ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Inside the Open Door: Considerations of Inclusivity Among Women Accessing an Open Door Housing Service in Canada

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Abstract

The provision of shelter to individuals experiencing homelessness creates a 24/7 community of co-living in which the common denominator uniting members is lack of housing. Women of all ethnic, racial, religious, cultural backgrounds, as well as members of 2SLGBTQ+ communities, find themselves co-living in the shared and often challenging transitional space. As services have shifted to "open the door" to provide more inclusive access to services, little attention has been paid to the experiences of diverse communities within co-living spaces. Questioning the assumption that shared loss inherently binds a community of homelessness service users to a common identity, this research asks: what discourses of heterogeneity of service users emerge in descriptions from women experiencing homelessness of their trajectories through transitional housing services to stable housing? Interviews were conducted with 33 service users in a women's transitional housing service between 2016-2018 in Montreal, Canada. Data collected over two waves of semi-structured interviews focused on service usage, homelessness histories, transitional programs experiences, and well-being, featuring 33 and 12 interviews, respectively. Qualitative thematic analysis revealed several instances of participants reflecting on the challenges and benefits of engaging with the heterogeneity of individuals in the space: reflections centered on the unsuitability of services, mental health and substance use, gender identity, as well as a sense of solidarity. In addition to an unexplored complexity associated with inclusive transitional housing user experiences, this analysis underlines a desperate need for refined perspectives on inclusive service policies.

Keywords
women's homelessness, transitional housing, open door, inclusive policies, community-based participatory research, qualitative

Introduction

The provision of services to individuals experiencing homelessness creates a 24/7 community of co-living in which the common denominator uniting members is lack of housing. The life paths that lead to this shared space are many and varied. Residents have often experienced complex traumas and may have physical and or mental health or substance use concerns (Padgett et al., 2016). Within homeless-serving organizations, the profile of service users range widely: residents' ages range from 18 to 70+; people of all ethnic, racial, religious, cultural backgrounds, as well as members of 2SLGBTQ+ and Indigenous[1] communities, find themselves co-living in the often challenging communal service space (Sakamoto et al., 2008). As services have shifted to "open the door" to welcome individuals with few social identity restrictions, little attention has been paid to the experiences of service users who are homeless within a diverse community in co-living spaces. Previous research has explored exclusion practices and the creation of hierarchies of identities amongst individuals experiencing homelessness (Boydell et al., 2000; Cloke et al., 2011; Hoolachan, 2019; Johnsen et al., 2005; Snow & Anderson, 1993; Takahashi, 1996; Terui & Hsieh, 2016). This research has focused on the perpetuation of "undeserving" and "deserving" divisive labelling among service users, often as a means for service users to justify their legitimacy and citizenship in a space. Perceptions of the "other" require further investigation as they often go beyond simply imposing undeserving narratives onto the "other" to elevate one's legitimacy in a service space. Hierarchical validation of other service users extends itself to other factors of identity, particularly those subject to current and historical oppression, such as mental health stigma, sanism, or transphobia. The social hierarchies created by these perceptions may increase the discomfort of service users within an already uncomfortable space. Without conflating or comparing regular discomfort with structural forms of violence, the discomfort of homeless-serving spaces can take many forms: an abrupt confrontation with different personalities, a loss of the basic comforts associated with home, a lack of privacy, the trauma of housing loss, among others (Cloke et al., 2011).

Research has shown that confrontations between service users, and negative perceptions towards one another, can challenge the physical safety and wellbeing of service users (Cloke et al., 2011; Lyons et al., 2016; Maassen et al., 2013; Pyne, 2011; Sakamoto et al., 2009). To improve services for a diverse community of service users, it is essential to examine the assumption that shared loss inherently binds a community of homelessness services users to a collective, inclusive identity. This assumption of a shared identity comes in the form of "one size fits all" programming, notably in the case of inclusive programming where users of diverse backgrounds are expected to co-exist amicably with little-to-no guidelines or structure to do so. More knowledge of inclusive programming and discourses around the heterogeneity of service user populations is needed, as well as increased inquiry about the interaction of homelessness services users with the unfamiliar intersecting identities of other service users.

