 1963a; Becker, 2018). Through institutional experience, they learn to 'play the game.'

It is imperative to note here that the barriers to getting out of institutions do not exist at the micro-level or the macro-level, rather they belong to the interaction order of the institution. Each time an individual is seen to make primary adjustment to the institution, they will be teased or bullied. Each time an individual detoxes and gets sober, they will be tempted with alcohol and drugs. These interactional barriers are enduring and will long-outlast the individuals introduced in this thesis. This standpoint challenges the current thinking about institutional exits, as barriers do not derive from individuals or structures per se, but from the interaction order *sui generis*, as it is this order which produces those structures, individuals, and barriers in the first place (Rawls, 1987: 138; Goffman, 1983). Individuals may therefore struggle to get out of an institution when all of the ingredients for becoming stuck within it – many of which are outlined in this chapter – are rooted firmly within its interaction order.

Applicability of findings and future directions

On 12th December 2023, Leonard Farruku died on the Bibby Stockholm by suicide. The Bibby Stockholm – a barge moored at Portland in Dorset – is the most recent iteration of 'accommodation' used to warehouse asylum seekers, and can contain to up 506 men (Johnson, 2023; Pearce, 2023). It has previously been used to contain those experiencing homelessness in Hamburg (1994) and asylum seekers in Rotterdam (2005), albeit at less than half of this capacity (Finnis, 2023). The containment of individuals in this kind of carceral space is problematic in multiple ways (Pearce, 2023). Reports of mistreatment, rape, fire safety failings, and the death of Rachid Abdelsalam on board in 2008 resulted in the Dutch authorities taking it out of service (Finnis, 2023). Nonetheless, the UK Government see this vessel as a viable, cost effective solution to the number of asylum

seekers reaching UK shores, as despite the multiple health and safety risks posed by the Bibby Stockholm, it is cheaper than accommodating them in hotels – such as the 'Home Office Hotels' mentioned in Chapter One (Davidson, 2023). On the same day as Leonard's death, senior civil servant Matthew Rycroft wrote a letter which reduced UK immigration to a series of figures – the number of people returned to their country since January 2020, the cost of housing individuals on the Bibby Stockholm, outcomes of asylum decisions per quarter, and so on (Rycroft, 2023).

The Bibby Stockholm highlights that the issues arising in this thesis are not unique to homeless hostels, nor to those experiencing homelessness. The UK government similarly does not know how to handle asylum seekers, and therefore seeks to spatially contain them, in the most cost-effective way possible, in spite of the obvious problems with the containers themselves (Hopper, 2003; Gowan, 2010; Marr, 2015; Evans and DeVerteuil, 2018). Holbrook House and the Bibby Stockholm are two examples of limbo-like places, which hold people for an unspecified amount of time, whilst they await an uncertain destiny (Ridgway and Zipple, 1990; Hoch, 2000; Sahlin, 2005; Wong et al, 2006; Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007; Busch-Geertsema, 2010; Marquardt, 2016; Stewart, 2019). Further, both cases demonstrate a fundamental disconnect between statistics and human experience, stemming from the bureaucratic management of men (Goffman, 1961; Graeber, 2015).

Whilst this research may focus on homeless hostels, the concepts developed herein are applicable to the spatial containment of various problematic populations, through the use of institutions, including prisons, care homes, young offenders institutions, rehabilitation centres, detention centres, hospitals, mental health hospitals, and so on. Future research on institutions may therefore apply the concepts developed in this thesis to other places within the 'institutional web,' from 'hyper inclusion' in hospitals, to the ways in which care home staff 'learn not to see', to what 'getting by' and 'getting out' looks like in prison.

This research also contributes to the field of homelessness and housing in several ways, firstly by resolving the macro-micro dichotomy within the pathways literature. Whilst academics recognise that the two levels are intertwined and interact in complex ways, no theory has been capable of resolving this dichotomy (Piat et al, 2014; Johnson et al, 2015;

Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018), despite attempts at theorising the 'situational' (Barrett et al, 2010) or 'mesosystemic' (Sample and Ferguson, 2020). The interactional approach taken within this thesis fills this gap, as by studying the interaction orders of institutions as a distinct analytic domain, researchers are free from this dichotomising tendency, and can instead take social situations as the basic unit for analysis (Goffman, 1983). This provides a new way of looking at the everyday experiences of hostel members, including their experiences of exiting homelessness.

Secondly, by taking an ethnographic approach to the study of homeless hostels, it is possible to observe the challenges with these places from the inside. Whilst interviews enable participants to say what they do – which can be problematic if used in isolation – participant observation enables researchers to see what they actually do (Atkinson and Coffey, 2003; Hammersley, 2003). Observation has multiple benefits, for instance, researchers are well-placed to pick up on the mundane, taken-for-granted, and almost invisible interactions which happen within a place, which uncoincidentally is where the most deeply-entrenched challenges and barriers reside. Such barriers are therefore only accessible through the observation of situated interactions.

Thirdly, this research highlights that interactional barriers find their roots within the treatment-first model of housing. The homelessness pathway is premised on the idea that individuals want to make 'change' and rewards change with incremental adjustments in living conditions for doing so, though fails to appreciate that not everyone can or wants to make normative changes of this kind (Dordick, 2002; Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010; Warren and Barnes, 2021). Further, the institutional measures of success adopted within the pathway perpetuate the cyclicality of movement, in some cases by setting individuals up to fail (Sahlin, 2005; Graeber, 2015; Bourgeois and Schonberg, 2009). The category of 'housing ready' has been shown to act as a barrier in itself (Dordick, 2002; Sahlin, 2005; Marquardt, 2016; Stewart, 2019; Brookfield et al, 2021). Goffman suggests that 'readiness' is equated with becoming 'an easily manageable patient' (1961: 385). A housing-first approach would avoid the interactional barriers outlined in this thesis by providing individuals with their own homes and then building support around them if they want it (Mackie et al, 2017; Stewart, 2019).