Background

Open Door Policies

"Open door" or inclusive homeless and housing service seeker acceptance policies are measures put into place to ensure that access to these spaces is "free of discrimination and respectful of people's values, identities, beliefs, cultures and life experiences" (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2017, p. 8). This approach to service delivery is increasingly prominent for homeless service providers looking to serve all individuals experiencing homelessness (Cloke et al., 2011; Sakamoto et al., 2008). Changes to housing services access in response to calls for inclusivity have brought

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[1] The place of the study is unceded First Nations territory on Turtle Island, land that has been subject to an ongoing and centuries-long state-led genocide of Métis, First Nations, and Inuit peoples. In the context of this study, the use of Indigenous is inclusive both to those traditional caretakers of the land and others who carry this identity who have found themselves in this homeless service.

attention to the history of exclusion within homeless services provision. Racialized, 2SLGBTQ+, and individuals with mental health conditions and or addiction, individuals living structural oppressions beyond or intersecting with homelessness, have often been deliberately or systematically excluded from services. Equity-seeking social movements, e.g., 2SLGBTQ+ rights (Choi et al., 2015) and harm reduction-focused services (Zelvin & Davis, 2001), have brought about important changes in access to services for formerly excluded users.

Research considering the experience of service users in the environment of explicitly open door homeless services is limited. Cloke et al. (2011) conducted a study of day centres in England and described environments of open door services in which individuals are welcomed without social identity restrictions. The population accessing the services studied is far from homogenous; the group of individuals who access services reflects the diversity and prejudices of the population outside homeless services. Within the homeless services studied, the diversity of individuals coupled with the inherent stress associated with the environment leads to a perception of unsafeness on the part of service users, inextricable from the perceptions of other service users as undeserving or disruptive. The authors report that individuals receiving homelessness services evaluate their relative deservingness through "their productivity, degree of dangerousness and personal culpability for homelessness episodes" (Cloke et al., 2011, p135), drawing on Takahashi's (1996) "continuum of stigma". More broadly, Takahashi draws on these ideas of productivity, dangerousness, and personal culpability as interlocked factors of perception that define the way individuals experiencing homelessness are judged (both by others experiencing homelessness and the broader public) and ultimately how the collective responds to dealing with homelessness. As Cloke et al. (2011) emphasize, inclusive services are designed with the best intentions to provide support for all, yet often fail to consider the more challenging realities of navigating these spaces for service users and staff. Because many open door spaces lack the resources necessary to address these challenges, there continues to be discord between the intended intervention and the outcome for everyone involved. Despite the importance of Cloke et al.'s (2011) considerations, we were unable to locate any additional studies that have purposefully investigated open door policy concerns in a space where service users sleep in the same space (i.e., transitional housing) or with a population of women experiencing homelessness.

Cloke et al.'s (2011) study emphasizes the value of open door services while avoiding a romanticization of the model. There are additional limitations not covered in their analysis. Perhaps the most crucial limitation is that there is no commonly utilized definition or scope of "inclusivity" for use when designating homeless services as "inclusive". Thus, definitions and implementation vary across service provider organizations. The extent to which exclusionary practices are still enacted is unknown even in these services. Some examples of exclusionary practices are the perpetuation of binary gendered services excludes non-binary users and renders services continually unsafe for transgender users (Pyne, 2011). Dry shelters may exclude those practicing a harm reduction approach to substance use (Azim et al., 2019; Carver et al., 2021; Zelvin & Davis, 2001). Mental health-centered programming serves only users needing psychological services; conversely, the absence of that programming focus may leave people in need without access to mental health services. Furthermore, the general lack of culturally-adapted homeless programing reinforces the social hierarchy of dominant culture, often preventing service users of colour from accessing homeless programming or from exiting homelessness (Olivet et al., 2019).

Heterogeneity and Women's Experiences in Transitional Housing Services

Knowledge of the complexity and heterogeneity of experiences before, during, and after homelessness has significantly expanded, including increased awareness of the role of gender. Research suggests that women's experiences of poverty, racialization, and violent victimization while homeless differ significantly from those of men (Bellot & Rivard, 2017; Schwan et al., 2020). Women's service needs and/or utilization while homeless necessitate additional considerations to those developed through male-

centric research. Increasing attention in research is being paid to the specific experiences of women accessing homeless services (e.g., Schwan et al., 2020).

The question of security is central within many discourses about services for women experiencing homelessness. Existing literature highlights the complexity of and violence within women's trajectories of homelessness such that housing services are often represented as a harbor of safety for them (Murray, 2011). Physical safety is not the only concern. Schwan et al. (2020) highlight a consistent shortage of adequate homelessness services for women across Canada; driven by this shortage, there is a further failure to address the gender-specific inequity and violence lived by women through systems like social assistance, employment, transportation, and housing. Given the shortage of services, women are often forced to access services that are either unsafe or inappropriate to their circumstances (Schwan et al., 2020). Although services designed to protect women from some of the external dangers that have contributed to their homelessness such as domestic violence victim shelters, exist, there is a gap in our knowledge about the dangers and safety concerns within women-only service user communities.

Research on women's homelessness demonstrates the diversity of backgrounds, identities and social locations of service users who are homeless (Bellot & Rivard, 2017; Laporte & Le Méner, 2008; Lyons et al., 2016; Schwan et al., 2020). Few studies have focused on the diverse experiences of women experiencing homelessness in the context of open door policies. Ranasinghe (2019) explored perceptions of the "other" between staff and clients in a women's shelter as an inability to navigate an individual's subjective perception of "civility". Subjective binaries of "civility" and "incivility" can define the practices and policies of shelter space without serious consideration of what "civility" means for different actors. These standards of "civility" in many ways mirror the way groups living through structural oppression are policed outside of a shelter environment, for example, through police use-of-force in mental health crises (Morabito et al., 2017) or through police intervention around sleeping in public spaces (Robinson, 2019). Ultimately, the rules of civility in and out of a shelter environment reflect a broader societal practice of policing the "other", or the "less-desirable".

Women within a shelter environment may find that the physical proximity to other users with mental health or substance issues, or more generally being crowded in spaces with strangers, prevents them from meeting their housing goals (Burlingham et al., 2010; Padgett & Henwood, 2012). In Burlingham et al.'s (2010) study with seven alcoholic women in a housing first program, some participants indicated preferring to sleep outside because of the crowding of sleep spaces or the discomfort associated with other service users with mental health challenges. These perceived challenges of the shelter environment can lead to a negative understanding of the other individuals accessing services, as some see the "other" as a barrier to their success or outright a barrier to accessing the space at all.

Research is increasingly presenting examples of service providers developing inclusive service models (Burlingham et al., 2010; Cloke et al., 2011; Ranasinghe, 2019), with the attendant benefit that service providers may welcome a broader diversity of women in need of homeless services. Research has also begun to demonstrate that inclusive policies carry the unintended consequence of putting service users of different social identities in conflict with one another, often to the detriment of service users' success and comfort in programming. Ultimately, there is a harsher reality beyond the utopic vision of cohesiveness in inclusive programming: that of service users forcibly confronting the "other" and the "other" being subject to those prejudices carried over from outside the shelter environment. This research highlights a tension between a genuine and worthwhile desire to serve an inclusive community of women experiencing homelessness, and the unintended harm that can be caused to the same group. Further research is needed on these consequences and the implications for service providers considering strategies for ensuring the wellbeing of a greater diversity of service users.

Objectives

In addition to research focused on substance use or mental health, there is a lack of analysis of

how homeless service users experience differences and heterogeneity within service communities. This study is part of a larger research project exploring the trajectories of women through transitional housing services within an organization with an open door policy of inclusionary access to services. The purpose of this sub-analysis is to better understand how service users experience an inclusionary service access policy in an environment with a heterogeneous service user population. Thus, we re-engaged with the content presented by participants on their experiences and asked: What perceptions of co-service users emerge in women experiencing homelessness's descriptions of their trajectories through transitional services to stable housing?

Methods

The study was conducted as part of a long-standing university-community organization research collaboration in Montreal, Quebec, Canada (Duchesne et al., 2016). A case study approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) was used to examine women's homelessness trajectories from entry into transitional services provided by the community organization to service users' eventual exit to external housing. After receiving institutional ethics approval (McGill University Research Ethics Board, file # 420-0416) two waves of data were collected from 2016-2018. In accordance with the principles of a community-based participatory project, focus groups were held at the service provider organization with program residents to design and develop the questionnaire. All participants gave written consent to access their administrative data collected during their intake process when first accessing services, audio-recording of study interviews, as well as the dissemination of anonymized interview content. Wave I interviews were conducted during residents' initial stay at the transitional housing service; 12 months later, Wave II consenting participants were contacted via contact information previously provided. Both waves of data were analyzed in the current study. Wave I consisted of 33 semi-structured interviews focused on service usage, homelessness histories, transitional programs experiences, and well-being. Twelve participants from the Wave I

participated in Wave II follow-up interviews; all but one participant had moved on from transitional housing and were securely housed. Wave II interviews focused on reflections on past transitional service use and current experiences with independent housing or of remaining in transitional housing. Participants were allocated a randomized three-digit identifier that was used across both waves of interviews. Neither interview included specific questions about the open door policy, discourses, or experiences of heterogeneity or that were specific to social inclusion/exclusion.

This research was conducted within a women's transitional housing service. In this organization, participants typically begin in the emergency shelter and then are moved into transitional housing within three weeks; once in transitional housing, participants remain anywhere from a few weeks to several months, with some women staying over a year. Among the other services provided on-site, mental health resources and counselling are an integral part of all programming, while the organization works in close partnership with local health authorities to offer rapid physical and health support to service users. This service provider welcomes participants with an inclusive access policy, by which women are not refused access because of age, race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, physical or mental disability, or substance dependence. Residents are not allowed to consume alcohol or drugs on site.