Fourthly, this thesis has also given a voice to the staff team, who are often neglected within this body of literature. It demonstrates that by observing all hostel members as they go about their daily round of activity, researchers can gain a more holistic and well-rounded view of institutional life. From a staff perspective, it is possible to see how the ordinary institutional troubles which they experience can create or contribute to certain barriers to exiting homelessness. From this vantage point, we can see that in the face of multiple competing demands, the staff must also learn to 'play the game' (or indeed games).

Conclusion

The most noteworthy contribution made by this thesis is that of the 'institutional web,' a concept which permeates the entire thesis. Chapter Five highlights how this concept was made available to the researcher through the interactions of hostel members, notably those points of past institutional contact. Such interactions were often so mundane and taken-for-granted within the hostel – for instance, checking up on mutual acquaintances or comparing prison-based activities – that the institutional web was very nearly invisible. As Chapter Eight emphasises, the institutional web is more than a mere list of institutions and services, it is the intangible space within which individuals become stuck, caught in a constant state of motion, as they cycle around the tangible places which make it up. It is here, in this sticky web, that individuals become 'fixed in mobility' (Jackson, 2015: 5). When inmates engage heavily with the institutional web, they become 'hyper included' within its services and systems, and are reminded of their relative abnormality on a societal scale, through their 'institutionally-backed' abnormalities or normative goals (see Chapter Seven). The staff team engage with the institutional web for the purpose of mobility, amongst other things, as they accept new referrals from various places, share information which can speed up prison recall, and arrange to offload disruptive clients elsewhere in the web. On a broader scale, this contribution highlights the merits of interactionist and ethnographic approaches to the study of problematic populations and the places which are used to contain them.

Unfortunately, for many of those who become stuck in the institutional web, death is the only guaranteed way out, the only permanent 'exit,' as the Epilogue illustrates.

Epilogue: Getting out?

I return to Holbrook eleven months after officially concluding my fieldwork, to hand back my pass and ask a few questions. I do not recognise a single member of the reception team. After observing the handover, I visit the managers' office. Here, Elijah and Rachel debate whether moves to non-commissioned homelessness accommodation count as 'positive moves' or not. The individual in question has just returned from level three for playing loud music, in retaliation to the loud music of another. Elijah questions whether this dispute could have been 'handled locally.'

I ask them for updates on some of the residents I spent time talking to, which they are able to do from memory.

> Tyler is still here, he will be nominated for level 3 soon.
>
> Noah abandoned.
>
> Anthony passed away.
>
> Jake passed away.
>
> Samir is 'an interesting one,' he was offered a place in December but turned it down. He has been offered another place, so if he turns this one down, it will be an eviction.
>
> Lincoln passed away.
>
> Harry was a mystery, they could not recall him, nor find him on the system. Perhaps he was using a fake name all along.
>
> Fred was in the same accommodation and still volunteering.
>
> Paul was still in his council flat.

Isam was in prison.

Stanley had left prison, moved into another level one hostel, and had since been recalled to prison again.

Allen's social worker found him more appropriate accommodation.

Joey moved to Scotland and passed away.

Shaun had not returned since his time in prison. He lives elsewhere in the web.

Jared moved into the extra-care facility.

Hassan moved to level two and then passed away.

Eric was still here 'embarrassingly.'

Dylan had abandoned three times since I had known him, 'he always moves in with a woman.'

Dean still lived in the extra-care facility.

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Appendix A – List of pseudonyms

This appendix provides a full list of the informants mentioned within this thesis, in alphabetical order, and alongside their role.

Name	**Role**
Abbas	Resident
Adrian	Staff
Allen	Resident
Anthony	Resident
Bernie	Staff
Blake	Staff
Bradley	Resident
Cali	Support worker
Caroline	Staff
Charlie	Manager
Chrissy	Reception worker
Damian	Resident
Dean	Resident
Dylan	Resident
Elijah	Manager
Elizabeth	Reception staff
Emran	Resident
Eric	Resident
Evie	Staff
Frances	Staff
Frank	Staff
Fred	Former resident
Harry	Resident/ Former resident
Isam	Resident
Jake	Resident
Jared	Resident
Joey	Resident
Lara	Reception staff
Layton	Resident
Lincoln	Resident
Martin	Resident
Matteo	Resident
Megan	Staff
Milly	Staff
Mr P	Resident
Nick	Resident
Noah	Resident
Olivia	Reception staff
Pablo	Resident
Paul	Former resident
Paul	Former resident
Polly	Reception worker

Rachel	Manager
Ray	Resident
Rico	Staff trainer
Roger	Staff
Ronnie	Resident
Sam	Resident
Samir	Resident
Shaun	Resident
Simon	Manager
Sophie	Staff
Stanley	Resident
Trevor	Staff
Tyler	Resident

Appendix B – Spatial organisation of the hostel

This diagram provides a rough sketch of the ground floor of Holbrook House. The three floors above it mainly comprise bedrooms, though there are also kitchens, bathrooms, and a couple of staff offices or storage cupboards.