The location of the study is in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, a large francophone city located on the St Lawrence River. Despite being a major city in a high-income country, Montreal faces major concerns towards homelessness, with the last Point in Time count for the city indicating 3,149 people without a stable dwelling in 2018 (Latimer & Bordeleau, 2019). As temperatures fluctuate with radical highs and lows from summer to winter in Montreal, the city maintains a large diversity of services that adapt according to need and seasons. As one of Canada's metropolitan centres, Montreal also accommodates a large diversity of individuals in terms of race, ethnicity, and the 2SLGBTQ+ community, additionally with an important historical Anglophone community (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Author Positionality

Particularly given the highly subjective nature of this analysis, the authors wish to situate their understanding of the experience of heterogeneity amongst women experiencing homelessness. Hannah Brais has been conducting research, as a staff member, since 2018 within the large homeless service provider that is the subject of the study, and working with precariously housed individuals since 2013. Katherine Maurer is a clinical social worker who has engaged with individuals experiencing homelessness for two decades. She first trained as a frontline service provider in a women's shelter, later participated as a service provider in community-based research in New York City; she has transitioned to leading research projects in partnership with homelessness services providers in Canada. Both authors inform their understanding of the data presented with lived experiences of invisible homelessness and housing precarity, as well as well as through their respective identities as a queer settler québécoise woman (Hannah Brais) and as a well-resourced immigrant colonial-settler cis woman (Katherine Maurer). The authors do not present the views of service users in this piece as mirrors to their views and experiences, but as complex testimonies to the experience of accessing transitional housing.

Participants

We recruited participants via promotional material displayed in the service and snowball sampling. Participant median age was 43 years; 30% were born outside of Canada; 55% were Francophone; 8% identified as Aboriginal (the term employed by the database used by service provider); 32% reported a homelessness duration of more than one year. Wave I consisted of 33 participants. Wave II was composed of 12 participants who were recruited through contact methods they provided to the research team at their first interview. The majority of the contact methods provided were no longer valid, an expected limitation of research with this vulnerable and mobile population. Of the 13 we were able to contact, all but one participant accepted to participate in the follow-up interview.

Data Analysis

Interviews in each wave were approximately one hour long, conducted in French or English per the participant's preference, and recorded digitally with the participants' verbal and written consent. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim and coded thematically using NVivo 10 software (QSR International, 2012). Following an initial analysis of Wave I and Wave II data in NVivo, we observed a series of unsolicited reflections on the identities of other service users within the space. Based on this initial analysis, we developed a list of keywords that had emerged in the perceptions of other service users. The following English and French search terms were used for thematic analysis (slurs omitted): Trans, guy, man, transgender, gars, homme/s, transsexual, transsexuel, transsexuelle, transgenre/s, Slur, arab/e/s, muslim, arabic, black, brown, noir/e/s, race, racist/e/s, anglophone, anglais/e/s, crazy, mental/e, head, nuts, fou, folle/s, drug, drogue/s, fight/s/ing, chicane/s, drugs, crack, cocaine, weed, smack, poudre, marijuana, blow, heroin.e, alcohol, alcool, alcoholic, alcoolique, beer, worse, worst, pire, piquer, coke, junky, junkie/s, lesbienne, lesbian, gay, gai/e/s, friend/s, friendship, girlfriend, ami/e/s, ally, understood, ok, alright, correct, amitié, solidarity, and solidarité. Using these terms, we conducted a keyword search of both waves of data in English and French, which produced limited results but broadened the content around the experience of heterogeneity. We conducted a thematic analysis of the resulting subset of data. Per Creswell and Creswell's (2017) case study analysis recommendations, the authors engaged in an in-depth description of participants and the service provider space, then independently reviewed the subset of data and through an iterative process, themes were identified, discussed, and eventually agreed upon. All analyses were conducted in the original language of the interview, either French or English. To maintain the integrity of quotes in the bilingual context they were collected in, quotes have been presented in their original language. A translation of the French quotes has been provided in the appendix (Table 1).

Results

Through an iterative process of data analysis, four themes emerged from a subset of 19 participants out of the 33 Wave I and 12 Wave II interviews analysed. The remaining 14 participants did not articulate content related to the analysis. Three themes of exclusionary discourses centered on the unsuitability of services, mental health and substance use, and gender identity. One theme of solidarity, in the form of mutual care, community and friendship, across difference was identified.

Exclusionary Discourses

Unsuitability of Services

This theme includes critiques of the unsuitability of services by study participants based on perceived differences between residents. These general perceptions, that avoided naming particulars about the "other" such as mental health, race or ethnicity, or gender identity, often brought up the question of who belongs in the space or is deemed appropriate to the services based on perceived stability rather than a particular axis of oppression. In these cases, it seemed that a general categorization of the "other" and their fit for the service felt more appropriate than explicitly naming what the participant thought was "wrong" with them, potentially saying something offensive. Unsuitability for the services was highlighted in the additional psychosocial challenges other than being "just homeless":

"*Um, this place is good for people that need homes, but in another way it's not good for other people that come here because they're bringing all their... I don't know how you would call it... there are some people that don't belong here.*" (Participant 108-Wave I)

Similarly, the unqualified "other" is marked as outliers within the service: "*Là-bas, la nourriture est bonne, c'est une bonne place, c'est juste que des fois, ils prennent du monde bizarre, t'sais je ne le sais pas (rire).*" (Participant 152-Wave II). Stability and challenges towards others were also linked to participants' unmet service expectations, particularly regarding space sharing in crowded

transitional housing. This participant expressed a desire for segregated services based on stability:

"*I felt uncomfortable the first day. I thought it would be a little bit more separated sort of thing. They mix everybody together. It was not what I expected and eating together because sometimes there's fights downstairs in the kitchen. […] They get very hot. It's not a good environment… like I said, you gotta separate the centres properly. Stable with stable because your… you're…. you don't need a program that's as severe as that.*" (Participant 118-Wave I)

Due to a long and complex historical and ongoing cultural conflict between English and French speakers in Montreal, there are often tensions between the groups. This participant felt that the Anglophones in the space challenged the peacefulness of the space and expressed clear discomfort co-sharing space and with the Anglophone interviewer conducting the interview in French:

"*C'était un groupe, c'était surtout des Anglaises, elles insultaient tout le temps… On ne parle pas de mon ami en bas, je parle de d'autres Anglaises plus ingrates [...] Je suis désolée de ne pas te regarder dans les yeux.*" (Participant 168-Wave I)

These perceptions emerged in an overall appraisal of their experience within transitional housing, underlining the importance that service users attribute to the presence of the "other" while participating in this programming.

Mental Health and Substance use

As is common to previous homelessness research (Padgett et al., 2016), content emerged regarding participants' perceptions of other individuals' mental health and substance use. Some participants felt they should not be in a space with individuals with mental health issues or active substance users and that individuals facing these challenges should be in a separate environment specific to their needs. As in the unsuitability of services data, expectations about sharing the space are entwined with a discourse of heterogeneity: "*(long pause) I didn't think I was gonna live with a bunch of severely ill people. I was like: oh no! This is a hospital. I think I am in the wrong place, you know?* (Participant 118-Wave I). In lieu of separate spaces for those with substance use

issues, this resident proposed greater regulation and restrictions on their autonomy compared to other residents:

"*As when you're dealing with a* [racial slur] *or a drug, or a drunkie or...or...or...or whatever. They need to be programmed from 8:00 right till they go to bed and there's no exceptions. You're here at 7:00, and you're here at 5:00 and there is no going out.*" (Participant 118-Wave I)

In addition to arguing against shared services for persons with mental health conditions and/or substance use issues, another participant expressed a medicalized understanding towards service users who use drugs, further suggesting they could not be successfully housed:

"*there are people that take drugs. There are other people that don't take drugs that are iffy and they should be in another place. Uh, the people with drugs, they should be in rehab. People that are homeless and can live here and can eventually get out on their own and get a home, yes* [they should be here]." (Participant 108-Wave I)

This participant explicitly acknowledged that the diversity of residents was the direct result of the organization's open door policy, not happenstance: "*I mean everybody has a story why they're here, but people that are not level-headed: they don't belong in this... in this place. They belong in another place. But the* [organization name withheld] *brings everybody in*" (Participant 108-Wave I). Participants expressed expectations of more homogeneity and less diversity amongst homeless service users. They expressed tacit and explicit understanding that the diversity resulted from the organization's open- door policies and held the organization responsible for the effects on the community of the diversity resulting from the inclusion policy.

Gender Identity

The third discourse to emerge in the analysis was participants' reactions to sharing the space with transgender women. Reproducing the narrative of oppressive exclusion of trans women from cis women's spaces, a number of participants - not all of whom were cisgender - strongly criticized the presence of transgender women in the transitional living space. This theme included more explicit references to the

inclusion policy. The quotes about trans women often reflected questioning their gender altogether in the form of policing feminine presentation:

"*Bien il y a des hommes habillés en femmes, c'est des vrais gars. Puis ils font des tresses, ils font … parce qu'ils ont des tendances féminines, ils les prennent…Ça, il y en avait une couple, hein! Je pense qu'ils m'ont dit, la minute que la personne soit elle est habillée en femme ou elle a des contacts plus féminins, t'sais ils les prennent. Ouais.*" (Participant 152-Wave II)

Several participants felt that the open door policy, which invites the presence of trans women, compromised their safety. This service user described the other woman's perceived masculinity at length and denounced her mental stability in a way that suggested she could be harmful to others:

"*Ils acceptent n'importe qui là-bas autant des gars que des filles.…Non, ils acceptent des gars. C'était plus des filles, mais en même temps on avait un gars, il était assez détraqué mental, c'était un psychopathe […] Il n'a rien à voir dans le transgenre, il ne prend même pas d'hormones ni rien, seulement un homme qui a de la barbe! De la grosse barbe!*" (Participant 168-Wave II)

Another participant also questioned the effects and safety of staff welcoming trans users. She was particularly concerned with the "passing" of trans women within the space and seemed to hold the view that trans users had to be actively seeking gender-affirming interventions to be considered eligible for services. Despite qualifying one trans woman as more adequately effeminate than the other, she still continued to use male pronouns for her:

"*Its not, its not all ss-really really safe. And then there was this other thing and I told* [name withheld] *about it…There was this guy..and when I first met him, well saw him, it was a real guy. And she accepted him as a girl. Said he was going through the changes-he wasn't going through the change 'cause one day he would dress up like a guy the other day he would dress up like a girl…You can't have it both ways. You're either a guy or you're a girl, you're not both, you can't be both. And she seen him running around like that…But to her knowledge, he was going to be a girl…Well I don't know he, he talked like a guy,*

*he acted like a guy. He didn't act like a female at all 'cause there's another guy in there, [*name withheld*]. Now he looks like a girl, he's has several operations…"* (Participant 108-Wave II)

She also expressed a sense of inequity in the acceptance of transgender individuals into the women's space, questioning if the same would occur in a men's space:

"*And then there's… then there's the people that are… well there is guys that are coming here that are transitioning to be a woman. I was thinking, geez you know, I should dress myself up like a guy and go to the* [men's shelter] *and see if I get accepted. Which, it... it wouldn't happen."* (Participant 108-Wave I)

As in the case of Lyon et al. (2016) and Sakamoto et al. (2009), these reflections signal a pressing challenge to services that welcome trans, non-binary and Two-Spirit service users: while they may be able to access the services, they are subject to forms of discrimination where their gender identity is policed and criticized. As they demonstrated, trans women will often avoid accessing services because of this discrimination, further exacerbated by the failure to intervene on the part of staff. To this end, the true inclusivity of services is put into question: the service policy welcomes these women on paper, but in practice they are often excluded. Service users' perceptions of trans women in this study signal a potentially concerning point of exclusion, as well as a need to better educate staff and residents around trans-inclusive policies and practices.

Solidarity

Despite the thematic presence of aversion to difference in the service user community, there were also expressions of solidarity. Women often created a bond in cognizance of identified difference. Most notably, women discussed durability of bonds created while in the transitional service which they maintained after transitioning to independent housing. These connections provided mutual care, community, and friendship, albeit did not necessarily suggest a form of solidarity that defended the "other" and their potential differences. One participant describes the essential support service users offer one another for their wellbeing: "*And the other*

girls like if they see one of their friends or peers that is beside them in their bed or something and they see that they are sick, they go down and tell someone straight away" (Participant 148-Wave I). Another participant explains the challenges associated with the transitional space identified in exclusionary themes, yet reacts to the "other" empathically and optimistically when bringing people together to overcome these challenges to put on a play:

"*C'est comme une activité, puis les gens vont apprécier aussi, je pense. Ils vont bien aimer là. […] On est dans un endroit où est-ce que les gens ont vécu beaucoup de choses, beaucoup d'épreuves, beaucoup de stress, que beaucoup de personnes sont malades. Qu'ils ont besoin de se changer les idées justement. C'est ça qui est le problème. Puis ça aide! Ça change son moral! D'être heureux puis de faire quelque chose, puis de changer les idées, ton moral est mieux là."* (Participant 149-Wave I)

Friendships offered important means of support while they were in the service: "*I became best friends with someone in here I'll tell you that. […] She's up on the 4th floor now. I became best friends with her. […] We get called sidekicks (haha). You can't keep us apart*" (Participant 172-Wave I). Several participants even visited the space for lunch or coffee to reconnect with participants or counsellors after they had moved on. Some discussed maintaining contact with former participants after leaving the service:

"*Il y en a une que j'ai eu de ses nouvelles. Puis les autres, je les ai vues sur Facebook, mais elles ne m'ont pas répondu. Il y en a deux qui m'ont répondu. […] Fait que dans le fond, il y en a une que je suis restée en contact, puis les autres sont sur Facebook."* (Participant 189-Wave II)

The modest sample of expressions of solidarity provides a glimpse of connections that highlight the more positive aspects of participating in a transitional housing service. The data demonstrate that attitudes towards solidarity, community, and friendship coexist with exclusionary practices in services with an open door policy.

Discussion

Open door policies promoting inclusive access are implicitly predicated on the assumption of a shared sense of identity around homelessness and a one-size-fits-all service model. These policies are designed to accommodate as many individuals experiencing homelessness as possible, regardless of mental health status, gender identity, ethnicity, race, substance use or others. Research about women's experiences utilizing homelessness services often fails to consider the heterogeneity of identities that intersect in these spaces, and the resulting experiences of individual service users. The results of our thematic analysis contradict this assumption and demonstrate discourses of heterogeneity in a community of diverse and intersecting service users' identities. Four social identity-related themes emerged in the analysis: unsuitability of services, mental health and substance use, and gender identity, and solidarity. These themes represent important reactions to accessing an explicitly inclusive transitional housing program, particularly the stigmatization of women with divergent social identities within a service user community.

Our analysis demonstrates that for some services users, there is a clear gap between the goals of implementing policies for inclusive service access, notably creating a discrimination-free space, and the day-to-day realities of service users' experiences within the community those policies create. The challenges of the shared physical space of shelters and transitional homelessness services are many, as articulated by our participants. Participants' struggles with the quotidian demands of communal living, alongside the structural forms of oppression and violence they may be experiencing, were an inextricable backdrop to the quotes engaging with heterogeneity across all themes, exclusionary or inclusionary. Although service users were broadly aware of the open door service access policy of the service, their negative experience of the service environment potentially obstructed an appreciation for a greater vision of inclusivity. Repeated expressions of surprise about the physical space and the community suggest the substantial and critical need for explicit engagement with service users articulating access policies, their intent, and the

co-living community they create. More importantly, this analysis underlines the responsibility of service providers offering inclusive programming to ensure that staff are well equipped to enact principles of inclusivity while considering the wellbeing of participants.

The stigmatization of service users with untreated mental health and substance use issues also intersected with co-living challenges. Many participants suggested that people described as only needing housing services should have a space separate from those exhibiting active mental health or substance use issues. Individuals with a mental health or substance use history represent a significant proportion of people accessing homeless services (Hwang, 2001). Particularly as it related to the theme of the unsuitability of services, study participants seemed concerned with other service users exhibiting behaviors violating subjective norms of civility, which led to stigmatization and concerns about safety. This common concern suggests that while service providers may shift towards a policy of inclusivity, the behaviours, prejudices, and fears that would exist in another space remain, despite an intent to create a more welcoming environment.

Research has shown that service users often perceive the "other" as an impediment to their ability to meet program objectives or access housing (Cloke et al., 2011, Padgett et al., 2016; Padgett & Henwood, 2012). This viewpoint was evident in the study data. Nonetheless, participants recognized fellow service users as in need of community and support perhaps beyond their own, which generated inclusive bonding or solidarity. Specifically, our analysis suggests the need for better mental health and addiction supports within homeless services and more education for all service users about mental health and substance use. As harm reduction and mental health recovery activism call for more inclusive and adapted programing (Gillis et al., 2010; Sakamoto et al., 2008), there is a clear need to better support individuals accessing services with and without mental health and substance use challenges.

Mental health and safety concerns were central to the glaringly transphobic statements expressed by several participants. Open door policies provide access for trans women experiencing homelessness who share cisgender

women's concerns for safety, given the very high rates of interpersonal and institutional violence they experience (Ecker et al., 2021; Lyons et al., 2016; Pyne, 2011; Sakamoto, 2009). Indeed, the 2SLGBTQ+ community tends to be overrepresented in homeless populations (Abramovich, 2014). The extensive transphobic discourse of several participants raises the alarm for comprehensive education of service users about gender identity in general and especially in spaces with inclusive access policies. Service providers also need to be educated in order to enhance the safety of trans users and the community at large (Abramovich, 2014; Lyons, 2016; Pyne, 2011).

Limitations

Given the exploratory nature of this thematic analysis, there are several limitations. Most importantly, we did not ask directly about service users' perceptions of others; themes emerged in the data independent of specific interview questions. However, content from only a moderate proportion of participants emerged within the thematic analysis, as subjectively interpreted by the researchers. Content regarding substance use arose in the context of a dry service, meaning service users are expected to be sober and non-consuming on site.

Conclusions and Implications

Exploring reactions to the other in the space of a women's transitional housing service highlights that inclusive approaches to women's homelessness are both important and complicated. There is an urgent need to better understand what living in an inclusive environment means for women experiencing homelessness as individuals and as a community, as well as the impact on service access and utilization. As a starting point, this study offers a perspective on heterogeneity within an inclusive service and engages with the complexity of relationships and perceptions between service users. Notably, it echoes previous claims that inclusive programming may actually hinder the positive experiences of service users (Cloke et al., 2011, Johnsen et al., 2005, Padgett et al., 2016; Padgett & Henwood, 2012). Homeless service providers, scholars, and policymakers would

benefit from examining entrenched assumptions about a homogeneous homeless identity; there is much yet to understand about the range of experiences within a diverse community.

Our study raises several important questions for our service provision. Foremost, what is our responsibility as service providers to manage service user's experiences of the co-living community? How do we account for perceived danger experienced because of inclusionary policies? How do we minimize the real danger and violence experienced by service users from traditionally marginalized groups? How do we amplify the inclusionary bonding service users expressed towards one another despite identity differences? Emerging discourses of trauma-informed care (TIC) in homeless services aim to create safer spaces and ensure that diversity amongst users is addressed and respected (Hopper et al., 2010). Open door policies promote TIC's inclusionary approach to diversity, requiring service providers to practice openness and engage with the diversity of service users. On the other hand, the open door model as applied to homeless services has yet to account for the reactions of all service users to inclusionary policy and communities.

Specifically, a common thread of stigmatization emerged in our study expressed by individuals performing exclusionary practices towards co-service users living in different oppressional axes. These exclusionary practices pose serious risks for retraumatizing exceptionally vulnerable individuals by members of their service user community. Integrating a trauma-informed approach as part of service providers' overall attention to the interaction and shifting of organizational policies, service provider support, and service user subjective experiences may be a resource to better meet the aims of the implementation of open door policies. Future research may consider exploring service user's experiences of open door policies and service providers' engagement with the culture those policies generate.

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Appendix: Table 1

Participant #	Text	Translation
189	*Là-bas, la nourriture est bonne, c'est une bonne place, c'est juste que des fois, ils prennent du monde bizarre, t'sais je ne le sais pas (rire).*	Over there, the food is good, it's a good place, it's just that sometimes, they take strange people, you know I don't know (laughs).
189	*Bien il y a des hommes habillés en femmes, c'est des vrais gars. Puis ils font des tresses, ils font … parce qu'ils ont des tendances féminines, ils les prennent…Ça, il y en avait une couple, hein! Je pense qu'ils m'ont dit, la minute que la personne soit elle est habillée en femme ou elle a des contacts plus féminins, t'sais ils les prennent. Ouais.*	Well there's men dressed like women, they're real men. And they braid their hair, they…because they have feminine tendencies they take them… that, there were a couple of them, eh! I think they told me, the minute someone dresses as a woman or that she has more feminine traits, they take them. Yeah.
168	*Ils acceptent n'importe qui là-bas autant des gars que des filles….Non, ils acceptent des gars. C'était plus des filles, mais en même temps on avait un gars, il était assez détraqué mental, c'était un psychopathe […] Il n'a rien à voir dans le transgenre, il ne prend même pas d'hormones ni rien, seulement un homme qui a de la barbe! De la grosse barbe!*	They'll take anyone there as much guys as girls... No, they take guys. It was more girls, but at the same time we had a guy, he was pretty messed up mentally, he was a psychopath [...] He has nothing to do with transgender, he doesn't even take hormones or anything, just a man with a beard! A big beard!
149	*C'est comme une activité, puis les gens vont apprécier aussi, je pense. Ils vont bien aimer là. […] On est dans un endroit où est-ce que les gens ont vécu beaucoup de choses, beaucoup d'épreuves, beaucoup de stress, que beaucoup de personnes sont malades. Qu'ils ont besoin de se changer les idées justement. C'est ça qui est le problème. Puis ça aide! Ça change son moral! D'être heureux puis de faire quelque chose, puis de changer les idées, ton moral est mieux là.*	It's like an activity, and people will appreciate it too, I think. They're really going to like it. […] We're in a place where people have lived a lot of things, a lot of challenges, a lot of stress, with a lot of people who are sick. They need to be able to think about something else. That's the problem. And it helps! It shifts morale. To be happy and to do something else, to change your mind, your morale is better off.
189	*Il y en a une que j'ai eu de ses nouvelles. Puis les autres, je les ai vues sur Facebook, mais elles ne m'ont pas répondu. Il y en a deux qui m'ont répondu. […] Fait que dans le fond, il y en a une que je suis restée en contact, puis les autres sont sur Facebook.*	There's one that I got news from. As for the others, I saw them on Facebook, but they haven't answered me. There's two that answered me. […] So there's one that I've stayed in contact with, and the others are on Facebook.